Thus far, the analysis has primarily been concerned to define political trust and to set out the various ways in which trust is measured. In the final section of the previous chapter, the analysis turned to the factors that affect people’s trust in political actors and institutions. The focus there was on explaining changes in trust over time. Yet a longitudinal perspective provides only a partial handle on the factors driving trust. The main problem here is that we don’t have very good measures recorded over time that enable us to understand why levels of trust might have changed over the years. Better data are often available at single points in time – because a particularly detailed survey or experiment has been conducted – which enable us to examine in greater depth which factors stimulate or depress levels of trust. This chapter is devoted to what these data tell us about the causes of trust.

**Identifying potential causes of trust**

For someone to designate a particular actor or institution as worthy of ‘trust’ is potentially a complex judgement.\(^1\) In particular, that person must identify among a range of potential considerations those factors that are important or salient in determining the trustworthiness of that actor or institution.\(^2\) There are a wide variety of factors that people might use to determine whether to judge someone as worthy of trust or not. It may be that different (types of) individuals will use different factors to determine trust. Even empirical models that contain variables measuring a number of these factors often turn out to have limited explanatory power. The complexity of trust as a judgement and the variety of factors that drive this judgement mean that we have to cast our net very wide if we are to explain trust, and even then many of the reasons that impel people to trust or to distrust may remain hidden.

Yet while the task of pinpointing the reasons for trust may be daunting, we have plenty of help. In particular, a large number of existing studies have explored the drivers or
antecedents of political trust and related judgements such as system legitimation, political confidence and political disaffection. These studies are as extensive outside political science as they are within it. There are bountiful studies on the factors shaping how individuals evaluate decision-making agencies within disciplines such as psychology, sociology, risk studies, management and business studies. Typically, researchers have studied how individuals react to a decision taken by an authority figure (whether in the workplace, within the community or in government), with those reactions measured either in the form of attitudes (how positively does the individual feel about the decision?) or behaviour (does the individual feel bound by the decision?). Trust here is often of the interpersonal basis: do I trust my line manager to take decisions that affect my role within the organisation? Some of the factors likely to affect such interpersonal trust will not necessarily help determine whether or not someone trusts a large political institution such as a government or a legislature. For example, people’s trust in their line manager has been shown to reflect how discreetly managers deal with workers’ personal issues (Butler, 1991). It is unlikely that this kind of factor, which arises in the context of personal relations, will also shape how people assess the trustworthiness of larger-scale, impersonal, political institutions. However, many of the studies of trust conducted in fields outside political science do help in identifying the potential reasons why citizens may view political authorities in a particular way, and so the literature drawn on in this section ranges more widely than is normal in studies of political trust.

Within this literature, the factors identified as driving trust judgements are numerous. To discern some general antecedents among these myriad factors, we can organise them under various broad headings. One fairly basic feature suggests that citizens are likely to accept a decision, or trust a decision-maker, if the decision fits with their personal preference or value. In other words, an actor may be trusted if she delivers an outcome that is favourable to another person. Alongside the substance or valence of the outcome, trust may also be responsive to the outcome’s distributonal qualities. Trust is likely to be forthcoming if the outcome of an actor’s decision is felt to involve a fair distribution across people affected by it, where fairness is a function of the relative input or merits of all participants. Yet trust does not rest solely on the outcomes of a decision; it is also shaped by the way decisions are taken. People’s evaluations of an actor or a decision are shaped by the procedures involved, in particular by their fairness. Hence, in seeking to identify the reasons why someone might trust or distrust an actor, we might, at a general level, distinguish between three factors: *outcomes*, *distributive justice* and *procedural fairness* (Tyler et al, 1986; Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996).

Judgements based on outcomes may be particularly important in situations where an individual is asked to evaluate a particular decision or policy task. Hence, trust in a public official responsible for a decision (say the siting of a new public building) is likely to reflect the virtues and drawbacks an individual sees in the particular decision. However, where trust relates to an actor or institution outside the context of a particular policy decision, the nature of these outcomes may be less important than the way in which decisions are seen to be taken. Hence, trust in the context of specific decisions may be heavily shaped by perceptions of outcomes, while trust in the context of more generalised institutions may be more heavily shaped by perceptions of procedural fairness (Tyler et al, 1986: 975; Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996: 189-90; Earle, 2004).
Another high-level distinction that helps us to differentiate the various causes of trust is between whether a decision-maker is concerned with someone’s interests and whether she is competent to act on those interests. This reflects a basic distinction in the way people form impressions of others, where judgements are based on whether a person is seen as either warm or competent (Fiske and Durante, 2014). The criteria employed in assessing whether to trust another thus concern an agent’s intentions and their ability (Johnson, 1999; Levi and Stoker, 2000: 476; Colquitt et al, 2007; Earle, 2010). Some other studies have added a third broad antecedent to trust, namely integrity (Mayer et al, 1995; PytlikZillig et al, 2016). Although there is some overlap between these three antecedents of trust (in particular, virtuous intentions share some features with the quality of integrity), they also are held to comprise distinctive elements in assessments of trustworthiness.

Within each of these three potential antecedents of trust, a set of more specific factors may be used by citizens to assess the trustworthiness of a person or an institution, and thus as the basis on which to either express trust or distrust (Butler, 1991; Mayer et al, 1995; McKnight and Chervany, 1996; Johnson, 1999; Colquitt et al, 2007; Earle, 2010; McEvily and Tortoriello, 2011). These factors are listed in Fig 5.1. Within the category of ability or competence, citizens may assess someone’s expertise or knowledge, their experience, their efficiency, and their propensity to avoid mistakes. Within the category of intentions, citizens may assess the extent to which someone is deemed to be benevolent, caring and respectful of others people’s interests, and receptive to those preferences. Within the category of integrity, citizens may assess whether someone acts in a manner consistent with their promises, and whether actions are motivated by suitable ethical principles. In the following sections, I use this threefold typology to identify what the extensive and multi-disciplinary empirical literature tells us about the determinants of trust.
Fig 5.1: Typology of factors shaping trust judgements

TRUST

Outcomes
- Nature of outcome or decision
- Distribution of outcome

Procedures
- Procedural qualities
- Intentions / motivation
- Integrity

- Ability / competence
- Intentions / motivation
- Integrity

- Expertise
- Knowledge
- Experience
- Efficiency
- Absence of mistakes
- Benevolence
- Care
- Respect
- Responsiveness
- Openness; transparency
- Receptiveness to demands
- Fairness
- Consistency
- Fulfilment of promises
- Actions motivated by principles
- Honesty; truthfulness
- Absence of self-interest

Existing studies on the causes of political trust

**Competence**

It is often assumed that people will trust politicians if they deliver the kind of outputs desired by citizens. Trust as a bond between citizens and governments – with the former entrusting the latter to act on their behalf – involves judgements about whether governments are responsive to citizens’ needs and capable of delivering an optimal level of social outputs. Thus, assessments of government reflect whether governments are act responsively and also competently.

Analysts have used two ways to examine how far trust is shaped by aspects of government performance. The first measures performance in objective terms, and considers whether citizens in political units marked by high levels of economic and social performance are more trusting of their governments than their counterparts in units marked by poor levels of performance. The second measures performance in subjective terms, and considers whether citizens who perceive economic and social performance to be good are more trusting than citizens who perceive performance to be poor.

At the aggregate level, most empirical studies find that countries’ levels of economic development are positively associated with levels of political trust or democratic satisfaction (Weatherford, 1987; Wessels, 2009; Norris, 2011: ch10; Armingeon and Guthmann, 2014). Analyses using longitudinal data suggest that changes in economic conditions (such as rates of GDP growth and unemployment) have a significant impact on evaluations of political actors (Patterson and Caldeira, 1990; Bellucci and Memoli, 2012). At the individual level, too, government performance is often found to be highly correlated with levels of political trust. Studies have shown a strong relationship between trust and both people’s assessments of their own economic situation and of the economic situation of their country as a whole (Citrin and Green, 1985; Whiteley et al, 2013: 260-66; Magalhaes, 2016). Over-time changes in levels of trust in the US during the 1980s and 1990s have been explained by feelings about the health of the national economy and by government performance on crime (Chanley et al, 2000). Many studies have also shown a strong positive link between people’s assessment of government performance in areas like education and health and their trust in politicians (Gronlund and Setala, 2012).

However, other studies have suggested the relationship between economic conditions and trust is more tenuous. Using individual-level data, Dalton (2004: 115-25) shows the relationship between economic evaluations and trust to be modest. Thus, peaks and troughs in people’s feelings of economic confidence are not strongly related to changes in levels of trust in government. The reluctance of people to trust their elected officials even when they are optimistic about the state of the country can be seen in US data collected from the late 1970s. These data show the proportions of people who trust the national government alongside the proportions of people who are satisfied with the state of the country. Even during periods of economic boom, such as the mid-1980s and late-1990s, people felt positively about the state of the country without this optimism translating into higher rates of trust in government (Pew Center, 2015: 25). Comparative analyses also suggest that variations in objective economic conditions between countries are not associated with
significant differences in levels of trust (van der Meer and Hakhverdian, 2016). This may be because people don’t always blame the government when the economy is performing poorly, or credit the government when the economy is performing well (Citrin and Green, 1986). Indeed, in some cases, scholars have suggested that citizens in rich countries are more demanding of politicians and, when politicians fail to deliver on these demands, less forthcoming in their trust. Hence some studies have found that people in economically developed countries are actually less trusting in government than their counterparts in economically poorer countries (McAllister, 1999).

Beyond the delivery of desired outputs, what do we know about whether trust is affected by perceptions of politicians’ competence and ability? Some studies have suggested that people are prone to trust government when they believe that officials are “smart” and “know what they are doing”, and less likely to trust government when their views of officials’ competence are more negative (Ulbig, 2002). Studies conducted by psychologists have also shown that people trust institutions more if their personnel are seen as competent, for example by having relevant experience or a track record of providing accurate information (Terwel et al, 2009). People may trust politicians not only because they are seen to deliver desirable outputs, but also because of the manner in which they do so. In particular, people may assess politicians on whether the outputs they produce are seen to involve reasonable or excessive costs. Hence, levels of trust seem sensitive to people’s perceptions of government efficiency; where people perceive government to waste public funds this has a depressing impact on their trust in politicians (Hetherington, 2005: 16-35; see also Owen and Dennis, 2001).

However, there is some doubt over how far trust in an actor is shaped by perceptions of ability or competence. For a start, studies show that politicians tend to be rated quite highly on their competence; it is on other aspects of their performance – for example concern with their constituents – where ratings are poorer (Fiske and Durante, 2014). A US study conducted in 2015 found that citizens believed the key fault of elected officials to reside less in their competence than their honesty. When asked about the traits of various groups of people, 67 per cent of US citizens labelled elected officials as ‘intelligent’, the same proportion as for the typical American, although a little lower than the proportion for business leaders. However, politicians were rated far more negatively on ‘honesty’; 29 per cent of elected officials were seen as possessing this trait, against 45 per cent for business leaders and 69 per cent for the typical American (Pew Center, 2015: 75). When asked about the major problem with national politicians, US citizens’ most common gripes related to politicians’ lack of responsiveness (politicians are seen to be influenced by interest groups, to care primarily about their own careers and to be out of touch with ordinary citizens) and their dishonesty; there was less criticism of their competence or their wise use of government funds (ibid: 74). In short, politicians appear to be criticised not for a lack of competence, but for a lack of concern with citizens’ needs (see also Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002: 109-10). In similar vein, studies conducted by psychologists have shown that, while trust in institutions is affected both by perceived institutional competence and perceived institutional care and concern (Twyman et al, 2008), it tends to be shaped more by whether decision-makers are seen to share citizens’ interests than by whether those actors are experts or not (Eiser et al, 2009).
**Intentions or motivations**

As just noted, empirical studies have tended to show that trust is more strongly influenced by people’s perceptions of whether politicians are motivated to look after their interests than by whether they are competent to do so. Studies show that people distrust political institutions if they feel politicians fail to take their interests into account when making decisions (Owen and Dennis, 2001; Farnsworth, 2003; Catterberg and Moreno, 2005; Jones and McDermott, 2010). Indeed, a recurring finding from the empirical literature is that people distrust politicians not because they fail to deliver appropriate outputs, but because they are unwilling to find out what citizens want and then to act on those demands (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002: ch3). 

Studies conducted in various European countries identify similar findings; that popular discontent reflects feelings that political elites are weakly attuned to the concerns and problems of citizens (van Wessel, 2010; Dekker, 2011). Using data from surveys of Swedish citizens, Grimes (2006) shows how changes in people’s trust of a state institution (the Swedish rail authority) reflect how far they think that body has taken local people’s views into account. People do not trust or distrust according to whether they themselves have any influence on decisions, but by whether an authority is seen as responsive to the general population. An analysis of the law-making process in the US finds that legitimacy assessments are more strongly shaped by perceptions of whether law-makers’ intentions were good or not than by perceptions of the neutrality and representativeness of the decision process (Gangl, 2003). Studies have found that politicians are trusted more when they are seen as being aligned with voters’ own policy preferences than when they are seen as holding a different set of preferences (Werner, 2016). Studies of trust in other public bodies, like the police, also show that public support is heavily dependent on whether agents are seen as acting with people’s priorities and concerns in mind (van Craen and Skogan, 2015).

While trust has been shown to be strongly shaped by decision-makers’ perceived concern with public interests, few people perceive politicians to be motivated by such concern. Studies in the US have shown that citizens tend to see politicians as less responsive to voters’ concerns than to those of interest groups (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002: 95-106, 121-24). Analyses in the UK have shown that people distrust politicians because they are seen as motivated by their own goals and ambitions, rather than by the interests of the citizens they serve (Graham et al, 2002). A survey conducted in autumn 2012 found that Britons’ low opinions of politicians arose from a perception that MPs did not understand or share the concerns of ordinary people (Wallis, 2012; Wright, 2013). Part of the problem with politicians’ lack of responsiveness might be because those politicians are seen to be unrepresentative of the wider population, and thus as unlikely to intuitively understand the kind of issues and concerns facing citizens. Some studies have found that trust in public institutions is higher where these bodies are seen as being socially representative of the wider population, for example in terms of their gender balance (Riccucci et al, 2014).
**Integrity**

Although at a conceptual level trust has a strong moral dimension, few studies have considered how far trust is shaped by the ethical nature of the way political elites behave. Those that have explored the link between trust and ethical behaviour have tended to explore how far trust is eroded by instances of political corruption or misconduct. There is an obvious potential directional problem in relating trust in politicians to perceptions of political conduct; perceptions of misconduct may drive distrust, but existing feelings of distrust may just as well drive perceptions of political misconduct.

Various studies designed in a way to overcome such chicken-and-egg problems still identify misconduct and a lack of probity as factors that drive down levels of trust. Thus, experimental studies show that people’s trust in politicians declines when they perceive politicians’ to be dishonest rather than honest (Faulkner et al, 2015). Cross-national and longitudinal studies that employ objective indicators of political misconduct similarly find these to correlate fairly well with levels of political trust (Chanley et al, 2000; Van der Meer, 2010; Van der Meer and Hakhverdian, 2016).

Beyond corruption, however, there are many aspects of politicians’ ethical behaviour which may shape citizens’ feelings of trust. One such aspect is how far political decisions and actions are undertaken for reasons of principle rather than for partisan advantage. Public support for decision-makers has been found to be higher when decisions are seen to have been made carefully and objectively than when they are seen to be partial and partisan (Ramirez, 2008). Similarly, trust has been found to be low if people believe politicians lack principle and engage in ritualistic behaviour – such as point-scoring – and higher where politicians are seen to pursue value-driven goals (Dekker, 2011). Likewise, trust in politicians is lower when politicians are perceived to seek an electoral advantage rather than taking decisions on a more impartial basis (Boggild, 2016). This reflects a pattern that is particularly prominent in the US, where citizens appear to dislike bickering and conflict between different political parties; public approval of Congress has been shown to decline when the parties are in conflict with one another (for example by engaging in heated debate or by voting against one another) and to increase when the parties act more harmoniously (Funk, 2001; Ramirez, 2009). In fact, approval of Congress has been found to fall when it engages in its core function – of debating and passing legislation – since this role tends to involve disputes between the parties and conflict with the President (Durr et al, 1997).

Another aspect of politicians’ ethical qualities relates to their consistency or propensity to keep their word. Here, studies – drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data – have shown that people react negatively to politicians when they fail to keep their word or fulfil their promises (Graham et al, 2002; Naurin, 2011: ch6). Experimental research in the US has found that people’s trust in political representatives is depressed if representatives change their policy stance as opposed to remaining consistent in their views (Sigelman and Sigelman, 1986; Doherty et al, 2016). So honouring promises and acting consistently are important for trust. But beyond the few studies cited here, we lack much evidence of how far these qualities matter, and in relation to which type of political actor.
One factor that does not fall squarely into any of the three procedural features identified in Figure 5.1 is fairness. To act fairly – in the sense of treating all views and claims with equal weight – reflects considerations of both motivation (namely a concern with other people’s interests) and integrity (namely a desire to act in a way that accords all people equal place in the decision-making process). Numerous studies have shown that people’s perceptions of the fairness of a decision-making process carry more weight for their satisfaction with that decision than the specific outcome (Tyler and Caine, 1981; Lind and Tyler, 1988). Both country-specific and comparative analyses, and survey-based and experimental research designs, have similarly shown that fairness of treatment or fairness of decision-making explain trust more strongly than approval of an outcome (Esaiasson, 2010; van Ryzin, 2011; (Herian et al, 2012).

Summary

I have identified three potential sources for people’s judgement about whether a political actor can be trusted or not: whether she is competent, whether she is motivated to serve the public interest and whether she acts ethically and with integrity. In practice, it is often difficult to separate these sources, since there is some overlap between them (an absence of self-interest might indicate that a politician is responsive to public demands, yet might also suggest that she manifests clear moral principles and personal integrity). Yet in separating them, our expectation is that competence is likely to be a weaker determinant of trust than motivation and integrity. While existing studies show that individual qualities related to an actor’s competence (such as expertise, experience and efficiency) affect trust, other studies have suggested that people trust individuals less on the basis of their competence than on their concern with others groups’ interests. In addition, the relationship between trust and objective indicators of politicians’ competence (such as good economic performance) is far from strong. The existing literature consistently finds, however, that trust is shaped by whether people perceive actors as motivated to serve others (by acting in the public interest and being receptive to people’s concerns) and as behaving with integrity (by avoiding misconduct, by acting in a principled manner, and by keeping promises and acting consistently).

Methodological issues in assessing the causes of trust

In assessing the potential causes of trust, scholars have employed a variety of methods and sources of data. One way of identifying what drives people to trust or distrust political actors and institutions is simply to ask them. This approach can take the form either of a large-scale opinion survey, or of a smaller-scale qualitative exercise in which a small group of citizens are asked in some depth about their opinions. Another way of identifying causes is to compare citizens in different units (for example regions within a country, or countries themselves), where variations between units in aggregate levels of trust can be related back to an underlying unit-level variation that is hypothesised to shape trust. A third way of identifying causes is through an experimental design, in which randomly assigned participants are allocated to different conditions hypothesised to shape trust, with subsequent levels of trust among participants in each condition being observed.
Taking these methods in reverse order, experimental research designs are being increasingly used to analyse issues such as trust, although the majority of such experiments focus on trust between individuals, or ‘social’ trust, as opposed to trust between individuals and institutions, or ‘political’ trust (Wilson and Eckel, 2011). There are few experimental studies on the factors shaping political trust, and thus as yet this research design provides a limited amount of data from which to construct an understanding of causal factors. Yet experimental designs are highly effective at detecting causation in relationships between variables, even if they also suffer from concerns over generalisability or ‘external validity’. The second type of research design, using a comparative approach, may also help us to identify the drivers of trust if we can trace any variations in trust across units to one or two hypothesised causal factors. Comparative analyses have been widely conducted in the field of political trust, often focusing on the impact of such factors as economic conditions, political institutions (Magalhães, 2006) and political representation (see below). Yet because measures of some of the hypothesised causes of trust are not available across units, comparative analyses tend to be limited in the range of potential causes they can explore. In addition, even though the ‘logic of comparison’ may enable researchers to isolate the effects of a specific variable on trust, there remains a question about whether this variable is really causal or whether some other (unobserved) variation between units is really driving observed differences between the units.

The bulk of studies seeking to identify the causes of trust draw on data that originate from asking people for their attitudes towards political actors. These data usually take the form of surveys, either in single country or multi-country guises. When robustly designed, surveys have the advantage of generalisability, or external validity. Yet in most cases, they involve constructs and measures designed by the researcher themselves; they tend to assume and impose a perspective on trust rather than exploring citizens’ own perspectives on the issue. These perspectives are better identified through some form of qualitative research design, in which citizens’ own viewpoints can be explored. Our understanding of political trust has recently been enhanced through research designs such as focus groups, in-depth interviews and analyses of citizens’ newspaper correspondence, that have highlighted a variety of reasons behind contemporary political discontent (Graham et al, 2002; van Wessell, 2010; Dekker, 2011; Kemmers et al, 2015).

In identifying key findings from existing studies on the factors driving political trust, I have drawn on survey-based, qualitative, comparative and experimental research designs. Although the bulk of these studies rest on survey-based sources of data, I also draw on other research designs, which offer important findings in their own right as well as allowing us to establish the representativeness and generalizability of the findings from opinion surveys. When it comes to my own analysis, my research design and data are country specific. They are also primarily based on the results of opinion surveys, supplemented at one point by evidence drawn from an experimental study. One advantage of using surveys is that, due to the wide variety of opinions that can be canvassed, it is often possible to compare the effects of different types of judgement on trust. This comparison between multiple potential causes is usually not available through experiments (where the number of manipulated conditions that can be simultaneously tested is limited) or comparative analyses (since data enabling measurement of all these causes are often not available across units). Yet opinion surveys – such as those I draw on below – often include wide batteries of questions on issues relating
to political trust, which allow a relatively broad approach to identifying causes. However, even large-scale opinion surveys are limited in the range of measures they can field, and so even these usually provide scholars with data tapping only some of the potential causes of trust.

One particular problem with relying on data gleaned from surveys is that they are usually available only at particular points in time. While such cross-sectional data allow researchers to identify attitudes at a particular point, they force them to assume a set of relationships rather than allowing those causal relations to be identified more precisely. Measured at one point in time, a relationship between two variables might show that variable X causes variable Y, or it might show the reverse (that Y causes X). Previous studies on political trust and legitimacy have pointed to exactly this effect. Hence, feelings of legitimacy towards the Supreme Court in the United States might arise from whether citizens perceive the Court's procedures to be fair and just; or legitimacy feelings may arise from a different cause and themselves shape how procedurally fair the Court is seen to be (Mondak, 1993). Studies that point to the impact of politicians' behaviour or responsiveness on citizens' trust may well have the story the wrong way around; existing feelings of trust may induce people to perceive politicians as behaving poorly (Dancey, 2012) or as being unresponsive (Chanley et al, 2001). It is often the case that solid theory provides a good guide to the direction of the causal relationship (so that, at a conceptual level, $X \rightarrow Y$ makes sense, while $Y \rightarrow X$ does not). If not, however, then other forms of data can help to verify findings derived from cross-sectional data. Over-time (or longitudinal) data can often help isolate causal relations more precisely, and so where possible I complement evidence gained from surveys undertaken at a particular point in time with data gained from surveys that stretch over time.

**Modelling the causes of trust in Britain**

In Britain, the most extensive source of survey data on political trust is the British Election Study (BES), conducted around general elections since 1964. The surveys in 2005 and 2010 contain a particularly wide variety of indicators of the kind of factors likely to shape political trust. In the analysis that follows, I draw on these two surveys, focusing first on the 2005 study and then using the 2010 study to explore how far the determinants of trust might change over time.

The 2005 BES study comprised three main elements: a pre-election survey, a post-election survey and a self-completion mailback survey. For reasons to be explained shortly, my analysis draws on the pre-election wave. This wave was conducted between February and April 2005, and involved interviews with 3,589 people. I employ as a measure of trust the responses given to two separate survey questions that asked for people's trust in parliament and in politicians. I sum the responses to these two questions into a single trust scale, whose values range from 0 (indicating no trust) to 10 (indicating a great deal of trust). The mean level of trust on this scale was slightly under the mid-point of the range, at 4.26. Earlier on, I identified three core judgements that can be drawn on to help explain why people might trust or distrust politicians. These judgements concerned an actor's intentions, competence and integrity. The 2005 BES pre-election wave contains indicators that allow us to tap assessments of politicians' intentions and their competence. In later analysis – which draws
on the self-completion element of the 2005 BES study – I also draw on measures that assess politicians’ integrity.

One way of assessing people’s ratings of politicians’ ability or competence is through measures of policy delivery. In the 2005 BES, assessments of policy delivery take the form of questions asking respondents how well they judge government to have handled various policy issues, notably crime, asylum-seekers, the health service, terrorism, the economy and the level of taxation. People’s evaluations of government delivery on these issues are strongly interrelated, as suggested by a principal component factor analysis which identified a single factor underlying the evaluations (eigenvalue=2.53; proportion of variance explained=0.42). I therefore calculate a factor score for these various measures, tapping overall assessments of government policy delivery, with high scores indicating positive assessments. Politicians’ ability can also be tapped through people’s assessments of the state of the economy. I therefore draw on a measure of how well people believe the national economy is likely to perform over the coming year.

I also assess the role of people’s assessments of politicians’ abilities through an indicator which taps people’s feelings about the current condition of the country. Some people may lack clear views on how well the government is handling issues like the economy and health. But they may have more generalised feelings about the state of the country, since people’s judgements rely not only on cognitive assessments but also on more gut-level feelings (Kuklinski et al, 1991). The 2005 BES included questions that asked people for their feelings on the state of the economy and the health service. For each issue, I test for the effects of negative policy feelings against positive policy feelings. Finally, since trust may well be shaped by people’s feelings about high-profile policy actors, I include a measure of the perceived competence of the incumbent prime minister, Tony Blair.

To gauge the effects on trust of people’s perceptions of politicians’ motives, I draw on three measures. The first measure comprises an assessment of how well people are represented by the governing political party; this is an indirect measure of motives, since it assumes that only politicians that wish to respond to public demands will in fact adopt policy positions close to the average voter. I measure representation by reference to where, on two ideological scales (one measuring preferences over whether to raise or lower taxation and public spending, the other measuring left-right preferences), people place themselves and where they place the governing (Labour) party. Representation is then calculated as a function of the distance between the citizen’s placement and the party placement; higher scores are coded to indicate congruence between voters and party. In modelling both these measures of representation, I find that trust is shaped more by relative placements on the tax-spending scale than on the left-right scale. I therefore limit the analysis to how responsive Labour is seen to be on the issue of taxation and public spending. The second measure of politicians’ intentions relates to how equitable they are seen to be, and is captured by a survey question that asks people whether they think the government treats people fairly. Third, in a match to the question asked about the competence of the prime minister, I also draw on a question that asks whether Tony Blair is responsive to voters’ concerns. On an 11-point scale (where 0=absence of the quality and 10=presence of the quality), Tony Blair was seen to be more competent (mean score: 5.73) than responsive (mean score: 4.85).
Finally, trust may be affected by specific issues or policy decisions that show politicians to be (in)competent and/or (un)responsive. In 2005, the key issue that might have been expected to have shaped Britons’ trust in their politicians was the decision in 2003 to go to war with Iraq. My model of trust therefore includes a term measuring public disapproval of that decision.

In sum, the model of trust in Britain allows us to explore judgements about politicians’ ability and competence along with their intentions to act in people’s interests. In formal terms, the trust model I employ takes the following form:

\[
Y(\text{trust}) = b_0 \text{constant} + b_1 \text{govt handling} + b_2 \text{future of national economy} \\
+ b_3 \text{policy feelings} + b_4 \text{Blair competence} + b_5 \text{policy representation} \\
+ b_6 \text{govt fairness} + b_7 \text{Blair responsiveness} + b_8 \text{Iraq}
\] (5.1)

To ensure that people’s judgements and their trust are not both shaped by their personal characteristics, the model controls for a number of demographic, socio-economic and political variables, notably age, gender, education level, occupation and party vote. For reasons of space, the results from these demographic controls are not shown in the table. But confirming the findings of Chapter 4, people’s demographic and socio-economic characteristics are shown to explain little of the variation in trust. The oldest age group (those aged 70 and above) are found to be more trusting than the youngest (18-30 years) age group, while the more highly educated people are, the greater their level of trust. Yet these effects are not that substantive; together, the demographic and socio-economic variables account for only 4 per cent of the variation in people’s trust in parliament and politicians.

Compared to people’s individual characteristics, trust is far more heavily shaped by evaluations of politicians’ ability and their intentions to serve the public good. As shown in Table 5.1, the degree of variance in the level of trust (measured by the R^2 figure) increases in this model to 40 per cent. Assessments of policy delivery, the economy and the prime minister’s competence are all significantly related to trust. People are able to relate such cognitive assessments to trust; more generalised feelings about the state of the economy and the health service are found not relevant for trust. Evaluations of government fairness and prime ministerial responsiveness are also closely related to trust; as is people’s perceptions of how well they are represented by the governing party. Net of these appraisals, however, judgements about the Iraq war are not a significant predictor of trust. To identify the substantive effects of these appraisals, I simulate the effects on trust of altering the value of each variable from its minimum to maximum level, holding all other variables constant at their mean. The results, presented in Fig 5.2, show that some appraisals have a stronger effect on trust than others, and that judgements about both politicians’ competence and their intentions are important for trust. Assessments of Tony Blair’s concern with people have a stronger effect on people’s trust than their assessments of his ability. Someone who believes the prime minister to be fully responsive to people’s concerns has, all other things equal, a level of trust one fifth (21 per cent) higher than someone who believes the prime minister to be not at all responsive to people. Similarly important for trust are people’s perceptions of whether the government acts fairly. Yet trust is also heavily shaped by whether people feel the government is delivering on important policy areas.
Table 5.1 Impact of political competence and motivation on political trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 2005</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2 Change in 2005</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coef</td>
<td>(t)</td>
<td>Coef</td>
<td>(t)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government handled policy issues well</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>(4.87)</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>(5.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National economic situation will get better</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>(2.87)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive feelings about economy</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>(1.05)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive feelings about health</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>(-0.53)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Blair is competent</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>(2.68)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>(3.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governing party is responsive on tax-spending</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>(2.10)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government is fair</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>(5.46)</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>(4.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Blair is in touch with people</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>(7.59)</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>(6.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapproval of decision over Iraq</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>(-0.85)</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>(-0.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Model significance (prob &gt; F)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.46</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted N</td>
<td>2,797</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,316</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Fig 5.2: Impact on political trust of judgements of politicians’ ability and intentions

Note: The figures report the impact on trust of changes in each variable from its minimum to its maximum level, derived from models 1 and 2 in Table 5.1.
Source: 2005 BES, pre-election and post-election waves.
Trust is thus a broad judgement on the part of citizens, driven by a number of considerations about politicians’ intentions and competence. Some previous studies have suggested that citizens’ assessments of a decision-making or rule-imposing actor involve a trade-off between that actor’s competence and intentions. Thus, the higher the evaluations of the actor’s competence, the weaker the impact of procedural evaluations on overall satisfaction with the actor. Conversely, the more the actor is seen as possessing good intentions, the less important perceptions of delivery become for satisfaction (Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996). The implication is that trust in an actor might be dependent on judgements of either competence or intentions, but not necessarily on both. In fact, including in the model an interaction term between government delivery and government fairness shows no significant effects, suggesting that there is no direct trade-off between government effectiveness and government fairness. Unfortunately for Britain’s politicians, citizens’ trust appears dependent both on receiving appropriate policy outcomes and on being fairly treated.

There is a potential problem in these findings. When there is a (statistically significant) relationship between survey respondents’ evaluations of politicians and their trust in those politicians, I interpret that relationship as showing that evaluations drive trust. But what if people’s existing feelings of trust in politicians drive their evaluations of what government has delivered and how it behaves? This reverse causal model is certainly plausible, yet cannot be ruled out in cross-sectional models that rely on data gathered at one point in time. To assess causal relationships more accurately, we need observations gathered at different points in time. This way, we can identify how far evaluations of politicians at some preceding point are associated with levels of trust measured subsequently; the temporal ordering allows us to rule out the reverse causality that plagues findings derived from cross-sectional data. We can introduce this temporal sequencing using the 2005 BES, since the pre-election wave of this study (conducted in February – April 2005) was followed by a post-election wave (conducted in May – July 2005). Of the sample interviewed in the pre-election wave, 2,959 people, or 82 per cent, were re-interviewed in the post-election wave. We can therefore draw on these two survey waves to explore how far changes in levels of political trust between waves 1 and 2 were affected by evaluations of politicians recorded at wave 1. (The necessity of recording attitudes at wave 1, prior to any changes in trust, explains why the model reported in Table 5.1 drew on the pre-election wave of the 2005 BES.)

I estimate the same model as earlier, except that the variable being explained is now trust measured at wave 2. The explanatory variables are the same as in equation 5.1, with three exceptions. First, I include a measure of trust at wave 1; by including this, what is being estimated is the change in trust between the two waves. Second, I omit the terms for policy ‘feeling’, since these feelings about the economy and the health service proved insignificant predictors of trust in Table 5.1. Third, since the model is based on the same respondents across the two waves, I do not need to be so careful about controlling for the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the population. I therefore drop the control variables, with the exception of the measure of party voting. The model now being estimated takes the following form:
\[ Y(\text{trust wave } 2) = b_0 \text{constant} + b_1 \text{trust wave } 1 + b_2 \text{govt handling wave } 1 + b_3 \text{future of national economy wave } 1 + b_4 \text{Blair competence wave } 1 + b_5 \text{policy representation wave } 1 + b_6 \text{govt fairness wave } 1 + b_7 \text{Blair responsiveness wave } 1 + b_8 \text{Iraq wave } 1 \] (5.2)

The effect of modelling trust as a function of attitudes recorded at an earlier point in time (model 2 in Table 5.1) is to identify some variables that no longer have a statistically significant causal effect. In this model, trust is no longer significantly predicted by people’s judgements about the future health of the economy and about their proximity in policy terms to the governing party. Yet trust does reflect people’s assessments of how well the government handles key policy issues, by whether the government is seen as fair and by whether the prime minister is seen as competent and responsive to voters’ concerns. Even though the variance in trust between waves 1 and 2 of the BES survey is limited, these judgements still play a substantial role in shaping trust (as shown in the white bars in Figure 5.1). Since we are measuring people’s judgements before we measure trust, we can be more confident that these judgements are driving trust rather than vice versa. The message, moreover, is that trust reflects people’s assessments both of politicians’ abilities and of their intentions.

The broad nature of trust judgements – reflecting evaluations of multiple aspects of politicians’ behaviour and performance – is further supported when we draw on the third part of the 2005 BES survey, the self-completion questionnaire. This survey included four measures of how people perceived the main political parties in Britain: as in touch/not in touch with ordinary people, as united/divided, as promise-keeping/promise-breaking and as capable/incapable of strong government. These measures are helpful, since they enable us to move beyond assessing people’s perceptions of politicians’ ability (parties are united, capable of strong government) and intentions (parties in touch), to also assess perceptions of politicians’ integrity (parties keep promises). For each of these measures, I construct variables that gauge whether people feel each of the three main parties (the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats) manifests virtuous qualities, through two parties manifesting virtuous qualities, only one party manifesting virtuous qualities and finally no party manifesting virtuous qualities. The model also controls for the same attitudinal and demographic variables as the models reported in Table 5.1. The results show how much judgements about politicians’ integrity shape trust; assessments of whether parties keep or break promises have the strongest effect on trust (Fig 5.3). Judgements of politicians’ intentions are also important for trust, as are judgements of their competence, although these are somewhat less consequential.

**Variations in trust: people, institutions and contexts**

Findings like those presented above are helpful in identifying why citizens trust or distrust political actors. Yet results that span a whole population and that relate to a group of political institutions or a single point in time raise the question of whether trust judgements might vary within the population, between different political institutions and across different time periods. In other words, do different people trust political actors for different
reasons, are different factors involved in forming trust judgements about different political institutions and do those reasons and factors differ across time periods?

![Fig 5.3: Impact on political trust of judgements of party characteristics](image)

Note: The figures report the impact on trust of changes in each variable from its minimum to its maximum level, derived from a model (not shown) that includes attitudinal, demographic and party support control variables.

Source: 2005 BES, self-completion wave.

When it comes to variations in trust judgements between individuals, I focus on the role of political information. As noted in Chapter 1, it has been argued that “Trust is a thoroughly cognitive phenomenon. It depends upon knowledge and belief” (Offe, 1999: 55). In Chapter 2, we found in studies of trust formation (Rahn, 2000) and voting decisions (Sniderman, Glaser and Griffin, 1990) the argument that people who are well-informed about politics base their decisions on more cognitively demanding factors than people who are poorly-informed, for whom decisions reflect a more affective set of factors such as feelings or images. Might the same be the case when it comes to making judgements about political trust?

Previous studies have suggested that politically informed and uninformed citizens employ different criteria in forming trust judgements. In the US, politically knowledgeable citizens base their approval of Congress primarily on performance criteria (such as delivering policy outcomes), while politically less knowledgeable citizens depend more on factors such as approval of the president and of their own congressional member (Mondak et al, 2007; see also Bernstein, 2001). In similar vein, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002: 79-81) have shown that people with high levels of political interest assess government on how well the national economy is performing and on how closely political parties cleave to their own policy ideals. By contrast, people with low levels of political interest assess government against their personal economic situation and on the effectiveness of the political decision-making process. In other words, people who are not interested in politics evaluate institutions based on how well they are doing and how they feel the political process works; for the more politically interested, evaluations reflect how well the country as a whole is doing and how good a job they think the parties are doing in reflecting their own policy preferences. In a
comparative study, Van der Meer (2010) showed the level of corruption in a country to be more closely tied to people’s trust in parliament among highly educated citizens than among less educated citizens. This is because assessments of how well political actors and institutions are performing become more consequential for trust as people’s level of education rises.

However, other studies have suggested that differences in levels of political information among citizens have little impact on trust. Thus, in the context of trust in various environmental agencies, it has been shown that these agencies’ attributes have little more impact on trust among people with high levels of environmental knowledge than among people with low knowledge (Johnson, 2010: 225-226). In a study of popular attitudes towards Dutch state institutions, trust is shown to be no more shaped by judgements of politicians’ competence or responsiveness among well-educated people than among poorly-educated people (van Elsas, 2015).

To explore whether political trust is driven by different considerations among people high or low in political information, I replicated the models of trust presented above (using the 2005 BES), breaking the sample into two groups. The first group comprised people with low levels of political information, while the second group comprised people with high levels of information. I then explored whether trust judgements among poorly-informed people were strongly shaped by cognitively ‘easy’ judgements, such as evaluations of one’s personal economic circumstances, feelings about the economy and evaluations of whether the prime minister (Tony Blair) is responsive to public concerns. I then explored whether trust judgements among well-informed people reflected more cognitively ‘hard’ judgements, such as evaluations of the national economy, assessments of how well the government has handled the economy and how proximate the governing party (Labour) is to individual’s own preferences on the issue of government tax and spending. In fact, aside from the occasional indication that politically informed citizens rely rather more on cognitively demanding evaluations (such as government handling of the economy), while less politically informed citizens rely rather more on cognitively easier assessments (such as feelings about the economy), there is little to suggest that different groups of citizens arrive at trust judgements on the basis of different sets of considerations. It appears, then, that evaluating trust is not a cognitively demanding task (particularly when compared with, say, the choice of which party or candidate to vote for, or the expression of an opinion on a tricky policy issue). Given this, when asked about their trust in political institutions, groups across the population draw pretty evenly on a range of evaluations encompassing both generalised impressions and specific judgements.

If trust judgements thus do not arise from a cognitively demanding set of assessments, we might anticipate that when it comes to different actors and institutions, citizens would base their trust on a similar set of factors rather than different sets of factors. In other words, if trust does not demand too much mental computation – but instead arises from a set of general impressions or perceptions – people’s trust in different institutions may rest on a similar set of generalised evaluations rather than on particular factors specific to each institution. On the other hand, people may sometimes judge institutions on specific criteria. As noted in Chapter 2, empirical studies have shown that trust in different bodies often rests on different criteria. People appear to trust executive organisations (such as presidents or
central banks) based on perceptions of actors’ competence or performance, while their trust in agencies that have a delivery function (eg. a family court) or a representative function (eg. a legislature) rest on perceptions of their responsiveness to citizens (Feldman, 1983; Braithwaite, 1998; Kelleher and Wolak, 2007). In the British context, Fisher and colleagues (2010) have argued that people’s trust in politicians and political parties reflect different considerations, not similar ones.

To explore the distinctiveness of trust judgements, I constructed models relating to six sets of institutions or actors, namely government, politicians, parliament, the civil service, local government, and the courts. If people do form trust judgements of different institutions on different grounds, we would expect to see variations in the role of explanatory variables between these institutions, and certainly between the first three (‘core’ political institutions) and the rest. The variables used to explain trust cover evaluations of policy outcomes and of national political actors. These evaluations cover assessments of how well the government has handled key policy issues (the NHS, crime and asylum-seekers), expectations of the future path of the country’s economy, appraisals of the prime minister (Tony Blair) and the incumbent governing party (Labour), assessments of procedural fairness (how fairly government treats people), and attitudes towards a key recent policy issue, namely UK involvement in the Iraq conflict. Since these evaluations mainly concern policy delivery and national-level political actors, the assumption is that these factors will drive people’s trust in government, politicians and parliament more than their trust in the civil service, local government and the judiciary. However, feelings of procedural fairness – although asked about specifically in relation to the government – should have a general impact on institutional trust across institutions.

The results of these models are shown in Table 5.2. The first feature to note is that, as expected, assessments of government actors and government policy delivery have a strong impact on people’s trust in government and a weaker impact on their trust in bodies like the civil service, local government and the courts. The second feature to note is that some aspects of policy performance shape trust in core policy actors, but not in other institutions. Judgements about the national economy strongly shape people’s trust in government, but not in other institutions. Assessments of the Iraq war similarly affect trust in the government and parliament only; unpopular actions by the government do not appear to spill-over into distrust of other institutions. And while appraisals of government performance on health (the single most important issue to British people in 2005) help to shape people’s trust in government, politicians and parliament, they have no such effect on trust in the civil service, local government and the courts. However, trust in the latter institutions is affected by how well people perceive the issues of crime and asylum-seekers to have been dealt with. On these policy areas, there does appear to be some spill-over from national government performance to other institutions (or maybe people view these institutions as having a shared policy role alongside national government and parliament). Moreover, assessments of procedural fairness shape trust in all institutions. The third feature to note is that assessments of the prime minister have strong and significant effects on trust in government, politicians and parliament, but weaker or non-significant effects on the other institutions. Instead, trust in the civil service, local government and the courts is affected by assessments of the national governing political party. Thus, trust in core political institutions appears to
## Table 5.2 Impact of evaluations on trust in different institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Politicians</th>
<th>Parliament</th>
<th>Civil service</th>
<th>Local govnt</th>
<th>Courts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy performance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government handling well:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>0.17 (6.18)</td>
<td>0.09 (2.69)</td>
<td>0.13 (3.81)</td>
<td>0.06 (1.65)</td>
<td>0.03 (0.76)</td>
<td>0.08 (1.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>0.10 (3.48)</td>
<td>0.10 (2.67)</td>
<td>0.10 (2.69)</td>
<td>0.15 (3.42)</td>
<td>0.17 (3.71)</td>
<td>0.22 (4.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum seekers</td>
<td>0.07 (2.35)</td>
<td>0.16 (4.42)</td>
<td>0.12 (3.26)</td>
<td>0.16 (3.89)</td>
<td>0.05 (1.07)</td>
<td>0.29 (5.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive evaluation of national economy</td>
<td>0.21 (6.49)</td>
<td>0.06 (1.49)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.98)</td>
<td>-0.03 (-0.62)</td>
<td>0.14 (2.85)</td>
<td>-0.13 (-2.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blair is competent</td>
<td>0.21 (12.07)</td>
<td>0.10 (4.94)</td>
<td>0.18 (8.05)</td>
<td>0.04 (1.47)</td>
<td>-0.00 (-0.00)</td>
<td>0.06 (2.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour are capable of strong govnt</td>
<td>0.19 (2.82)</td>
<td>0.12 (1.42)</td>
<td>0.33 (4.01)</td>
<td>0.41 (4.24)</td>
<td>0.40 (3.96)</td>
<td>0.63 (5.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intentions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blair is responsive</td>
<td>0.37 (21.05)</td>
<td>0.20 (9.42)</td>
<td>0.17 (7.69)</td>
<td>0.13 (5.19)</td>
<td>0.14 (5.32)</td>
<td>0.06 (2.07)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Labour are in touch</td>
<td>0.43 (6.69)</td>
<td>0.22 (2.80)</td>
<td>0.22 (2.77)</td>
<td>0.39 (4.12)</td>
<td>0.55 (5.64)</td>
<td>0.31 (2.79)</td>
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<td><strong>Procedural evaluations</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Government treats people fairly</td>
<td>0.36 (10.88)</td>
<td>0.39 (9.76)</td>
<td>0.38 (9.33)</td>
<td>0.26 (5.52)</td>
<td>0.34 (6.84)</td>
<td>0.23 (4.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy issues</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Disapproval of decision over Iraq</td>
<td>-0.14 (-4.51)</td>
<td>-0.02 (-0.58)</td>
<td>-0.09 (-2.46)</td>
<td>-0.02 (-0.55)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.35)</td>
<td>-0.06 (-1.21)</td>
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<td>-0.85</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>1.30</td>
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<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model significance (prob &gt; F)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.16</td>
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<td>2 641</td>
<td>2 628</td>
<td>2 633</td>
<td>2 625</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures represent coefficients (t-statistics in brackets).

Source: British Election Study 2005; post-election and self-completion waves. Since the data derive from more than one survey, they are unweighted.
be heavily shaped by perceptions of the prime minister, while trust in non-partisan and sub-national bodies is shaped more by appraisals of the incumbent party.

Trust judgements are thus neither wholly distinctive to particular institutions nor wholly generalised. Appraisals of how well some policy issues are being dealt with are seen as relevant to trust across a variety of state institutions, as are evaluations of procedural fairness. Yet some policy issues affect people’s trust in some institutions but not in others. The same is true of high-profile political actors. There is no ‘one size fits all’ model of political trust. What drives trust in core national political institutions does not drive trust to the same extent in non-partisan or sub-national state institutions (perhaps to the relief of their inhabitants!).

Just as the drivers of trust might vary between institutions, so they might vary over time. While some general judgements about political actors – their perceived responsiveness, say – are always likely to shape trust, it may be that specific actions or events affect people’s trust at particular points. To see this, we can compare explanatory models of trust among British citizens immediately after two national elections, in 2005 and 2010. In between these elections, the global economic crash occurred with significant implications for Britain’s economy. Not surprisingly, asked in 2010 about the most important issue facing Britain, by far the most popular choice (identified by 38 per cent) was the state of the economy. To see what impact the economic crisis had on how people assessed political trust, I constructed two identical models of trust, one for 2005 and the other for 2010. Both models included a term that captured how people perceived the economy to be performing, along with terms capturing other factors likely to shape trust: how people evaluated government performance (on health, crime and terrorism), whether people liked the incumbent party (Labour) and prime minister (Tony Blair in 2005 and Gordon Brown in 2010) and believed the prime minister to be competent, along with perceptions of government fairness. In 2005, evaluations of the future direction of the national economy have no significant relationship to levels of political trust. In 2010, however, the relationship is highly significant; trust is much higher among people who believe the economy will perform well than among those believing it will perform poorly.

This is a prime example of how people’s trust in political actors and institutions reflects events that crop up, and which citizens look to government to resolve. Hence, while trust has a series of general determinants, specific factors affect people’s trust depending on which issues are particularly important to them at specific points in time. People do not form trust judgements in a vacuum; rather, these judgements are shaped by the context of their relations with political actors. If those relations are heavily based on a particular area of policy or an event, people’s trust may well reflect that context. This may be welcome for policy actors, since it suggests that they have some role in shaping the kind of criteria on which people’s trust assessments rest. It also entails, however, that the drivers of trust can be taken out of politicians’ hands if major events, such as the 2008 global financial crash, occur and stimulate people to assess politicians on how well they react to such crises.
Conclusion

This chapter has posed questions about the origins of political trust, of the reasons why citizens trust (or distrust) politicians and political institutions. Perhaps a more precise way of formulating the same question is to enquire what is it about those actors and organisations that stimulates judgements of trust or distrust?

Among the multitude of studies dedicated to these questions, I suggest that many adopt too narrow an approach to identifying the determinants of trust. There are scores of analyses which highlight the causal role of this or that factor, but which pay scant attention to the wide range of other potential drivers. Accordingly, this chapter deliberately cast a wide net, starting with an outline of the numerous features and qualities of political actors that might shape how those actors are evaluated by citizens. In broad terms, political trust arises from judgements about what governments deliver and the equity of this delivery, along with the ability, responsiveness and integrity of political actors. The voluminous empirical literature highlights the variety of factors that trigger political trust, ranging from the delivery by government of economic growth through to the way that members conduct themselves within the legislature. My review of that literature suggested that trust is stimulated more strongly by judgements about the intentions and motivations of political actors than by judgements of their ability or competence. In the British data reviewed here, there were similar indications that people’s trust depends more on what they think of politicians’ intentions than on how competent they perceive those politicians to be. Hence, perceptions of prime ministerial responsiveness have a stronger impact on trust than perceptions of his competence (Fig 5.2). Similarly, assessments of political integrity (in the form of perceptions of party promise-keeping) have a stronger impact on trust than assessments of political performance (in the form of perceptions of party unity and capacity for strong government; Fig 5.3).

Yet performance also matters for trust. It is clear that people’s evaluations of political actors depend in part on whether they feel those actors have delivered appropriate policy outputs. This is unsurprising; after all, we delegate authority to political actors – a relationship based on trust – on the basis that this delegation yields beneficial policy results. Trust also depends, however, on how political actors behave, not only on what they deliver. Again, the fact that trust rests on a range of factors should not come as a surprise. To ‘trust’ – whether this involves a known person or a distant political actor – is a broad judgement, potentially involving a number of different considerations. In addition, different people may trust for different types of reason. It would be surprising if we could identify one or two particular stimulants for trust, to finger one or two ‘culprits’. Instead, it is clear that trust arises from a cocktail of judgements about politicians and the institutions they inhabit.

At certain points in time, trust may rest particularly heavily on a specific consideration or set of factors. This has been shown in the fact that, for people in Britain, economic considerations became much more important for trust in government in 2010, immediately after the global financial meltdown, than in 2005 during a more economically benign period. Moreover, some considerations may be especially relevant for people’s trust in some political institutions, but less so for their trust in others. People clearly look to certain
institutions to deliver on certain public functions, and base their trust on whether those functions are met.

Hence there are some specifics to political trust. Trust does not arise in all cases from the same general causal roots, to be applied uniformly to evaluations of all public institutions and at all points in time. But it is perhaps the breadth of political trust that has been revealed in this chapter, rather than its specificities. Trust in political actors involves a wide set of judgements, which apply in a reasonably consistent way across the population. This offers both succour and challenges to political elites pondering how they might encourage citizens to be more trusting of them and their offices. The succour lies in the conclusion that, in seeking to stimulate trust, elites need not focus on particular social groups, or adopt different strategies for different sections of the population. If people trust or distrust politicians for the same reasons, then actions designed to stimulate trust can be addressed to the entire population, rather than involving a panoply of potential confusing strategies designed to appeal to different social groups. On the other hand, the challenge to political elites lies in the conclusion that trust is not primarily caused by a single factor, but by a range of factors. Thus, if politicians are serious about addressing issues of low trust among the population, they are going to have to think in broad terms about what they deliver to citizens and how they behave. Trust in political actors rests on a wide set of judgements; stimulating trust will have to address an equally wide range of actions and behaviours.
In presenting trust as a judgement, I am ignoring the potential role that lifecycle or socialisation effects might have in shaping people’s propensity to trust (see Schoon and Cheng, 2011).

As noted in Chapter 2, most empirical analyses of trust assume the importance or salience of certain types of consideration, rather than basing them on the considerations that citizens themselves deem to be relevant. At least, however, where citizens’ own consideration have been explored these have been found to align closely with the type of considerations deemed relevant within the conceptual literature.

The distinction between outcomes and processes as drivers of attitudes towards the political system is mirrored in other analyses; for example, Scharpf’s (1999: 6-13) model of ‘output’ and ‘input’ based legitimacy. Feelings of fairness might underpin both distributive and procedural judgements. For example, people can judge an allocation of goods or benefits as ‘fair’ to the extent that this reflects individuals’ level of effort or input (a ‘proportional’ model of fairness) or to the extent that the allocation is equal across citizens (an ‘egalitarian’ model of fairness) (Rasinski, 1987).

I have identified various features of an actor or organisation that contribute to judgements of trust and might thus be labelled as trust’s ‘antecedents’ or ‘causes’. It is, however, sometimes difficult to distinguish between features that are external to the phenomenon being explained and are genuinely causal, and features that help to define the phenomenon and thus are primarily definitional. Trust is often held to be a concept that comprises – or is defined by – many different aspects or components. Part of the task in conceptualising and measuring trust is therefore to identify these various components. However, an aspect that is held to define trust cannot also be treated as one of its causes. Where trust is defined and measured through multiple contributory components, the task of explanation becomes very difficult since the aspects held to define trust cannot also appear as its explanation. The separation of definition and causation becomes a little easier when trust is measured in a unidimensional way with no reference to any potential components. Hence, when survey researchers ask people to express a level of trust in government, no reference is made to any of the dimensions that trust might involve. Hence we can use these aspects as potential independent variables to see how far each predicts a given level of trust or distrust. In the analysis that follows in this chapter, all the measures of trust are general and, in the main, non-dimensional (in that they don’t reference a particular aspect against which trust should be assessed). As I argued in Chapter 3, this presents a rather crude way of measuring trust. Yet for the purposes of explanation, is also allows for greater latitude in considering which factors might determine levels of trust.

Studies have suggested that judgements about the state of the national economy (‘sociotropic’ evaluations) tend to be more important for feelings of political trust than judgements about the state of the economy as it affects individuals (‘egocentric’ evaluations) (Torcal, 2014).

One reason why citizens may be more attuned to politicians’ behaviour than to their performance is that, arguably, the average citizen enjoys low levels of political information and is thus poorly placed to form judgements about the quality of political outputs. Instead, in forming trust judgements, citizens tend to rely on the cognitively easier prop of assessing politicians’ motivations (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002: ch3).

As Kaina (200) points out, we might expect trust to have a weak (or even a negative) relationship with a desire for direct participation in decision-making; after all, trust in political rulers implies a willingness to delegate authority to such figures, the antithesis of direct citizen involvement in decision-making. Once political rulers have been invested with decision-making rights, however, we should trust them to the extent that their decisions are responsive to citizens’ demands.

Although correlations between (assessed) trust and (assessed) policy proximity inevitably raise questions about causal ordering.

Although some studies (eg. Gibson et al, 2005) find that when bodies such as the US Supreme Court and Congress take decisions marked by partisan division they generate no lower legitimacy among
the public than when their decisions are marked by consensus. The same appears to be true for public evaluations of the legislation passed by Congress (Harbridge et al, 2014).

Testing the impact on trust of judgements about government handling of each policy area separately shows significant positive effects for crime, asylum-seeking, terrorism and the economy. Trust seems to be less affected, in 2005 at least, by judgements about the health service and the level of taxation.

I also tested the effect of evaluations of the personal or household economy. However, the effect of this evaluation on trust was weaker than for evaluations of the national economy. Since we are interested in judgements about politicians’ ability, and since people may not ascribe the fortunes of the national economy to the actions of politicians (instead, they may see economic conditions primarily as a product of global forces beyond politicians’ reach), I included in the model a measure of how far people see government policies as shaping the performance of the national economy. However, in interactive form with the economic optimism variable, this measure returned a non-significant result and was therefore dropped.

Negative feelings are measured by survey respondents describing themselves, on each policy issue, as ‘angry’, ‘disgusted’, ‘uneasy’ and ‘afraid’. Positive feelings are measured by respondents describing themselves as ‘happy’, ‘hopeful’, ‘confident’ and ‘proud’. On the economy, more people felt positive (53 per cent) than negative (47 per cent). On the health service, more people felt negative (63 per cent) than positive (37 per cent).

I rely on party vote rather than party identification since the 2005 pre-election wave measured party identification in two different ways as part of a split-ballot experiment. Party vote is measured as the party a respondent would vote for in the forthcoming national election.

These values are calculated using the Clarify programme in Stata (Tomz et al, 2003).

Since the full trust scale runs from 0 to 10, the size of the effect for this variable is calculated as: 2.28 /11 * 100 = 20.7%.

Previous empirical studies have generally shown trust to reflect a variety of procedural judgements, rather than one or two dominant considerations. Thus, analyses (eg. Ulbig, 2002) have pointed to the importance of the perceived responsiveness of policy makers, their neutrality and their efficiency and competence.

For a recent study across European countries which also points to this effect, see Magalhães (2016).

Although the survey measures ask about people’s perceptions of parties, I take this to tap evaluations of politicians within these parties.

When it comes to parties keeping or breaking promises and being capable or incapable of strong government, I omit judgements about the Liberal Democrats since for this party the questions elicited high numbers of ‘don’t know’ responses (presumably reflecting the party’s absence from government in the post-WWII period).

Construction of these groups was based on the number of correct answers people gave to an eight-item factual knowledge quiz fielded on the 2005 BES. People who correctly answered 0-4 questions were deemed to be low in political knowledge; those who answered correctly 7-8 questions to be high in political knowledge.

Nor do different sets of considerations shape trust if alternative ways of measuring political information are used. I divided the sample by levels of political interest, attention paid to politics and formal education without identifying any significant variations between the samples in the type of evaluations drawn on in assessing political trust.

Research on the legitimacy of decision making suggests that citizens’ acquiescence with the decisions of different institutions is affected by the grounds on which those decisions are seen to have been taken. Thus, for example, citizens have been found more accepting of decisions made by the US Congress when this decision is seen to have been made on the grounds of fairness or natural justice rather than the strict application of the legal rules, while acceptance of a decision made by the US
Supreme Court is higher when that decision is based on legality (Gibson et al, 2005). In other words, people seem to evaluate the activities of different political institutions on different criteria, presumably reflecting the core functions they believe each institution serves.

24 In particular, Fisher et al (2010) argue that ‘moral’ factors (ie. how far an actor is likely to share my interests) are likely to drive trust in politicians, while ‘deliberative’ factors (ie. whether policy issues are subject to full and open public debates) are likely to drive trust in political parties. However, it is difficult to assess the relative effects of these two sets of factors on trust in the two types of institution, since the models for each institution use different measures of each factor. For example, the moral aspect of trust – which is argued to be more salient for assessments of politicians than for parties – is gauged, in the case of politicians, by a survey item that states “Politicians share the same goals and values as me” but, in the case of political parties, by an item that states “People involved in political parties are people just like me”. Yet similarity of goals and values is not the same as similarity of personnel. Hence, the supposedly distinctive drivers of trust in politicians and political parties may arise from dissimilarities in the measures used rather than dissimilarities in public perceptions of the two institutions (for a similar argument see Hooghe, 2011).

25 These issues were selected as, at the time, they were deemed by the public as the most important issues facing Britain, as measured in an earlier question on the 2005 BES survey.

26 According to the BES, in 2005 two thirds (65 per cent) of the population disapproved of British involvement in the Iraq conflict.

27 Given the effects from 2010 onwards of government fiscal austerity on people’s economic fortunes, it is also noteworthy that trust in 2010 is shaped more heavily than in 2005 by perceptions of government fairness. Similar results on the effects of economic judgements and procedural perceptions on trust are provided by Whiteley et al (forthcoming). On the basis of these results, I tested the argument of Brockner and Wiesenfeld (1996), that acceptance of government decisions is responsive to a combination of outcome favourability and procedural fairness, not just to each of these factors individually. However, I found no interaction effects of economic judgements and perceptions of government fairness on levels of trust.