

Trust in Government – the Significance of Attitudes Towards Democracy, the Public Sector and Public Sector Reforms

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APRIL 2003

Working Paper 7 - 2003

Content

PREFACE.....	3
SUMMARY	4
SAMANDRAG	5
Introduction.....	7
Theoretical elaborations	9
An institutional-cultural perspective.....	9
The development of individual political attitudes	10
Individual political attitudes and trust: some expectations	11
Data and method	13
Empirical results.....	14
The dependent variable: trust in government institutions.....	14
The independent variables: three sets of political attitudes	16
Analysis and discussion: political attitude variables and trust.....	20
Conclusion.....	23
References.....	26

Preface

This paper¹ is part of the research project “Auditing, regulation and control”, financed by the Norwegian Research Council. It is written in connection to the research group “Administration and governance” at the Rokkan Centre. The data basis is placed at our disposal by the research program “Power and Democracy” and it is based on a broad mass survey of the Norwegian citizens conducted in 2001. An earlier version of the paper was presented at the panel “The Power to Create Trust: the Impact of Public Sector Reform on Citizens” at the American Society for Public Administration’s 64th National Conference, “The Power of Public Service”, Washington D.C., March 15.–18., 2003. We want to thank the participants at this panel, Lise Hellebø and Paul G. Roness for helpful comments.

¹ To be presented at the panel on “The Power to Create Trust: the Impact of Public Sector Reform on Citizens” at the ASPA’s 64th National Conference, “The Power of Public Service”, Washington D.C., March 15.–18., 2003.

Summary

This paper examines trust in government along three dimensions: general levels of trust, trust in political bodies and actors and trust in the civil service. In correlating trust in government with citizens' general attitudes towards democracy, their assessment of the organization and functioning of the public sector and their attitudes to public-sector reforms, a distinction is drawn between traditionalist and modernist attitudes. The theoretical framework of the paper is institutional theory, and the analysis is based on a mass survey conducted among 2,297 respondents in Norway in 2001. The main findings are first, that people's trust in government is of a general character: a high level of trust in one institution tends to extend to other institutions. Second, general attitudes towards how democracy works in Norway have the strongest overall effect on variations in citizens' trust in government. Third, trust is also significantly affected by whether a person holds modernist or traditional values. Traditionalists, especially people who want to strengthen the public sector, have more trust in government generally, and in the public administration specifically, than modernists, who believe there are significant efficiency problems within the public sector.

Samandrag

I dette notatet fokuserer vi på tillit i folket til ulike politiske institusjonar og aktørar og til offentleg forvaltning. Eit sentralt spørsmål er i kva grad tillit til desse institusjonane varierer med generelle politisk- og ideologiske haldningar og med tradisjonelle og modernistiske oppfatningar om offentleg sektor. Paperet er forankra i institusjonell teori og analysen er basert på ei survey til eit representativt utvalg av det norske folket i 2001. Hovudfunna er for det første at folks tillit til offentlege styresmakter er av ein generell karakter. Dersom folk har høg tillit til ein institusjon eller gruppe så har dei også høg tillit til andre institusjonar. For det andre har generelle oppfatningar om korleis demokratiet fungerer i Norge den gjennomgåande største effekten på variasjonar i folks tillit til offentlege styresmakter. For det tredje er tillitsnivået også påverka av om folk har tradisjonalistiske eller modernistiske haldningar til offentleg sektor. Tradisjonalar, særleg dei som ønskjer å styrkja offentleg sektor, har større tillit til offentlege styresmakter generelt og til offentleg forvaltning spesielt enn folk som gjev uttrykk for modernistiske haldningar, for eksempel ved å hevda at det er store effektivitetsproblem i offentleg sektor.

Introduction

Trust in government is a mainstay of democracy. Yet the relationship between democracy and trust is paradoxical. On the one hand, the legitimacy of political and administrative institutions and actors vital to the political process is based largely on trust. In a system of indirect democracy the people delegate their sovereignty to these institutions and actors, trusting that this mandate will be handled in an appropriate way. On the other hand, an inherent part of any democracy is a “healthy distrust” in, or at least scepticism towards, the interests of others, especially the powerful. Thus democratic systems also institutionalize distrust or scepticism by providing many opportunities for citizens to monitor the activities of people and institutions they supposedly trust (Warren 1999). This monitoring function is performed by independent bodies seen by Olsen (1988) as democratic safeguards in a state that has strong integrative features and scores high on what he labels “moral community” values.

Trust is a complex and multi-dimensional concept, potentially subject to inconsistent and ambiguous interpretation, and the causal link between trust and good government is a contested one (Braithwaite and Levi 1998, Læg Reid 1993, Rothstein and Stolle 2002). Trust can be both general, directed towards the political-administrative system as such, and much more specific. Trust may be inspired by core political and administrative institutions or else it may be more contingent on the behaviour of central political and administrative leaders (Bouckaert and Van de Walle 2001). Trust may vary according to developments and events in the (political) environment, via a kind of determinist mechanism, or else be based more strictly on internal features of the system. Trust can also vary according to *Zeitgeist* or “fashions”, i.e., in certain periods it is taken for granted that government can or cannot be trusted (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996).

The popular mandate given by the people to government institutions and actors can, according to representation theory, be seen either as specific and binding, leading to strong mechanisms of public control of representatives, or else as rather general, furthering an independent role for representatives and institutions (Pitkin 1967). It is the latter type that currently seems to dominate. It makes great demands on politicians and bureaucrats, who are faced with the challenge of combining representativeness, responsiveness and sensitivity to popular demands and sentiments with efforts to influence and “educate” people (March and Olsen 1989 and 1995). Moreover, as the world becomes ever more complex, giving rise to increasingly complex institutional structures, constellations of actors, decision-making processes and policies, it becomes more difficult to define what the popular mandate, and hence the role of representatives, really consists of (Olsen 1984).

People’s trust in government may be based on a number of common elements but also on divergent factors. There are potentially a large number of factors explaining variations in trust. One set of explanations is connected with people’s practical experience of specific administrative units, as shown in the literature on service satisfaction and trust (Bouckaert and Van de Walle 2001). When the individual’s experiences are largely good, they tend to trust the state (Kumlin 2002, Rothstein and

Steinmo 2002). Another is based on demographic factors, either individual or relational, such as education, gender and age (Christensen and Læg Reid 2002a). A third set is political variables, such as level and type of political activity and political attitudes. This paper focuses on the latter set of variables, which are here labelled political-cultural variables.

The main research questions raised are first: How much do people trust government and to what degree will trust of a general character, meaning high levels of trust in one institution correlate with high levels of trust in another institution? Second, to what extent and in what ways do political-cultural variables affect trust in government? Can variations in trust be explained by broad attitudes to democracy and ideology? Do people who hold traditional attitudes towards the organization and functioning of the public sector and state apparatus have a higher level of trust than those with more modern attitudes towards current reforms of the public sector inspired by New Public Management (NPM) (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000)?

The data used in this analysis are taken from a broad mass survey, covering 2,297 respondents, conducted under the auspices of the Norwegian Power and Democracy Study in 2001. Norway has traditionally been characterized as a reluctant reformer, adapting slowly to the NPM reform movement and having an incremental and pragmatic reform style (Olsen 1996). It has taken a maintenance approach to modernization of the public sector, focusing more on management and improving the efficiency of the public sector than on rolling back the state. The Norwegian version of NPM was characterized by the pragmatic introduction of a formalized performance-assessment regime, labeled “Management by Objectives and Results” (MBOR) and sector-specific reforms involving greater autonomy, agencification and devolution for public enterprises (Christensen and Læg Reid 2001). Until the mid-1990s the privatization drive, contracting-out and out-sourcing were relatively weak. The pace of reform in Norway has, however, picked up over the last five years, and the label “reluctant reformer” is now less appropriate. Thus Norway is a latecomer to the NPM movement, speeding up the process after it seems to have peaked elsewhere (Christensen and Læg Reid 2003b).

The Norwegian public sector is one of the largest in the world; about 31 percent of the workforces are public employees. Norway has a strong statist democratic tradition, scores high on per capita income and abundance of natural resources, has relatively strong collectivistic and egalitarian values, is consensus-oriented and has a low level of internal conflict (Christensen 2003). It also has one of the most comprehensive and universal welfare states in the world. The regime’s performance, support for democracy and the level of trust in public institutions are generally higher than in most other countries (Dalton 1999, Klingemann 1999, McAllister 1999, Norris 1999b). Surveys of political support for national government and parliament nearly always accord Norway a leading position (Listhaug and Wiberg 1995, Listhaug 1995 and 1998). Nevertheless, the pattern of confidence in political institutions is cyclical, and the level was lower at the end of the 1990s than in the early 1980s (Listhaug 2000).

Theoretical elaborations

An institutional-cultural perspective

The set of variables used in this paper for explaining variations in trust are primarily political, covering people's attitudes towards the political and administrative system. The theoretical perspective that we use to elaborate on these variables is an institutional-cultural one (March and Olsen 1989, Selznick 1957). The main theoretical arguments of such a perspective proceed from the notion that a political system, encompassing political and administrative institutions and actors, but also people as citizens, cannot be designed but develops in a natural way, more through processes of institutionalization and integration than of aggregation. Over time institutional features evolve, as identities and informal norms and values are added to the more formal organizational features. Furthered by a mechanism of path-dependency, the system develops certain political and administrative traditions that make it distinctive or even unique (Krasner 1988). This uniqueness reflects an adaptation to internal and external factors and pressure that will vary from one political-administrative system to another and also display national variations.

The uniqueness of the institutional features of each individual political system means that each country will have traditions of system-wide norms and values. The historical trajectories of political-administrative systems, leading to certain norms of appropriateness, may have passed through quite complex and diverse processes of development. Certain systems will be characterized by strongly hierarchical and closed processes of institutionalization, others will have negotiations among competing interests, while others still will have a large degree of variety, inconsistency and "temporal orders" (Christensen and Røvik 1999). Some systems will see it as appropriate to follow logic of consequences or self-interest in public policy, while others will see this as highly inappropriate (March 1994). Norway, for example, represents a collectivistic, high-context culture with a long statist-oriented tradition, emphasizing equality and homogeneity. In contrast the United States is more accurately categorized as an individualistic, low-context culture that caters much more to the values of individualism, competition, diversity and scepticism towards the central state (Christensen and Peters 1999, Christensen, Læg Reid and Wise 2001).

The important point is that each system will contain common norms of appropriateness (March 1994). The members of the system will learn how to cope with the matching of identities, institutional rules and situations and internalize this knowledge. They will learn how to behave appropriately and react intuitively as good politicians, bureaucrats or citizens (March and Olsen 1989). But the norms of appropriateness and how strong they are will vary among systems. There will also be norms indicating how to cope with subcultures, and these will naturally be stronger under conditions of social and geographical heterogeneity.

The institutional-cultural perspective sees the development of political-administrative systems primarily as evolutionary. This means that systems develop gradually and incrementally, primarily elaborating their central norms and values in a careful way.

Institutional leaders will, in such a perspective, mainly be guardians of path-dependency and “historical necessities”, trying to proceed slowly further down the road already taken. Their motive in adhering to the tried-and-tested path is that alternative paths would imply a retraining and refocusing of the institution that might demand a lot of extra resources and create insecurity and ambiguity (Krasner 1988). Such institutional systems are, however, constantly threatened by change or reform, whether internal or external, and hence, as Selznick (1957) underlines, leaders also must be able to make “critical decisions”, not only routine ones. They must balance the need for stability and continuity with the need for change; otherwise the system will become too rigid, potentially putting its “survival” in jeopardy.

When a political-administrative system with strong institutional features encounters demands for change, for example through modern reforms, the crucial question is how compatible the norms and values underlying the proposed reforms are with the traditions of the system (Brunsson and Olsen 1993). A high level of compatibility makes it quite easy to accept change, since it can be adapted to existing institutional features. A low level of compatibility, on the other hand, often leads to resistance and conflicts about the very essence or “soul” of the system. Another possibility is that change will be accepted but not implemented, working primarily in the form of ideas, myths and symbols (Brunsson 1989, Christensen and Lægveid 2003c). In such a situation institutional leaders with the ability to take “critical decisions” will often pragmatically accept some of the changes demanded, but adapt, translate and edit them to fit existing institutional norms and values (Røvik 1996, 1998, Sahlin-Andersson 1996, Czarniawska and Sevón 1996).

The most dramatic scenarios for political-administrative systems are periods of extreme crisis and turbulence. At such times one often witnesses the breaking off of a historical trajectory and the beginning of a new one. This can happen when leaders, often in an entrepreneurial spirit, seize a “window of opportunity” to make dramatic changes, seeing the system as unable to live with “performance crises” (March and Olsen 1989) and “punctuated equilibria” (Krasner 1988) at “critical junctions” (Collier and Collier 1991, Kingdon 1984). A typical example of this phenomenon was New Zealand in the early 1980s, when, in the face of a severe economic crisis, Roger Douglas seized the opportunity to lead the country down an extreme NPM path that was largely incompatible with the country’s past (Aberbach and Christensen 2001). States of crisis have not, however, been typical for Norway over the last 20 years.

The development of individual political attitudes

Given the institutional-cultural perspective outlined and the institutional features of the political-administrative system – how might people’s political attitudes develop? A point of departure is to focus on the development of individual identities. Individual identities can be formed in the course of two interwoven processes: a process of individualization and a process of socialization (March 1994:61–66). In the former process the individual chooses to adopt a number of self-imposed and self-selected roles. People can, for example, choose to join an interest group or a political party or to apply for a certain

type of education or job on the basis of demographic characteristics or path-dependencies in their own personal development.

In the process of socialization, however, obligations, responsibilities and commitments are learned and followed, not chosen. Individual identity and the development of attitudes are assumed much more to reflect institutional identity, traditions, norms and values. The institutions where the individual has his or her primary connections – for example the place of work – are held to have the most determining influence on how individual identities develop. This is what Krasner (1988) calls *vertical depth* of institutional processes, i.e. “the deep structures” of identity develop via roles that are important for the individual.

The logic of appropriateness presupposes that individuals have multiple identities, and therefore also multiple rule options, which become relevant in the different situations an individual may face (March 1994: 63, 68). An implicit assumption is that these identities and rules exist in relatively consistent sets, furthering systematic attitudes and behaviour. But competing logics of appropriateness, reflecting competing identities and rules, complex dependencies and attention structures would also seem inevitable (Christensen and Røvik 1999:164–165). This could potentially lead to more variation, tension and ambiguity in the development of attitudes.

We will look primarily at the end result of the development of individual political attitudes rather than probing the question of why people have developed the attitudes they have. We will not, for example, address the question of how political attitudes correlate with demographic variables, such as gender, education or employment.

The political attitude variables examined in the analysis are divided into three groups, one consisting of broad political attitudes and the other two of more specific sets of political attitudes. The first group covers people’s attitudes towards the functioning of democracy and their ideological position. The second covers attitudes to the organization and functioning of the public sector and public apparatus. We have labelled these “attitudes to tradition”, reflecting the traditional Norwegian institutional political and administrative context, embracing a large public sector and emphasizing political control, universalism, people’s rights and egalitarian values (Christensen 2003). The third group concerns people’s attitudes towards public-sector reform, which we label “attitudes to modernism”. People described as “modernist” tend to espouse NPM-oriented reforms that favour efficiency, market solutions, competition and privatization. These are all values that traditionally have been fairly incompatible with the Norwegian statist tradition but that have started to make more of an impact during the last five years, furthered mainly by central-right governments (Christensen and Lægreid 2003b)

Individual political attitudes and trust: some expectations

Our starting point concerning the concept of trust is the distinction made by Easton (1965) between diffuse and specific support for a political system. Diffuse support emphasizes system-wide and general support for the political system, often built on a long “tenure” as a citizen, while specific support can be described as people’s support for specific institutions, actors and policies, regardless of systemic givens, and is

generally expected to be more “recent” in origin. Levels of diffuse support, which seems to form a central dimension of trust, consist of several interwoven elements (Bouckaert and Van de Walle 2001). First, people may have underlying ideological reasons for supporting or trusting the government, for instance, because they support collective societal goals and favour a large public sector (March and Olsen 1989). Second, general support and trust may be a consequence of structural legitimacy, i.e. people have a long-term positive experience of the way government is structured and works. This may cover satisfaction with the formal organization of government (the way government tasks are specialized and coordinated), the fairness of rules and the enactment of central roles, including the overall perceived level of professional competence and satisfaction with central political and administrative leaders. A third general set of factors that may be of significance for diffuse support and trust is macro-factors, like economic performance and levels of unemployment (Miller and Listhaug 1999).

People’s more specific support for or trust in the political system seems to divide into two main categories – support for process and support for output (Easton 1965). People may trust the government because they have recent positive experience of decision-making processes or public services. Conversely, distrust might emerge from disagreement with the government’s handling of specific policy issues, like immigration policy (Aardal 1999). This may relate to how the policy-making process is structured – i.e. in terms of actors, problems, solutions and rules, participation of affected parties and openness – but also to the level of professional competence experienced. Specific trust and support that is process-based may be rather unaffected by an unfavourable output, because the process as such is seen as appropriate. Output-related specific trust and support, very typical for NPM-related reforms, stems more from whether a public decision or service is seen to be fulfilling the interests of individuals or specific groups (Christensen and Lægreid 2002b). Whereas process is about “doing things the right way” output is about “doing the right things”. The process of decision-making is not important as long as the results are favourable. Traditionally process and procedures are more prominent features of democracy than output and results.

The three sets of political attitudes we use in the analysis relate in different ways to general and specific trust and support. The broad set of political attitudes relates primarily to diffuse support and general trust. The first variable – “satisfaction with democracy” – obviously covers a whole range of experiences with institutions and actors over a longer period of time (Christensen and Lægreid 2002a). We have every reason to expect that people scoring high on satisfaction with democracy would trust government both broadly and more specifically. The second variable – “position on a Left-Right dimension” – covers the ideologically based trust dimension and people’s attitudes towards a variety of more specific policies over time. The main expectation is that Norwegian citizens who place themselves towards the Left of the political spectrum will trust the government the most, because they traditionally support collective values and a large public sector. In Norway a person’s position on the Left-Right ideological dimension has proven to be a consistent and important factor in understanding attitudes towards public-sector institutions (Aardal and Valen 1989). A qualifying expectation is that differences in levels of trust between people positioned at the two extremes of the Left-Right dimension would not be that large, since Norway has a long tradition of a

strong state and of a welfare state that has been built up with few conflicts; political cleavages among the population are therefore neither very numerous nor very profound (Christensen 2003).

The second set of political attitudes, encompassing “attitudes to tradition” (Christensen and Lægneid 1998) would seem to relate to the more general aspects of trust, focusing on questions about political and administrative norms and values that have traditionally been strong in Norway, such as universalism in service provision, the strengthening of public services and political control of state-owned companies (Grønlie 2001). The expectation is that people supporting these values will score highest on trust, particularly towards the main political institutions and the public administration.

The third set of political attitudes measured are the “attitudes to modernism”, which are assumed to relate more to specific aspects of trust. These variables are designed to reveal whether people have political attitudes that are supportive of norms and values connected to efficiency, marketization and privatization in the public sector – features that are central to the NPM reform wave (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000, Self 2000). They can be seen either as reform ideas and ideological symbols or as reflecting real changes going on in the Norwegian system. The main expectation is that people espousing “modernist” political attitudes will score low on trust. The Norwegian system is still rather traditional concerning the organization of the public sector, even though more radical changes are occurring currently; hence “modernist” values may primarily be seen as an alternative to the traditional integrative Norwegian state model.

Data and method

The data set used in this paper were obtained from a mail survey sent to a representative sample of Norwegian citizens between the ages of 18 and 84. 5,000 persons received the questionnaire and the response rate was 46 percent. The respondents are representative for the population between the ages of 18 and 75 in terms of gender and age, but there is some overrepresentation of people with higher education (NSD 2002).

The dependent variable – trust in government – is based on a direct question about trust in various political and administrative actors and institutions.² For each of these categories the respondents were asked to evaluate their level of trust on a scale from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (a very high level of trust). We look at trust in six different actors and institutions: the parliament (the Storting), the cabinet, the public administration (in general), local councils (municipal level), political parties (in general) and politicians (in general). We also used a general trust variable, constructed as an additive index based on the six single variables.

The first group of independent variables consists of two political-cultural variables. One focus on how satisfied people are with the functioning of democracy in Norway,

² The question was: “Below are the names of various institutions, such as the police, the cabinet, the civil service etc. How much trust do you have in each of these institutions?” In addition to the six institutions examined in this paper, the list also included the police, the courts, the EU and the UN.

on a scale from 1 to 4 (very satisfied).³ The other covers the Left-Right dimension in politics, asking the respondents to place themselves on this dimension, ranging from 0 (far Left) to 10 (far Right).⁴

The second group of independent variables represents attitudes to tradition. The respondents were asked to what degree they agreed with the following statements on a scale from 1 (agree completely) to 5 (disagree completely). The first statement was on universalistic attitudes: “Less attention should be paid to people’s right to free public services and more attention to the users’ obligation to pay for the services themselves”; the second on strengthening the public sector: “It is more important to expand public services than to have lower taxes”; and the third on political control: “The political control of a number of public companies like Telenor, Norwegian Railways and Norwegian Post is too weak and should be strengthened”.

The third group of independent variables covers attitudes to modernism. People were asked to respond to four statements in the same way as for the attitudes to tradition. The first statement was about the significance of efficiency problems: “It is not lack of resources but lack of efficient use of resources that is the most important problem in the public sector”; the second was on the relative importance of efficiency: “One should pay more attention to efficiency in the public sector than to equal treatment”; the third focused on privatization: “In Norway one should encourage privatization and a smaller public sector”; and the fourth on market solutions: “Supply and demand on the market should direct economic development to a greater extent than it does now”.

Empirical results

The dependent variable: trust in government institutions

First, we give an overall view of trust in government, using the dependent variable. One question is whether people’s trust in government is of a general character or differentiated among various political and administrative actors and institutions. Table 1 shows that respondents do not tend to differentiate their trust very much, even though there are some differences between political and administrative institutions, the core governmental institutions, and political parties and politicians. Trust is highest in parliament and in the public administration and lowest in political parties and politicians.

³ Here we use the standard question used in the Eurobarometer and the World Value Survey: “Are you generally very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy functions in Norway”? (Norris 1999a).

⁴ The question was: “In politics one often talks about the “Left” and the “Right”. Where would you generally place yourself on this scale”?

Table 1. *Trust in government on a scale from 0 to 10. Average score. N=2252.*

Parliament	Cabinet	Public administration	Local council	Political parties	Politicians	Overall trust index
5.21	4.93	5.02	4.94	4.11	3.80	4.61

This supports a more general finding in several studies that trust in general institutions is normally higher than in specific actors, such as politicians (Norris 1999a). A decline in party identification and party membership in Norway in recent years reflects a more general trend, i.e. political parties have, to a greater or lesser degree, declined as socially integrated movements (Listhaug 2000, Strøm and Svåsand 1997). In addition, media targeting of and pressure on individual politicians has increased, leading to more criticism and greater legitimacy problems, which in turn gives politicians less political leeway and creates more problems of attention and capacity (Christensen and Lægred 2002c).

Our main finding seems to be rather paradoxical. How is it that people trust certain central political institutions more than the central actors in them? One reason for this could be that the political and administrative institutions have built up their trust over a long period of time, are path-dependent and less vulnerable to social change processes, and people may also differentiate between formal structures and actors who come and go (Selznick 1957). Political parties and politicians may be seen as representing special interests that mess up the system, and they may encounter greater problems in dealing with modernization and change processes. The modern mass media have probably enhanced this trend, because it is easier to criticize individual parties and politicians than to focus on or gain insight into the workings of the cabinet, of the parliament as a whole or of the civil service in general.

The second question is whether trust in government indicates some kind of cumulative pattern, as many studies have shown (Bouckaert and Van de Walle 2001:12), or whether there are certain clusters of trust. Table 2 shows quite clearly a cumulative pattern concerning trust, i.e. if people trust one of the governmental or political institutions or actors they normally trust the others as well; or if they distrust one they also distrust the others. Thus, there is a cluster of trust relationships that encompasses the main political institutions and actors (Listhaug 1998). There does not seem to be a clear distinction between regime institutions and political actors, as claimed by Norris (1999a). Government seems to be approached as a rather amorphous concept, and citizens have difficulty distinguishing one institution or set of actors from another (Bouckaert and Van de Walle 2001, Dinsdale and Marson 1999).

Table 2. *Correlation between different measures of trust in government. Pearson's R.*

	Parliament	Cabinet	Public administration	Local council	Political parties
Cabinet	.80				
Public administration	.66	.64			
Local council	.59	.61	.55		
Political parties	.72	.68	.56	.59	
Politicians	.69	.67	.61	.58	.79

All scores are significant on .000 level

There are, however, some small variations in this picture. Trust in parliament and cabinet have the highest inter-correlative score together with trust in political parties and politicians, and these four trust measures also inter-correlate strongly. We find the lowest correlative scores between trust in local councils and other trust factors, indicating that attitudes to the lowest level of the system are somewhat different, although scores are still on a highly significant level.

The independent variables: three sets of political attitudes

In the set of *broad political and ideological* variables, the first variable on democracy shows quite clearly that people are satisfied, but not strongly so. Four percent are very satisfied with the working of democracy in Norway, 70 percent relatively satisfied, 23 percent relatively dissatisfied and 4 percent very dissatisfied. Compared to 1995 there has been a slow decrease in satisfaction with democracy, but the level is still high compared to other countries (Aardal 1999) The second variable – position on a Left-Right political-ideological dimension – shows that the largest group (26 percent) put themselves in the middle category (5). This is in line with the Norwegian party structure. The largest party has traditionally been a moderate labour party and the differences between parties are relatively small. Few take extreme positions. Only 4 percent put themselves in the two categories on the far Left (0 and 1) and 7 percent adopted positions to the Right (9 and 10). The mean is 5.32, showing a slight leaning to the Right among the respondents.

The second set of political variables consists of three measures of *attitudes to tradition*. Table 3 shows the scores for each of the variables.

Table 3. *Variables showing attitudes towards traditional government. Percentage.*

	Completely agree	Partly agree	Both agree and disagree	Partly disagree	Completely disagree	Mean	N=	Mis-sing
Undermine universalism	5	18	17	27	34	3.68	2131	(166)
Strengthen public sector	19	34	13	20	14	2.75	2169	(128)
Increase political control of public companies	24	28	21	14	13	2.65	2037	(260)

The table shows quite a consistent picture, indicating that traditionalist values are relatively strong. The first variable shows that support for universalism is rather strong among the respondents. Sixty-one percent disagree partly or completely with the statement that the government ought to pay less attention to people having free access to public services and more to users having to pay for the services, while 23 percent agree. Traditionally universalism has been a central feature of the Norwegian welfare state, but over the last decade it has been more debated and some services have introduced user fees. Nevertheless, the main services, like health and school education, are still free in principle. Despite some attacks on the universalism of the welfare state in Norway, it is characterized by institutional stability (Eitrheim and Kuhnle 2000). However, the strong support for universalism in the population decreased from 32 percent in 1990 to 30 percent in 1996, declining to 23 percent in 2001 (Læg Reid 1997).

The second variable is the question whether it is more important to strengthen and extend public services than to decrease taxes. The table shows clearly that more people agree than disagree with this (53 percent versus 34 percent), revealing a deep-seated cultural adaptation to a high tax level in order to support a large public sector.

The third variable concerns the issue of whether political control of state-owned companies that have gained more autonomy under NPM is too weak and should be strengthened. The background to this question is that, like many other countries, Norway has reorganized its state-owned companies, moving them both formally and actually further away from executive political leaders and ministries and making them more commercially oriented (Christensen and Læg Reid 2003b). People are obviously sceptical towards this development, showing attention to traditional norms and values: 52 percent of the respondents support more control, while 27 percent do not. This is quite different from the attitudes of elites in Norway, where the majority do not support such a strengthening of control (Christensen and Læg Reid 2003a). The leaders of state-owned companies are, as expected, very much against an increase in control, but so, too,

are top civil servants; executive political leaders and parliamentarians are more divided (Christensen and Læg Reid 2002c).

Table 4 reports on a third set of political attitudes, the *modernist* variables, which are connected with the efficiency and privatisation variables. Overall the picture seems to be rather varied. The first variable relates to efficiency problems. Here an overwhelming majority of the respondents hold the general opinion that it is not scarcity of resources that is the problem in the public sector, but the way these resources are utilized. Here “resources” refers chiefly to Norway’s petroleum revenues, and the responses also reflect the fact that efficiency problems are high on the agenda of critics of the public bureaucracy in Norway. In spite of the strong focus on efficiency problems in the government’s modernization programs over the past 15 years, public criticism has continued unabated. In 2001, 84 percent of citizens agreed with the efficiency problem statement compared with 74 percent in 1996 and 80 percent in 1990 (Læg Reid 1997).

The second variable shows that although efficiency may be a problem, greater efficiency is not favoured at the expense of equal treatment. Fifty-six percent of the respondents disagree that efficiency is most important, compared with 27 percent who agree. These attitudes confirm the relatively strong egalitarian values in Norwegian society. Popular opinion on this issue has not changed very much over the past 12 years. In 1990, 26 percent agreed with the statement and in 1996, 22 percent (Læg Reid 1997).

Table 4. *Variables showing attitudes towards modernism in government. Percentage.*

	Completely agree	Partly agree	Both agree and disagree	Partly disagree	Completely disagree	Mean	N =	Missing
Efficiency problems	43	41	8	6	2	1.83	2152	(145)
Importance of efficiency	9	18	16	25	31	3.50	2120	(177)
More privatization	15	34	15	21	16	2.90	2142	(155)
More markets	7	30	26	21	16	3.09	2052	(245)

The third variable focuses on whether Norway should privatize more and have a smaller public sector. The respondents are much more divided on this question, with a majority favouring more privatization (49 percent agree, 37 percent disagree). To understand these responses one has to remember that the privatization debate in Norway is taking place in the context of a large public sector and in a country where privatization has traditionally been an ideologically-charged issue. In general the Norwegian elite is much more in favour of more privatization than Norwegian citizens (Christensen and Læg Reid 2003a).

The fourth variable deals with whether market forces should be more important than the government in influencing economic development. Here the respondents are

divided equally in their attitudes. Until the early 1980s Norwegian economic policy was strongly influenced by the Keynesian approach to economic planning; since then, however, it has been more deregulated and more open to the market.

Table 5 shows quite a varied picture concerning the correlations among the independent variables. If we first look at the correlations inside each of the three clusters of variables, the two variables measuring broad political attitudes show a low but significant positive correlation. This means that people on the Left of the political spectrum are slightly more satisfied with democracy than people on the Right.

Among the traditionalist variables the correlations show, as expected, that people who support strongly universalism would also like to strengthen the public sector, as would people who favour increased control of public companies.

Table 5. *Correlations between different measures of political attitudes. Pearson's R.*

	Satisfaction with democracy	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2. Left-Right dimension	.09*							
3. Undermine universalism	-.03	-.24*						
4. Strengthen public sector	.16*	.35*	-.18*					
5. Increase political control of public companies	-.04	.21*	.00	.19*				
6. Efficiency problems	-.09*	-.21*	.11*	-.16*	-.03			
7. Importance of efficiency	-.03	-.16	.38*	-.12*	.10*	.19*		
8. More privatization	-.07	-.52*	.35*	-.35*	-.25*	.31*	.25*	
9. More markets	.00	-.38*	.25*	-.14*	-.16*	.18*	.21*	.41*

*Scores are significant on .000-level.

The modernist variables show overall strong inter-correlations, the strongest ones are those between support for privatization and support for markets, and between support for privatization and emphasis on efficiency problems. The general picture is that if people prefer privatization they also prefer market solutions, see big efficiency problems in the public sector and are less concerned with issues of resource-accessibility and equality.

If we now focus on correlations between the clusters of variables, position on the Left-Right dimension shows an overall stronger correlation with the other two clusters than satisfaction with democracy. The correlations are, as expected, particularly strong with core variables about privatization and markets, and with those concerning undermining universalism and strengthening the public sector. The respondents are obviously clearly divided between those at the Left end of the political spectrum, who support universalism and a strong public sector and are sceptical towards privatization and market solutions, and those tending towards the Right, who support the opposite values and norms.

If we look at the correlations between the traditionalist and modernist variables, the strongest correlation is that people who support universalism in the welfare state see little need for increased privatization or strengthening the market and do not emphasize efficiency at the expense of equal treatment; resistance towards privatization is also combined with support for strengthening the public sector and increasing political control of public companies. This illustrates that modernist and traditionalist attitudes in many ways represent two sides of the coin. If one favours traditionalist values one scores low on modernist attitudes and vice-versa.

Analysis and discussion: political attitude variables and trust

The next question on which we focus is how the score for each independent variable correlates with trust variables. We first examine the bivariate relations between each set of variables and trust in various government institutions and then do a multivariate analysis of the relative importance of the various independent variables for the trust in government index and for trust in public administration.

Bivariate analysis. Table 6 shows the bivariate correlations between our independent variables covering political attitudes and trust in various political and administrative institutions and actors. The main finding is that there is a lot of consistency. The correlations between the political attitude variables and each of the dependent variables do not vary much, i.e. there is an overall pattern, indicating that the trust index could be used for a regression analysis. Five of the nine independent variables show significant and consistent correlations with all the dependent variables. The only variable with no significant correlation with trust is attitudes towards universalism. This might be explained by the decreasing support for these attitudes among the population and by the fact that conflicting attitudes among different groups contradict and neutralize each other.

If we look at the varying strength of the correlations, the most important independent variable is satisfaction with democracy. People who are most satisfied with how democracy works in Norway today also have by far the most trust in government.

Satisfaction with democracy is more important for trust than position on the Left-Right dimension, although people on the Left of the political spectrum consistently trust government more than those on the Right. This indicates that opinion of general regime

performance is relatively more important than political ideology, something that may reflect the absence of deep political cleavages in Norway. The independent variables vary somewhat in the different trust scores. Satisfaction with democracy correlates strongest with trust in parliament and the cabinet, which form the backbone of Norway's relatively centralized democracy. For position on the Left-Right spectrum, the correlation with trust in the cabinet is strongest, something that may reflect either more long-term trust in the cabinet as an institution or possibly more short-term trust in the current cabinet, which was a Labour minority government during the survey conducted in 2001.

Table 6. Correlations between political variables and trust in government. Pearson's R.

	Parliament	Cabinet	Public administration	Local council	Political parties	Politicians	Trust index
Satisfaction with democracy	-.42***	-.44***	-.37***	-.29***	-.33***	-.36***	-.44***
Left-Right dimension	-.10***	-.18***	-.14***	-.06**	-.06**	-.10***	-.13***
Undermine universalism	.04	.03	.04	-.01	.01	.00	.03
Strengthen public sector	-.19***	-.19***	-.23***	-.16***	-.15***	-.18***	-.21***
Increase political control of public companies	.07**	.06**	.01	.00	.04	.03	.05*
Efficiency problems	.15***	.17***	.23***	.10***	.14***	.17***	.19***
Importance of efficiency	.10***	.06**	.10***	.02	.05	.03	.08***
More privatization	.11***	.14***	.17***	.08***	.07***	.11***	.13***
More markets	.06***	.05	.05	.02	.05	.05	.06**

***significant on .000-level; ** significant on .01-level; *: significant on .05-level

With regard to satisfaction with democracy, the variable showing the strongest correlation with trust, one can ask whether it is possible to distinguish the variables theoretically and empirically. Kaase (1999) stresses that these are indicators of the same phenomenon, while Miller and Listhaug (1999) take satisfaction with democracy as an

indicator of the extent to which citizens support political institutions or democratic principles. While these concepts are obviously close, it is also possible to differentiate between them. Norris (1999a) and Klingemann (1999) regard satisfaction with democracy as an indicator of citizens' evaluation of regime performance, which may or may not be interpreted as satisfaction with the incumbent government. Another difference is that trust may imply more commitment and potential willingness to let institutions and actors act on one's behalf or to have autonomy in doing so. Satisfaction is a narrower term, even if it concerns democracy, and it is not obvious that satisfaction always leads to trust. A third argument is that satisfaction with democracy, as it is posed in this survey, relates more to the current working of democracy, while trust may be based on a broader and more long-term perspective.

The second most important variable is the one relating to strengthening the public sector. People who favour a strengthening of public services, instead of lowering taxes, are more inclined to trust the government. A third variable worth mentioning is the one related to efficiency problems. People who rather strongly disagree that the government and the public sector do not lack resources but have an efficiency problem trust government the most. It is interesting that this correlation is strongest concerning trust in the public administration. And finally, people disagreeing with the demand for more privatization and a smaller public sector trust government the most. This is especially the case for trust in the public administration.

Multivariate analysis. We now turn to the question of the relative explanatory power of the different independent variables for variations in trust in government by focusing on the additive trust index based on the six single variables.⁵ Because of our special interest in trust in public administration we add this single institution to our analysis.

The multivariate analyses (Table 7) confirm the strong effect of satisfaction with democracy revealed in the bivariate analyses. After controlling for Left-Right ideological allegiance, traditional opinions and modernist attitudes towards government, people's satisfaction with how democracy works in Norway emerges as the strongest predictor of variation in the respondents' trust in government. This variable can be seen as an indicator of general regime performance as well as of support for political institutions or democratic principles. This finding is consistent both for the general trust index and for the specific analysis of trust in the public administration. This indicates that citizens' general political-democratic beliefs have a strong effect on their trust in public-sector institutions. This finding remains consistent when one controls for democratic factors and people's experience and satisfaction with specific public services (Christensen and Læg Reid 2002a).

A second finding is that traditional attitudes, represented by agreement with the statement that it is more important to expand public services than to lower taxes, have a significant effect on both trust in government generally and in public administration specifically. What is more, modernist values, represented by agreement with the notion

⁵ The reason for this is the strong inter-correlation between trust in the six institutions (Table 2) and the relatively strong similarities between trust in each institution and the various independent variables (Tables 6).

that it is not lack of resources but inefficient use of them that is the most important problem in the public sector, shows a significant negative variation concerning trust in government generally and even more so concerning trust in public administration.

Table 7. *Summary of regression equation by individual political attitudes and trust. Standardized Beta Coefficients. Linear regression*

	Trust in government	Trust in public administration
General attitudes:		
Satisfaction with democracy	-.40***	-.32***
Position on Left-Right dimension	-.02	.00
Attitudes to tradition:		
Strengthening public sector	-.12***	-.14***
Attitudes to modernism:		
Efficiency problems	.12***	.17***
Importance of efficiency	.01	.02
More privatization	.02	.04
Multiple R	.483	.447
R ²	.233	.199
Adjusted R	.231	.197
F statistics	95,153	77,194
Significance of F	.000	.000

Bivariate correlations that are significant at .000-level are included in the regressions

The analysis confirms our general hypothesis that broad positive political attitudes and orientations towards democracy and positive, traditionalist attitudes towards the public sector enhance trust in government institutions generally and public administration especially, while more negative, modernist attitudes towards the public sector tend to weaken trust in government.

Conclusion

In this paper we have shown, first, that people's trust in government is of a general nature, with some differentiating features. Variations in trust between the different institutions are relatively small, but levels of trust are highest in the parliament and lowest in politicians, while there is a strong inter-correlation between trust in the different institutions. People with a high level of trust in one institution also tend to trust the other institutions, while distrust in one is related to distrust in others. In other

words, trust in government shows a cumulative pattern, and trust relations are more supplementary than alternative.

Second, trust in governmental institutions varies significantly with political-cultural factors, including broad political attitudes as well as traditionalist and modernist political attitudes. People who are satisfied with how democracy works and who support traditional features of the Norwegian public sector generally have more trust in government organizations than citizens who support ideas and values connected with NPM public-sector reform. One can ask whether this will eventually lead to less trust in government, since more NPM measures are being implemented under the current government, or whether people will in the long run adapt their attitudes to the new norms and specific reforms.

Third, the general political-cultural variables have the strongest overall effect on variation in people's trust in government. This indicates that integration, involvement and engagement in the political system and the political-administrative culture is more important for trust in governmental institutions than people's traditionalist values or modernist attitudes. The strong effect of general satisfaction with democracy indicates that passive political integration and satisfaction may be as important for trust as more specific opinions about particular aspects of public-sector values, organization and performance.

The main picture is that variation in people's trust in government institutions can be traced to a somewhat larger degree to factors affecting diffuse support for the political system (such as satisfaction with democracy) than to factors affecting specific support for particular aspects of public-sector reform (such as market competition and privatization). Long-term general identities seem to be more important than contemporary administrative policy issues. In a high-context culture with strong collectivistic attitudes like Norway, an intuitive understanding of how democracy works seems to have a greater impact on trust in government than opinions about specific reform initiatives or administrative policies (Bennett 1990; Christensen, Lægreid and Wise 2001). Whether this is because modern reforms are seen as ideas and symbols rather than more threatening specific reforms is not possible to tell from our data. What is more, if people tend to see government as an amorphous entity and do not make a clear distinction between the different institutions, as indicated in tables 1 and 2, it becomes difficult to determine the effect of specific aspects of public-sector organization, functioning and reform on trust in specific government institutions (Bouckaert and van de Valle 2001).

The argument is compounded by the complexity of causality. Our assumption is that satisfaction with government and opinions about public sector organization, functioning and reform affect the level of trust in government: But it could also be the other way around, with more trusting attitudes leading to greater satisfaction with how democracy works and producing traditionalist (or modernist) attitudes towards the public sector, a conundrum that cannot easily be solved using the survey data (Huseby 2000). Svallfors (2002) examines how the absence or presence of political trust affects attitudes towards state intervention. He concludes that political trust does not matter a great deal for attitudes towards the welfare state. The truth is probably that we are looking at mutually dependent processes and a co-evolution between different sets of attitudes, opinions

and beliefs (March and Olsen 1989). This makes it difficult to operate with clear dependent and independent variables and reveals a greater need for an approach that allows the dynamics of opinion development to be studied.

Bearing this in mind, we can say that regime performance and generally positive attitudes towards how democracy works within the national setting seem to further trust in government, but so do more specific political attitudes towards crucial questions of administrative policy and reforms. Citizens' general level of (political) identity and belief in politics and democracy enhances their trust in parliament, the cabinet, the civil service, local councils, political parties and politicians.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that trust is a multi-dimensional concept and there is no one-factor explanation for variations in people's trust in governmental institutions. In addition, it is difficult to differentiate between different attitudes and beliefs that might affect trust. The variables are highly interwoven and interconnected. Furthermore, the reforms themselves can contribute to change in the normative foundation and in attitudes over time. Democracy is an open-ended project (Olsen 1997) and the values and norms that constitute trust in democracy can change over time: for example through the development of meaning and interpretation of experiences with administrative reforms. Neo-liberal reforms based on the ideas of NPM might thus have a content that strengthens an aggregated and individualist conception of trust and democracy and weakens integrated and more collective values (Lægneid and Roness 1999).

One implication of this analysis is that the causal relations are contested, complex and multi-faceted. Citizens' trust in government institutions seems to be a complex mix of images, ideology and stereotypes, as well as attitudes to specific aspects of public sector organization, functioning and reform. To gain a better understanding of the variation in citizens' trust in government one needs to take a more comparative approach, focusing on changes over time and studying different institutions and different countries.

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