Political Mistrust and the Discrediting of Politicians
International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology

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Political Mistrust and the Discrediting of Politicians

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Introduction

“No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time” (Churchill, 1947). This statement is so often cited because it expresses in a few words a feeling shared by the majority of citizens in all established democracies, and because it reflects the diagnosis formulated by dozens of philosophers, historians, sociologists, and experienced politicians: all societies advanced and developing, large and small, mature democracies and pseudo-democracies are full of dysfunctions generating political mistrust. But such an ubiquity does not stem from an epidemic sickness. If a phenomenon is present in so many countries, nourished in each one independently, then we are facing an important feature of contemporary politics.

Empirical evidence on political mistrust is available for almost one hundred nations, generated by many national surveys conducted over decades, and also by international surveys, particularly the World Values Surveys, the European Values Surveys, the Latin American Barometer. Trustworthiness is an empirically grounded concept. Very few countries in the world today are immune to political mistrust. A society where all individuals would mistrust all others is sociologically inconceivable because it would rapidly dismember, dislocate, or disband. In fact, all countries could be ranked on a scale of trust-mistrust, as indicated in the following text and which proposes a threshold based on the potential frequency of misconduct separating a culture of trust from a culture of mistrust:

Democratic principles institutionalize distrust: they assume that trust can be breached and provide correctives for that. The fact that this is activated indicates that trust had in fact been breached. As long as corrective mechanisms happen sporadically, exceptionally, as a last resort, the culture of trust is not undermined, but rather enhanced by the proofs of effective accountability. But there is some threshold where this may backfire and the trend reverses itself. Hyperactivity of correctives indicates that there is perhaps too much to correct. For example, if people constantly resort to litigation and the courts are flooded with suits, if the Ombudsman is overloaded
with claims, if the police is overworked and prisons overcrowded, if the media constantly detect and censure political corruption, and citizens denounce or revoke their representatives – then the culture of trust may break down. To be pervasive and lasting, generalized trust cannot be due merely to efficient controls. Rather, it must see it in the potentiality of controls only the ultimate defense against unlikely and rare abuses of trust. Institutionalized distrust breeds spontaneous trust most effectively as long as it remains at the level of institutionalization, and does not turn into actual, routine practice. This is the specification of our paradox of democracy: the extensive potentiality of controls must be matched by their very limited actualization. Institutionalized distrust must remain in the shadows, as a distant protective framework for spontaneous actions. (Piotr Sztompka, Trust, Distrust, and the Paradox of Democracy, European Journal of Social Theory, 1998, 1)

This symposium does not include a chapter on the USA. For this country rich empirical evidence has been compiled. It has been the object of significant theoretical interpretations of political mistrust. I do not see how a chapter on the USA in this book would reveal anything really new. Consequently, priority has been given to other countries less well studied. This country remains nonetheless, at least implicitly, a point of reference for comparative research. Thus, it would be useful to recall here the American experience, by citing two scholarly testimonies.

The United States had experienced four troubled presidencies in a row. The previous two decades had been marked by an unrelenting sequence of crises: assassination, racial and social conflict, foreign policy disaster, political scandal, and economic disruption. The public turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s in many ways resembled the crises of the 1930s and 1940s, with one major difference. The New Deal and World War II entailed triumphant assertions of federal power. They demonstrated that, given the right leadership and a sense of collective purpose, government could be made to work. And so Americans came out of those decades with a sense of renewed confidence in institutions generally and in government specifically. Vietnam, Watergate, the energy crisis, recession, and hyperinflation demonstrated that our institutions generally, and the federal government in particular had failed to perform. The result, as documented in this book, was a collapse of confidence in those running our institutions. (S.M. Lipset and W. Schneider, The Confidence Gap: Business, Labor, and Government in the Public Mind, 1987, p. 436)

Confidence in the government has declined. In 1964, three-quarters of the American public said that they trusted the federal government to do the right thing most of the time. Today only a quarter of the Americans admit to such trust. . . . The top reasons given for distrusting government are that it is inefficient, wastes money, and spends on the wrong things. . . . Government is not alone. Over the past three decades public confidence has dropped in
half for many major institutions... The United States was founded with a mistrust of government. The American Constitution was deliberately set up in such a way that a King George could never rule over us again. And some might add, ‘Nor anybody else’... If you ask Americans what is the best place in the world to live, 80 percent say the United States. If you ask them whether they like their democratic system of government, 90 percent say yes... Most people do not feel that the system is rotten and has to be overthrown. (J.S. Nye, PhD, Zelikow, David C. King (eds) Why People Don’t Trust Government, 1997, pp. 1-3)

In the beginning of the sixties, 85 percent of Americans considered the performance of their political institutions as the most important factor in their national pride, while at the same time, only 3 percent of Italians indicated that political institutions were the basis for their national pride, giving priority to other aspects such as the physical beauty of the country, its artistic treasures and the character of its people (Almond and Verba, The Civic Culture, pp. 102 and 248) About thirty years later in July 1995, in a survey conducted jointly by two institutes; one connected to the Democratic Party, the other to the Republican Party, American citizens reproached the government with wasting the taxpayers’ money (93 percent), of making fallacious electoral promises (88 percent), of voting for laws favoring immigrants over American citizens, etc. In their book, The Confidence Gap, Lipset and Schneider, after having stressed Americans’ traditional pride regarding governmental institutions, painfully admitted that during the last quarter of the century, confidence in these institutions had fallen to a deplorable level. Formerly, Americans thought “they lived in the best society in the world” (Almond and Verba). But in the last twenty years, two-thirds of American citizens said they were discontented with the functioning of the regime (Gallup Report, 1973-1990). In 1988, only 16 percent of Americans had “a lot of confidence” in the federal government (as against 41 percent in 1966); only 15 percent felt the same about the Congress (as against 42 percent in 1966); only 15 percent felt the same about the Congress (as against 42 percent in 1966); 13 percent had confidence in the unions (as against 22 percent in 1966); 17 percent in religious institutions (against 41 percent in 1966); 19 percent in big business (against 55 percent in 1966); 32 percent in the Supreme Court (against 50 percent in 1966); 33 percent in the army (against 61 percent in 1966). (Harris Institute, April 1988, cf. I.I.O.P 1988-1989, p. 279)

Every two years between 1973 and 1983, and annually since 1984, the Gallup Institute has asked a national sample how much confidence they had in ten selected institutions. In these surveys, Congress ranked in the sixth or seventh position after the church, the army, the Supreme Court, banks, and public schools. However, Congress inspired more
confidence than big business, television journalists, union leaders or newspapers. A Harris Poll survey in 1980 of people aged 25-40 living in cities stressed that the institution that offered the least satisfaction was the political leadership (72 percent), (I.I.O.P 1980-1, p. 418). This survey was conducted soon after the pessimistic speech by president Jimmy Carter. Addressing the nation on July 15, 1979, he stated that the crisis of confidence revealed by the surveys “constituted a danger for democracy” because of “the gap between the government and the people.” Between 1966 and 1993 all institutions slid down the slope of confidence. In a 1985 Gallup Institute survey on honesty and ethical principles in 25 professional categories, senators ranked lower than 14 other professionals, and members of the House of Representatives raked 18th. In 1988, “the representatives of the people” carried less esteem than real estate agents, newspaper journalists or funeral parlor directors, however they were judged better than sales people and small real estate agents. These two surveys confirmed the results of other surveys conducted throughout the United States. The categories for which ethics were judged to be the most negative in 1981, 1983, and 1987 were high-level federal civil servants, senators and members of the House of Representatives, state governors, municipal leaders and union leaders, while scientists, doctors, and professors enjoyed high esteem or at least a good standing.

This detailed empirical evidence may serve as points for comparisons. Is the erosion of confidence more profound in the United States than in most European democracies? Given the internal diversity in Europe it is extremely difficult to reply to such a question. In comparison to Norway or the other Scandinavian countries, the reply would be affirmative. In comparison with other European countries the reply may be negative.

The available American documentation shows that a pluralist democracy can become accustomed to a lack of confidence in institutions, that the mistrust of citizens can become chronic, that political regimes can persist in spite of the loss of confidence of a large part of the citizenry, that democracy can continue to function in spite of persistent dysfunctions, that it can continue to live as do some people suffering from a chronic illness. Forty years of surveys attest to this loss of confidence but not of legitimacy.

What is still missing in the literature is a comprehensive cross-Atlantic comparison. Such a comparison cannot be undertaken here, but when it will be attempted will have to retain the same factors and parameters, particularly the following: decline of traditional values; decline of primate institutions (Gemeinschaft, family, parenthood); decline of ideologies; increasing governmental overload; increasing mass communication and information; increasing popular expectations; increasing visibility
and transparence of political rulers; increasing immigration into the Atlantic countries from other parts of the world generating a higher frequency of status incongruence; increasing upward social mobility of elites; increasing influence of the counter-power represented by journalists and editors of newspapers and magazines; increasing uncovering of misdeeds by another counter power represented by judges; increasing individualism.

Another country that is “missing” in this symposium is Japan. It should have been included because this case suggests better than many others an important theoretical aspect: some specific forms of political mistrust seem to be inherent in any democracy. In Japan, after a very long period of traditional legitimacy, democracy was born in the aftermath of a national disaster, within a political vacuum. A careful analysis of the public opinion during the last six decades shows that the maturing of the democratic mentality had been accompanied by an increasing awareness of various dysfunctions and by a growth of critical perceptions of the political process, which had generated a limited trust in institutions and deep mistrust of politicians and of political parties.

Taking into consideration other similar transitions from authoritarian regimes to democratizing regimes, I would go so far as to suggest the following hypothesis: some forms of political mistrust testify to the existence of a real democratic regime, and other forms of mistrust are nourished only in authoritarian systems.

All these aspects contribute to the explanation of this ubiquitous phenomenon but none of them would appear as pertinent as corruption.

In a statistical analysis corruption would appear as the major source of political mistrust. The World Report on Corruption 2004, prepared and published by Transparency International, as its previous volumes, provides extremely rich empirical evidence on the worldwide spread of corruption. It seems that excepting a dozen countries all face at various degrees, political corruption. Sociologically speaking there is a negative correlation between the level of corruption and the level of economic development. It is surprising that in this World Report such a relationship is not directly emphasized, but is implicitly hinted at. Any new study on the relationship between political mistrust and corruption has to take into consideration the contributions to this World Report, particularly the one made by Johann Graf Lambsdorff on indices of the perceptions of corruption for the year 2003. The intertwining nature between corruption and mistrust has become today a privileged domain for comparatists.

The main difficulty facing a comparative analysis of political mistrust comes from the necessity to take into account the national contexts and the diversity of political cultures. Our work here aims to reflect such a diversity. Another difficulty stems from the temporal gap between the
moment when a causal factors is produced and the moment when their effects appear. The phenomenon of political mistrust results most of the time in a cumulative way and not from exacerbating factors.

The second source of disenchantment and mistrust, after corruption, seems to be the increasing penetration of the post-industrial society by the State which takes the form of a social redistribution of the gross national product, half of the population preferring less State intervention and more economic liberalism, while the other half want exactly the opposite. In this domain each major decision inevitably divides the society into winners and losers. Paradoxically in appearance, economic growth and improvement in standards of living have preceded the increase of distrust and have continued during further spread of distrust. It remains true nonetheless that the recent growing unemployment in many post-industrial societies have favored the spread of distrust in some social strata.

Curiously, corruption tends to be much more widely diffused and perceived in the largest countries: China, India, Russia, Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines, than in the smallest countries: Iceland, Luxembourg, Singapore, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, New Zealand, Switzerland, Ireland (according to the data in the World Report on Corruption, 2004, chapter 10). Nonetheless, the correlation between the size of the country and the level of perceived mistrust is weak, because there are many exceptions, and because of intervening factors, particularly the level of economic development.

This book is divided in three sections. The first includes continental comparisons within Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Obviously, within each of these world regions there are significant variations from country to country. There are nonetheless more similarities among the Latin American countries (all being of catholic culture) than among the South Asian countries ethnically heterogeneous, carefully analyzed respectively by Thimothy Power and Giselle Jannison, and by William Case. In contemporary Latin America the dictum of Tacite is no longer validated “they could hate provided that they fear me.” It may still be valid in some rural areas in African countries. This section includes also a theoretical contribution on political scandals, which, contrary to some interpretations, appear very often as redemptive events rather than symptoms of fragility.

The second section presents contrasting cases of national configurations of trust-mistrust, taking as examples Norway, France and Nigeria, which could be considered as three basic types. Norway is a fortunate country, whose national budget is largely alimented by revenues from marine oil, and also a model of democratic pragmatism, of stability and of a legitimate regime. France, on the contrary, is an historical laboratory for
testing all kinds of ideologies, a country which has experienced since the revolution of 1789 a succession of nine political regimes (but never civil war), and whose constitution appears as a kind of periodical, having changed or been modified so many times, and where the legitimacy of regimes, at one time or another has been contested by some sectors of the citizenship. Nigeria, the largest African country, but not the poorest, is perceived as the next to the most corrupted society in the world (after Bangladesh), and contrary to the other two countries may be considered as a model of mimic-democracy. What is a mimic-democracy? The clientelistic-patrimonialist-conspicuous behavior of “big men” described by Jean-Pascal Daloz in his essay, shows that a western pluralist type of democracy cannot be placated on a society which is not ripe to receive it. To trust the “big man,” rather than the bureaucracy, is not for the citizen a free choice.

The third section deals with dramatic crises of legitimacy catalyzed by accumulated mistrust and frustration that have shaken the political regime in Argentina in 1999-2003, and in France in May 1968.

In their meaningful inventory and critical appraisal of “theories of crisis and catastrophe, change and transformation,” Max Kaase and Kenneth Newton (Beliefs in Government, 1995) undertook an empirical validation of eight well-known theories analyzing their pertinence, but overlooking the historical dramatic turning-points and upheavals, which have “genetically” produced the mentality of the European publics and nurtured their political skepticism and mistrust, much more than the normal politics covered by these eight theories. In the collective memory of nations remain alive the suffering and horrors of the three world wars (First, Second, and Cold) and of several civil wars (Spain, Finland, North Ireland, and defunct Yugoslavia), of the breakdown of many democracies and of the collapse of five empires, and other catastrophes. Contrary to what Kaase and Newton claim, the legitimacy of the political systems and of their ruling elites have indeed been challenged by millions of citizens in various countries (See M. Dogan and J. Higley, Elites, Crises and the Origins of Regimes, 1998). The Argentinean and the French crises of legitimacy resulting from deep mistrust, described in this book, should be considered as only two examples among many, particularly the implosion of the Soviet Empire, or the Iranian revolution against the corrupted regime of the Shah or the fall of the Weimar Republic. In Italy in 1992 the democratic regime has avoided a complete collapse as did Argentina in 1999-2003.

We express our gratitude to the research committee on Comparative Sociology of the International Sociological Association for having sponsored our initiative and driving it forward. The relationship between
political mistrust and public corruption is a rugged, scabrous topic. Intellectual elites tend to abstain from intervening in the debates on political scandals. I have long time hesitated before involving myself with this topic. Considering that for us sociologists it is a professional duty to study this societal phenomenon in our own language, our research committee has included it in our program.

Mattei Dogan
April 14, 2005
I

Comparative Analyses
Erosion of Confidence in Thirty European Democracies

Mattei Dogan

Abstract

The deficit of confidence is attested by a wealth of empirical data. The analysis deals with some nine institutions, political parties, discredit of politicians, the tandem of judges and journalists in denouncing the wrongdoings, the decreasing mistrust between nations as a compensatory trend of mistrust within nations. The countries are ranked according to the level of mistrust, which permeates all social strata. Corruption is an ubiquitous phenomenon in Europe, with few exceptions. Two illustrative emblematic cases are compared; Britain and Italy. In spite of the widespread feeling of mistrust, the legitimacy of democracy remains unchallenged. What types of citizens are needed in advanced democracies? Ignorant, credulous, believers in myths or well informed rationally distrustful citizens? Today democracy is permanently under the supervision of the public, as attested by surveys conducted periodically.

Key words: legitimacy, dysfunctions, corruption, parties, media, rational distrust

Democracy is not cast in stone; it is a living organism always in search of equilibrium. On the eve of the Second World War, in 1939, Europe was, from Lisbon to Riga, the cemetery of seventeen democracies which had collapsed between 1922 and 1938. Obviously, today, no advanced democracies are threatened with collapse, even if Italy has recently escaped disaster. Democracy is perfectible. The issue was already formulated long ago in 1884 by a French senator: “From the moment that we agree that democracy is not a supernatural government, endowed with all the virtues and protected
Half a century after the victory of democracies over totalitarianism in 1945, and several generations after the collapse of four traditional empires in 1917-19, there are today more democratic regimes than ever in the past. Democracy has been exported as merchandise, imported by imitation, adopted with enthusiasm or imposed from outside, implemented or mimicked in some sixty countries during the last decades. It is paradoxical that at the time of the geographical extension of democracy, we observe symptoms of weakness at the heart of the old advanced democracies, persistent dysfunctions on both sides of the Atlantic poliarchies. The geographical extension of democracy seems to be accompanied by a weakening of some of the essential wheels of the post-industrial polyarchy.

I use the word “erosion” deliberately. This word seems to best express the phenomenon of mistrust in advanced democracies. The words disillusion, disenchantment, malaise, used by some authors, seem insufficient to describe it. On the contrary, the words crisis, delegitimization and pathology, used by other observers seems excessive. It is not easy to formulate the right diagnosis because we can resort the same data and consider the same radiographs and propose different interpretations.

Surveys conducted in almost all of the European countries have shown that a large part of the citizenry, in some cases the majority, have “none” or “little” confidence in the principal institutions and organizations of the political regime: parties, government, parliament, high-level administration, courts, army, police, unions, big business, churches, television and printed mass media. These findings were confirmed by other surveys, which without being internationally coordinated nevertheless lend themselves to comparisons, even if the questions were not formulated in identical terms.

A massive majority of Europeans are deeply attached to democracy as the only acceptable political system. According to many surveys most European citizens do not conceive realistically an alternative system of government for their own country. Such a massive attachment is a new phenomenon in Europe – before the war the picture was very different. At the same time, a wealth of data indicates that in most countries a large proportion of people are dissatisfied with the real functioning of the system, that they mistrust basic institutions and social organizations and that they have lost confidence in the “political class.” Does this deficit of trust challenge the legitimacy of the current regime?

The problem of trust-mistrust is primarily a political issue but overflows on the civil society, because many non-political institutions (churches, unions, large corporations, the army, the police) are mistrusted by a significant
part of the citizenry. Mistrust is spreading also into many professions from lawyers to real-estate agents.

In spite of the diversity of countries, institutions and variables, I shall refrain from engaging in a sophisticated statistical exercise, because the available data does not support more than simple cross-tabulations. In effect, for most countries the sample is about one thousand interviewed individuals. The most trusted institution is the family, in spite of the fact that in Europe and the United States one out of every three marriages ends today in divorce. The family may serve nevertheless as a point of reference.

**Four characteristics of distrust**

Comparing the European countries some common traits clearly appear across nations, but also a significant diversity in many domains, resulting in large part from national histories.

The available documentation shows that the erosion of confidence has four characteristics. First, it is not a temporary phenomenon tied to a particular situation. It is a persistent phenomenon attested to by surveys conducted over the last three decades in some countries and for a longer period of time in other countries. It is an international disenchantment, a discontent that is tending to become chronic.

The crisis of confidence in not only chronic and international, it is also structural in the sense that it concerns most of the important institutions. It is casting its shadow over some fifteen institutions, sapping their respectability and reducing governmental authority.

Finally, the mistrust seems to have a rational tonality. For most interviewed people, such mistrust is not of ideological nature, but rather pragmatic. In effect, the attitudes of trust-mistrust vary little on the axis of liberalism-socialism.

Persistent, international, structural, and rational, the crisis of confidence has worsened in parallel with the economic difficulties in some European countries, particularly structural unemployment.

**Mistrust permeates all social strata**

Some common sociological features crossing national frontiers can be noticed. Everywhere young people are less willing that their elders to trust institutions and their leaders. The importance of age in the dynamic of values has been first stressed by Jean Stoetzel in 1983 and confirmed since then. On the left-right axis, unions appear as more mistrusted by politically right-oriented people than by the political left, the contrary
being true for big business. Educated citizens are less willing to trust institutions and leaders than less educated citizens. But the education level variable is related to the age variable because today the majority of the young are better educated than their elders. Of course, the influence of the two variables could be separated by factor analysis. We notice a significant relationship between level of education and confidence in the written media (but not in television): readers of newspapers have more confidence in the print media (Döring, 1992). There are relatively few differences between men and women, except for confidence in the church.

The absence of confidence is not more frequent in the lower social strata. On the contrary, it is in the middle strata with a good education level where the critical spirit develops regarding the insufficiencies and faults of institutions. Kenneth Newton arrives at the same conclusion: “Social trust does not correlate widely or strongly with the usual set of social, economic, and political variables (income, education, class, gender, age, race, left-right politics, employment status, membership of voluntary organizations), but there is a slight tendency for it to be found in some social types. It is more frequently expressed by the “winners” in society, rather than the “losers.” (Newton, 2001, p. 204)

**Mutual mistrust among individuals**

Political mistrust has to be interpreted in the context of a high level of distrust among individuals. A deep distrust toward others, except members of one’s own family, was observed in the south of Italy in the 1950s by Edward Banfield, who called it “amoral familism” (Banfield, 1958). For a long time, this mutual distrust was considered as a particular phenomenon limited to the Mezzogiorno and explained by ancestral collective memory in this part of Italy. However, later the same phenomenon was observed in Greece, Portugal, Spain and to a lesser degree in other European countries. In 1963 Almond and Verba suggested in their *Civic Culture* a typology where they contrasted the political culture of Americans and Italians. Verba also suggested that distrust of other people and political distrust went hand in hand (Verba, 1972).

One generation later, a series of surveys and particularly the *World Value Survey*, conducted by Ronald Inglehart, attested a generalized distrust of others in almost all European countries and in the United States. In fact in 17 out of 22 countries, more that half of the people interviewed in 1981 responded that “they did not trust most people” and “one can never be careful enough”. In only five countries (three Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and Canada) was the proportion of distrustful people less than half of the population. In France, Germany, Italy,
Spain, Portugal, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland between two-thirds and three-quarters of the citizens were distrustful. According to the results of the third wave of the *European Values Study* in 1999-2000 (see Tables 1 and 2), a large majority of European adults replied that “one can’t be too careful in dealing with people”, except in Denmark, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands, where only a minority admitted to be mistrustful (Halman, 2001, 44). In the United States the proportion reached 60 percent in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Two hypotheses can be formulated. The first is fragile: in a relatively short period of time distrust was diffused. But in this case what remains of the concept of culture that implies certain stability? According to the second hypothesis, the phenomenon of mistrust is older than previously supposed. It is the internationalization of research in values that has brought it to light. Such interpretation would challenge certain old theories based on insufficient empirical evidence. Meanwhile, the American political culture seems to have come closer to the political culture of the Mezzogiorno.

**Decline of confidence in institutions**

*Table 3* shows the proportion of people who expressed a negative opinion (“little or no confidence”) on nine institutions or organizations in 1999-2000. Among these nine institutions, six represent the State and the political regime: parliament, army, police, public administration, courts and social security. Three institutions without being a direct part of the political system contribute to its functioning: unions, big business and churches. For some people interviewed, the reason for lack of confidence is the inefficiency of institutions, while for others it is the abuse of power, favoritism, patronage and in several countries, corruption, particularly in Russia and in most East-European countries.

The level of confidence in institutions should not be confused with the proportion of people who approve or disapprove of the manner in which governments resolve problems like housing, unemployment, schooling, taxes, social security, pensions, etc. Opinions about these problems may be volatile and tied to ideologies. Opinions may vary with changes in partisan power. The majority of people may be dissatisfied with the way in which the government leads the country, but such opinions may indicate only an absence of confidence in the people who hold power. When a majority says that they disapprove of the manner in which the government treats the unemployment problem, they do not express distrust of the political regime itself but of some political decision makers. Other public opinion surveys conducted at the same moment do not leave any doubt about the attachment to the regime itself. Such a distinction
Table 1
Mutual Trust-Mistrust Among Individuals

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A (Most people can be trusted)</th>
<th>B (You cannot be too careful)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>67,33</td>
<td>Austria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>66,34</td>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>66,34</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>60,40</td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>42,48</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>41,49</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Ireland</td>
<td>40,60</td>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>39,61</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>35,65</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>35,65</td>
<td>Estonia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A: Most people can be trusted
B: You cannot be too careful


Table 2
Mutual Mistrust between Individuals

<table>
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<th>Trustful</th>
<th>Mistrustful</th>
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<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<td>Netherlands</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<th>Trustful</th>
<th>Mistrustful</th>
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<td>1990</td>
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<td>Japan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
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</tr>
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<td>West Germany</td>
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<th></th>
<th>Trustful</th>
<th>Mistrustful</th>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1990, World Values Survey conducted by Ronald Inglehart, (decimals eliminated, figures rounded).
between judgment on particular problems, and the belief in the validity of the regime is needed for all European democracies.

One remains perplexed when one notes that in twenty-three out of twenty-five countries considered in Table 3, the majority of the public has no confidence in parliament. The exceptions are “consociative” democracies. The lack of credibility in this founding institution of democracy – which for a long time was the center of gravity of democratic regimes – corresponds to its real decline in the functioning of representative democracies. In almost all countries only a minority stated that it was confident in parliament (Table 3). Other surveys confirmed that a significant minority of citizens were judging the behavior of parliamentarians severely and had no confidence in parliament, even though they believed that it should play a more important role. The level of mistrust in the parliament has increased during the last two decades in several European countries.

In most democracies the majority of people have a critical attitude regarding the “necessary evil” of the public administration. In twenty-two countries an absolute majority express “no confidence at all” or “not very much” (Table 3). Differences in appreciation which we observe among countries correspond to the perceptions that specialists have of the efficiency of public administration. The structure of the State (federal or centralized) does not seem to have an impact on the perception of the performance of public administration. The Belgian prime minister recognized that “the State functions badly in spite of a plethora of civil servants. One of our biggest challenges is to modernize the public bureaucracy. We have started this by de-politicizing the nominations of the holders of important positions.” (Le Monde, November 23, 1999) Similar statements have been formulated by political rulers in France, Italy, Germany and Russia.

Recent and older military history of several European countries is rich in events that do not inspire full confidence in the army. This absence of confidence is not a new phenomenon. The novelty comes from the freedom to express oneself without fear and to show it empirically. Such a state of mind requires many commentaries. Many European countries have abandoned the military conscription, and have built a professional army. The situation was ripe for a radical change.

The image of the police depends on several factors, first of all on its integrity and its recruitment methods. On the whole, the police, among the institutions considered in Table 3, are the one that inspires the lowest mistrust.

The surveys measured attitudes about the church as an institution and not religion as a belief. But there is naturally a significant relation
Table 3

Trust/Mistrust of Institutions

“No confidence at all” or “not very much” in 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Parliament %</th>
<th>2. Public Administration %</th>
<th>Courts %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Rep.</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>79</td>
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<td>Latvia</td>
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<td>Greece</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>Britain</td>
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Source: Reconstructed from European Values Study: Third Wave (edited by Lock Halman)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Church %</th>
<th>5. Trade Unions %</th>
<th>Press %</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</table>

4. Church Ecclesiastical Hierarchy

5. Trade Unions

6. The Press media

%
Table 3 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Church %</th>
<th>5. Trade Unions %</th>
<th>6. The Press media %</th>
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</tr>
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</table>

Source: Reconstructed from European Values Study: Third Wave

7. Army %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8. Police %</th>
<th>9. Courts Judicial Institutions %</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Czech Rep.</td>
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Source: Reconstructed from European Values Study: Third Wave
### Table 4
Confidence in the Parliament 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Great deal or quite a lot %</th>
<th>Not very much or none at all %</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Great deal or quite a lot %</th>
<th>Not very much or none at all %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Britain</td>
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<td>Czech Rep.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The European Values Study: A Third Wave.
Decimals eliminated, figures rounded

### Table 5
Contrasts within Europe: Small but Beautiful

**Question:** People have different views about the system of governing the country. Here is scale for rating how well things are going: 1 means very bad; 10 means very good.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High ranking in some “small” countries</th>
<th>Low ranking in some countries of the West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malta, 6.83</td>
<td>Russia, 2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark, 6.34</td>
<td>Lithuania, 3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg, 6.28</td>
<td>Croatia, 3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands, 6.27</td>
<td>Ukraine, 3.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland, 6.20</td>
<td>Romania, 3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland, 6.05</td>
<td>Slovakia, 3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal, 5.86</td>
<td>Hungary, 4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland, 5.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Reconstructed from the European Values Study (2001).
between the confidence in churches as organized religion and the level of beliefs and religious practices in Catholic as well as Protestant countries (Dogan, 2002). Such a correspondence has its logic, but it is likely that the people interviewed have attached different meanings to the word “church”. For some, it concerned the position of the ecclesiastic hierarchy on issues such as birth control, abortion, divorce and eroticism. Other respondents reacted according to their anti-clericalism or agnosticism. True believers may show opposition to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and some agnostics or non-believers may sympathize with the church because of their own conservative attitudes in other domains. However, in most countries, the absolute majority of adults say they have “little” or “no” confidence in ecclesiastical institutions. This finding is, no doubt, one of the most astonishing in these international surveys on values. It raises an embarrassing question: What is the church’s real audience in Western and Central Europe today?

The Netherlands merit special attention because, after having been partitioned for a long time into denominational communities, has become one of the most agnostic country in Europe, where today people are trying to throw off the ecclesiastical framework. Similar rapid transformations have been observed in other countries. It is not astonishing that the church benefits from a greater confidence in some catholic countries.

Another surprising finding is the discredit of unions in most democracies. The decline of unions is a well-known trend, carefully studied by social scientists. What is surprising is its magnitude. Huge majorities in post-industrial societies – whose development is characterized by social reforms achieved through union action – do not trust the “main organizations of workers”. This change shows that a page of history has been turned. In Sweden where a “neo-corporatism” has been forged based on the strength of unions, three every five citizens said in 1990 that they did not have confidence in unions, and about the same number in the survey of 1999-2000. One could explain the poor position of unions in British public opinion by their impact on the performance of business, and by the consequences of frequent strikes. In surveys conducted by the Gallup Institute, one-third of the British indicated in the 1980’s that the unions were “the greatest threat to individual freedom,” but, the strength of the unions has been considerably reduced in recent period. There are people who say that they have “no confidence in unions”, but who admit at the same time that they belong to a union, willingly or not. How do we explain the current weakness of one of the greatest social institutions of the early part of this century? Oligarchic trends continued to develop after the formulation of the “iron law of oligarchy” by Roberto Michels at the beginning of the century.
Big business, not included in the survey of 1999-2000, has always been criticized, rightly or wrongly. It never inspired a large degree of confidence among industrial workers. In recent years a high proportion of workers who have admitted that jobs are created by big business and not by the State bureaucracy have changed their attitudes toward big business. For France, the surprise is great: the *patronat* is perceived in favorable terms to such a degree that, with the exception of social security, it is the institution that enjoys the largest amount of trust, in spite of decades of ideological criticism of big business. A similar phenomenon was visible in Italy. After a half-century of nationalization of large companies in Britain, France, Italy and elsewhere, after the rich experience of State capitalism in Western Europe and the lessons learned from the socialist experience in Eastern Europe, the *grand patronat* today reflects a better image in the mirror of public opinion. For this category there is no erosion of confidence but a rehabilitation in the eyes of the large public.

The principle of social security is widely accepted. What varies from one country to another is the practical functioning. Detailed studies have shown in recent years that its efficiency is more frequently perceived in France, Germany and Belgium than in Italy and Britain. Social security is not, strictly speaking, a political institution, but it is nevertheless the one which today gives rise to the hottest political debates in many European countries. The ideological “left-right” dimension appears strikingly in this debate because the essential function of social security is the redistribution of income in advanced welfare states. This problem of redistribution is increasingly becoming one of the main sources of conflict, and, consequently, of frustration and calculated mistrust. Today, social security is the Gordian knot of liberty-equality in all advanced democracies, but this issue had not been included in the survey of 1999.

Among the institutions considered in these tables, the school system is the most trusted, except in Greece. For six institutions (parliament, public administration, judicial courts, church, trade unions and media) the absolute majority of citizens have expressed “no confidence at all” or “not very much” in the majority of countries.

There are significant differences between West and East European countries. The level of mistrust is higher in the East. The nine European countries manifesting the highest mistrust of parliament are in the Eastern side. The same is true for the ten countries expressing the highest mistrust in the police (*Table 3*). Four Eastern European countries merit special attention: the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Greece and Lithuania. The Czech Republic has the highest proportion of people mistrusting the church (according to cross tabulations of survey results many are non-
believers, agnostics or atheists). It is also the most anti-militarist country in Europe, and one of the most critical concerning the functioning of the parliament, of the public administration, of the police, and of the trade unions. In Greece and Bulgaria more than 70 percent of citizens mistrust the public administration, the judicial institutions, parliament and trade unions. These two countries differ nevertheless in their attitude concerning the church (Table 3). For one of them religion is an essential component of the national independence, the other had been submitted during many years to an anti-clerical propaganda, which has left an imprint in the minds of the people. Lithuania is on the top of the list of mistrust concerning the parliament, the public administration, the judicial system and the police, at the bottom concerning the role of the church. A careful analysis on the post-communist countries has been undertaken by William Mishler and Richard Rose:

Across the 10 post-Communist societies, public reactions to the new social and political institutions range from skepticisms (the midpoint on the 7-point trust scale) to outright distrust. The median citizen in post-Communist societies actively distrusts five of the institutions and is skeptical about the remaining six. Distrust is greatest for political institutions, especially parliaments and parties, which are actively distrusted by 59% and 69% of citizens, respectively. The least democratic institution of the state, the military, enjoys the highest level of popular trust (46% are positive), although the median citizen is still skeptical and nearly a third actively distrust the military. Across all institutions, an average of 31% of respondents express positive trust, 22% are skeptical, and 47% are distrustful. (Mishler and Rose, 2001, p. 31)

**Mistrust of political parties**

Political parties play a crucial role in the process of aggregation of interests and in the selection of political representatives. These two functions are essential in the functioning of pluralist democracies and even in dictatorial and totalitarian regimes. They are unavoidable in contemporary politics. Parties are also, everywhere, the most mistrusted among political institutions and organizations across all continents and types of regimes. A wealth of data attests to such mistrust. Lamentations against their presence in democracies seem superfluous.

But, as all living organisms, parties often degenerate, and become sources of serious dysfunctions. Since 1917 (starting point of the 20th century) several democratic and semi-democratic regimes have, because of the malfunctioning of parties been in crisis throughout Europe and elsewhere. Among the most famous breakdowns of party-democracies are the Weimer Republic, the Spanish Republic, the Italian political system in the aftermath of World War One, several regimes in the Balkans...
during the interbellum period, and the French Fourth Republic. Italy has avoided a collapse in the 1990’s by eliminating *partitocrazia*. Parties may not be responsible for the crisis in which Argentina has been plunged in 1999-2003 (see chapter by F. Turner and M. Carballo), but they constitute an old plague in Mexico.

Why and how do parties degenerate? To this question dozens of sociologists, political scientists and historians have replied in outstanding books and articles, which we do not need to review here. It is better to concentrate our attention on the extreme case of party overgrowth in Germany: the *Parteinstaat*. Germany during the two wars experienced one of the most tragic types of party polarization. After the collapse of the Nazi regime, a general consensus predominated among the German elites: democracy cannot function without parties. But as often happens in history, the ruling elite went from one extreme to another. In the new German constitution parties have been institutionalized, recognized as essential wheels of the political system, and consequently the electoral procedure attributed to parties a privileged role in the organization of the State, by adopting a system of party-list of candidates to be designated and controlled by the party leaders. Only half of the parliamentarians were elected by majority vote. The system functioned without too much criticism for some time before the dysfunction became more and more obvious: a new word has been concocted to designate the “disease of parties:” *Parteinverdrosenheit*. Meanwhile the discontent of citizens and their mistrust of parties have been repeatedly been attested to. In the 1990’s it has become fashionable for German political scientists, journalists and politicians to acknowledge the disenchantment with parties (Scarrow, 1996). In 1992 the federal president von Weiszacker in an interview with *Die Zeit* formulated several charges against the parties: they promote the wrong type of politicians, they are obsessed with winning elections rather than giving priority to the interest of the population, they politicize everything including the administration, the universities and the television and radio networks. Weiszacker’s interview sparked a vivid and long debate about the “overpower of parties.”

Meanwhile severe criticism of parties developed in several countries (Gunther Montero and Linz, 2002; Webb, Farell and Holliday, 2002; Cain, Dalton and Scarrow, 2003; Poguntke and Scarrow, 1996; Rose, 2004). A summary of the literature on the deterioration of the party’s image in the public opinion and in the scholarly research has been recently undertaken by Dalton and Weldon (2004).

The number of party members has declined everywhere. The mass parties of yesterday have today become mostly parties of active politicians. The most notorious examples are the social democratic parties.
The low level of election turnout is the result of disillusion. The most spectacular case is obviously the fall of the “partitocrazia” in Italy.

“Parties are only interested in peoples’ votes, not in their opinions or aspirations.” Such a statement submitted periodically to citizens in survey research was approved by strong majorities in many countries. Even in Sweden, where parties have been well organized for a long time, the proportion of those who did not have confidence in parties rose from 36 percent in 1968 to 68 percent in 1992 (Listhaug, 1995).

The decline of parties is related to many factors. The electoral volatility (not to be confused with long-term trends) often reflects the disappointment of a significant part of the electorate. The decrease in the number of active members and supporters has been the object of study by many scholars, for instance Schedler, 1996; Caciagli, 1977; Calise, 1994. All of them conclude that the main reasons are disappointment with parties as oligarchic organizations. The oligarchy of parties is not a new phenomenon, but has recently become more visible through the mass media, and consequently, has generated more dissatisfaction. The weakening of parties and identification with parties may also be related to the decline of ideologies.

In terms of social capital, political participation and capacity to mobilize citizens there is a kind of competition between political parties and voluntary associations. In the countries where parties are strong and well organized, forcibly there remains limited room for political action outside political parties, except for the churches. That is the case of many European countries where parties have been able to articulate and aggregate interests, and mobilize a high proportion of citizens. Here we face an important contrast with the United States, where the political parties are skeletal, except during elections, and consequently there is a lot of social space for voluntary associations. The relationship between membership in voluntary associations and the level of political trust must be interpreted through an intervening variable: the strength of political parties. Such an intervening factor is neglected by Robert Putnam for whom there is a direct relation between membership in voluntary associations and the level of trust. Putnam ranks the United States as a country where this relationship is very strong, and France, Italy, Spain and Portugal as countries where it is at a low level. In his diagrams there is obviously a statistical artifact.

As a consequence of the deep mistrust of parties, a new significant trend could be observed in many European countries, and not yet sufficiently analyzed and explained: the tendency of many voters to vote not for a party but against the party they most dislike. The best example is the French presidential elections of 2002 when, at the second
round, four of every five voters pronounced themselves against the candidate of the extreme rightist party, voting, reluctantly, for a candidate of a moderate party, who has obtained, at the first round, only eighteen percent of the national vote. The voters have not chosen, they have only rejected the worst party.

Mistrust of parties and mistrust of politicians are the two faces of the same coin.

Discredit of politicians

In international surveys of professional ethics concerning the honesty of some twenty-four professions, politicians appear, in many countries, as “the least worthy of confidence”, at the same rank as “used car salesmen” and “real estate agents”, while doctors, pharmacists, school teachers and bankers inspire a lot of confidence. Such an absence of confidence in parliamentarians seems incompatible with the fact that many of them succeed in being re-elected. Curiously, one values “one’s own representative” but not representatives in general. The popularity curves of the principal political figures, particularly prime ministers, rise and fall, and this implies that the erosion of confidence is only partially rooted in ideology, that the curves respond to government decisions and to the performance of political actors.

In several countries, people have been invited to formulate judgments periodically on the following issues: Do you have confidence in the government to make good decisions? Do you think the people in power waste the taxpayers’ money? Do you think that leaders are knowledgeable people who know what they are doing or that many of them do not know? Do you think that politicians are honest, and, if so, many or a few of them? The responses to these questions – asked every two years in the United States since 1952 by the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan and reproduced in many European countries in 1980, 1990 and 1999-2000 – attest to an increase in negative attitudes toward political rulers.

Loss of popularity is a sociological given. With rare exceptions, presidents and prime ministers lose during the exercise of their functions a significant part of their political capital which permitted them to rise to power initially. This loss may be gradual or abrupt, slow or rapid. There is in the archives of surveys in many countries a rich documentation of these sociological trends. The trajectory of leaders in public opinion depends first of all on their own actions, their choices or their lack of action. The trajectory also depends on factors that are outside their control. The loss of popularity can mostly be explained by the difficulty or
the impossibility of keeping electoral promises. Such criticism appears in numerous surveys. Whether sincere promises or deliberate lies, sooner or later these commitments appear as imprudent or cynical.

Unpopularity is largely engendered by the “hypocrisy of those who govern us”. The “little screen” is a detector of hypocrisy, acting as a magnifying mirror. One needs to be a good actor to be able to dissimulate cynicism on television. The former French Prime Minister R. Barre admitted that “political life is fundamentally hypocritical”. He said this (in a television broadcast on May 2, 1993) as if it were the formulation of a medical diagnosis. Hypocrisy, which may be inevitable in the art of politics, produces mistrust. It is for this reason that politicians who frequently appear on television lose, after a certain time, their credibility.

In various countries, and in particular in presidential regimes and in prime ministerial systems, presidents and prime ministers have most of the time governed without the support of the majority of the public. Elected according to constitutional rules, most of them lose the support of the majority shortly after their election. Only retrospectively can historians claim that some of the leaders, in spite of their temporary unpopularity, nevertheless made the wise decisions. In most democracies leaders behave as if they represent the majority of the population, while in reality they are supported only by a minority. This is one of the sources of political mistrust.

**Corruption and its corrosive effects**

In most European countries the majority of people perceive their governmental rulers as corrupt and/or bureaucratic (Gallup Millennium Survey, Table 6). A distinction is needed between petty corruption at the lower and middle levels of the society and the crafty corruption at the elite level. The first is interpreted by many social scientists as “functional,” particularly in the developing countries. The second appears where money and political power converge. Here we are interested in the elitist corruption.

Another distinction is needed, between personal enrichment by corrupted practices, and illegal partisan financing. The personal enrichment is unanimously condemned morally, politically and judicially. Usually the debate about what is moral and what is immoral takes place in academic circles. But the scandals around public corruption take place in the printed and electronic media. In Italy, the trial of the most prominent leaders of the partitocrazia was televised in front of a large part of the population, an audience of millions of citizens. The protagonists were on one side and the magistrates on the other judging many of the most
Table 6
Perception of Corruption

Which of the following words best describes the essential characteristic of your government?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Corrupt</th>
<th>Bureaucratic</th>
<th>Efficiency</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Sensitive to popular requests</th>
<th>Other resp. Don’t know</th>
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<td>53</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gallup Millineum Survey, 2000

Some important countries, for various reasons were not included in the survey: France, Germany, India.

In a few countries (Iceland, Switzerland, Belgium) multiple responses – instead of a choice of one word were particularly frequent. For these countries, one must take into consideration the numbers in the columns “Efficiency, fair, sensitive to popular requests” which compensate for the numbers in the column “corrupt.”
notorious Italian politicians during more than two decades. Those who are in a position of power are some times the corruptors, and other times the corrupted.

In *La démocratie en Amérique*, Tocqueville distinguishes, one must admit, in an impressionistic manner, two types of regimes: aristocratic and democratic. The illustrious comparativist wrote:

*Aristocracy and democracy mutually reproach each other for making corruption easy: a distinction must be made. In aristocratic governments those who get to the head of affairs are rich men desiring only power. The statesmen in democracies are poor, with their fortunes to yet to be made. As a result, the rulers in aristocratic states are little open to corruption and have only a very moderate taste for money, whereas the opposite occurs in democracies. In aristocracies those who wish to get to the head of affairs have great wealth at their disposal, and as the number of those by whose assistance they may rise is comparatively small, the government is in a sense up for auction. In democracies those who intrigue for power are hardly ever rich, and the number of those who help to give it to them is very great. Perhaps there are just as many men for sale in democracies, but there are hardly any buyers; besides, one would have to buy too many men at the same time to attain one's end.* (Tocqueville, p. 220)

How was it that this penetrating observer, this eminent comparativist, wrote such a statement, forgetting the corruption of the notables under the *Restauration*? But this statement raises nonetheless a true and important issue: why is corruption so frequent among the political elites in democratic regimes in Europe, the United States and in most emerging democracies in Asia and Latin America? One possible explanation may be found in the social recruitment of political elites in the regimes with universal suffrage.

Today, in the European political forums corruption is more visible than in the past. A careful observation of the phenomenon of corruption during the last three decades in some countries, particularly Italy, France and Spain, tends to indicate that in the recent period there was at the same time an increase of corruption involving politicians, and an increasing control and reporting of graft. The better uncovering results from the joint action of magistrates and journalists.

Action and rhetoric of politicians are today more than ever in the past under the spotlight of a counter-power, the mass media. For the print or electronic media, “bad news sales better than good news.” But the media do not engender this bad news, they only spread it. The media is a vehicle, not a political decision maker, even if the power of some journalists through the influence they exercise is greater than that of many politicians. Investigative journalists, by alerting the courts, play the role of prosecutor. But, it is the official judge who condemns or pardons.
The media not only inform but also monitor. Governments are controlled by voters only on election day, this is to say, only once in a while. But they are constantly supervised by the civil society through the media. Governments are perceived in the mirror of public opinion as they are portrayed by the journalist’s pen or through the camera’s lenses. It is impossible to conceive of a truly democratic regime without powerful and independent journalists. Today, we may have democracy without powerful parties, but not without strong printed and electronic mass media.

The relation between democracy and scandal is fallacious. It is such an apparent correlation, grounded in the independence of the judiciary branch and the freedom of the press, which has so often blinded, between the two wars, enemies of democracy in the Weimar Republic, France, Italy, the Austrian Republic, Belgium and Spain.

In reality, a scandal is a redemptive act. It is because of a scandal that captain Dreyfus was rehabilitated. In democracy, scandal, if not too frequent, is a symptom of good democratic health. In some exceptional cases a scandal may appear as proof of democratic functioning and of the legitimacy of the system. In few countries is democracy solid enough to correct political error against the will of the army, or to require a chief of state to resign, as was the case with three Japanese prime ministers, the Italian president Leone and the American President Nixon. It is time to revise the conceptions that moralists have spread about scandals. For scandals to blow up two conditions are necessary, and these are found only in democracies: freedom of the press and independence of the courts. Scandals are symptoms of democratic vigor.

The impact of media can be demonstrated by content analysis of daily newspapers and weekly magazines. Many pages have been written about corruption at the highest level of society in several European countries. Many politicians have been implicated in scandals and have been obliged to resign from their official functions. It is worthwhile to mention that the Scandinavian democracies do not suffer from public corruption as some other European countries (see chapter 5 on Norway by Gulbrandsen).

In the domain of public corruption, some observers estimate that we see just the tip of the iceberg. When it becomes very frequent, citizens lose confidence in institutions. One cannot emphasize strongly enough the corrosive effects of corrupt behavior on the loss of confidence in institutions.
Compensatory Trends: From Nationalist Mistrust to Mutual Confidence Among European Nations

The relatively high levels of mistrust in institutions, parties, politicians and even compatriots within the countries is compensated by an increasing trust among the European nations. The Eurobarometer surveys carried out periodically since 1970 show an increasing trust of European nations toward their neighbors.

It is unnecessary to display here statistical tables. The questions asked did not make any distinction between trust of people as individuals, trust of the country as a collective body and trust of rulers in power at the time of the survey. Only by such distinctions could clear interpretations become possible. The available data carries various stereotypes. In the replies of some French about Italians, the stereotype was “the knife in the back,” driven in forty years earlier by Fascist rulers. The stereotype of the U.S. is “capitalism,” “imperialism.” It does not refer to Americans as individuals. It is well known that American and European businessmen trust Japanese and Chinese businessmen, even if they do not have any particular reason to trust Japan and China as nations. In practice, it is difficult to obtain “aseptic” data.

In July 1954 one of every two of the 2,562 French included in a national sample told the interviewers that he or she was a “victim” of the wars with Germany in 1914-18 or 1939-1945, and at least in the family memory of the short war in 1871, having lost a family member, been injured or had their house destroyed (Sondages, 1958, I, p. 54). In each of the 36,000 French towns and villages, a monument is dedicated to those lost during the wars with Germany. In February 1955 30% of the French believed that Germany represented a “danger”, while 40% feared mostly the Soviet Union. From November 1954 to May 1956, the proportion of French people who had “a bad or very bad” opinion of the Germans fluctuated through six surveys; from 26% to 31%. Only in May 1957 the proportion fell to 18% and seven months later to 15% (Sondages, 1958, I, p. 46). In September 1952 and again in December 1955 one out of every three French believed that in case of a war with the Soviet Union, “France could not trust East Germany,” and only 9% manifested confidence in their former enemy. In the same survey Britain and the United States were heavily trusted without reserve. (Sondages, 1958, I, p. 50). In 1954 only 24% of the French would have had confidence in a treaty with Germany, against 43% who refused to trust such a treaty (Sondages, 1958, I, p. 64). At the same moment old stereotypes continued to flourish: “The German people fundamentally like
“The German mentality has not changed;” “It would be better for France if Germany remains divided” were many popular responses (Sondages, 1958, I, p. 74). The same person who at the age 25 in 1954 carried such stereotypes may have changed his mind at the age of 54 by admitting in 1983 that Germany was France’s best ally. Nonetheless, one looking at the pyramid of the French population in 1950s would see the hemorrhage of the youths sacrificed a generation earlier. For some French historians France has never completely recovered from the bloodshed during that war.

After several generations of nationalistic antagonism between France and Germany, three wars and a tenacious collective memory full of prejudices, an important turning point has taken place in European history: the majority of Germans have confidence in the French, and vice-versa. In surveys conducted in France and Germany in May 1983 and October 1988, in response to the question, “Among the following countries which are the two that you consider as friends of your country?” France was at the top of the list in German samples, and Germany in French samples. (SOFRES, 1990, p. 145).

“A miraculous change!,” would say those who refresh their memory by gleaning in the archives. How fickle collective memory can be in some cases! Like the French/German reconciliation. How enduring could collective memory be in other cases, when over generations later they cannot forget nor forgive? For instance, the attitude of Armenians towards the Turks, Albanians towards the Serbs, Poles and Romanians towards the Russians, and victims of the Nazi regime toward the “German nation.” And, how fickle is the memory of some Europeans toward the American army which saved the European Democracies three times in only two generations: World War One, World War Two and the long Cold War? Civil wars, like the one in Spain in 1936-1938 transfer the hate between nations to a hate within the nation. In Spain the wounds are still bloody on regional levels.

The absolute majority of Europeans polled in 1980 had confidence in nine of the thirteen European countries considered. Only four countries – Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal – were perceived as trustworthy by less than half of the Europeans belonging to the other nine countries.

In 1980, the majority of the French showed confidence in the English, but the feeling was not reciprocated (there was, perhaps, residual resentment due to Gaullist foreign policy to keep Britain out of the Common Market). A higher number of British people trusted the Germans than trusted the French: 60 percent to 34 percent. Similarly, the French tended to rank their former enemy higher than their former ally, 60 percent to
53 percent. This is an historical fact, even if today for most people world wars belong to history, and the European unification to the future.

In the 1970s the majority of Italians had confidence in the French and Germans, but a smaller proportion of the French and Germans trusted Italians. There was a strong affinity between Belgians and Dutch. Curiously enough, the majority of the Irish trusted Britain, and vice-versa.

In 1980 a significant proportion of Greeks did not have confidence in Americans (53%), Germans (45%), Italians (45%), or the British (42%). A possible explanation is that at that time a visible and even rebellious minority of Greeks had sympathy for communism. They were paid in return: one-third of the European public did not trust Greeks (with 27 percent not responding). Not only did many Europeans not trust Greeks, but even one out of every four Greeks did not trust their own fellow citizens. The country which inspired the most confidence in Greeks was France (58 percent), without doubt for historical reasons dating from the nineteenth century.

The most interesting case is Italy. In 1950’s one out of every two Europeans had no confidence in Italians, especially Germans (64%). At the same time, Italians did not trust their Mediterranean neighbors, in particular Greece (45%) – no doubt due to residual memory of the Italian-Greek War of 1941 – but also Spaniards (45%) and the Portuguese (42%). The absence of trust in Italians by many Europeans dates back to World War II, when the Italian army did not show a great enthusiasm for fighting. This has been misinterpreted because, in the minds of many Italian soldiers (recorded by historians), a great combative spirit would have signified support for the Fascist regime.

It is difficult to rank the countries according to the degree of confidence that they enjoy in the minds of their neighbors, because too many people failed to express any opinion about the smaller countries: these seemed to ignore each other and to gravitate towards the largest ones. For instance, 54% of the Irish did not have any opinion about the Greeks; and reciprocally, 42% of the Greeks did not know what to think of Irish people. A large proportion of the Irish did not express any opinion about the other smaller European countries: 48% had “no opinion” about Belgians; 46% about Danes; 40% about the Dutch; 53% about Luxembourgers – but only 7% had no clear opinion about the British. Similarly, many Greeks responded by “no opinion” about the other smaller countries: Belgians (37%), Danes (36%), and Dutch (33%). One-third of Belgians did not know if the Portuguese or Greeks were or were not trustworthy. One-third of the French and 44% of Italians had the same hesitation about the Irish. It seems that some “small peripheral” countries – Ireland, Portugal, Greece – were not really integrated into
the European consciousness. Other “small” countries – Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands – were among the most trusted; very few people mistrusted them because, being small, they were not perceived as a possible threat.

Between 1976 and 2000 the level of mutual trust increased for all countries. Already high in 1976 the confidence in the small four northern countries (Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) continued to rise. A substantial increase in trust has been noticed for Italy, Spain and France. Italy has reached between 1986 and 2000 the level of trust enjoyed by the other major countries. Ireland has also improved its image, as well as Portugal and Greece. The salience of the smaller countries has improved between 1986 and 1990 (Hofrichter and Niedermayer, pp. 13-19).

Briefly, only a small minority of Western Europeans do not trust other Western Europeans, the majority show trust unencumbered by nationalism. But many fear economic disequilibria, for instance de-localizations of industry from West toward the East where labor costs are cheaper. It is not difficult to imagine what the results would have been of a similar survey conducted in the 1930s in France, Germany, Britain or Italy. Today, all Western European countries are pluralist democracies; and as it is well known, liberal states do not tend to fight one another (“liberal” in the English sense of the word, not the French).

Mutual confidence among peoples in Western Europe contrasts with the absence of such confidence in Eastern Europe. The figures convey their full meaning when compared to those concerning Eastern Europe. In a survey conducted in October 1990, the majority of Poles declared that they “do not trust very much” or “not at all” the Russians (69%), Ukrainians (75%), Belo-Russians (63%), Romanians (64%), Bulgarians (56%) and Czechs (61%). Only 2% of Poles “have a lot of trust” in Russians, Ukrainians or Belo-Russians, whereas Americans, British, French, Italians and the Swiss are the only ones to be “trusted a lot” by at least 10% of the Poles. The collective memory is still alive 45 years after the end of the war: 70% of Poles mistrusted Germans. (Eurobarometer, December 1990, p. A47) We must conclude that the majority of Poles felt that they were living in a hostile environment. Such a feeling can only nourish strong nationalism.

Czechs also believed to live in a hostile environment. The majority of Czechs did not trust Russians (62%), Poles (77%), Romanians (77%), Hungarians (67%), or Bulgarians (64%), but only 44% of them did not trust Germans. The most curious finding is that a significant minority of Czechs did not trust the Slovaks. (Eurobarometer, December 1990, p. A-47)
How does one explain such a trend? Mistrust among nations is declining in Europe because a supranational consciousness is slowly emerging by a progressive interaction at several levels: economic, military, social, cultural, and political.

The consequences of the interpenetration of European economies are obvious and decisive. Each country needs to trade with other countries and, above all, with their immediate neighbors. For most countries, about one-half of their G.N.P. is based on foreign trade, mostly within Europe. Western European economies interpenetrate each other. They are undoubtedly in competition but also show reciprocal dependency. Considering current technological performance, no European country – not even Germany, France or Britain – has viable economic size and space. It is for this reason that some of the smallest European countries are very much in favor of an extended European market (the Netherlands understood very early its advantage in promoting an European unification process). This interdependency engenders a supranational market, detrimental to the old-fashioned economic isolationism or protectionism.

Certainly, economic rivalries within Europe persist, particularly on the regional level, but these rivalries are relegated to a secondary level by the advantages offered by the Common Market in the economic competition with the two other powers, the US and particularly Japan. The reaction to such an external economic competition nourishes the erosion of classical nationalism within Europe.

At the military level, four decades of Cold War during the age of missiles, under the protection of the American atomic umbrella, convinced many people as early as the 1960s that no European nation could have resisted an attack from the Eastern Giant, who, in turn, may have had the same reaction to the Atlantic Alliance. The nation-state, having been for several decades too weak to protect its citizens against the Eastern super-power, has lost part of its military function. It is significant that the military establishments in European countries are no longer nationalistic. No European democracy could claim today to be militarily independent: nationalism has lost its military foundation. Military dependence and economic interdependence have combined their effects.

In parallel, the frontiers between the old states of Western Europe have received, so to speak, the seal of perpetuity: a war between these countries is inconceivable today, except in Northern Ireland. Consequently, nationalism in Western Europe, in contrast to the situation in Eastern Europe until recently, can no longer generate territorial disputes.

The increasing complexity of social stratification is another important aspect of this trend toward a European consciousness. Every European country is characterized by considerable internal diversity, from many
points of view. There is a striking cross-national similarity between these intra-national diversities. There are more similarities between two bourgeois, one French and the other British, than between a British middle-class person and a British manual worker, or between a French lawyer and a French farmer. There are more social differences within each country than between the countries, at all levels: birth rates, divorce rates, growth of some sectors of the economy and decay of other sectors, unemployment rates, financial crisis of the social security system, and so on.

At the cultural level, European consciousness has progressed enormously during the past decades. A series of surveys gives an idea of the rapid internationalization of national cultures. Today people, ideas and goods circulate freely in the European community. More Europeans have crossed the frontiers within Europe during the last four decades than during the previous eight centuries. Every summer millions of tourists move from northern lands to southern seas. Television ignores national barriers; Eurotelevision is already a reality. In spite of linguistic diversity, cultures become less and less national and more and more eclectic, among young people more than among their elders. The European cacophony remains, even today, the most vulnerable target. Europe is a new Tower of Babel. Of course, the mixing of cultures does not penetrate equally everywhere. Spain and Italy receive each year a number of tourists greater than the number of its adult inhabitants. The majority of Dutch teenagers are familiar with three foreign languages. But such an ideal polyphony is not to be expected during our generation. After all, the most important language today is the one spoken by the computer a truly international dialect.

It is possible to rank the countries according to the level of their “pro-European feelings.” Eurobarometer has repeatedly measured the proportion of people favoring European integration. In three kinds of countries the levels of favorable attitudes were the highest from 1973 to 2000. First, the countries whose economic performance depends largely on foreign trade – particularly the Spain, Belgium and Luxembourg – showed the highest pro-European feelings. Second were the countries for which the European Community was a protecting institution: the German Federal Republic before the fall of the Berlin Wall. At that time, Greece also felt the need for European protection. Third came a few countries that believe that they could resolve their national problems more efficiently by delegating some power to the European superstructure. Many Italians believe that the efficiency of the administration in some fields could be improved if some decisions were made in Brussels, instead of being debated in Rome. Belgians also see the European Community as a source
of legitimacy for their “tribal system.” In case of conflict between a French regulation and a European regulation the second prevails. This implies that some countries are winners and others losers, and this phenomenon appears mainly in economic sectors of the division of labor and of the market.

Each European country presents a *sui-generus* configuration of trust-mistrust. The clusters of factors are not identical everywhere. Of particular interest are Russia, Belgium and Poland, but here we have to give priority to two emblematic cases: Britain and Italy, to which for reasons of space, have not been dedicated full chapters in this symposium, as for Norway and France, considered as contrasting types (see chapter 5 and 6).

**Two emblematic cases: Britain and Italy**

Looking at the European chess board I had much hesitation in choosing pairs of countries taking into consideration that the binary comparison is one of the most used strategies in comparative sociology (Dogan, 2002). I have chosen Britain and Italy because such a binary comparison sheds light onto the relationship between legitimacy and efficiency.

A. Britain: weakening of a classical model of democracy

Once Britain was considered a model of democracy. Through its resistance in the winter of 1940-41, this country saved all European democracies. Dozens of books and essays published by British economists, sociologists, and political scientists include the word “decline” in their titles. Public opinion surveys periodically measured skepticism. From them, we learn that a large part of the population believes that politicians are not sincere, that they do not tell the truth, that they are not concerned about the people’s views, and that they doubt the capacity of the establishment to govern. The president of one of the main public opinion institutes, wrote in 1993 that what was involved was “a declining faith in the monarchy, Westminster, Whitehall, the judicial system and the system of government in its entirety.” (MORI) According to the Daily Telegraph, referring to a poll by S.S.L.T. Institute in 1993, half of the British people would be willing to emigrate to the United States if they had the chance. Such a state of mind of a significant number of the population is attested to by surveys from other institutions during the last quarter of a century.

Prime minister John Major invited his countrymen on March 3rd 1993 “to not let the British tendency toward self-denigration sap confidence.”
Newspaper editors spoke of a national malaise, of a moral crisis. It was not the first time that feelings of moroseness were denounced. This theme has been present in the sociological literature for over thirty years.

According to an interview in 1995, most of the British thought that the governmental system was malfunctioning; the way in which Britain was being governed must be improved; parliament did not sufficiently control the government; between elections voters could do nothing, and consequently there was a need for a recourse to referenda; the House of Lords should be replaced by an elected assembly; a written constitution should be adopted; the terms of office of the legislature should be fixed in advance; the electoral system should be changed; there was a need for a new law of freedom of information; and other laments (Table 7).

Do these complaints challenge the legitimacy of the regime? The answer is negative, in spite of mounting discontent (Kavanagh, 1997). The public is advocating a profound reform of the regime, its improvement, but not the suppression of its democratic foundation. The British example demonstrates better than many others that in today’s complex democracies the electoral game is no longer sufficient, that it does not

<table>
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<th>Table 7</th>
<th>Britain: A Democracy Without a Written Constitution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Adoption of a Bill of Rights</td>
<td>79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Britain needs a written constitution</td>
<td>59%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliament does not have sufficient control over what the government does</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The system of government in Britain is out of date</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament works very badly (11%); fairly badly (19%); neither well nor badly (22%)</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied with the way the House of Lords is doing its job these days</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacing the House of Lords with an elected second chamber</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British people should be able to force the government to hold a referendum: good idea</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary voters do not have much power over government policies between election (none at all or little)</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixing the length of parliament</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Britain’s current electoral system to proportional representation</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be a freedom of information act, giving the right of access to information</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The present system of governing Britain needs a great deal of improvement or could be improved quite a lot</td>
<td>75%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

promote a satisfactory expression of the aggregation and articulation of interests.

In a survey conducted by MORI in 1991, sponsored by the Rountree Reform Trust one of every two voters thought “parliament does not have a sufficient control over what the government does,” and 60 percent declared, “Britain needs a Bill of Rights to protect individual freedoms.” Four years later in 1995 a MORI survey on the “State of the Nation” indicated that three-quarters of citizens interviewed believed that the current system of government in Britain “needs a great deal of improvement” or “quite a lot.” Only one-third were “satisfied” with the “way parliament works.” Four of every ten citizens would support the “replacing of the House of Lords with an elected second chamber,” and in the same proportion they recommended that the courts should “oversee the MP’s conduct.” Concerning the misconduct of government ministers, one of every two British citizens thought that “an independent official commission should investigate and decide whether ministers should resign” (MORI, 1995) (Table 7). Even the church has lost the confidence of one of every two citizens. (IIPO, April 1983, March 1981) The most mistrusted categories in the 1980’s and 1990’s were the press, the trade union, and the public administration.

In his essay Dennis Kavanagh reported that a poll conducted in 1993 revealed that 90% of the survey sample believed that politicians could not be trusted, and according to another poll in 1995 a smaller proportion considered that “most of MP’s could not be trusted to tell the truth.” Many MP’s were perceived to be willing to put their own interests or that of their party ahead of other considerations, particularly the interest of the constituency or of the country. Party membership has also declined from 40% to 13% in just one generation. (Kavanagh, 1997, p. 34)

The decline of public trust in the government reduces what David Easton called “diffuse support.” The decline of trust means a decline of the “deference” that had characterized in the past the attitude of many British people, particularly in the working class. D. Kavanagh concludes his analysis by saying that “Britain is no longer widely regarded as the model democracy that it was throughout Europe for the first decades after 1945. Today few of the member states of the European Union look to Britain for a democratic inspiration . . . this is a telling contrast to the mood in which Almond and Verba regarded Britain as an example of stable democracy” (Kavanagh, 1997, p. 40).

B. Italy as a clinical case

Italy is a beautiful country and its population is blessed with many talents, except for the recruitment of politicians, in spite of the fact, or maybe precisely for this reason, that this country has given birth to some
of the greatest theorists of political elites: Machiavelli, Mosca, Pareto, Giovanni Sartori and some others. The political system built in the aftermath of World War Two was weak from its inception. It was an imitation of the French Fourth Republic that died in 1958. An early diagnosis was formulated by the president of the senate Cesare Merzagora: “a climate of corruption weighed heavily upon the Italian political life, polluted by affarismo and by illicit financial interventions... the resignation of various political actors upset the national consciousness, not only mine, but of the majority of our colleagues in all parties, who suffer silently, facing a pestiferous situation... so we cannot advance this way... the Italian politicians are facing a gloomy future” (Tedeschi, 1962, p. 16).

A third of a century after this admonition the political system finally collapsed in 1992-1994. The deterioration of the system had been accelerated in the 1960s. In a few years, the proportion of Italians who expressed a negative judgment about the dignity and honesty of political rulers rose from 33% to 70% between 1967 and 1974; the dissatisfaction concerning the functioning of the State and of the public administration went from 35% to 83%, and the negative opinion of the competence and loyalty of political rulers went from 22% to 66% (Surveys by Doxa).

During the years 1992 to 1994, the Italian newspapers reported daily in full pages the vicissitudes of the prosecutions over corruption. Never in the history of the European democracies had a political class been more humiliated than the Italian during these 30 months. It would not be enough to say that the Italian political class had been decimated – which would imply that only a tenth of politicians were excluded from the forum. It was clearly decapitated. More than half of the Italian politicians at the top of the political pyramid had been eliminated at the following the elections of 1996. The chronology of survey results has an important sociological meaning: when the magistrates started their action in Italy in 1992 the public opinion was already ripe, and ready to applaud the prosecutors.

By 1994, 6,059 persons were under judicial investigation. Among them were 335 deputies, 100 senators, 331 regional councilors, 122 provincial councilors, 1,525 communal councilors, 973 entrepreneurs and businessmen, 1,373 civil servants (Allum 1994, p. 166). In the middle of them were the five party leaders of the pentapartito coalition, and four former prime ministers. The 435 deputies and senators represented almost half of the elected parliamentarians.

According to data published by the prosecutors of Milan in February 1995, in this city alone were investigated during the previous three years about 2,500 persons, of whom 718 were preventively incarcerated. About
210 of these 2,500 persons were condemned, at the first trial, but most have appealed to a higher judicial court. Only one person had been condemned definitively.

How to explain that a few dozens judges have been able to decapitate the powerful political class of the partitocrazia? It is generally admitted that one of the main reasons is the status of the magistracy, its independence and freedom of action (Azzariti, 1994).

Is there a breaking point in the loss of confidence, a point where legitimacy breaks down? Italy may serve here as a clinical case. Of all the European pluralist democracies, Italy is the country where every year since the early 1970s, surveys have found the highest proportion of people who were dissatisfied with the way democracy functions. In 1987, 72% of Italians were discontented. Only 26% said that they were satisfied with the regime. In twenty-five surveys between 1960 and 2000 a negative judgment was expressed by more than 70% of Italian adults; in only one survey, in November 1987, the proportion was slightly lower (Eurobarometer, 1995). Hundreds of books and articles written by social scientists or by Italian politicians have denounced weaknesses: patronage, corruption, ministerial instability, partitocrazia. Many surveys conducted in the last three decades have shown severe criticism of the “system” and particularly of the political class.

Nevertheless, Italy is still a democratic country. The legitimacy of the regime seems to be contested only by a small minority. It is only the performance of the system that is targeted by the critics. Italians interviewed every year during the last quarter of a century by Eurobarometer, were invited to choose among three propositions: a) It is necessary to radically change the entire organization of our society by revolutionary action; b) It is necessary to progressively improve our society by reforms; and c) We must courageously defend our society against all subversive forces. During these years, the absolute majority chose “reform,” implicitly accepting the legitimacy of the regime. The proportion of those who chose “revolutionary action,” contesting the legitimacy, varied from 6% and 10% (only twice, in 1976 and 1977 did it reach 12%).

According to various surveys conducted by Institute Doxa, the majority of Italians admitted that it is better to have a mediocre parliament than to have no parliament at all. In the same surveys, they denounced “the multiplicity of parties as the source of all troubles,” while simultaneously recognizing that “parties are indispensable in democratic countries.” So, in spite of these criticisms, they did not contest the regime’s legitimacy. Why have they tolerated such a regime? For forty years, Italy has benefited from considerable economic growth, higher than most other European countries. The Italian society seems to be, comparatively, in
good health in spite of, or perhaps paradoxically, thanks to the weakness of the State.

Comparing these two countries during four decades (1945-1985) we face intriguing trends. On one side we see a venerable and solid political system, even if seriously criticized, and who enjoyed, on the international arena a high prestige but sloping down economically (for many reasons that have been analyzed and interpreted by dozens of British scholars in all disciplines); on the other hand, we see a weak polity, full of political and administrative dysfunctions, but progressing nonetheless economically more rapidly than most European countries. According to E.O.C.D. statistics, the standard of living was in Italy in 1949 one of the lowest in Western Europe, and in 1985 one of the highest. During the same period Britain went, in terms of standard of living from the second position in 1950 among the same countries, to the next to the last in 1985. These contrasting trends invite us to ask the following theoretical question: if they had the choice between a healthy and grounded economy accompanied by a “sick” state, and a declining and impoverished economy in a respectable political system, which one would the people prefer? Not all countries would make the same choice. We know by historical studies done in political sociology that in the past all citizens have not made the same choice. The most important factor is the vigor of political legitimacy in times of crises (Lipset, 1959; revised version 1981). Politics cannot be explained only by political criteria. When we try to understand the dynamics of political legitimacy we should not neglect the economic and cultural factors.

**Legitimacy and dissatisfaction**

Given such an erosion of confidence in institutions – in particular concerning the parliament as a central institution – a phenomenon which has persisted for decades in some democracies and longer in others, one wonders if there is in the old democracies a risk of challenging the legitimacy of the political regime. The reply to such a question should not be speculative. It should be based on empirical data. There is not a single country in the world where all the people perceive the regime as totally legitimate. Legitimacy comes in degrees. Ranking a regime on a scale from minimum to maximum of legitimacy is a valid approach for comparative analysis of political systems. Many scholars have felt the need of such scaling: “Legitimacy runs the scale from complete acclaim to complete rejection . . . ranging all the way from support, consent, compliance through decline, erosion and loss. In case of conscious rejection we may speak of illegitimacy” (Hertz 1978, p. 320). As Juan Linz stresses,
“no political regime is legitimate for 100% of the population, nor in all its commands, nor forever, and probably very few are totally illegitimate based only on coercion” (Linz 1988, p. 66).

Legitimacy never reaches unanimity. All groups and all individuals do not evaluate equally the authority of the political power. There are apathetic strata and rebellious subcultures, peaceful opponents and armed terrorists, and between these extremes the majority is only partially convinced of the government’s pretension to legitimacy. For David Easton, frequent violation of the law and dissident movements are an indication of the degree of legitimacy. But in empirical research it is difficult to identify and to measure this phenomenon.

There is often confusion between legitimacy and legality. In a democracy, governments change periodically. It is considered as legitimate precisely because there are rules concerning the replacement of the holders of political power. Hostility toward the party in power is compatible with the belief in the wisdom of the regime. Occasional violations of constitutional rules do not undermine the legitimacy of the political regime. What is lost in such a situation is the confidence in its leaders or in particular institutions. A distinction between the legitimacy of the regime and the confidence in certain institutions or rulers is necessary because no institution can totally escape the criticism of some people. Unanimity is a ridiculous pretension of totalitarian regimes.

The available documentation does not permit us to say that democratic legitimacy has been contested. The majority of European citizens are favorable to improving political regimes by reforms according to democratic rules. Between conventional reforms and revolutionary agitation there are many forms of action and pressure. A question raised by Eurobarometer, was whether a high proportion of citizens were satisfied with the functioning of democracy. In all of Western Europe, one out of every two citizens declared that he or she was dissatisfied with the way in which democracy was functioning in their own country. In most cases this signifies a desire for improvement. The dissatisfaction regarding the functioning of institutions does not challenge the legitimacy of the regime. A pertinent question has been asked many times in various countries inviting people to choose from three propositions concerning the issue of legitimacy. 1) Accept overall the existing law, our present system of government and our society; 2) See many shortcomings in our present system, but believe in a gradual improvement within the existing system of government; 3) Completely reject the existing law, our present system of government and our society, the only solution is complete social change.

The first proposition implies a belief in the legitimacy of the regime; the second bears witness to the conviction that, in spite of all insufficiencies, the
exiting regime is the best conceivable and that, in addition, it is improv-
able. The third indicates that the existing regime is perceived as illegit-
imate. In most countries, the proportion of people who chose the third
option was insignificant. In some countries the proportion was relatively
significant, (more than ten percent) particularly in France and Italy.

How far can the level of confidence fall before it disrupts the foundations
of democracy? Italy can serve here as a test. As we have seen, between
1992 and 1994 this country experienced an implosion that eliminated
important political parties from the political arena, brought about a
change of leadership and of the name of parties, and provoked a hecatomb
of the political class following a large number of corruption scandals.
The corrosive effect of corruption on the regime’s legitimacy appeared
clearly. Nevertheless, democracy has not collapsed, it has spontaneously
reconstructed itself. Even in this extreme case, democracy proved itself
non eradicable.

Today most citizens cannot conceive of an alternative solution to a
democratic regime. The available documentation does not allow us to
conclude a rejection of the basic civic culture. The only exception that
comes to mind is Russia, but this is an exception that confirms the rule:
today, Russia is still a democracy in gestation; it is not yet an advanced
democracy.

arrived at the same diagnosis. They asked if there was a crisis of legit-
imacy in the United States. Their interpretation is that “people lose
confidence in their leadership much easier than in the system” and that
“the public has become more and more critical about the performance
of the major institutions.” Their conclusion is that “the loss of confidence
has positive and negative aspects. It is real because the Americans are
extremely dissatisfied with the performance of their institutions. It is in
some sense superficial because Americans have not yet reached the rejec-
tion point of these institutions” (Lipset and Schneider, pp. 378-9).

Substantial empirical evidence covering Western democracies oblige
us to make a clear distinction between the legitimacy of the regime,
confidence in institutions, and popularity of governments. In a democ-
ratric country, even if the number of dissatisfied people is high for a long
period of time, the legitimacy of the regime is not challenged, except in
case of economic, military or political disaster (Dogan and Higley, 1998).
The democratic regime does not collapse because the majority of citi-
zens believed that there is no better alternative than to reform democ-
archy in a democratic way. The virtue of democracy is that it offers the
possibility of change according to the rules of the political game. It is
easier to avoid errors when one can anticipate the actions of others.
This is what Carl Friedrich calls the “rules of anticipated reaction.” Such a quasi-medical precept is particularly useful when one analyzes the erosion of confidence and seeks a remedy.

As the French politician cited in the first paragraph of this essay commented wisely, it is not because we are convinced that democracy is the best system of government that we should refrain from admitting that it is not perfect, that it contains dysfunctions and injustices, that it can, as living organisms, experience pathological trends that engender feelings of alienation.

Legitimacy of the democratic regime is not contested in any of the western post-industrial democracies (not even in North Ireland), but the persistence of low confidence shows that we are in the presence of serious dysfunctions (Heath and Dorren, 1991; Gwyn, 1980; Kaase and Newton, 1995; Lockerbie, 1993; Ester, Halman and de Moor, 1993; MORI 1991-1995).

The development of mass communications and the increasing intervention of the state in all domains have created what is called governmental overload. Intermittent voting rites are no longer sufficient. Parliament is no longer a privileged center of power. To the old constitutional theory of parliament mandate, it is gradually substituted a permanent surveillance of institutions and their leaders by frequent recourse to surveys of public opinion. Parliamentary elections take place every four or five years, but surveys can be conducted every month. Parliamentary democracy becomes more and more survey-directed, giving citizens the possibility of expressing themselves on concrete problems. In all countries, politicians are sensitive to the results of surveys.

Overloaded with conflicting tasks, governments cannot satisfy all aspirations. By its omnipresence, the State engenders doubt and dissatisfaction. In this stateist society, a large part of the GNP is collected and redistributed by the State according to criteria and methods which are contested by certain categories of the population, disadvantaged or privileged. Citizens depend more and more on a government in which they have less and less confidence. The more powerful the State, the less efficient it seems to be. The more generous it is, the less impartial it appears. As a result, citizens are manifesting skepticism. Advanced democracy today is in a paradoxical situation. The more it develops, the more it demands of a powerful government. But a free society does not support a too-powerful government. It is for this reason that the arrows of discontent and distrust are directed against the central government and its institutions.

What types of citizens do we need in a democracy? Ignorant, naive, deferential, sheep-like, credulous, believers in myths? Or informed citizens, demythologized, who are at the crossroads of multiple influences and
cleavages, in brief, rationally distrustful citizens? A good critical skepticism can only consolidate democracy. By crisis of confidence, we must understand rather the collective aspiration to more democracy, and not a loss of faith in its fundamental values. All political philosophers have said and repeated: democracy is the “least bad political system,” as Churchill said. Erosion of confidence is first of all a sign of political maturity. It is not so much that democracy has deteriorated, but rather the critical spirit of most citizens has improved. What has changed during the last decades is the perception we have of the performance of the political system. The critical attitude against the established authority is more frequent among the young generation than among the older (Table 8).

Pluralist democracy is today becoming less governable, not so much because of government overload, but rather because of the diffusion

| Table 8 |
| Variations According to Generations |
| Trust according to age in nine European countries in 1981 and 1990 |
| Proportion of people having great confidence in: |

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<td>55-64</td>
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<td>65+</td>
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| Mean over Europe | 26 | 20 | 20 | 11 | 19 | 13 |

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| Mean over Europe | 10 | 6  | 7  | 8  | 6  | 5  |

throughout all strata of society of a mitigated confidence, or in other words, of rational distrust nourished by experience.

One of the principal lessons to be drawn is that electoral procedures are no longer sufficient for building confidence in representative democracy. Today citizens’ judgment is no longer expressed only once in a while at election time; it is pronounced weekly or monthly, by the civil society attested to by survey research. Contrary to classical theories, and to some old, sometimes dusty, constitutional practices (as in Britain), the electoral procedure today – while it is irreplaceable and rightly sanctified – can no longer insure the harmonious operating and full legitimacy of democratic regimes in the most developed and demanding countries. From one electoral rite to another, choices must be made and decisions must be taken for which the vote expresses a vague indication, too often misleading. Deception, frustration and discontent are the inevitable results. Surveys conducted according to the rules of the art under the supervision of a constitutional court could in some cases usefully complement universal suffrage. It is not inconceivable that one day such a survey will be institutionalized in certain domains, at least on a consultative basis, without decision-making power, as participation of large social strata in the great political debates. Since there are too many dysfunctions in the most advanced democracies (and even more in other kinds of regimes), the venerable parliamentarianism is called upon to enlarge the political forum.

**Final comment**

The classic Weberian typology of legitimacy distinguishes three types: traditional legitimacy, charismatic legitimacy and legal-rational legitimacy. It is no longer appropriate because only a few countries today have a truly traditional authority, while the charismatic phenomenon is extremely rare (Khomeini being the latest example). There is not one single example of traditional or charismatic legitimacy in Europe during the last half century. This famous typology appears today anachronistic. Two of the three “boxes” are in the contemporary world almost empty. In the third “box” we have to lodge almost all independent nations – about 170-mixing a wide variety of regimes (Dogan, 2004). Weber’s definition of legitimacy needs an updated reformulation by taking into consideration the neighboring concepts of trust, popularity and effectiveness. One of the most significant findings of research on legitimacy and trust conducted during the recent decades in Western pluralist democracies is the visibility of a large part of the citizenry that expresses limited or no confidence in some institutions and does not trust the leaders of these
institutions, but does not contest the legitimacy of the political system itself. In this third type there are many varieties of legitimacy. One of the most prominent varieties within this third type of citizens is the one who behaves vigilantly, who does not fully trust their rulers, who does not give them a mandate but only a revocable delegation and who supervise permanently by testing periodically the state of the public opinion.

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Political Mistrust in Latin America

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with contexts, causes and consequences of mistrust in politicians in today’s Latin America’s. The weak support for democracy across the entire continent is generated as much by mistrust of politicians as of institutions. Citizens are increasingly willing to separate their evaluations of incumbents from their evaluation of democracy as a regime type. Incumbents have repeatedly modified constitutional arrangements to suit their own interests. The analysis is based on sources such as the Latinobarometro (17 countries from 1995-2003), the World Values Surveys (7 countries in 1995), the Hewlett/Tulane study (Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico in 1998), the Informe Iberoamericano, and Transparency International.

At least since the classic work of Almond and Verba (1963), culturalist accounts of liberal democracy have held that political trust is important for regime legitimacy, governability, and consolidation. However, beginning in the 1970s, “allegations that mass publics [were] losing confidence in politicians and many aspects of the political system” (Listhaug 1995: 262) began to worry scholars of advanced industrial democracies. Although the problem was first detected in the United States in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate, recent research suggests that declining levels of trust in politicians and institutions seem to be a global trend affecting not only wealthy polyarchies but also nascent democracies in the developing world (Przeworski 1995; Norris 1999a; Pharr and Putnam 2000). If the problem is indeed global, it may affect older and new democracies differently, since new democracies have not yet generated the reservoir of legitimacy that older democracies enjoy. New democracies may
be disproportionately vulnerable to a sudden collapse in public confidence. Thus, the basic problem of the production of legitimacy assumes paramount importance for new democracies such as those in Latin America (Diamond 1999; Lagos 1997, 2001; Camp 2001). Recognition of state authority and public confidence in the new regime may rest largely upon citizen evaluations of the “test drivers” of the new democracy: professional politicians.

This article examines the context, causes, and consequences of mistrust of politicians in Latin America’s current democratic era, focusing on the 1990s to the present. In terms of context, a principal argument of this paper is that low levels of trust of politicians in Latin America cannot be understood in isolation from other aspects of social and political trust. Recently, Pippa Norris has argued persuasively that political trust is a “multidimensional” concept that includes not only trust in politicians or “authorities” but also trust in political institutions, trust in the performance of the regime, and trust or support for democratic principles, which is the most “diffuse” type of support (Norris 1999a). In contrast, Easton’s original (1953) framework emphasized trust in politicians as the most “specific” type of political trust. We find it useful to engage these two levels of analysis simultaneously, framing trust in politicians against the broader background of support for democracy. Mistrust of politicians is merely one aspect of a syndrome of “low trust across the board” in Latin America – including low interpersonal trust, mistrust of institutions, low confidence in the performance of the regime, and even skepticism about many non-governmental institutions. We demonstrate that it is difficult to “unpack” trust in politicians from this broader syndrome: there is a significant inertial dimension of mistrust in Latin America that we must document and control for before we can move to what causes levels of mistrust for politicians in the region.

Despite this analytical difficulty, we attempt to identify some proximate causes of low trust in politicians in Latin America that can be teased out of the inertial syndrome and studied in isolation. Rather than historically given factors, these are palpable, contemporary issues that have colored the political experience of Latin America since the advent of democratization in the 1980s: economic performance, corruption, and the instrumental behavior of political elites. Although this is by no means an exhaustive list of causal factors – and we await more country case studies and individual-level data on which to base our conclusions – we attempt to shape a future research agenda on the causes of low trust in politicians.

Finally, we examine the consequences for democracy. While many scholars and journalists adopt an alarmist perspective, recent research has shown that citizens around the world are increasingly willing to separate
their evaluations of incumbents (often negative) from their evaluation of democracy as a regime type (Norris 1999a). We speculate that mistrust of politicians is increasingly embedded into the expectations and practices of newly emerging democracies in Latin America, and there is no compelling reason to believe that democracy cannot accommodate this shortcoming in the medium term. However, does this mean that “all is well” in the Latin American democracies, as Putnam et al. (2000: 27) asked about the more advanced democracies of the world? Probably not.

We focus our analysis on professional politicians, although much of the available data make it difficult to separate evaluations of politicians from evaluations of the representative institutions (parties and parliament) that they inhabit. By trust in politicians we mean general orientations toward “actions or performance of the government or political elites,” rather than a focus on specific individuals or incumbents (Dalton 1999: 58). This essay will provide general coverage of all of Latin America’s existing democracies (17 Spanish-speaking republics plus Brazil). Our focus is regional and comparative.

**Trust in politicians in theoretical and comparative perspective**

Although political scientists have always been concerned with the basic issue of legitimacy, and although cross-national survey research began with The Civic Culture project in the late 1950s (Almond and Verba 1963), the contemporary debate on political trust began in earnest in the early 1970s. In the United States, Vietnam and Watergate revealed the problem of rapidly declining trust in government. Comparative research found similar trends unfolding in other advanced democracies. The publication of the controversial study by Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki, The Crisis of Democracy (1975) set the tone for the 1970s. Among political analysts, crisis theories abounded; their ideas even found their way into the discourse of political practitioners, as in Jimmy Carter’s famous “malaise” speech of July 1979. Fittingly, the decade closed with the publication of Almond and Verba’s The Civic Culture Revisited (1980), in which several of the contributors dramatically revised earlier hypotheses about the allegedly enduring cultural bases of democratic legitimacy in the United Kingdom and the United States.

With the temporary resurgence of political trust in the United States and other advanced nations in the 1980s (Citrin and Green 1986) research moved away from the abstract meaning of trust for democracy to the more immediate question of what causes levels of political trust to increase or decrease. Over the past 15 years, the main analytical challenge has
been to determine whether the erosion of political trust is part of a “worldwide trend” of declining levels of support for politicians due to “common structural and secular factors,” or whether trends may be cyclical and/or attributable to “country-specific factors” such as “specific historical traditions, the performance of governments, or the working of particular political systems” (Norris 1999a: 8). Efforts to solve this puzzle fall into several camps.

One approach pursued the performance-based hypotheses of Crozier et al. (1975). This approach seeks the causes of mistrust in the massive expansion in the role of the state after World War II. A crisis of political trust occurs when stagnating socioeconomic performance meets rising popular demands. However, these theories were challenged by a number of scholars in the 1980s when the state did not collapse as predicted but adapted to increased demands (Listhaug 1995). Moreover, measuring performance is no simple task. When performance has been measured with macroeconomic indicators, as Pharr (2000) argues, the link between mistrust in politicians and performance has not always been clear, particularly in the developed world.

A second approach links political mistrust to broad cultural changes, best exemplified by Ronald Inglehart’s theory of intergenerational value change (1997). Inglehart argues that declining levels of trust in “all types of traditional authority” are due to cultural changes “linked to the processes of modernization and postmodernization” (Inglehart 1997, 296). Citizens who grew up in societies that have experienced significant economic growth, particularly after World War II, “evaluat[e] their leaders and institutions by more demanding standards than in the past” (Inglehart 1997, 295). In sharp contrast to the crisis theorists of the 1970s, Inglehart suggests that citizens are not withdrawing from political life but are more involved in politics in nontraditional ways, becoming what Pippa Norris calls “critical citizens” (Norris 1999a). Contrary to those who claim that declining levels of trust in politicians have unambiguously negative effects for democracy, Inglehart finds that a secular decline in respect for traditional authority is devolving policy debates back to the level of ordinary citizens, thus sparking renewed political interest and participation at the individual and grassroots levels – not via the mass-membership, bureaucratic, and monopolistic institutions associated with the early phases of modernization. While Inglehart’s assumptions and methodology have been challenged repeatedly,¹ his is the most encompassing theory link-

¹ See especially Duch and Taylor (1993), Muller and Seligson (1994), and Jackman and Miller (1996).
ing mistrust in politicians to broad cultural changes, particularly in the industrialized world.

A rival culturalist approach is social capital theory. Here, declining political trust is viewed as the logical consequence of the erosion of the civic community and of interpersonal trust. This argument is most cogently advanced in the widely read contributions of Robert Putnam (1993, 2000). Social capital theorists draw broad interconnections among the variables of face-to-face interactions, engagement in associational life at the community level, subjective political competence, and trust in all of its various incarnations (social, political, and interpersonal). However, the causal linkages among interpersonal trust, social capital, and levels of distrust of politicians have not been easy to demonstrate empirically, particularly at the individual level (Norris 1999a, Newton 1999). For example, using data from the World Values Surveys (hereafter WVS), Newton concludes that “political distrust is not caused so much by social or economic factors but by political ones” and that “the links, where they exist, tend to be weak and contingent” upon other factors (Newton 1999, 185). An example is provided by della Porta’s (2000) innovative study of the relationships among corruption, social capital, and low levels of trust of politicians in Italy, Germany, and France. Merging the performance hypothesis with social capital theory, della Porta argues that “corruption worsens governmental performance, reducing trust in the government’s capacity to address citizens’ demands and...lack of confidence in government favors corruption” (2000, 203).

The corruption hypothesis is receiving increasing attention, particularly with the availability of cross-national data that attempt to measure misconduct and graft (e.g., the Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International). Susan Pharr argues that distrust for politicians is a function of “public officials conduct in office” as in “corruption and ethics scandals, whether socially constructed or not” (2000, 192). Her study of Japan claims that “reports of official misconduct” are the “single best predictor” of confidence in politicians and government (Pharr 2000, 199). Seligson’s careful study of corruption and regime legitimacy in Bolivia, Paraguay, El Salvador, and Nicaragua arrives at a similar conclusion (Seligson 2002).

Some scholars argue that distrust in politicians is a function of information (Nye et al. 1997, Lau 1982). This approach emphasizes that citizens get their information about politicians and politics through the mass media, particularly television. Since television is blamed for “negativity bias in political perceptions” then an increase of exposure to television will increase distrust in politicians (Listhaug 1995, 265). Putnam (2000) goes further, contending that TV is responsible for a generalized
erosion of all forms of trust, both political and interpersonal. However, Norris (2000) has disputed this claim with data from the WVS and National Election Studies comparing Britain and the United States. She argues that “the short-term negative effects of watching television news have been greatly exaggerated” and that increasing levels of media exposure can be “beneficial for civic engagement” and political trust (Norris 2000, 250).

Yet another group of analysts argues that political trust is a function of the lack of accountability of intermediating institutions, such as political parties and parliament. Norris, for example, shows that perceived accountability is lower in dominant-party systems (Norris 1999a, 23). Listhaug argues that if “significant groups are excluded from political representation” and citizens feel that they cannot “throw the rascals out” then distrust in the political process and politicians will increase (1995, 265). Political distrust can also be explained by the growing professionalization of legislatures, low levels of incumbency turnover, and the insulation of politicians from electoral defeat (Norris 1999b). When the design of political institutions makes voters perceive officials as distant and unaccountable, trust in politicians declines.

This cursory review of the literature illustrates that (1) there is little consensus on the causes of mistrust of politicians, and (2) the aforementioned approaches have yet to make their way into research on Latin American democracy. Many of the theories that can be used to explain lack of trust in politicians were originally developed to explain other aspects of political trust. Moreover, most research deals with causes and not with consequences of mistrust, so important for the study of democratic sustainability in Latin America.

For these reasons, we are obligated to look less at theories that purport to explain global trends and turn more to hypotheses that are regional or country-specific. Such temporal or territorial circumscriptions are a common strategy in the scholarly literature. An example of an event-centered hypothesis would be the emphasis by U.S. scholars on the Watergate affair, still considered an important historical event that helps explains lingering distrust for politicians in the United States (Nye et al. 1997). The temporal domain is equally important. Listhaug argues that distrust in politicians need to “be investigated over a shorter time span” because mistrust is determined by “factors of a cyclical nature” (Listhaug 1995, 264). We thus restrict our analysis to the Third Wave of democratization in Latin America, particularly the 1990s.
Context: A syndrome of low trust across the board

Latin Americans are known to express low levels of *confianza* in politicians and representative institutions. How should we interpret this finding? Survey research conducted in the current democratic era has consistently found that Latin Americans express low levels of trust in almost all types of social, political, and economic institutions. Of the institutions that are routinely mentioned in such opinion surveys, only the Catholic Church (or sometimes just “churches”) enjoys a consistently high ranking. For the 1996-2003 series of the Latinobarometro (www.latinobarometro.org, hereafter LB), the Church has won the confidence of about 70-75% of the entire Latin American sample in most surveys. Television is usually ranked in second place with trust levels in the range of 40 to 50%, just above the armed forces, which (using regional averages) will typically place third among major societal institutions. The entire LB series shows that in the aggregate, incumbent presidents usually rank fourth, with average support levels in the 30s – but in this case the averages are meaningless since they conceal wild swings in support both within and across countries. For example, in mid-2003 incumbent approval stood at 86 percent in Argentina (up nearly 70 points from a year earlier) and at 8 percent in Paraguay. Of the institutions with more stable trust ratings, private corporations are usually trusted by about 30-35% of citizens in the region, the judiciary from 25 to 35%, and the police by about 30%. In sum, the time series shows that only organized religion consistently wins the trust of more than half of the aggregate Latin American population.

When we move to distinctly political forms of trust, surveys point to even lower levels of confidence. Unfortunately, neither the LB nor the WVS measures trust in “politicians” in the abstract. Therefore, in the absence of this indicator the best we can do is to substitute the institutions that professional politicians normally inhabit: parties and Congress. Is it fair to use trust in parties and parliament as a proxy for trust in politicians? Common sense would suggest that it is, since in our experience ordinary citizens draw few distinctions among politicians, parties, and parliament. These are often lumped together as the *clase política*. Our anthropological street sense is confirmed by the very high correlations that exist between public evaluations of parties and Congress in Latin America. For example, Figure 1 presents LB data from 1997 showing that cross-sectionally (N = 17 countries surveyed), the correlation between trust in Congress and trust in parties was a remarkable .84.

The reputation of parliament is usually slightly higher than that of parties, but the ratings covary in predictable ways. On average, over the
past decade, only about one in four Latin Americans has expressed trust for Congress and only about one in five claims to have trust in political parties. Worse, levels of support for each institution have been dropping since 1997 (Table 1).

Some analysts of the first LB surveys assumed that since public evaluations of parties and Congress were so low, they could not fall much further. They were wrong. The most recent 2003 survey showed that we have almost certainly not reached the bottom limit of trust in representative institutions. If the current trends continue in a linear fashion, trust would hit zero for parties in 2007 and for Congress in 2008. But politics is nonlinear, and the unexpected can happen: in fact, from 1996 to 1997 confidence in parties and parliament actually rose by 8 and 9 points, respectively, and such a phenomenon could conceivably occur again.

Political trust is not the only form of trust that has shallow roots in Latin America: interpersonal trust is also remarkably low. In the 1990-93 World Values Survey, the percentage of respondents saying “most people can be trusted” to the standardized question (“Generally speaking, would you say that you can trust most people or that you can never be too careful when dealing with others?”) ranged from 58-66 percent.
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in the Scandinavian countries, to 52 and 50 percent in the United States and Canada, to 37 and 34 percent for Spain and Italy. For the four Latin American countries included in the same WVS, the figure for Mexico was 33 percent, for Chile and Argentina 23 percent each, and for Brazil only 7 percent (Inglehart 1997: 359). The LB surveys between 1996 and 2003 showed remarkable consistency in the aggregate rate of interpersonal trust in Latin America, which fluctuated between 16 and 23 percent. In the 2003 LB, Uruguay topped the field at 36 percent, considerably ahead of Panama, in second place at 25 percent. The bottom three performers were Chile at 10 percent, Paraguay at 8 percent, and Brazil at 4 percent. These data bear no clear relationship to macropolitical trends. Two of the least stable Latin American democracies in 2003 (Bolivia and Ecuador), were ranked 3rd and 4th in interpersonal trust, while two of the most objectively successful democracies (Costa Rica and Chile) were ranked 14th and 15th, respectively. In fact, interpersonal trust in Latin America is so low that it consistently lags trust in Congress (Table 2). Alarmist analyses of representative institutions in Latin America often miss this key contextual point: while Latin Americans evince very low levels of trust in their elected legislators, they often trust their fellow citizens only half as much.

These observations are intended not to minimize the very real problem of political mistrust in Latin America, but rather to contextualize the issue. Politicians and representative institutions are indeed evaluated poorly, but poorly compared to what? We have seen that no major societal institution, with the exception of the Catholic Church, can consistently claim high levels of support in the region. As Marta Lagos (1997) argued on

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Notes: Entries are percentages representing regional averages. Annual surveys generate approximately 18,000 interviews across 16 Spanish-speaking republics and Brazil. The Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Cuba are not included.

Source: Corporación Latinobarometro (2003).
the basis of the first LB surveys, a culture of mistrust pervades Latin America. When we examine political trust against the backdrop of “low trust across the board,” two possible interpretations stand out. A pessimistic interpretation would hold that a pervasive, multidimensional syndrome of low trust is inimical to democratic sustainability in Latin America. A more optimistic or “possibilistic” interpretation would counter that political trust is not out of line with broader societal norms – for example, in the last six LB surveys, interpersonal trust and trust in political parties have stood at broadly comparable levels. For the region overall, the average difference between the two indicators is less than 4 percentage points, and parties actually outranked persons three times. Even more remarkably, trust in Congress has consistently outperformed trust in one’s fellow citizens. Some might argue that it is not necessarily bad news for democracy if citizens trust elected parliamentarians slightly more than they trust one another.

Although we find the “possibilist” interpretation useful for the short-term analysis of democracy’s travails, we also recognize the traction of the “pessimistic” interpretation when we turn to long-term democratic consolidation. The conventional view in political culture research is that any political system must evolve a supportive cultural system or risk
eventual breakdown (e.g., Inglehart 1997). In the aggregate, Latin America is still nowhere near Diamond’s attitudinal rule of thumb for democratic consolidation: that mass support for democracy should reach the level of 70-75% in public opinion polls, and that active rejection of democracy should not exceed 15% (Diamond 1999: 68-69). But one-size-fits-all definitions do not take into account local context. For this reason, we make a simple methodological plea: that studies of political trust (politicians, institutions, etc.) standardize the dependent variable against other objects of trust within the territorial unit of analysis. Low levels of political trust in Latin America simply cannot be understood in isolation of the broader cultural syndrome identified by Lagos (1997).

Causes: Some prime suspects

Modern research on Latin American political culture is still fragmentary, and little if any empirical work has been done on the causes of low political trust. Like Lagos (1997, 2001, 2003) and Payne et al. (2002), we restrict ourselves here to sketching out some plausible causal stories about the current democratic period. At present we offer only hypotheses: the actual testing of these hypotheses awaits empirical testing with individual-level survey data and especially with cross-sectional time series analysis that can relate cultural variables to macropolitical, macroeconomic, and sociodemographic change. With the rapid accumulation of LB and WVS data, the latter strategy will soon be within our reach.

Here we emphasize three prominent features of democratic development over the past 15 years. The first is poor economic performance, which has plagued most new democracies in the region (Chile being the major exception). This has depressed support for incumbents, leading to plebiscitarian electoral cycles, or “delegative democracy” in the broader concept of O’Donnell (1994). The second factor is corruption, which has also served to delegitimize politicians across the board. The third factor is the instrumental use of political institutions. Incumbents have repeatedly modified constitutional arrangements to suit their own interests, thus leading the public to cast suspicious eyes not only on politicians but on the new political institutions they have crafted.

Economics. The current wave of democratization in Latin America has coincided with poor and uneven socioeconomic performance. The majority of democratic transitions commenced in the 1980s. In almost every one of these cases (Chile being the notable exception), transfers of power from military to civilian elites took place in the context of economic crisis, with recession, crushing foreign debt, and a rapid slide in state capacity. The so-called “lost decade” of economic development thus did not offer
many opportunities for democrats to generate legitimacy via performance. Although conditions partially improved in the early 1990s, the resumption of growth was fragmentary and inconsistent, and what growth did occur was generally not accompanied by increasing social equity. Internally, Latin American countries were wracked by painful structural adjustment and by the political conflicts that inevitably accompanied economic reform. Externally, countries were buffeted by newly globalized financial markets and by continual currency crises (the Asian Flu, the “tequila effect,” and so on). Short spurts of growth made temporary heroes (Salinas in Mexico, Menem in Argentina), but the boom-and-bust cycle seemed to make victims of all politicians and technocrats sooner or later.

The travails of economic management could not but tarnish professional politicians as a class. Electoral volatility in Latin America soared in the 1980s and 1990s, and this phenomenon has been linked directly to macroeconomic performance (Roberts and Wibbels 1999). Voters punished incumbents—in some cases so forcefully that entire party systems collapsed (e.g., Venezuela, Peru). Subjective perceptions of economic performance are clearly connected to trust in political parties and in Congress. For example, in the 1997 LB, at the cross-sectional level (N = 17 countries), trust in political parties was statistically unrelated to a given country’s level of economic development (measured as per capita GDP) to its Human Development Index (a composite of life expectancy, literacy, and infant mortality), and to its over- or under-performance on human development (measured as its world rank in HDI subtracted from its world rank in GDP per capita). However, trust in parties was positively and significantly related to the percentage of respondents describing the country’s current economic situation as “bad” or “terrible” (r = .53, p = .03). Although more research is necessary to confirm this finding, these data suggest that level of economic development is less important than economic performance in shaping popular orientations toward political parties. This is the most plausible explanation not only for the increase in political support from 1996 to 1997 (the only such upward spike in the short life of the LB, occurring in a relatively benign economic year) but also for the downward trend in political trust since 1997 (Table 1). Global financial crises hit Latin America hard in the late 1990s, and the lingering recession in the United States after 2000 impaired Latin America’s ability to recover.

The careful study of retrospective voting by Roberts and Wibbels (1999) shows that in Latin America, economic injury leaves political scars. At a broader level, O’Donnell (1994) has also emphasized how economic crises spawn political cycles that are distinctly corrosive of the quality of democracy. According to his influential model of “delegative democracy,” economic crisis attracts power contenders who portray themselves
as the savior of the nation. Claiming that only executive aggrandizement (decree powers, insulation of technocrats, etc.) can cure the crisis, savior-presidents run roughshod over democratic institutions and damage accountability. Their failure to solve the crisis generates yet another wave of contenders with populist promises and magical cures, but their own inability to generate enduring, inclusionary coalitions—an omission typical of delegative rather than representative forms of rule—means that they are likely to fail as well. Each iteration of this vicious cycle takes its toll on the collective reputation of the political class. Although O’Donnell’s “delegative democracy” is a grand theory of the “unaccountable” form of democracy that is emerging in Latin America, the foundations of his model rest largely upon macroeconomic performance.

**Corruption.** Beyond poor macroeconomic performance, democratizing countries in Latin America have been plagued by repeated corruption scandals. In the early 1990s, presidents Fernando Collor de Mello (Brazil) and Carlos Andrés Pérez (Venezuela) were both impeached and removed from office for official misconduct. Subsequent scandals have made international headlines, e.g., the Salinas kickback scheme in Mexico, the extortion scandal that led to the ouster of Fujimori in Peru, and the campaign finance affair involving Menem in Argentina. Once celebrities on Wall Street, these three presidents ended up in Dublin, in Tokyo, and under house arrest, respectively. Such cases are noteworthy because they involved heads of government, but these episodes only scratch the surface: scandals involving national legislators, mayors, city councilors, and appointed officials are legion. Democracy became associated with corruption in the majority of Latin American countries (Weyland 1998).

Although corruption is notoriously difficult to measure, the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is a first start. Produced by Transparency International (www.transparency.org), the CPI is a “poll of polls” that measures perceptions of the degree of corruption in 91 countries as gauged in 14 annual surveys of business people, risk analysts, and the general public. Countries are rated on an index ranging from 10 (highly clean) to 0 (highly corrupt). Averaging the 2001 and 2002 values for the CPI, we find that the Latin American regional average was a mere 3.6 index points. Only one country, Chile, scored higher than the midpoint of the global index of corruption. The majority of Latin American countries fell within the bottom third of the range, including a number of cases coming very close to “highly corrupt”: Venezuela (2.65), Nicaragua (2.45), and Bolivia (2.10). The implications for political trust are not encouraging.

It is important to recall that these rankings do not measure corruption, but rather perceptions of corruption (Johnston 2000). Perceptions can be shaped by a number of factors, including media exposure. Since a
largely free press is one of the most noteworthy achievements of democracy in most Latin American countries, it could be that corruption has not actually risen throughout the region, but that people are simply better informed about it than ever before. If this “media hypothesis” is true, then to a certain extent democracy is eroding its own legitimacy (a process that plagues advanced industrial democracies as well, although the latter regimes entered the Age of Information with far greater reserves of legitimacy). But whether corruption is real or exaggerated is largely beside the point, since perceptions can shape reality – in this case objective orientations toward politicians as a class. In the 1995-1997 WVS, which included 9 countries in Latin America, respondents were asked “How widespread do you think bribe taking and corruption is in this country?” The correlation between citizen estimations of corruption and trust in parliament was –.66 and statistically significant (Figure 2). In the 2003 LB, the correlation between trust in political parties and the lagged CPI score from Transparency International (averaging the 2001 and 2002 values) was positive and statistically significant (N = 16, r = .49, p = .05). Both the internal estimations of corruption (assigned in surveys by Latin American citizens) and the external estimations (assigned by TI’s panels of experts) seem to correlate with political trust in the region.

Can this situation be remedied? There is some suggestive evidence that it can. In 2003, LB asked the following question: “How much progress do you think has been made in reducing corruption in state institutions over the past two years?” The percentage responding “a lot” or “some” to this question is positively correlated with trust (confianza) in incumbent governments (N = 17, r = .43, p = .09) and more strongly with the job approval rating of the incumbent president (N = 17, r = .46, p = .06). However, the “progress against corruption” indicator is not at all related to trust in parties or parliament. This suggests two things. First, progress in reducing corruption may have a lagged effect on political support, which would accrue first to incumbents and later (perhaps) to the political class as a whole. This proposition, which awaits longitudinal testing, may be no more than wishful thinking – and confirmation of it would certainly require sustained progress against graft (not just one anti-corruption campaign by one government). Second, making headway against corruption is very clearly a strategy for incumbent governments to generate public support. Today’s Latin American governments have less control over macroeconomic performance than they would prefer, but they do have it in their power to target official misconduct – and if successful in this endeavor they may partially compensate for shortcomings in other areas of public policy.
Instrumental Use of Political Institutions. For democracy to be viewed as broadly legitimate, political institutions must be accepted as the “rules of the game.” Institutions should be seen as relatively neutral with regard to the success or failure of given actors, and should also be viewed as reasonably enduring. This is not to say that institutions should be immutable – they can and should be modified according to accepted rules – but that reforms to political institutions should not be viewed as transparently self-serving maneuvers by professional politicians. When political institutions are viewed as a highly malleable means to an end (power), both democracy and the reputation of politicians suffer. This is a central claim of Chalmers’ (1977) classic model of the “politicked state” in Latin America, which argued that political institutions have long been viewed instrumentally by key actors.

Events in the 1990s seemed to bear out Chalmers’ interpretation. The decade was one in which incumbent presidents often intended to reverse
taboos against continuismo. As John Carey writes, “Longstanding prohibitions on immediate reelection were overturned in Peru (1993), Argentina (1994), Brazil (1996) and Venezuela (1999).... in all four cases, the presidents who secured the reforms were subsequently reelected by large margins” (Carey 2003: 124). In each case, the second term of reelected president was significantly less successful than the first; in three of the cases, major political crises or stalemates emerged. In both Peru and Venezuela, incumbents who changed constitutions argued that they were bound only by the new charter, implying that their first term “did not count” and that three consecutive terms in office would therefore be constitutional; a similar ex nunc justification was attempted in Argentina but later dropped. In Costa Rica in 2000, a former president and Nobel Prize winner (Oscar Arias) barred from returning to office argued for an end on the lifetime ban on reelection; in Argentina in 2001, a president appointed by Congress for an interim period (Adolfo Rodríguez Saa) tried to over-stay his welcome; and in Mexico in 2003, the first democratically elected president (Vicente Fox) – elected on a platform of ending the continuismo that kept the Mexican presidency within one party from 1929 to 2000 – floated the name of his own spouse as a possible successor.

It is not at all surprising that politicians endeavor to design political institutions that further their own careers. U.S. legislators are famous for their scientific devotion to this practice (Mayhew 1974). Similarly, elites in Latin America are known to devise electoral systems that favor their reelection, assist their allies, and punish their opponents (Mainwaring 1991; Samuels and Snyder 2001). However, when politicians are nakedly ambitious and attempt to change the rules in the middle of the game, they are likely to alienate voters. That much of the instrumentalization of political institutions in democratic Latin America has come from the very top – heads of government – dovetails with the strongly plebiscitarian character of O’Donnell’s “delegative democracy” discussed earlier. Worse, such activities lead to a vicious circle in which the next incumbent sees no reason not to change institutions yet again (if my predecessor had a tailor-made constitution, why can’t I have one too?). Constitutions and laws are viewed as inconveniences rather than institutional limits to politics. The end result is that politicians are seen as governing for themselves, not for the people.

A well-known example of this occurred in Ecuador, where Abdalá Bucaram was elected president in August 1996. By February 1997, the eccentric president was in a political battle with Congress, which tried to but could not find grounds to impeach him for official misconduct. The solution was therefore for Congress to declare him mentally incapable to serve, thus vacating the presidency by fiat. Vice President Rosalia Artagea initially tried to succeed Bucaram as the constitution prescribed, but dropped
Although there are few empirical data pertaining to how citizens view the “ politicized state,” we believe this is a serious problem contributing to the erosion of political trust in Latin America over the past decade. In the 1995-97 WVS, respondents were asked whether “the country is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves” as opposed to being “run for the benefit of all the people.” This is a loaded question: of the 80,000 people around the world asked this survey item, 70% felt that their governments were run on behalf of the few. Coincidentally, 70% of Americans and 70% of Canadians expressed this view about Washington and Ottawa. For most Latin American cases, however, the figure was higher: 75% of Brazilians, 76% of Mexicans, 77% of Uruguayans, 79% of Colombians, 84% of Venezuelans, 88% of Argentines, and 92% of Dominicans believed that their countries were run by a few selfish interests. Only two countries (Chile and Peru) were below the world average on this measure of skepticism. To the extent that they perceive oligarchy, Latin Americans tend to blame political rather than economic actors for this state of affairs. From 1996 through 2003, when asked to pick from a list of eight groups the three actors “who have the most power in this country” respondents to the LB consistently rated “the government” first (55-60%), “large corporations” second (40-50%), political parties third (25-40%), and Congress fourth (18-25%). Three of the top four choices consistently point to the political class, while banks, unions, the armed forces, and the media always rank lower in perceived power.

When oligarchy is perceived in terms of political rather than economic institutions, elected officials have a special obligation not to take actions that reinforce or exacerbate such skeptical views. Unfortunately, much as Chalmers’ (1977) model foresaw, the experience of the past decade and a half has been short on statesmanship and long on short-term, manipulative abuses of constitutional frameworks for political gain. The countries where this has happened the least, or where the political reforms that have occurred have been negotiated broadly across the political spectrum (e.g., Uruguay, Chile) tend be the same ones where public support for politicians remains comparatively high.

We reiterate that this review of the causes of political mistrust is exploratory and incomplete. Other causes can and should be added to the list, including issues such as crime and security, the nontransparent nature of many privatization programs in the region, the manner in her plans when Congress made clear its opposition to her as well. Congress then promptly installed its own leader, Fabián Alarcón, as president of Ecuador. Opinion polls showed that 80% of the population approved of this constitutional creativity, whereas 54% of the voters had elected Bucaram president only six months earlier.
which many decentralization initiatives have been hijacked by local politicians for selfish ends, and poor public policy delivery at both the national and subnational levels. All of these hypotheses deserve to be investigated both separately and jointly. Nonetheless, economic mismanagement, official misconduct, and unabashed manipulation of political institutions would be central to any holistic explanation of political mistrust.

**Consequences: Does political mistrust matter?**

The most salient fact of Latin American development over the past 25 years has been the conquest of political democracy. We are careful to say *political* rather than social or economic democracy, which remain elusive goals. But in drawing this distinction, we by no means wish to downplay the historical significance of polyarchy: it is a vast improvement over the repressive military regimes of the 1960s and 1970s. It is therefore understandable that when confronted in 2003 with a Churchillian proposition—“democracy may have problems, but it is the best system of government”—fully 64% of Latin Americans agreed with this survey statement (Corporación Latinobarómetro 2003: 9). Latin Americans concur with us that democratization is no small achievement. Thus, in the final analysis the problem of lingering political mistrust must be evaluated in terms of its consequences for democracy.

A first consequence of political mistrust is that politicians may be viewed as disposable. The 1997 LB asked respondents: “As far as you know, do you think that it is possible for the country to work without politicians?” In the aggregate about 27% of Latin Americans agreed with this statement. Some 33% of Venezuelans, 38% of Colombians, and 40% of Ecuadorians viewed politicians as dispensable; however, in Uruguay, which has an almost perfectly balanced three-party system in which most policies must be carefully negotiated across party lines, only 15% agreed. There is strong evidence that attitudes toward the dispensability of professional politicians are related to support for democracy as a regime type. In the 1997 survey, the same two countries (Ecuador and Uruguay) held the polar values on these variables (Figure 3). These data from the 1997 LB showed that the cross-sectional correlation between dispensability of politicians and support for political democracy was strongly negative ($N = 17$, $r = -.64$, $p < .01$).

Although many Latin Americans agree with Churchill’s dictum that democracy is the worst form of government save for all the rest, a large minority disagree with his contemporary Schumpeter (1947) about the importance of professional politicians to this particular type of political regime.
Following on this idea, to the extent that politicians perceive popular disdain for their profession, they are attracted to antipolitics. In their efforts to escape identification with the political class, with traditional parties, or with ideological labels, many politicians choose to attack representative institutions. Parties are abandoned; candidates continually create new ones; personalistic movements abound. In recent years, civilian elites portraying themselves as outsiders have undermined party systems “from within” in countries as diverse as Peru, Ecuador, and Brazil. Coup-mongers or ex-dictators have won the presidency in Ecuador, Venezuela, and Bolivia and have made strong electoral showings in several others. Anti-system movements have proliferated, corroding political party systems throughout the region. Here we will not revisit the compelling theoretical arguments as to why political parties, or representative institutions more generally, are critical to democratic consolidation (e.g. Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Payne et al. 2002); we believe these propositions to be

**Figure 3**

Dispensability of Politicians and Support for Democracy, 1997

Notes: preference for democracy is the percentage of individuals who agree that “Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government” as opposed to the other options: “in certain situations, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one” or “for people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic government or a non-democratic government.” Dispensability of politicians is the percentage of people responding “yes” to the question: “As far as you know, do you think that it is possible for the country to work without politicians?”

Source: Latinobarómetro.
self-evident. But when we connect political mistrust at the mass level to antipolitics at the elite level, it is reasonable to ask whether this is tautological: is not anti-institutional behavior simply a reflection of a climate of mistrust? To a certain extent it is, but there is also a cyclical effect at work. Political mistrust generates anti-party behavior on the part of elites, which is successful in the short term (for winning election) but usually unsuccessful in the medium term (for governing). In the absence of functioning institutions, policy makers are unlikely to deliver the goods they promised (O’Donnell 1994). Moreover, in the absence of vertical institutional linkages, voters who elect free-agent populists are unlikely to be able to hold them accountable once they are in office (Weyland 1996). This exacerbates political mistrust, which exploited by political entrepreneurs can lead to another iteration of the cycle. In this interpretation, political mistrust creates a demand for actors who aggravate it. As Figure 3 suggests rather strongly, the credibility of politicians and democratic legitimacy seem to go hand in hand.

If politicians are mistrusted and viewed as expendable, to whom, if anyone, do citizens transfer their loyalties? There is some evidence that a climate of widespread desencanto with democracy opens up a space for the return to power of ex-dictators (as has occurred in Bolivia and Guatemala) or for the accession to power of failed putschists (Venezuela, Ecuador). The LB surveys offer suggestive evidence that a prime beneficiary of political mistrust is indeed the armed forces, the clearest threat to democracy in Latin America throughout most of the postwar period. Figure 4 presents evidence showing that in 1997, societies with low respect for politicians tended to have higher trust in the military, and vice versa. The correlation between dispensability of politicians and trust in the armed forces was .69 (N = 15, p < .01).

Skepticism about politicians and low support for representative institutions such as parties and Congress seems to be connected to an ill-defined longing for “order,” as suggested by O’Donnell’s model of “delegative democracy.” In 2003, LB included a survey statement drafted by O’Donnell: “More than political parties and Congress, what we really need is a decisive leader who gets problems solved” (Corporación Latinobarómetro 2003, 9, translation ours). This statement was agreed to by 69% of the more than 18,000 respondents across 17 countries in the region. A broadly similar statement, “I wouldn’t care if a non-democratic government came to power if it could resolve our economic problems,” was agreed to by 52% of respondents. The difference in the levels of agreement between the two statements is probably explained by the presence of the term “nondemocratic” (no democrático) in the latter. A third assertion along these lines, “I would give a blank check to a
savior-like leader [un líder salvador] who resolves problems,” was agreed to by only 15%. Conversely, a statement worded more positively in favor of democracy – “Even if we had a government with a strong hand [un gobierno de mano dura, implying some degree of authoritarianism] this wouldn’t solve our problems” – earned the agreement of 50% of LB respondents.

Unfortunately, the 2003 data are not yet available cross-sectionally so we can neither analyze the items separately not link them to other variables. What the survey items suggest is that there is a reservoir of authoritarianism at the mass level, but it is fragmentary, ill-defined, and highly sensitive to context and question wording. There is also a significant – and clearly larger – stock of democratic attitudes. As the LB authors point out, “one in three Latin Americans simultaneously agrees with both a negative and a positive statement about democracy,” although the Churchillian characterization of democracy is still agreed to by nearly two thirds of the region’s citizens (Corporación Latinobarómetro 2003: 9). The pragmatic Churchillian bias is good news for the region’s democrats, but there is also evidence that a lingering reservoir of pro-order or

Figure 4

Dispensability of Politicians and Support for Democracy, 1997

Notes: for dispensability of politicians, see notes to Figure 3. Trust in the armed forces is the percentage of respondents mentioning either “a lot” or “some” trust, as opposed to “little” or “none.”

Source: Latinobarómetro.
pro-authoritarian sentiments is available for tapping by populist entrepreneurs. As Figure 3 suggests, this reservoir is likely to be largest where skepticism about professional politicians is highest. And as Figure 4 suggests, a prime beneficiary of political mistrust are the historical forces of “order,” the military. Where the legitimacy of the political class is relatively high and party systems are reasonably intact, golpistas are likely to remain unemployed; conversely, widespread political mistrust provides an avenue to power that authoritarian elites are all too willing to exploit.

Conclusions

Our review of political mistrust in Latin America is exploratory and by no means conclusive. Much more research needs need to be done on the context, causes, and consequences of mistrust. The field is wide open for researchers beginning to work with individual-level data from the LB and especially from the third (1995-1997) and fourth (1999-2001) waves of the WVS. The advent of new parallel datasets on issues as diverse as corruption, crime victimization, income inequality, and the design of political institutions will soon make it possible to isolate the purported causes of mistrust in Latin America. In light of the preliminary nature of our efforts here, we conclude with three observations that we hope will guide future research on the topic.

First, emerging sources of data on public opinion and political culture in democratic Latin America remain open to widely divergent interpretations. Even scanning only the brief review we have provided here, one may see the glass as half empty (i.e., Latin America has a long way to go before it develops a political culture that is unambiguously supportive of democracy) or half full (i.e., the Churchillian view of democracy is widely accepted, authoritarians are in the minority, and some forms of political trust compare favorably with other objects of trust in the society). It is true that support for representative institutions such as parties and Congress is low and has fallen since 1997. However, the near-total absence of historical data means that we have no way of knowing whether these rates were ever very high. Moreover, low levels of public support for politicians and institutions seem rather firmly embedded in the expectations and practices of many Latin American democracies, some of which are now approaching 25 years of age and yet show no signs of collapsing. As Przeworski (1986) noted in his classic attack on legitimacy as an explanation for regime survival, what really threatens political regimes is not low legitimacy but the presence of organized alternatives. Most – though not all – Latin American democracies have benefited from the lack of clearly articulated authoritarian coalitions, thus
allowing them to weather crisis conditions and “muddle through” even with dismally low levels of public support for politicians and institutions. It is quite possible that this unattractive combination of political democracy and political mistrust will continue for some time. Latin America contains numerous postauthoritarian regimes that fall in the “excluded middle” between democratic transition and democratic consolidation, and that are the “most probable [outcome] under contemporary circumstances” (Schmitter 1995: 16). Thus, although there are valid reasons for concern about political mistrust in Latin America – and we have expressed many here – the predictable journalistic alarmism that accompanies the annual release of the LB poll needs to be taken with a grain of salt (e.g., The Economist, May 11, 2000; July 26, 2001; August 15, 2002).

Second, we urge researchers of political mistrust, especially those who work with large cross-national datasets, to provide more contextual information about regions, subregions, and cases. For example, we have argued here that the mere fact of low trust in parties or parliament in Latin America is meaningless unless it is understood against a syndrome of low trust vis-à-vis many societal objects. If low trust in organizations, institutions, and elites is widely diffused and historically given, then political objects such as parties and Congress are probably more likely to persevere than the raw data at first glance suggest.

Finally, we applaud the efforts by Norris (1999a) and others to unpack the concept of trust and to look for unexpected relationship among its component dimensions. Norris’ elegant concept of “critical citizens” holds that citizens in advanced industrial democracies are increasingly able to separate evaluations of politicians and institutions from evaluation of the regime. While mistrusting their governments, they retain deep faith in democracy as a system. Inglehart (1997) has made a parallel argument about value change and views of state authority: among postmaterialists, support for traditional forms of authority is eroding while support for political democracy continues to rise to unprecedented levels. Although no systematic research on “critical citizens” has yet been conducted in Latin America, we expect that future work will identify a growing number of voters who reject incumbents while holding out the hope that democracy will one day deliver on its promise.

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Political Mistrust in Southeast Asia

William Case

Abstract

Politics in Southeast Asia are often characterised by power abuses and corrupt practices, ramshackle political institutions, economic shocks, social inequities, and a steady erosion of cultural deference. In these conditions, mass-level mistrust of political leaders and institutions might be expected to surge. However, patterns of mistrust turn out to be more complex. Where political leaders are abusive and corrupt, while doing little to ease the declining fortunes of social forces, mistrust does indeed grow pervasive, even threatening political stability. But in other cases, political leaders, even though abusive, have ably mitigated mistrust, shifting mass-level grievances onto rival elites or social segments, deploying populist programs, or mobilising nationalist resentments, thereby perpetuating their standings. Analysis focuses on a number of contemporary leaderships in Southeast Asia that have produced variable amounts of mass-level mistrust, including those of Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore.

Mass publics in fully developed countries, usually defined by cohesive, if plural societies, mature economies, and advanced democracies, are growing ever more mistrustful of the political procedures and institutional arenas through which they are governed. Nonetheless, they have not lost confidence in the broader dimensions of their democratic regimes. As Mattei Dogan has shown in Europe, ‘a massive majority [is] deeply attached to democracy as the only acceptable political system’ (Dogan 2002: 91). Accordingly, analyses of politics in developed countries focus closely on institutions, the mass attitudes toward which hold important
implications for democracy’s functioning. Further, in finding policy relevance, these analyses point to reforms through which to enhance opportunities for popular participation. However, though institutional adjustments might be made, there is never any more fundamental doubt about democracy’s worth or its capacity to persist.

Shifting analysis to Southeast Asia, though, yields quite different perspectives on political mistrust. This is a region characterised by divided societies, emerging economies, sprawling and ramshackle, but intrusive state apparatuses, and hybrid forms of pseudo-, semi-, and low-quality democracy (Case 2002). Further, these features can be attributed to prior sets of complex and countervailing variables, including mixed colonial legacies, precarious positioning in the global economy, and transitional cultural outlooks. Of course, in this setting too, mass-level mistrust of procedures and institutions often prevails. Political parties, state bureaucracies, legislatures, and security forces are widely dismissed as corrupt and inefficient. But for most mass publics, despite their mistrust, the intrinsic importance of reforming institutions remains quite secondary. Indeed, even the worth of broader democracy is not always obvious. Rather, mistrust among mass publics is most readily politicized by an absence of populist benefits, demonstrating that the impartiality of procedures and institutions is less valued than substantive outcomes.

Thus, where democratic transitions takes place in Southeast Asia, they are mainly pursued by mass publics whose populist benefits have dried up, prompting them finally to cohere in civil societies. They may also press for institutional reforms, deepening the quality of democracies that already exist. But even after these gains have been made, mass publics still give greater priority to populist benefits, a ranking revealed by the ways in which elites who resume populism can roll back their new democracies’ quality, actions in which placated mass publics acquiesce.

In exploring these claims about political mistrust, this essay addresses Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia, countries that within Southeast Asia have been categorised by the World Bank as lower-middle to middle income, at least prior to the region’s economic crisis in 1997-98. It also includes Singapore, a country that while distinguished by much higher income, displays a disproportionately low level of political development. These cases, then, pulsing with social change and upheavals driven by late industrialisation and fluctuating fortunes boldly illustrate the impact of mistrust. Indeed, far more than fully developed countries, which, within their stable parameters simply fine tune their democratic institutions, or for that matter, less developed countries, usually mired in base authoritarianism, the intermediate countries of Southeast Asia show how mistrust can contribute to profound political change, sometimes
amounting to democratisation. Paradoxically, though, with mass publics remaining less interested in impartial institutions than in substantive outcomes, their new democracies are easily eroded by national leaders who dispel mistrust with populist benefits.

**Southeast Asia and political mistrust**

The political mistrust investigated in fully developed countries mostly involves mass-level attitudes toward political procedures and institutional arenas. Put simply, mass publics mistrust the institutions that limit their participation, while leaving the behaviours of top politicians and bureaucrats insufficiently regulated. It is in this context that reforms are proposed, though always within democracy’s parameters. In Southeast Asia, we find that vertical patterns of mistrust between mass publics and elites also exist. But this mistrust stems less from institutional weaknesses, ensuring that power abuses and corrupt practices occur, than from an inadequate provision of populist benefits. In addition, despite the vicissitudes of this mistrust, it can exert determinative impact on the forms regime take, cumulating even in democratization from below.

Moreover, this progress in Southeast Asia may be affected by political mistrust on a variety of planes. With societies in the region divided, fragmenting along ethnic, religious, class, and rural-urban faults, mistrust thrives between mass publics. And given the importance of pursuing scarce patronage and populist resources, it flourishes also between elite persons and factions. Thus, in order fully to examine the most crucial dynamic that turns finally on mass-level mistrust of leaders and elites, let us first consider other areas of mistrust in the region. This section, then, begins by analysing the mistrust that exists between mass publics, weakening their initiation of political change. It turns next to the mistrust between elites, opening up new opportunities. Finally, analysis traces the dynamics of mistrust between these planes, holding implications in the region for democratic transitions and quality.

**Mass-level mistrust**

Much has been written about social trust, made manifest in flourishing primary groups and micro-relationships that build potential for social capital, fuller associational life, and even civil society (Putnam 1995). In Southeast Asia, however, while enough organizational nodes now cohere at the mass level that is increasingly useful to think in terms of civil society, much mistrust persists. Indeed, the region’s sectarian, class, and spatial identities refract unrepentantly through these nodes, limiting the collective impact upon politics that civil society can muster (Rodan 2001).
To be sure, over the past three decades, civil societies have episodically gained force and democratised politics in bottom-up ways. In Thailand, student groups helped in ousting the military government during the mid-1970s, then contributed to a broader re-democratisation of politics during the early 1990s. In the Philippines, ‘people power’, composed of NGO networks marshaled by ‘street parliamentarians’, contributed famously to the ouster of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, followed by a democratic transition. In Indonesia, a student-led reform movement ousted Suharto in 1998, hence ushering in democracy, even if at a more gradual pace. At the same time, a cross-ethnic reform movement took hold in Malaysia, challenging the tenure of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad at least briefly. And in Singapore, new women’s and environmental movements appeared during the 1990s that probed the government gently in key issue areas (Rodan 1996).

But despite the emergence of civil society in these cases and its commitments to political change, it has tended afterward to lose steam, energized by resurgent mistrust between sectarian groups, classes, and spatially distinct populations. In Thailand, analysis of the country’s most recent democratic transition once focused intently on middle-class activists in Bangkok, overlooking the vast gulf between them and the rural poor. However, after democracy was in place, divisions between mass publics soon widened. Accordingly, analysis has begun to probe the middle class’ democratic commitments (Englehart 2003), revealing new impatience with rural grievances. Social fragmentation has been reflected also by a shift in scholarly research from the center to provincial-level politics (McVey 2000; Arghiros 2001) and ‘localism’ (Hewison 1999). Thus, as we shall see, amid this mistrust between mass publics, many of the constitutional changes that were made at the height of civil society activity during the late 1990s, contributing to the quality of Thailand’s new democracy, have since been blunted by the national leader.

In the Philippines too analysis once focused on the vitality of civil society, galvanized by past democratic experience, traditions of advocacy, and Church progressivism. But after ousting Marcos, civil society weakened, with divisions appearing between middle class activists and the urban poor. Mass-level solidarity was also eroded in rural areas by the continuing activities of the Communist New People’s Army in the country’s north and Muslim secessionist groups in Mindanao. In these conditions, despite the re-democratization of Philippine politics, the most pressing area of structural reform, land redistribution, was finally neglected by Marcos’s elected successors. Reflecting this shift in salience from civil society to mass-level fragmentation, recent studies of Philippines politics have turned from civil society to new forms of clientelism and local ‘bossism’ (Sidel 1999).
In Indonesia, in the wake of Suharto’s ouster and the democratization of politics, civil society dissipated even more rapidly, with mistrust proliferating between the country’s tiny middle class and vast mass publics of urban and rural poor. Students groups, moreover, once the vanguard of the reform movement, split over policy directions and a premature sense among some of having completed their transformative task. But more important in Indonesia than these class-based disparities and sources of fatigue have been long-standing vertical divisions between secular or ‘nationalist’ mass publics on one side and devout, sometimes militant Muslim groups on the other. Ethnic tensions have erupted in killings and church burnings on Java and more sustained warring between Christian and Muslim militias in the outer islands. Accordingly, in Indonesia, like the Philippines, much research has begun to shift from civil society and democratic transitions to Islamic resurgence and political violence, intimating how little has been achieved in terms of democratic consolidation.

In Malaysia, despite the new cooperation that flourished among mass publics across ethnic and religious lines, producing a robust opposition front during the run-up to the 1999 general election (Weiss 2000), only its Islamic party component finally made strong electoral gains. And as the party began afterward to pursue its Islamising agendas more vigorously, it so strained relations with its non-Muslim partner that the front finally ruptured. Indeed, the dynamic of mass-level mistrust in Malaysia, turning traditionally on ethnic suspicions between the Malay and Chinese communities, has evolved now into spiraling tensions between revivalist Muslims on one side and moderate Muslims and non-Muslims on the other. Accordingly, it appears that the opposition will test the government less effectively in the next election. Taking no chances, however, the government has not only avoided the kinds of political changes and structural reforms that were introduced, however tentatively, in other Southeast Asian cases. It has also further suppressed what electoral competitiveness its regime has permitted, truncating politics from a semi- to pseudo-democracy (Case, 2004).

In Singapore it is difficult to evaluate the extent to which mistrust between mass publics has impeded the formation of civil society. As we will see, other factors such as the government’s ‘performance legitimacy’, backed by steady coercion appear more salient in perpetuating indifference. Nonetheless, mistrust has long festered within Singapore’s Chinese community, pitting segments educated in English, who make up much of the city-state’s bureaucratic middle class, against those educated largely in Chinese vernacular, labouring in small-time trading and factory places. Further, amid recent revelations over terrorist plotting in Singapore, targeting not only Western interests, but also public infrastructure and
facilities, mistrust has doubtless increased between the Chinese collectively and the minority Muslim population. In these conditions, one finds even less pressure for political reform in Singapore than in Malaysia. Accordingly, in seeking to fabricate greater political opposition and parliamentary debate, useful for ‘sharpening up’ its listless MPs, the government proposed in 2002 to introduce a People’s Action Forum made up of 20 backbenchers posing as in-house critics. It soon afterward dropped the plan, however, with little public dissent (Case 2003: 167).

In sum, among the Southeast Asian countries analysed in this essay, much mistrust exists between mass publics, rooted in various matrices of ethnic, religious, class-based, and spatial suspicion. Hence, even where civil societies take shape and initiate democratic transitions from below, the new democracies they produce may formally persist, but yield few lasting structural reforms. Instead, mistrust soon cools civil society’s momentum, providing a resource for national leaders and elites who seek to limit political change in ways that perpetuate their statuses atop mass publics.

**Elite-level mistrust**

O’Donnell and Schmitter demonstrated long ago that where divisions exist between elites, opening the fissures in which mistrust can lodge, political change, even democratic transitions, are likely to take place (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986). This section, then, investigates the varying amount of elite-level mistrust that exists in our selected Southeast Asian countries, forging different opportunity structures for democratisation. We will see that mistrust between elites in the region stems less from the rivalries over ethnicity, religion, and class that afflict mass publics than from a baser, secular pursuit of patronage resources. In addition, we will see that while mistrust flourishes between elites in all national settings, its intensity—and hence, the extent to which it creates scope for democratisation—has much to do with the kinds of organizational bases upon which elites who operate authoritarian regimes have founded their statuses.

In Thailand, organizational bases for elite statuses have been complex. With the country never having been formally exposed by a colonial power to ‘tutelary democracy’ (Weiner 1987), a succession of military governments long prevailed. But as Barbara Geddes has shown, militaries that seek to govern directly lose institutional integrity and coherence over time, producing fierce factional struggles over patronage (Geddes 1999: 122). In the case of Thailand, military cliques and factions have clustered around personal loyalties, graduating class years, and diverse ideological ‘mentalities’. These alignments have also spread across sectors into the state bureaucracy and the local Chinese business community. In this way, frictions appeared between parallel networks of generals, bureaucrats,
state enterprise managers, and Chinese business elites, resulting in Thailand's lengthy record of coups and counter-coups. This elite-level mistrust and the political instability that resulted were conceptualized by Fred Riggs through an influential model labeled the 'bureaucratic polity' (Riggs 1966).

Nonetheless, Thailand underwent steady economic development, gradually tilting causal ballast from the military and bureaucracy to a new urban middle class and regional business elites. Thus, at junctures where military factions grew crippled by mistrust, middle-class activists, joined sometimes by business elites in opportunistic ways, were able to initiate democratic transitions. To be sure, with military elites then finding their prerogatives threatened, they several times gained enough unity to strike back, rudely imposing authoritarian closures. But still hampered by the intrinsic frailties of their organisational bases, their attempts again to govern directly reproduced the mistrust in which re-democratisation might take place. Of course, the political parties that then appeared, marked by shifting alignments of politicians and business elites, were equally weakened by mistrust, ensuring that the country’s party system remained a volatile one. As will be shown in the next section, though, an artful national leader has been able in congenial conditions to alleviate mistrust at both the elite and mass levels, finally stabilizing the country's new democracy, even if compromising its quality.

In the Philippines, elites have historically anchored their statuses in a different set of organisational bases than in Thailand, though there have more recently been important areas of convergence. Specifically, having been exposed through U.S. colonialism to formal democratic procedures and competitive party dynamics, elites in the Philippines avoided constructing strong military and bureaucratic apparatuses. Instead, they rooted their standings in vast family land-holdings and business conglomerates, then used their socio-economic power to operate political parties. In this way, Philippine elites presided over what has often been conceptualised as an ‘oligarchical democracy’. However, while in sharing access to state positions and patronage elites may have limited mistrust among themselves, they deeply alienated mass publics, enabling an ‘upstart’ politician, Ferdinand Marcos, to adopt the mien of social reformer. And suddenly injecting new competitiveness into the regime, Marcos gained the presidency through popular election in the early 1970s. He afterward closed the regime through an executive coup, however, clinging to power through martial law until the mid-1980s.

During his tenure, Marcos greatly diversified Philippine elites, opening up new avenues of mistrust. Wary of existing landed and business elites, he seized many of their assets, then brusquely transferred this wealth to his own family members and new ‘cronies’. Further, in enforcing these
patterns, he dismantled political parties, closed the Philippine congress, then elevated the security forces to new prominence. In this way, Marcos instituted a personal dictatorship which, as Geddes has shown, amounts to a kind of authoritarianism that mediates patronage with little more effectiveness than military governments (Geddes 1999: 122-23). Patronage distributions may be more ordered by the national leader than they are in the factional free-for-alls that characterize militaries. But they nonetheless heighten mistrust among those elites who are systematically excluded. Thus, in the Philippines, business elites were divided into rival cohorts marked by landed wealth and new money. Factions appeared also in the security forces, defined by varying loyalties toward Marcos, generational tensions, and suspicions between high- and middle-ranking offices, amounting finally to what Linz and Stepan have portrayed as a ‘non-hierarchical military’ (Linz and Stepan 1996: 68). Thus, with a national elite characterised by rivalries and conditional loyalties, large apertures opened up through which mistrustful mass publics were able finally to oust Marcos.

In important respects, patterns in New Order Indonesia resemble those of the Philippines under Marcos, with the national leader during this period, Suharto, introducing new cohorts of business elites, while relying on the military and bureaucracy to control mass publics. However, Suharto encountered more congenial patterns of elite-level composition and functioning. He also exercised more artful leadership, enabling him to distribute patronage in ways that perpetuated his personal dictatorship far longer (Case 2002: 223-24). In brief, Indonesia’s conflagration of 1965-66, followed by the marginalisation of its first president, Sukarno, wiped the small business scene nearly clean, allowing Suharto a free hand in his promotion of new business elites. He also distributed patronage across military and bureaucratic factions in ways that while hardly extinguishing mistrust, kept it in bounds, thereby rendering this sentiment less a source of resistance to his rule than an effective tool of elite-level balancing and managerial control.

The weakness in Suharto’s ruling style, however, lay in its utter dependence on centralized distributions of patronage. Thus, when patronage resources abruptly ran short during the East Asian economic crisis in 1997-98, few elites rallied in support of Suharto. Instead, with their mistrust now unregulated, elites quickly ‘splintered’, with many of those in business and politics successively abandoning the national leader. Meanwhile, mistrust between military elites boiled over in open confrontation, greatly exacerbating the momentous Jakarta rioting of May 1998. In this way, Suharto, like Marcos before him, was left exposed to mistrustful mass publics who swiftly brought him down.
In Malaysia too, the national leader, Mahathir, promoted many new business elites through patronage distributions. But with the country having gained democratic experience through British colonialism – or rather, a studied process of de-colonisation – that carried over into the first decade of independence, Mahathir’s leadership, while highly arbitrary and often abusive, never lapsed into a military government or a fully blown personal dictatorship. Rather, in limiting, but not abolishing democratic procedures, Mahathir forged a much sturdier kind of authoritarian politics, namely, a pseudo-democracy centring on a single dominant party. As Geddes observes, within the spectrum of authoritarian regime types, a single party system offers the most effective mechanisms by which to accumulate and disseminate patronage (Geddes, 1999, 129-30), avoiding the pervasive mistrust between elites that in other authoritarian settings can ready regimes for democratic transitions.

To be sure, even Malaysia’s single party pseudo-democracy has not been fully immune to economic recessions and deficits in patronage. And at such junctures, mistrust between elites over distributions has welled up in factional struggles, peaking even in leadership challenges and social upsurges. The economic crisis of 1997-98, precipitating Mahathir’s warring with his deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, and the emergence of a mass-level reform movement illustrate these outcomes amply. But Geddes notes too that in single party systems that are well-institutionalised, mistrustful elites seldom defect from their party, finding that despite their dire straits and diminishing patronage flows there is even less to be had by crossing over to the hardscrabble opposition. Further, in the Malaysian case, the qualities inherent in single party systems were artfully exploited by Mahathir, enabling him to retain the loyalties of key elite factions while isolating those whose mistrust persisted. In this way, Mahathir tided the regime over until the economy recovered some of its earlier vigour, at least partially replenishing his patronage resources.

Finally, in Singapore, even stronger combinations of single party dominance and artful leadership, abetted until recently by the continuous expansion of the economy and patronage resources, have obviated any open displays of elite-level mistrust. Rather, elites appear to have circulated contentedly through their organizational bases in the dominant party, the state bureaucracy, state-owned enterprises, and the military, occasionally enjoying multiple positions at once. At the same time, with elites avoiding mistrust, while resolutely imposing authoritarian controls, mass publics in Singapore, even if largely defined as middle class, have acquired but the dimmest outlines of civil society. Indeed, during those brief periods when the country’s economy has come under siege, mass publics, far from venting their mistrust, have avowed their support for the government.
more loudly, placing their trust in its managerial capacity to hasten recovery and the return of prosperity.

To summarise this section, elites in Southeast Asia, unlike mass publics, have mostly avoided ethnic, religious, class-based, and spatially defined mistrust. Instead, with elites geared firstly to a pragmatic pursuit patronage, mistrust has derived instead from the different organizational vehicles to which they have harnessed their statuses. Military governments dissolve into factions which, because they extend their webs deeply into the bureaucracy and world of business, generate pervasive mistrust. In personal dictatorships too patronage distributions are carried out in ways that exclude and hence alienate some elite factions, particularly during economic recessions. In partial contrast, dominant single parties, especially when operated by an artful national leader, can avoid the acute mistrust between elites that weakens other kinds of authoritarian regimes. But even here, mistrust can sometimes accumulate enough that mass publics find new openings for their activism. Indeed, from the perspective of this essay, the relevance of elite-level mistrust lies in the opportunities this creates for mass publics to act on their own mistrust of elites, the contingent possibilities for which we now turn.

**Elite-mass mistrust, deflection, and manipulation**

As discussed above, studies of mistrust in advanced democracies focus typically on mass-level evaluations of the procedures and institutions that govern the behaviours of politicians. Measuring popular perceptions of power abuses and corrupt practices, holding clear implications for participation rates and democratic functioning, thus lies at the heart of most such analyses.

In the transitional settings of Southeast Asia, however, mistrust at the mass level does not flow in any straightforward way from abuses and corruption. Though survey material is sparse, one can reasonably suggest that only among elements of new middle classes in the region have such issues grown central. It is instead the failure of elites to demonstrate responsiveness, usually made manifest in ways that can crudely be labeled populist, that most readily engenders a sense of betrayal among mass publics. Furthermore, it is in these circumstances that middle-class criticisms over power abuses and corrupt practices may begin finally to resonate more widely across mass publics, cumulating in the social upsurges through which democratic transitions in Southeast Asia have sometimes occurred.

But abuses and corruption remain secondary to most mass publics in the region, a preference ordering made plain by the fact that even in rare cases where elites have been encouraged by democratisation to respect new procedures, yet fail to muster the resources with which to
resume populism, mistrust at the mass level soon recurs. In these circumstances, mass publics press again for political change, perhaps rolling back the new democracy’s quality or conceivably paving the way for its breakdown. The procedures and institutions that make up different kinds of regimes thus count for less than substantive populist responsiveness.

Amid these oscillations, then, vulgar modernization theories – anticipating rapid economic growth, middle class formations, the valuation of programmatic appeals over narrow benefits, and the democratisation of politics – have had but limited application in Southeast Asia. Indeed, this progress appears only to correlate with Thailand where, because of pervasive mistrust between elites and the intense urban primacy of Bangkok, preponderance has been ceded at least episodically to the new middle class. More commonly in the region, though, it has not been continuous economic growth, but rather, growth followed by crisis which, in interrupting populist responsiveness, has roused lesser social strata to ally with middle class activists. In this way, mass publics coalesce, however ephemerally, in the civil societies that have driven democratic transitions in bottom-up ways (see Haggard and Kaufman 1999).

But with economic recovery and the resumption of populism, lesser social strata soon lose their new interest in democracy. It seems too that even in Thailand, some middle class mass publics have had second thoughts. What is more, the commensurate resumption of patronage eases distrust between elites, enabling them collectively to resist democratisation from on high or, where it already occurred, afterward to blunt any lingering social pressures for meaningful structural reforms. Alternatively, where economies recover only slowly, ensuring that resources for patronage and populism remain scarce, artful national leaders may resort to ‘deflecting’ mass-level mistrust onto rival elites or even global forces, while manipulating the mistrust that persists between mass publics. Hence, in this way too, civil society’s new thrust can be parried or weakened, enabling elites either to avoid democracy outright or its attainment of quality through reforms.

As a starting point for analysing our Southeast Asian cases, this section begins with the economic crisis of 1997-98. Abruptly ending a decade of rapid economic growth and steady populist responsiveness, this crisis instigated deep mistrust among mass publics toward elites across the region, while profoundly testing existing regimes. It thus poses a break in Southeast Asia’s record, affording a clear opportunity to gauge the effects of mass-level mistrust and the responses of national leaders and elites upon political regimes.

The economic crisis first struck in Thailand in mid-1997. While for the reasons enumerated above Thai politics had earlier been democratised even in the absence of crisis, mass publics grew motivated now to
coalesce in ways that increased their democracy’s quality. Specifically, while once inured to the political abuses and corrupt practices of top politicians and business elites, lesser social strata now joined with middle-class activists in pressing for greater government accountability. The deep politicisation of the once respected Bank of Thailand, leading to the central bank’s squandering half of the country’s foreign currency reserves in an inept bid to shore up the baht, emerged as a particular focus of mass-level mistrust. Thus, as mass publics grew active, cohering with civil society vibrancy, the government was obliged to respond with a strongly reformist constitution, replete with a counter-corruption agency, a new constitutional court, and sundry other oversight units. What is more, the government, led by a former general, was pressed to resign soon afterward, ushering in a new one formed by the Democrat Party under Chuan Leekpai.

By regional standards, the Democrat-led government adhered scrupulously to the new constitution’s stringent procedures and institutions. In addition, more than any other government in Southeast Asia confronted by the crisis, it tried to enhance public and corporate sector governance by following the prescriptions of international financial agencies. However, in maintaining probity and fiscal austerity, the Democrats may have retained the support of some middle-class activists. But in refusing to resume populist responsiveness, it soon precipitated mistrust among lesser social strata, especially the rural poor. In a clear demonstration, then, that most mass publics value impartial procedures and institutions less than substantive outcomes, they turned from the Democrats to a new and avowedly populist party, Thai Rak Thai (‘Thai Loves Thai’), giving it an unprecedented parliamentary majority in the next election, held in early 2001.

Thai Rak Thai is led by Thaksin Shinawatra, generally regarded as the country’s wealthiest business person. He began his ascent while a member of the police, using his familial and business connections to gain various government concessions, first in information technologies, later in telecommunications and the media. In then entering politics directly in order to safeguard his holdings, however, taking a post in the cabinet, he ran afoul of the new constitution’s requirements that he declare his wealth, leading to an ‘indictment’ by the new counter-corruption commission. Nonetheless, even as the case was scheduled to be heard by the new constitutional court, Thaksin won the prime ministership, his populist pledges having easily swayed mass publics (Case 2001). In brief, Thaksin promised new village development funds, moratoriums on loans repayments for farmers, and low-cost health care, rapidly dispelling mass-level mistrust. Equally, Thaksin won over deeply indebted political
and business elites, setting up a state asset management agency that unique in the region, prioritised the resuscitation of insolvent conglomerates over meeting obligations toward creditors and taxpayers.

After his election, Thaksin succeeded in having the case against him dismissed by the constitutional court. He then vowed to go further, dismantling the oversight units that had been set up. But while running roughshod over procedures and institutions in ways that diminished the new democracy’s quality, hence dismaying some middle-class activists, Thaksin’s usage of his mounting autonomy to dispense populist benefits gratified lesser social strata (The Economist, 19 April 2003: 25-26). In addition, any residual mistrust eddying at the mass level over his favoured treatment of business elites was neatly deflected onto global forces, with Thaksin attributing the need for this treatment to the rapaciousness of international agencies and firms. Hence, through artful national leadership, Thaksin regenerated the trust of mass publics and elites, stabilising the country’s democracy, in part by compromising its quality.

The Philippines, having attracted less foreign investment than other Southeast Asian countries during the 1990s, was less affected by the crisis’s massive capital flight. Even so, social disparities had earlier been heightened by the efforts of the national leader, President Fidel Ramos, to stimulate investor interest, made manifest in his pursuit of new administrative efficiencies and economic rationality (Montinola 1999: 130). Accordingly, brute privatisation, rather than populist responsiveness, emerged as the hallmark of his tenure. And hence, though the crisis reverberated only weakly through the Philippines, it exacerbated the mass-level mistrust that was already in place.

In this situation, mass publics used the existing Philippine democracy to make plain their preference for populism. Beguiled by the campaign slogan of Joseph ‘Erap’ Estrada – ‘Erap for the poor’ – a motto given cinematic force by the candidate’s earlier film portrayals of a neighbourhood tough with a heart of gold, they elected him to the presidency in 1998. Of course, despite their similar trajectories, the recent parallels in the Philippine and Thai cases should not be overdrawn. First, one notes that in a futile bid to prevent Estrada’s victory, Ramos strained institutions by pressing mightily for a constitutional amendment, one that in removing the presidential term limit would have allowed him to seek re-election. Ramos did not, then, respect the new democracy’s procedures in the way that Chuan Leekpai did. Second, Estrada’s populist appeals remained poorly defined, concretising less in Thaksin’s substantive benefits, however chimerical their budgets, than in crudely charismatic, indeed, macho incantations. Further, Estrada’s personal recklessness and nostalgia for Marcos so fomented mistrust among monied old families, those which
had regained their ascendancy in the wake of Marcos’s ouster, that they combined with mistrustful military elites, middle-class activists, and finally supreme court judges to cut Estrada’s tenure short. In the end, he seemed only to possess the loyalties of the urban poor. Nonetheless, the fact that Estrada could exercise leadership so ineptly, yet retain the trust of lesser social strata, underscores a central contention of this essay that mass publics value democracy’s procedures and institutions less than populist responsiveness, even if grounded in no more than flickering film star imagery.

In Indonesia, the crisis also instigated mass-level mistrust of the national leader and elites. But more than rounding out an existing democracy with new procedures and institutions, mass publics initiated profounder political change from a longstanding personal dictatorship. In brief, middle-class activists, given coherence by organised student groups, focused their mistrust on Suharto’s record of power abuses and corrupt practices, providing the impetus for marches and protests. Lesser social strata, made equally resentful over cuts in subsidies instituted at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), then exerted deadly force through widespread street rioting. Thus, in potent combination, diverse mass publics delivered the blow that brought down Suharto and precipitated a democratic transition.

Commencing from low levels of socio-economic development, however, and divided by recurrent mistrust, Indonesia’s mass publics failed to perpetuate even the intensity of civil society that had been attained in Thailand and the Philippines. Thus, while having initiated democratization from below, mass-level mistrust caused civil society soon afterward to fragment along class, nationalist, and Islamist lines on Java and ethnic and religious cleavages in the Outer Islands. In this situation, any significant deepening of the new democracy’s quality was prevented, while even populist responsiveness remained stunted.

More specifically, the major procedural and institutional gains made by Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia’s first competitively elected president after Suharto, involved his removing military elites from the cabinet and state bureaucracy. But the military retained its deep stakes in business, firmed by a territorial command structure that shadows the bureaucracy throughout the archipelago. Further, the deep eccentricities of Abdurrahman’s ruling style so alienated many elites and mass publics that he was encouraged finally to resign, hence summoning his deputy, Megawati Sukarnoputri, to the presidency. But while she had once intimated populist responsiveness to her vast constituencies of urban poor, she now grew distracted now by nationalist battles against outer island secessionists, while overlooking corruption that was worsening at the centre, thereby reigniting mass-level mistrust (Far Eastern Economic Review, 26 June
2003: 14-18). Accordingly with Megawati’s populism seen as even less substantive than that of Joseph Estrada in the Philippines, she was defeated in the presidential election, now made direct, in 2004, notwithstanding the fragmentation of the country’s mass publics.

In Malaysia, the economic crisis was less severe, owing to the country’s better regulation of banks and borrowing. Still, Mahathir and his deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, serving also as finance minister, differed over how to respond to the pressures, with Mahathir bailing out business elites and Anwar favouring austerity. Thus, in a much reported sequence of events, after Mahathir’s leadership was tested by Anwar at their party’s general assembly in 1998, Mahathir ousted his deputy from the party and government. Anwar responded by organizing mass protests, attracting complex constituencies of civil servants, middle-class activists, and Islamists. Court proceedings were then begun against Anwar over charges of corruption and sexual misconduct, leading finally to a lengthy jail sentence (Case 1999).

Mahathir’s efforts to disgrace Anwar, however, triggered widespread mistrust of his government. Indeed, the treatment given Anwar, perpetrated against a backdrop of corporate bailouts and mass-level hardship, catalysed grievances across sectarian and class lines, fueling the formation of civil society and a potent reform movement. What is more, civil society ‘agents’ worked closely with opposition parties, educating voters and cementing the front in ways that presaged a strong challenge to the government in the 1999 election (Weiss 2002), despite the regime’s pseudo- or semi-democratic character.

But Mahathir countered by artfully deflecting some mass-level mistrust onto rival elites and global forces. In particular, he castigated Anwar as a ‘traitor’, in league with the IMF and the Central Intelligence Agency in causing Malaysia’s economic crisis. He also attacked global forces directly, variously naming George Soros, Jews, ‘neo-colonialists’, and unfettered international capital as responsible for the country’s economic travails. At the same time, in rejecting economic orthodoxy in order to introduce capital controls, shoring up the national currency and slowing capital flight (Haggard and Low 2002), he posed as Malaysia’s defender, an imagery that seemed indeed to alleviate the mistrust of business elites and large parts of the middle class.

In addition, Mahathir artfully stirred mistrust between mass publics, especially over religious issues, warning moderate Muslims and ethnic Chinese of the consequences of an Islamist opposition party coming to power. Further, after this party demanded *jihad* over September 11 and U.S. retaliation in Afghanistan, Mahathir vilified it as ‘extremist’, effectively fragmenting the cross-ethnic opposition front, hence restoring still more
middle-class support to the government, especially among Chinese. At other junctures, though, Mahathir encouraged ethnic resentments against the Chinese, thereby re-energising Malay loyalties. For example, he castigated the Chinese as ‘worse than the Communists’ when an NGO sought greater equality for the community after supporting the government in the 1999 election. He also intoned publicly that ‘the Malays must fight as one’ after a street battle erupted in a squatter settlement between Malays and ethnic Indians, resulting in several killings.

Thus, while the economic crisis helped to trigger intense mass-level mistrust in Malaysia, solidifying civil society, a broad-based reform movement, and a potent electoral challenge conveyed through an opposition front, Mahathir was able afterward to parry this mistrust. He deflected some of it onto other elites and global forces, then pitted mass publics against one another. In this way, the democratisation of politics and populist responsiveness that took place in Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia, however brief or uneven, were evaded altogether in Malaysia, illustrating the ways in which national leaders can make artful use of mass-level mistrust.

Finally, the crisis also impacted on Singapore, causing the city-state’s economy, however well-managed, to contract slightly. But the government, rather than responding with skewed bailouts of favoured, but now floundering business elites, avoided mass-level mistrust by appearing to impose austerity equitably across the board. Most notably, government ministers took highly publicised pay cuts, enabling them to trim the compensation of middle-class bureaucrats and workers in ways that did not unduly trigger resentments. Thus, the government was able safely to sacrifice some of its sources of patronage and populist benefits, reducing the various corporate charges and taxes that it had long levied in hopes of re-energising foreign investment.

In these circumstances, amid the seeming equity and transparency with which austerity was applied, mass publics displayed little mistrust. On the contrary, to the extent that attitudes can be gauged in Singapore, mass publics appeared to forget much of the mistrust that they may have earlier harboired in order to return to the fold, entrusting no one but the incumbent government with the mission – quite overriding in its urgency – of restoring the economy. To be sure, bare elements of civil society persisted in airing residual concerns over women’s issues, environmental causes, and the deficient statuses of Muslim professionals. And upon this scant base, lonely dissidents and wizened opposition parties dared still to call for political change. But given the weak reeds by which they were propped up, the government effortlessly repressed their activist expressions of mistrust, handing down court judgements and detention
orders. In Singapore, then, despite – or perhaps because of – a level of development that by regional terms must be regarded as high, the economic crisis failed to convert mass-level mistrust into democratic pressures. If anything, mistrust was lessened, with anxious mass publics now forsaking the seeming frivolity of protest votes in order to support the government in restoring substantive populist benefits.

In summary, the economic crisis of 1997-98, posing a profound break in the developmental progress of the Southeast Asian countries surveyed in this essay, heightened the mistrust of many mass publics toward elites. In Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia, this mass-level mistrust was enough that amid divisions at the elite level, either transitions to democracy or significant changes within existing democracies, whether registered through greater respect for procedures and institutions or a baser, but substantive provision of populist benefits, were able to take place. But in Malaysia and Singapore, despite these countries possessing what are in proportional terms the region’s largest middle classes, democratisation made scant progress. In Malaysia, while elite-level bailouts precipitated mass-level mistrust, civil society failed to gain full potency, with mistrust artfully deflected and manipulated by the national leader. And in Singapore, the government imposed austerity equitably, hence avoiding mistrust even more ably.

**Conclusions**

The aim of this essay has been to gauge the impact of mistrust on political change in countries at an ‘intermediate’ level of development – Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. In comparison to fully developed countries, mistrust in these cases is volatile, focusing less finely on the inadequacies of existing political procedures and institutional arenas than tracking wide fluctuations in the provision of substantive populist benefits. Further, because of this volatility in mistrust and the infirmity of political regimes, mistrust can contribute to profound change, surging beyond institutional fine turning to determine the forms that regimes take. Accordingly, where authoritarian regimes have been democratized in Southeast Asia, it has been carried out in bottom-up ways.

But mistrust not only surges in populism’s absence; it is also alleviated by the resumption of populism. Thus, while fomenting dramatic transitions to democracy, it can be easily abated, hence limiting the new democracy’s quality. Put simply, any resumption of substantive populist benefits diminishes the new interest in procedures and institutions displayed by lesser social strata, dissociating them from middle-class activists and
enervating civil society. Thaksin Shinawatra, the new prime minister of Thailand, best exemplifies this artful leadership. Indeed, he appears even to have disarmed large parts of the middle class, enabling him nearly to ignore the country’s reformist constitution and oversight units. But Joseph Estrada in the Philippines and Megawati Sukarnoputri in Indonesia each made populist pledges too, which, in distracting mass publics, impeded the deepening of democracy’s quality.

Malaysia’s recent experience provides a different lesson, demonstrating the while mistrust between elites can summon up pressures for political change, an artful leader can shift some of this sentiment onto rival elites, while at the same time stirring mistrust between mass publics. Thus, even in the absence of substantive populist benefits, the force of civil society can be weakened, hence avoiding any democratic transition. Singapore too has avoided transition, though less by manipulating mistrust than regenerating public confidence in its capacity to restore the economy. But either way, whether encouraging democratization, as in Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia, or summoning new strategies of containment, as in Malaysia and Singapore, political mistrust – endemic among mass publics, elites, and between these two categories – exerts powerful impact on democracy’s prospects.

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Abstract

Scandals may seem to be unique events, and thus not comparable to each other. But closer analysis shows that scandals raise basic questions of power and legitimacy, and can play a role in clarifying the normative bases of mass-elite interaction and political rule in society. Scandals are a form of conflict, first visible in their present form in the bourgeois state; their origins and course of development depend upon both the normative commitments made by public figures and the consciousness and perceptions of the population at large. Bourdieu’s theory of “delegation” is particularly useful for illuminating the dynamics of scandal, and their implications for political legitimacy.

Political scandals are a daring topic for international comparative studies. Few events in public life seem so unique and so impossible to duplicate as a political scandal, once it has been revealed with all the special characteristics of the political culture of a certain country. Who would presume to claim that a counterpart to the Watergate scandal, the “Winni Mandela case” in South Africa or the recent “party donation affair” within German Christian Democrats could readily be found? Are the various triggering events, the ensuing development and the consequences of political scandal so strongly shaped by the peculiarities and current conflicts of different political systems that comparative research would seem inappropriate? In trying to understand the political significance of the “Clinton/Lewinsky” affair, for instance, would it not be better to study the specifics of American society instead of that iridescent subfield of social science that has already been labeled “scandology”? 
Political scandals as individual events may be short-lived and highly typical for the respective political system. And yet they reoccur so regularly in the political public that they provoke the question of possible comparable causes, characteristics, meanings and functions. This article suggests some elements for a general framework for the analysis of political scandals — something, I consider crucial, especially for comparative research on this subject.\(^1\) Historical case studies of contemporary political scandals always run the risk of becoming entangled in the details of a “case” (or even of becoming infatuated by the details), thus overlooking the structural principles that quite regularly provide for the emergence of scandals in politics. Political scandals seem to be a particularly good illustration of Emile Durkheim’s (1985) methodical dictum: that facts most arbitrary in appearance will come to present after more attentive observation, qualities of constancy that are symptomatic of their objectivity, i.e. of their social nature.

What is it that interests sociology about political scandals and to what purpose do sociologists study them? Sociological research into scandal is not the academic department of journalistic muckraking. The social scientist is not interested in the complete revelation of political scandals, but in the political and social conditions that make them possible in the first place. To paraphrase Emile Durkheim again: the sociologist studies social pathology in order to become better acquainted with social normality and a political scandal is without question an example of such a pathology. Like all pathological developments of social life it is inherent to normality and has its starting point there. Because scandal emerges from the normality of political life its analysis also exposes the normal business of politics itself. The revelation and inquiry of political scandals provide insights into social areas which usually remain concealed from the public eye, although they are of great significance for political life: the activities of economic corporations, party headquarters, state offices and intelligence services suddenly become visible. Characteristically in the course of institutional treatment of scandals findings come to light — often unintentionally — that go far beyond the original occasion that triggered the scandal itself. In the light of scandal more of everyday political reality is laid bare.

In its topics, development and consequences political scandal expresses the social conditions under which it occurs. Long-term social processes are focused and become “legible” in scandals. Corruption, for instance,

\(^1\) The following comments are based on considerations that I first have dealt with in Neckel 1986, Neckel 1990 and Ebbighausen/Neckel 1989.
can only become scandal if public positions are not longer regarded as remunerative means to private affluence and the separation of the public and the private sphere has become the cultural norm of a society. Thus the topic “scandal” also raises numerous interesting questions in regard to theories of civilization. Scandal could be regarded as a civilizational indicator for the historical process of moral development and the kind of potential a society has for conflict and violence. Only those things can become political scandals that have been accepted as norms in the public consciousness of the majority.

Furthermore political scandal can be regarded as an exemplary form of “conflict” in a strictly sociological sense of the word (cf. Coser 1956), because it expresses opposing social claims to the validity of norms and the course of scandals is shaped by the competing courses of actions typical for conflicts and in which instruments of power are used to try to defeat the opponent. A type of conflict like political scandal, however, only becomes possible once a distinct level of absence of violence in social conflicts has been reached in society. The legitimation of ruling powers in liberal democracies is essentially based on the ability to achieve agreement to their measures without the use of violence. Similarly the creation of scandals is a political technique which is only conceivable under the condition that non-violent delegitimation of political power is possible. In addition, the set of social roles in society must have achieved functional differentiation; power and control bodies in politics must not coincide. That is why there are no political scandals in dictatorships, with the possible exception of those that the ruling powers publicly stage themselves because of internal power struggles. The absence of political scandals is no evidence for the moral superiority of the political staff – quite the contrary. Where there is no scandal, there is strict control of opinions, repression and boredom and, at best, that form of sociality for which German sociologist have used the term “Gemeinschaft” (community) as opposed to “Gesellschaft” (society).

**Power and legitimacy**

This already shows that political scandals require certain historical preconditions. Pre-bourgeois societies were familiar with intrigues and “plots” but not with scandals. These have only emerged since bourgeois society evolved as a realm independent of the state, i.e. since the decline of aristocratic policy. Before the bourgeois state existed and before state institutions claimed to represent general interests, there could be no scandals. Political scandals are constituted by two institutions of modern society: the joining of state actions to general norms and the instance of the...
public which serves to control state actions accordingly. Political scandals always emerge when the normative inventory of politics has been violated by the actors in the political system itself and when the revelation of this violation leads to a conflict between different power groups within society. Each of these uses the authority of public opinion to try to divest the opposing groups of the legitimacy of their social position.

The anatomy of political scandal is the anatomy of modern society. In its light its structural problems become visible, problems which Jürgen Habermas (1989), for example, described as the perpetual hazard of a “refeudalization” of the bourgeois public sphere. How closely scandal is connected to the instance of the public is also illustrated by the fact that the first written account of a scandal leads us back to an earlier society, where public opinion at least in rudiments already existed: the late period of Greek antiquity. The Athenian commander Alcibiades, as depicted by Thucydides (1972) in his history of the Peloponnesian War, smashes the faces of the stone images of the Athenian gods, thus defiling the symbols of collective belief and thereupon being accused of sacrilege. While the destruction of symbols of collective belief by a power figure gave rise to an unprecedented stir in the year 415 B.C., we have by now become used to sacrileges. Political scandal has become commonplace; in liberal democracies it is a general structural phenomenon of politics. What reasons can be put forward to explain this, first of all on the level of the actors of the “political class” itself?

On the one hand the increase in political scandals proves to what extent the techniques of acquiring and preserving power have become independent of the objective ends of politics in the course of its modern rationalization. It shows how profound the contradiction between short-lived power rituals and the long-term political problems of modern society have meanwhile become. The professional politician as the predominant type of political actor in modern societies is subjected to the contradiction between his insecure position and the enormous efforts required to secure it by campaigning for voters, image-building and competitive struggle. In addition, he is in a fundamental role conflict, the result of which will make or break his political career. On the one hand, he is, as the political representative of the social community, more obliged than other members of society to abide by its binding norms. On the other hand, he is a power figure in parties or in offices and thus less able than other members of society (or, at best, no more able) to follow these norms in the face of the functional requirements of power competition. This is not only caused by the contradictory rules of the political public itself that reward normative conformity in politicians’ behaviour just as much as rigor in power politics. It is also caused by the divergent standards of assessment
that a politician is subjected to in the political sphere. As a political representative he can still – in the words of Max Weber – be assessed “value-rationally”, but as a power figure he is subject to the maxims of the “purposive rationality” of political action. In this dimension of public assessment a politician must be able to prove his ability by being able to assert his power against competitors under all circumstances. Politicians who have proven their ability to rigorously maintain power and who have already survived several scandals, are rated much higher in the public assessment of their competence than those whose moral discipline is often perceived as an expression of weakness. Politicians who don’t even start to arouse the impression that they are not only formally but also personally committed to prevailing moral standards run less risk of becoming successfully scandalized.

Scandals are thus the unintended side-effects of the symbolic rules of political representation in societies with an unequal public distribution of power. They are triggered off when it becomes public that politicians, institutions, associations or parties violate norms which they themselves claim to ensure; when moral obligations are violated by those who, as political representatives, represent the principle of moral obligation towards society as a whole. The bodies of political power – the state and its representatives – do not necessarily vouch for the contents of certain moral obligations; these could change without affecting the legitimacy of political power. The essential point is that the state bases its normative validity claims on the guarantee of a certain formal principle of morality. This principle is its general character of obligation. State bodies or bearers of state functions disclaim themselves when the obligations which they are to ensure are not even met be themselves. Whereas moral obligations only apply to citizens insofar as the infringement of accepted rules of conduct is always presupposed as an empirical fact, political representatives are subject to moral obligation because they represent the principle of obligation itself.

Politicians are therefore subject to normative self-commitment which makes them particularly susceptible to scandal. One reason for this is that the self-commitment of political representatives oversteps a limit that in all other cases has absolute validity for society: the dividing line between the public and the private. That is why in political scandals private transgressions of public figures against prevailing norms can be staged time and again as “political events” and they really are political in the sense that they impair the symbolic equipment of politicians. Regardless of the respective moral qualities of political staff, political scandals indicate an inherent systematic dilemma: the special status which gives political representatives legitimate power is at the same time the
measure by which the power figures are morally judged. In liberal democracy the chance of power reappears as a burden of morals. In political scandal the status opportunities of political power become a “status trap”.

**Rules of delegation**

In this context the principle of delegation acquires particular importance in parliamentary democracies. Pierre Bourdieu has written several important contributions to this topic (cf. Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu is not only interested in the aims and consequences of political power struggle but especially in the latent categories of interpretation which are generated or intensified by these power struggles. Bourdieu poses the question of how disparities of power create patterns of interpretation and how these patterns themselves in turn have an effect on the disposal of power. He proceeds on the assumption that political power in democratic societies can only be legitimately exercised if those in power are able to create an image of their authorized violence which leads the potential victims of this violence to mistake it as merely delegated, as in principle their own. For this purpose the political representatives must create the twofold impression that the delegation of power is not only unquestionably necessary, but – because of the special moral obligation of the delegates – is also in the best possible hands. In their speech and habitus political representatives therefore appropriate the universal values of a society and monopolize collective morality. But in doing this they at the same time draw a line between themselves and the ordinary citizen. Whereas the citizen is put in his place and possesses the status of an ordinary person, the individual person of the power figure is transformed into a quasi transcendent person of law. By equipping themselves with public dignity in such a way the political representatives – according to Bourdieu – mystify their own person.

Political scandal then makes this pose appear untrustworthy. The scandalized power figure returns to the world of the profane, but without the possibility of being measured by the moral yardsticks of the profane world, because citizens now base their moral assessment of politics on that pattern of interpretation whose continuous reproduction is a part of the act of political representation itself. Political scandal is therefore the product of the selective application of certain norms and values to the “political class”. The ironic difference here is that it is the political class itself which, as an unintended side-effect of its symbolic theatre of power, provoked this selective role-ascription. The citizen is not – and should not be – the trustee of public moral standards: this is a task that he or she, sometimes gladly, hands over to others. Those who exact this of themselves pay for the privilege of power the prerogative of being
evaluated by the norms of this privilege. That is why the political function of scandals cannot merely consist of typifying “scapegoats”: people whose political rivals, driven by unconcealed egoism, stigmatize them in order to use the support of public resentment to gain power themselves. This view is favoured within sociology by the “labeling approach” of interaction theory. It omits, however, that those who are to be “labeled” by jealous rivals have themselves in the act of political representation already contributed to the design of their labeling pattern and have then in political scandal become entangled in the consequences of their own self-ascriptions.

Two points are crucial in this context: apart from the different specific contents of the norms violated in scandal, transgressions of political representatives which become public always affect the duties of status politicians claim for themselves. Consequently it is not only the contents of certain everyday norms which are affected but, at the same time, the general norm of reciprocal obligation to status-appropriate action between representatives and those who are to be represented. The “norm of reciprocity” (Gouldner 1975) is suddenly at issue when interlinked status duties between individuals and groups with different social positions are not met.

This in turn can create a deficit in legitimation, for in political scandal the point at issue is not simply the violation of moral norms of conduct in society in general, but their violation by power figures. Somebody powerless in political affairs is never subject to a scandal because in these cases his fellow-men or – in the case of breaches of the law – the normal jurisdiction provide social control. Only those people who might possess the means by which they could withdraw from the reach of these controls provoke scandal. In politics the threshold of scandal is quickly reached. Scandals are context-bound events and can only be understood against the background of the typical conflicts, opportunities for power and normative patterns of the field of society in which they occur. In the special case of politics the rules that behaviour must accord with are not only set up by politics itself; any kind of power – except for sheer violence – is also liable to a framework of reciprocal duties which determines the limits of power and obedience. These presuppositions of reciprocity are, of course, not like a codified social contract. The respective rights and duties of competing social groups are disclosed implicit and practical, in the test on the reactions of the other side. Scandal is just one of the social forms in which this test takes place. For those

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2 Here I refer to the theory of “implicit social contract” as developed by Barrington Moore (1978).
governed and those competing for power the use of techniques of fomenting scandal is an attempt to demarcate the area in which the use of power is still legitimate, whereas the power figures try to make the scandalized misdemeanours look like behaviour which is still in good order. In both cases and for both sides it is a question of ensuring or expanding the respective positions and scopes of action, of redetermining the boundaries for the use of power or the possibilities for its critique.

If it is manifested in a political scandal that politicians – in contrast to their public stagings – violate the norms of their offices, if it becomes evident that they are unable to control their instruments of power or that they have used these instruments for illegitimate returns, those governed and those competing for power use this as a justification to reject their duties of loyalty. The public then reacts by (usually transitorily) terminating the rule that political power, if established by election, is accepted as legitimate, at least until it is replaced in elections again, and by proclaiming scandal as a sign of intermittent challenge to the legitimation of political authority. This vote of no confidence refers mainly to individuals and not to the political system itself because the moral duties taken over by the power figures are proclaimed to be personal ones which are therefore only personally attributable.

**Limits of political scandals**

The emergence of political scandal is therefore tied to a number of factors; if several of these factors coincide, an increase in the frequency of scandals is to be expected. A certain deterioration in using political power must hit upon a pronounced sense of justice in a sufficiently articulate public sphere, which itself must possess enough possibilities of wielding power to be able to remind the power figures to meet their status duties. Thereby political scandals can be expected to increase the more the public sphere is already polarized, and the more profound at least latent political antagonism have become in a society. Then competing power groups have much better chances to win the battle of definition which always precedes every scandal: whether one is really confronted with it and, if so, what makes it a scandal. An increase in scandals will not take place in three cases: if a national consensus is unquestioned in a society, for instance, because of real or imaginary external threats; if competing parties have hardly any real opportunities to gain power; or, if moral expectations towards political power no longer exist and public political consciousness has become increasingly cynical.

Political scandal, however, is not only a method to control power, but also a method controlled by power. The British social anthropolo-
gist Max Gluckman first drew attention to this and discovered that scandal – as well as gossip, by the way – has already been used as a technique of informal social control in tribal societies. According to Gluckman, scandal itself “punishes any excess (…) For the battle of scandal has its own rules, and woe to him who breaks these rules. By the act of carrying his scandalizing too far, he himself oversteps the values of the group and his scandal will turn against him (…) The scandal will in fact redound to the credit of the person attacked, since he will have been unfairly assailed” (Gluckman 1963, 313).

Thus the extent as well as the intensity of political scandal is limited. As a reminder to individuals of the reciprocity of political relationships in society it is terminated where public opinion accepts the exemplary sanctions of scandal as a moral promise for the future.

This elucidates that political scandal is a mechanism of informal social control interlinking the social relationships of competing power groups in such a way that this serves the function of moral regulation of politics, and at the same time makes it possible to maintain the symbolic reproduction of the ruling power conditions. In this respect scandals do represent a social institution: they provide a normative determination of the way in which special norm conflicts in politics are dealt with, they limit their contents and forms and therefore invest social integration with a certain degree of durability. Thus, political scandals seem to consolidate the rules for the delegation of political power precisely by annulling them temporarily. Contrary to first impressions scandals can very well become something that serves the function of maintenance social stability.

Limiting political scandal to a strategy of contrafactual stabilization of ruling norms und procedures does not, however, take the dynamic aspects of political scandals into account. The question, for instance, of what can be a scandal in a society and what cannot makes this evident. The power to define what should be called a scandal is always controversial in a society and the power figures certainly tend to be interested in limiting the issues which can possibly be transformed into scandals. An expansion of topics which can cause scandal could be observed, for example, in the area of ecology in all liberal democracies in recent years. On these occasions it has become clear that public opinion, if struggling for the power to define scandals, does not necessarily become apathetic in political scandal as claimed by the school of American policy research that refers to the work of Murray Edelman (1964; 1988). As meritorious as Edelman’s discovery of the dichotomy of “measures” and “staging” in politics is – the question of who lays down the program played on the political stage is not finally determined, neither at the socio-psychological nor at the institutional level. The spectator of democracy, as opposed to
the television viewer, at least has the opportunity of influencing the play that is being performed, of redistributing the roles and sometimes of having the actors make their exit from the political stage.

Although the technique of scandal may occasionally help to bring into the sphere of norms what has been unregulated in society before, scandals presumably have only very limited consequences for the actual contents of politics; furthermore, once they have been launched the public may be pushed into the role of passive “spectator participation” in political life. However, whether they are able to emerge in the first place and what topics they involve depends on the active participation of the public sphere in political events. The media cannot simply invent scandals without taking the sentiments and consciousness of the population into account. In one form or another there will always be scandals in democracies. It is up to the democratic public itself to use scandals as an occasion for political information and “enlightenment”, and not to fall into cultural regression in the selection of the topics of scandal. The political mentality of the public sphere itself determines what “cases” scandal researchers will have to deal with in the future. It doesn’t take a prophet, however, to foresee that our sociological efforts in this area will continue to be rewarded with a degree of entertainment otherwise rarely found in scientific work.

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Thucydides
II

Contrasting Cases of National Configurations of Trust-Mistrust
Norway: Trust Among Elites in a Corporatist Democracy

TRYGVE GULBRANDSEN

ABSTRACT

While there have been many studies of ordinary citizens’ institutional trust, there is very little knowledge about how national elites or leaders evaluate the trustworthiness of public institutions. This article contributes to filling this knowledge gap. Based on data from the Norwegian Power and Democracy Project’s Leadership Study 2000, it is demonstrated that Norwegian top leaders have more trust in the main institutions of the society than citizens do in general. They rank, however, the various institutions in the same way. As found in studies of citizens’ institutional trust, ideological orientation is an important cause of institutional trust among the top leaders. How they relate to the public/private cleavage as well as to the centre/periphery cleavage has significant impact upon their trust giving. The degree of trust in a particular institution is also positively affected by how much contact a top leader has with the leaders of this institution. The elites in Norway are involved in an extensive network of contacts and relations with leaders in other sectors and institutions. An indirect, and thus not always discernable effect of this network of relations seems to be that a higher degree of mutual trust is emerging among all the elites in the system.

Key words: Trust, institutional trust, elites

Introduction

During the last ten years, there has been an increasing focus upon citizens’ trust in political institutions. Scholars in several countries have observed a declining trust in these institutions, observations which have
aroused concerns about the viability of democracy itself. Other researchers claim, however, that there has not been any extensive decrease in the institutional trust by citizens and, rather, that such trust varies from one period of time to the next (Listhaug and Wiberg 1995; Aardal 1999). It has also been maintained that a more critical attitude on the part of the citizens towards the political institutions is not necessarily a major problem. It may rather be indicative of a more watchful (vigilant) general public.

While there has been much interest in the citizens’ trust, national elites’ or leaders’ trust in public institutions has received much less attention. In a modern society elites are persons holding important leadership positions in significant institutions and organizations. As leaders they are first and foremost representatives of these institutions, expected to act on behalf of the interests or concerns embodied in the institutions.

According to modern elite theories (Lijphart 1969a, 1969b; Presthus 1973; Putnam 1976; Burton and Higley 1987; Higley and Burton 1989), the continuance and stability of democracies are dependent upon mutual accommodation, compromises and consensus between the most important national elite groups. Mutual trust between the various elite groups is an important precondition for obtaining such elite accommodation and elite compromises. Since elites relate to each other as representatives, their mutual trust in each other is as much a trust in their respective institutions.

Just as the elites trust in each others’ institutions may be of vital importance to democracy, lack of such trust may have unfortunate effects. If particular elite groups do not have confidence in particular institutions, they have, more than ordinary citizens, the means available to push for changes in these institutions. Or they can choose to circumvent them. Dissatisfaction with the police and the judiciary may for instance lead to the emergence of private enterprises for creating law and order or for organizing legal settlements.

To what extent then do the various elite groups trust the most significant institutions in society? Hitherto, very few studies have attempted to answer this question. Exceptions are Steen’s (1996; 2001) studies of institutional trust among the elites in the Baltic countries and in Russia. This article is filling a gap in this knowledge by presenting the results of an analysis of the confidence in government and private institutions among political, economic and social elites in Norway.

I will describe how various elite groups assess and rank the trustworthiness of a sample of institutions in Norway and compare this trust with the confidence of ordinary citizens. I will also discuss and empirically test various theoretical ideas about what factors influence the trust giving of leaders. The focus will be both on factors which have received
attention in previous studies of citizens’ trust, as well as circumstances that are unique to the leaders. In the latter category I will concentrate upon (i) the significance of the top leaders’ personal contacts with leaders of other institutions, and (ii) their previous job experience from relevant institutions.

In the analyses I will avail myself of data from the Norwegian Leadership Study, a survey of Norwegian top leaders carried out 2000 and 2001 by the Statistics Norway, commissioned by the Power and Democracy Study. The Leadership Study is described in more detail in Norske makoteliter (“Norwegian Power Elites”) (Gulbrandsen, Engelstad, Klausen, Skjeie, Teigen and Østerud 2002).

Trust and institutional trust

I define trust as an attitude on the part of a person towards another person, or towards an institution or a social system, which contains an expectation that the other, or the institution, at a certain time in the near or distant future will execute or abstain from certain actions. One characteristic of the situations where such an attitude emerges is that the trust-giver will suffer a noticeable loss if his or her expectations about the behaviour of the other, or the institution, are not met. Another characteristic is that the trust-giver has no control of the future actions of the other, or the institution. There is a risk that the other’s behaviour will fall short of the trust-giver’s expectations (Gulbrandsen 2000).

We may distinguish between generalized and specific trust (Luhmann 1973; Easton 1975). Trust is generalized if a person’s trust embraces the other or the institution as a whole, and is not restricted to particular aspects of the other. When trust is specific it is valid only for certain actions, areas, or contexts.

Trust is a concept which most people affiliate with close interpersonal relationships. Is it possible to talk about trust in institutions? Some scholars seem to be reluctant to use the concept to describe individuals’ attitudes toward specific institutions or social systems (Offe 1999; Luhmann 1988). Claus Offe (1999), for instance, states that trust in institutions is only possible when a person trusts that the representatives of these institutions comply with the institutions’ own rules. Moreover, the person needs to have trust also in those individuals who monitor and enforce the rules. According to Offe, trust in institutions is actually trust in individuals.

1 In the theoretical literature about trust some authors such as Luhman (1988) distinguish between trust and confidence. In this paper I have chosen to regard the two terms as referring to the same phenomenon, and accordingly I treat them as interchangeable.
My own view is that it is theoretically relevant to term particular attitudes as institutional or systems trust. In many situations individuals hold attitudes towards particular institutions or organizations which they themselves experience and describe as trust. This trust may be derived from trust in particular persons who belong to that institution, but quite often is not. In fact, they may have never met, nor have any knowledge about these persons. The trust is, first and foremost, a trust in the organization itself, its resources, its management philosophy, its systems for quality control, the competence of its employees, etc. Moreover, trust in institutions may contain that kind of risk of future loss which is one of the basic signs of trust. For instance, it may become apparent that the political party an individual trusted and therefore voted for, did not follow up its political promises.

Contrary this view, however, it can be stated that most citizens, by being born into a particular society, have no choice other than to accept the present political institutions. This situation violates the idea within general trust theory that trust implies a choice on the part of the trust giving person (Gulbrandsen 2000).

**Theory and empirical expectations**

*Leaders’ trust in the institutions of society*

In general, elite persons are well qualified to assess how trustworthy various social and political institutions are (Sztompka 1999). Through their education and particularly through their work as top leaders, they have acquired considerable knowledge about the structure and operation of other institutions in the society. Moreover, through active participation in the Norwegian corporatist system of political decision-making many top leaders have personally met and know the leaders of these other institutions. These various sources of knowledge enhance their capacity for institutional trust.

In addition, the top leaders command resources that may be mobilized as sanctions against organizations or institutions that do not live up to the trust they have received (Gulbrandsen 2001).

Against this background it is reasonable to expect that national elites in Norway have a relatively high degree of trust in the main economic, political and social institutions.

In a study of institutional trust among a sample of citizens in 1990 it appeared that the police and the educational system were the highest ranking institutions on a scale of trust (Listhaug and Wiberg 1995). Least trust was accorded to the newspapers and to the public bureau-
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The researchers behind the study distinguished between “order” institutions (police, the judiciary, the military services and the Church) and other institutions. The “order” institutions enjoyed more trust in the population than the others.

I also expect that “order” institutions receive more trust than other institutions, with one exception – the Church. In the decade subsequent to the survey upon which Listhaug and Wiberg (1995) based their study, secularisation seems to have become more widespread in Norwegian society, as a result of which it is to be expected that the leaders’ trust in the Church has declined more than for the other order institutions.

Variations in the top leaders’ institutional trust

In previous research one can find several theories about the origins of citizens’ trust. At the macro level it has been claimed that decreasing trust of citizens in the political institutions may be a result of a decrease in social capital, i.e. in civic engagement and involvement, and a related declining trust between individuals (Putnam 1995a, 1995b). Further, increasing distrust in the institutions of society has been explained as an expression of a more critical attitude fostered by changed values and an increased educational level in the population (Inglehart 1997, 1990). It has also been maintained that decreasing institutional trust is caused by a gap between the citizens’ expectations of the government’s economic performance and the ability of the political system to satisfy these expectations.

Variations between individuals in institutional trust have been associated with their social and economic resources. It has been claimed that political distrust more easily arises in those with a socially or economically unfavourable position (Narud and Aalberg 1999). In addition, trust in the political system has been seen in relation with psychological and cognitive variables, particularly the citizens’ self-confidence, their political competence and their ideological orientation (Listhaug and Wiberg 1995; Rose and Pettersen 1999). Listhaug and Wiberg (1995) found, for instance, that institutional trust is higher among citizens belonging to the right side and lowest among those on the left side of the political spectrum.

Independently of whether the various theories have been empirically corroborated or not, are they really relevant for the top leaders of society? In several theories, irrespective of whether they focus upon the macro or micro level, the extent of institutional trust is claimed to vary with the degree of political and social distance between the citizens and the institutions. The greater the distance, the more distrust in the political and social institutions. As suggested above, social distance may be caused by isolation from other persons, lack of participation in civic
organizations, or an inadequate supply of economic resources. Political distance may be a result of political ideologies, values (for instance post-materialistic values), or of dissatisfaction with how the government's policy affects one's daily life.

The leaders occupy central positions, having responsibility for important decisions in society. They participate actively in various civic activities and organizations; they have high incomes and fortunes giving them a comfortable private economy. In other words, the existing society gives members of the national elite groups many advantages. There is hardly any reason to believe that Norwegian top leaders experience a social distance to the key institutions of Norwegian society.

On the other hand, it is possible that particular elite groups or individual top leaders experience a political distance to the public authorities for example. As discussed by Listhaug and Wiberg (1995) such a feeling of political distance may be due to the ideological orientation of the leaders. To follow up this possibility I examine the relationship between the elites' institutional trust and their ideological views in the analyses. To measure their ideological attitudes I use (i) a variable locating the leaders along the public/private or right/left political dimension, and (ii) a variable placing them along the centre/periphery dimension. These two variables represent national issues which for a long time have been important in elections as well as for the party structure in the Norwegian political system (Rokkan and Valen 1967; Rokkan 1987; Aardal 1999).

I assume that leaders sympathizing with the left have more trust in the Storting, the Cabinet and the public administration than leaders holding rightist ideological views. When they consider their trust in private business, I expect that the leaders’ ideological attitudes operate the opposite way: leaders whose opinions are more oriented towards the left have less trust in the private sector than those holding right-wing opinions.

It is less certain what to expect from leaders who give priority to the interests of the rural areas (the centre/periphery dimension). Inherent in the tension between centre and periphery is a potential for scepticism toward institutions which are located in the centre of the society. It is, therefore, possible that leaders who have a particular sympathy with the rural areas, have less trust in central government than other leaders (Aardal 2003). On the other hand, the central government of Norway transfer considerable economic resources to the rural municipalities, and this situation could be expected to stimulate trust in the political institutions.

In their study Listhaug and Wiberg (1995) discovered that ordinary citizens’ institutional trust was influenced by whether they profess religious values. A similar relationship is to be expected among the top leaders as well. Firstly, it is possible that a religious outlook is linked to a prefer-
ence for traditions and, therefore, may motivate a leader to support the established institutions of society. Secondly, it is probable that religious values are related to a stronger support for public welfare and policies for the weakest groups in society. Since political institutions in Norway represent the Norwegian welfare state model, there is reason to believe that leaders who defend religious values will demonstrate a stronger trust in these institutions than leaders without devotion for such values. In their book *Norske makteliter* (“Norwegian power elites”) Gulbrandsen et al. (2002) demonstrated that church leaders in Norway, relative to other elite groups, are distinctly located to the left along the political right/left dimension. This observation is an indication that the preceding line of argument is valid.

An important basis for trust in another person is the concrete experiences a trust-giver has had with this person. These experiences become significant indicators of how the other will most likely behave in the future. One may characterize this as “experience-based trust”. Experiences relevant for trust-giving are most easily obtained in ongoing and stable social relationships. This implies that social systems that bring individuals into regular contact with each other will contribute to increase their mutual trust.

An important aspect of the corporatist political system of Norway is that there are extensive contacts between the top leaders of various institutions, organizations and interest groups. Interest groups are represented on a large number of public boards and committees which are responsible for preparing or implementing political decisions. To a large extent interest groups are informally consulted before important political decisions are taken. In addition and at their own initiative, representatives of various elite and interest groups are actively engaged in lobbying, addressing politicians and senior officials in order to promote the interests of their organization.

All the contacts and relations which are created through the corporatist arrangements and the extensive lobby activities enable cooperation and consensus building across diverse interest groups. They should also be expected to pave the way for increased mutual trust between the top leaders of the different institutions of society, as discussed in the elite literature (Higley et al. 1991) and in the literature about corporatism (Öberg 2002).

The question is, however, whether such mutual, interpersonal trust fosters in addition trust in the institutions which the leaders represent. Theoretically there is reason to believe that there is such an effect. To a large extent, individuals experience the institutions of society through the persons who lead and represent them. These representatives become
manifestations of what the individual may expect in the future through relating himself with the institutions. Probably, such a “personalization” of trust will take place especially when the potential trust-giver has contact with top leaders who have responsibility for the institution as well as power to shoulder the responsibility. Against this background I expect to find that institutional trust is higher among top leaders with frequent contact with leaders of other institutions.

Work experience from a particular institution may also affect how a leader judges the reliability of the institution. The effects of work experience may, however, go both ways. On the one hand, negative experience from a previous work-place may prompt the leader to develop distrust towards this work-place. The negative experiences in themselves may have been the reason why the leader terminated his employment in the organization. On the other hand, having worked in a particular institution usually involves a socialisation with the values dominating in the institution (Putnam 1976). It is to be expected that such a socialisation can foster a trust in that institution. Many top leaders in our sample have previously worked within other sectors, for instance in the public sector or within politics. I assume that the longer a top leader previously has worked in a particular institution, the stronger is his or her trust in that institution.

Data and method

Through the Leadership Study personal interviews were held with 1710 top leaders. The sample of top leaders was constructed on the basis of a so-called “positions” method. We chose those persons who occupy the most important leadership positions in twelve sectors of the Norwegian society. The response rate was 87.3 per cent, which in an international perspective was very high.

In the Leadership Study institutional trust was enquired into in the following manner: “How much trust do you have in the institutions listed on this card. Please rank the institutions on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is no trust and 10 is very high trust.” In this article I have focussed upon the elites’ trust in the following nine institutions: (1) the Storting, (2) the Government, (3) the political parties, (4) the public administration,
(5) the courts of law, (6) the military services, (7) the church, (8) private business, and (9) trade unions. The chosen formulation of the trust question covers the leaders’ generalized or diffuse trust. The answers we have received must be seen as an aggregated or condensed judgment which may be founded upon several different experiences, impressions and views held by the leaders. A particular top leader may have a trust or distrust for several different reasons. Accordingly, there may be some variation between different leaders in the emphasis expressed in their judgment. We know nothing, however, about the individual reasons for this.

As indicators of the leaders’ ideological orientation I have used two indexes representing how they are located in relation to the public/private and the centre/periphery cleavages. The public/private index measures the extent to which the individual leaders endorse some main properties of the welfare state model.\(^3\) The centre/periphery dimension indicates the priority given by the leaders to the interests of the rural areas, for instance to the goal of maintaining the present regional settlement pattern.\(^4\)

The leaders’ endorsement of religious values was measured by asking them whether one should go in for a society where Christian values played a more important role than today.\(^5\)

The leaders’ contacts with other top leaders in society were charted by asking them how frequently during the last year they had been in contact with member of different elite groups.\(^6\)

\(^3\) We asked the leaders whether they supported the following four statements: (1) “It is more important to extend public services than to reduce taxes”; (2) “In Norway one should put stronger emphasis upon privatisation and a smaller public sector”; (3) “The state influence on private business should be reduced”; (4) “In Norway we have gone far enough in the reduction of income inequalities”. The answers were coded similarly. The index is based upon the mean of the leaders’ evaluation of the four statements and has values from 1 to 4. The value 4 indicates that the leaders fully back the public sector and policies for levelling of incomes. The value 1 indicates that the leaders favour a smaller public sector, more privatisation and a curtailing of the state power over private business. Cronbach’s alpha for the index is 0.83.

\(^4\) We asked about the leaders’ views upon the following statement and issue: (1) “Continued building of roads, bridges and tunnels in the districts should be constricted”. (2) “How important is it to keep up the present level of economic transfers to the districts? Is it very important, somewhat important, not so important, or not at all important?” Again the answers were coded in the same way. This index too has four values, 4 indicating full support for the districts and 1 no support. Cronbach’s alpha for the index is 0.61.

\(^5\) This variable as well has four values with 4 representing full support for and 1 very little support for Christian values.

\(^6\) A contact variable for each elite group was constructed, each with four values: “weekly or more frequently” (4), “monthly”, (3) “less frequently” (2) and “never” (1). In the models the variables were used as continual variables.
Previous work experience was charted by asking the leaders how many years they had worked full time within following sectors: (1) Politics, (2) public administration, (3) private business, (4) organizations, (5) culture, (6) mass media, (7) police and the judicial system, (8) the military services, and (9) the church.

As control variables I have used (i) Education, a variable with 8 values according to educational level; (ii) Age as a continual variable; and (iii) Gender.

In order to follow up the empirical expectations I have carried out a series of multivariate analyses where I examined the statistical relationship between the leaders’ trust in the selected institutions and (i) their ideological orientation, (ii) their support for religious values, (iii) contact with leaders within the relevant institution, and (iv) work experience from the institutions and sectors concerned (except for the analyses of trust in the Cabinet and in the trade unions), (v) controlled for the leaders’ education, age and gender, cf. Tables 1 and 2.7

**Results**

*The leaders’ trust in the institutions of society*

Figure 1 shows the leaders’ aggregated trust in each of the 13 institutions. On a scale from no trust (0) to maximum trust (10) the mean scores are between 4.4 and 8. The trust in the selected institutions varies from somewhat less than medium to very high. The figure demonstrates, as expected, that Norwegian top leaders’ institutional trust is high. The institutions can be separated into three groups: those receiving very high, high and medium trust respectively. In accordance with Listhaug and Wiberg’s (1995) study of citizens’ trust, we find that the order institutions – the courts of law and the police – belong to the first group. But they are not alone. Both universities and research institutes and civic organizations are also highly trusted by the leaders. The very high trust which these institutions enjoy may have its origin in their particular role as independent institutions in society. Moreover, they have responsibilities and follow norms that are strongly appraised. The courts of law manage justice, the universities and the research institutes have truth as their regulating norm, and the police have been given the task of safeguarding citizens’ physical safety.

7 In each of these analyses I took out those leader groups which are closely connected to the institutions concerned, i.e. (1) and (2) politicians and senior public officials, (3) politicians, (4) senior public officials, (5) leaders in the police and the judicial system, (6) higher military officers, (7) leaders in the church, (8) top leaders in private business, and (9) national leaders in the trade unions.
A more sceptical interpretation is that some of these institutions benefit from the fact that their inner life and doings are not well known, even among leaders in other sectors. The high trust which, for instance, the courts of law are accorded may thus be due to lower visibility of the operations and thinking of the judges.

The political institutions – the Cabinet and the Storting – fall into the medium group, receiving high trust. The difference between them is not, however, significant. The military services, the public administration and the trade unions are also located in the middle group. As an order institution the military services are somewhat less trusted than the courts of law and the police.

Least trust is expressed for the mass media and the political parties. It is noticeable that the trust score for the mass media is considerably lower than that received by the courts of law. Private business and the church also belong to this group. The church’s trust score is different from what Listhaug and Wiberg (1995) found in their study among ordinary citizens. Because of the increasing secularisation of the Norwegian society this finding was expected, however.

The leaders are thus less satisfied with the agents, the political parties who vie for the favour of the electorate than with the institutions which have the responsibility for passing and implementing the political
resolutions. How can this state of affairs be explained? One possible explanation is that to a larger extent than the political parties the Storting and the Cabinet are subject to constitutional mechanisms for control of how politicians undertake their obligations (Parry 1976). The higher trust accorded to the Storting and the Cabinet may then be a result of a more basic trust in these control mechanisms.

For some of the institutions there is considerable disagreement about how much trust they deserve. This is illustrated in the ‘dot-and-dash’ line in the graph which gives information about the standard deviation in the leaders trust responses. The line shows that the church stands out from the other institution. The peak on the line for the church indicates that there are many leaders who trust the church highly; simultaneously we find many leaders who have low trust in the church. In other words, the church is a controversial institution. On the other hand, the line shows that there is a general consensus among the leaders about the reliability of universities and research institutes, and the courts of law.

Above, it was argued in favour of the elites having more institutional trust than the ordinary citizens. Figure 2 demonstrates that this is valid assumption. In this figure I have compared the leaders’ and the citizens’ level of trust in the same institutions. Information about citizens’ trust is drawn from the Citizen Survey (“Medborgerundersøkelsen”) which was carried out by the Power and Democracy project in 2001 (Strømsnes 2003: 37). In this study the same question about trust was used as in the Leadership Study. Figure 2 demonstrates that the leaders have more trust in the main institutions than citizens in general. The differences are not, however, dramatic. In addition, it is noticeable that the leaders and the citizens rank trust of the various institutions similarly. The only exception is the evaluation of the police. While the elites rank the courts of law highest, the citizens rank the police as the most trustworthy institution.

Variations in the leaders’ institutional trust

Table 1 and table 2 gives the results of the multivariate analyses of factors influencing variations in the leaders’ trust in the political institutions and in other significant institutions.8

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8 In Table 1 and Table 2 the models differ as to how much they explain of the total variation in the leaders’ trust. The model 7 explains 27 per cent of the variation in the leaders’ trust in the church and the religious organizations, while models 5 and 1 explain only 3 and 5 per cent of the trust in the courts of law and the Storting respectively. To a certain extent, these differences in explained variance may be a result of the extent of the variation in the leaders’ degree of trust in the individual institutions. While there
The two tables demonstrate that the empirical expectations formulated above are largely confirmed. Firstly, the leaders’ institutional trust is significantly affected by their ideological orientation. This finding is in accordance with previous studies of trust among ordinary citizens. The nature of the statistical association between ideological orientation and trust varies, however, between the different institutions. Leaders who favour a large public sector have more trust in the Storting, the Cabinet, the political parties, the public administration and the trade unions than leaders who prefer more privatisation. As expected, the relationship is the opposite when it comes to trust in private business. Supporters of increased privatisation and a smaller public sector have more trust in private business than those leaders who defend the state welfare model. The advocates of economic redistribution and a large public sector also have lower trust in the military services and in the church. Trust in the “order” institutions comes first and foremost from leaders belonging to the political

is much variation in their trust in the church, cf. Figure 1, there is little spread in the leaders’ confidence in the courts of law. Another reason for why some of the models explain so little of the variation may be, however, that institutional trust originates in factors that are not captured by the models in Table 1 and table 2.
Table 1
Top leaders’ trust in political institutions. Regression analyses. St. error in parenthesis. Non-standardized estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trust in the Storting</th>
<th>Trust in the Cabinet</th>
<th>Trust in the political parties</th>
<th>Trust in the public administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>4.249** (0.436)</td>
<td>4.266** (0.453)</td>
<td>3.427** (0.394)</td>
<td>2.185** (0.389)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological orientation: the private/public cleavage</td>
<td>0.302** (0.059)</td>
<td>0.389** (0.061)</td>
<td>0.353** (0.053)</td>
<td>0.467** (0.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological orientation: the centre/periphery cleavage</td>
<td>0.128* (0.059)</td>
<td>–0.055 (0.063)</td>
<td>0.067 (0.053)</td>
<td>–0.045 (0.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian values</td>
<td>0.133** (0.043)</td>
<td>–0.010 (0.046)</td>
<td>0.044 (0.039)</td>
<td>–0.0134 (0.041)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with leaders in the respective institutions</td>
<td>0.120* (0.058)</td>
<td>0.331** (0.064)</td>
<td>0.156** (0.056)</td>
<td>0.295** (0.052)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience from the institutions</td>
<td>0.039* (0.016)</td>
<td>0.049** (0.914)</td>
<td>0.032** (0.0070)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled for education, age and gender of the leaders</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1368</td>
<td>1368</td>
<td>1467</td>
<td>1456</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Significant at the 1 per cent level, * Significant at the 5 per cent level


right. We are then faced with the paradoxical finding that leaders who are most concerned about privatisation have the highest trust in that institution (the church) whose leaders, according to Gulbrandsen et al. (2002), are the strongest defenders of the welfare state.

The leaders’ institutional trust is also affected by how they relate to the centre/periphery cleavage. Leaders who approve of continued economic transfers to the rural municipalities have more confidence in the Storting, the military services, the church, private business and in the trade unions. The associations between sympathy with the rural districts and trust in the Cabinet and the public administration are, however, negative but not statistically significant.

The two dimensions of ideological orientation have then somewhat
different effects upon the leaders’ trust. Particularly, those national leaders who back up the interests of the periphery have more confidence in private business than those leaders who are supporters of the welfare state. This is surprising. A possible explanation may be that private enterprises are important and visible sources of employment in the rural districts. These parts of Norway are dependent on the viability of a fundamental of small- and medium-sized firms, many of them family businesses with strong local roots. The knowledge about this reality may have influenced the trust of the strongest proponents of an active regional policy.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top leaders’ trust in other public institutions. Regression analyses. St. error in parenthesis. Non-standardized estimates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust in the courts of law</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideological orientation:</td>
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<tr>
<td>the private/public cleavage</td>
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<td>Ideological orientation:</td>
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<tr>
<td>the centre/periphery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian values</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>in other institutions or</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elite groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education, age and gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Significant at the 1 per cent level; * Significant at the 5 per cent level
The leaders’ trust in the courts of law is unaffected both by their attitudes towards the state and the public sector and their choice between centre and periphery. This result reflects that to a large degree the courts of law are above the ordinary ideological discussion in Norwegian politics.

It is not surprising that approval of religious values may foster a stronger institutional trust. Persons who emphasize the importance of Christian values hold more trust in the Storting and the trade unions than other leaders, a result in line with the findings of Listhaug and Wiberg (1995). At the same time Table 1 and table 2 demonstrate that a Christian orientation does not have any significance for how much the leaders trust the Cabinet, the public administration and private businesses. Listhaug and Wiberg (1995) thought that devout religious citizens would especially express support for order institutions. In our study, this idea is only corroborated with trust in the military services, but not as regards the courts of law. Leaders professing Christian values have no more trust in the courts of justice than leaders who express secular values.

Stepwise regression analyses (not reported here) show that ideological and religious orientation is the set of variables which explain most of the variation in the leaders trust attitudes. These variables explain 4 per cent of the variance in trust in the Storting, 9 and 6 per cent of the variance in confidence in private business and public administration, and 24 per cent of explained variance in the trust in the church.

An important result in Table 1 and Table 2 is that the interpersonal contacts between the leaders of the different institutions have a significant and positive influence upon their confidence in the individual institutions. Leaders who have frequent contact with leaders representing a particular institution have greater confidence in this institution than leaders with less contact. This finding supports the theoretical ideas and assumptions presented above.

However, there is theoretically a possibility that the causal direction between contact and trust is the reverse. It may be that those leaders who already had the strongest trust in a particular institution, also seek out the leaders of this institution more frequently. The frequency of their communications with other leaders may consequently be a result of self-selection. Against this interpretation it may be mentioned that the top leaders’ contacts with leaders of other institutions probably are closely related to their tasks and assignments. That is, their relations with these other leaders are institutionally determined and are a result of their own personal preference and choice to only a small extent. For this reason it is questionable if any original feelings of trust can be the main explanation of their contact pattern with representatives of other institutions. Moreover, the fact that the statistical associations between contact and
trust are systematically positive across all the different institutions also indicates that these associations are not a result of self-selection. In addition, the finding is exactly what should be expected from the general theory on trust and other empirical research about trust.

Tables 1 and 2 present results that suggest that the previous professional experience of the leaders affects how trustworthy they regard the various institutions. The more years they have previously worked in a particular institution or sector, the higher their trust in this institution. This relationship applies to all the institutions with one exception. Previous work experience from the church does not seem to influence the leaders’ confidence in this institution.

Again, it is possible that the causal direction is contrary to the preceding interpretation. For this reason, leaders who originally had strong faith and confidence in a particular institution may have been particularly motivated to seek employment in this institution. If this is the case, the statistically significant association between previous work experience and trust is a result of self-selection. Where an individual seeks employment is probably, to large extent, a result of his or her personal preferences and values. There is, therefore, all reason to believe that this individual’s confidence in a particular institution will affect his or her decision to apply for work in that institution.

In order to control for this possibility of self-selection I have carried out a two step statistical analysis of trust in the public administration which is not reported here. This analysis showed that when controlling for self-selection into public sector employment, occupational experience from public administration is no longer related to trust in that administration. In other words, the positive relationship between the two variables in Table 1 may be seen as a result of a reversed causation: trust in public administration provides the motivation to apply for jobs in this sector. But work experience in that same administration has no independent effect upon how much trust is accorded to it.

**Conclusions**

In a modern complex society, individuals and organizations are more than ever dependent upon the smooth functioning of various public and private institutions and systems of society, as for instance banks, energy production, the stock exchange, and aviation. In order to reach their goal both individuals and organizations leaders are compelled to have trust in these institutions and systems. The institutions and social systems themselves have, however, become more complex with the result that there is a greater risk for collapses in different areas of the social
infrastructure of society (Giddens 1990; Beck 1992). At the same time, this increasing complexity has made it more difficult for ordinary citizens, as well as for experts, to acquire sufficient understanding of the mode of operation of the relevant institutions and social systems. Faced with these institutions they are, therefore, more often than before left to act in a state of “darkness”. As a consequence, the individuals’ institutional trust has become more risky and less well-founded. Under these circumstances individuals having knowledge about the institutions concerned will be more able to consider whether it is safe to relate to them. It is reasonable to believe that the elites in a society will command such knowledge and accordingly will be better able to assess whether to accord particular institutions trust.

The preceding analyses have demonstrated that to a large extent Norwegian elites have trust in the main institutions of the society. Their institutional trust is, on average, higher than among citizens in general. The top leaders’ ranking of the various institutions according to how trustworthy they are, is however quite similar to the ranking among the citizens, with the “order” institutions receiving most, and political parties least trust.

Factors and circumstances that in previous research have appeared to have significant effects upon the institutional trust of the citizens affect the confidence of the elites as well. As in earlier studies of citizens, ideological orientation also emerged as an important cause of institutional trust. How the top leaders relate to the public/private cleavage as well as to the centre/periphery cleavage has significant impact upon their trust-giving. The effect of their ideological leaning varies, however, with the nature of the institution. Not surprisingly, the priority they give to a strong state vs. increased privatisation first and foremost influences their trust in political institutions and in private business. Top leaders favouring a large public sector and a strong state have more trust in the political institutions than proponents of a leaner public sector. And conversely, the first group of leaders have less and the latter more trust in private business.

Corresponding to other studies of citizens, support for Christian values is associated with higher institutional trust. This association applied, however, to only five of nine institutions.

An important objective of the present study has been to examine the influence of conditions which are specific to the top leaders and which have not received attention in previous studies of institutional trust. One such condition is that the top leaders in Norway are involved in an extensive network of contacts and relations with leaders in other sectors and institutions. This network is to a large extent a result of the cor-
A corporatist system of decision-making which is characteristic of the Scandinavian welfare states. The contacts which take place in this network are important channels for political influence, negotiations and compromises in Norwegian society. From the general theory about trust one would guess that frequent contacts with other leaders would pave the way for increased trust in these leaders. It could be expected that this trust is extended to those institutions which these leaders are heading. The analyses presented in this paper confirm this expectation.

The Norwegian corporatism and its extensive lobby activities bring leaders from various institutions, organizations and interest groups together. The purpose of all the actors participating in this system is to attempt to influence each other’s decisions, negotiate with each other and make compromises. An indirect, and not always quite visible effect, of all the ‘criss-cross’ relations seems to be that a higher degree of mutual trust emerges between all the elites in the system. Such an outcome may be of vital importance to the political stability of society as a whole.

I expected that the top leaders’ occupational experience from a particular institution or sector would foster higher trust in that institution. The first analyses seemed to support this idea. New analyses which controlled for the possibility of self-selection into employment in public sector, called that finding into question. These analyses revealed that there was no longer any positive effect of previous work experience in public administration upon the leaders’ trust in this administration. This result suggests that many of those persons commencing work in public administration already had a high trust in this institution.

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France: Political Mistrust and the Civil Death of Politicians

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The French word *politicien* has become pejorative to such an extent that one is hesitant to use it. To say *politicien* one uses instead what was once only an adjective: *politique*. The weariness in regards to politicians goes all the way back to the dawn of democracy. It appears at the beginning of the Third Republic in the following call for action addressed to Parisian electors by the Central Committee of the National Guard during the elections of 1871, just after the collapse of the *Commune de Paris*. This manifest merits reproduction here as an epigraph, as a sort of introduction to the debate on political mistrust. Five generations later this text keeps its original freshness:

*Commune de Paris 1871, Appel aux électeurs parisiens:*

“Citizens, Don’t lose sight of the fact that the men that could serve you the best are those that you will choose among yourselves, living your life, suffering from the same evils. Beware just as much of the ambitious as of the newly rich (parvenus); the former like the later obey only their individual interests and always finish by considering themselves as indispensable. Beware equally of orators unable to take action; they will sacrifice anything for a speech, for an oratory effect. Also avoid those that fortune has overly favorized, because too rarely, those who possess fortune are able to look upon the workers. Finally, look for men with sincere convictions, resolute, active, and having good common sense and an acknowledged honesty. Let your preferences go to those that will not manipulate you. The veritable merit is modesty. Citizens, we are persuaded that if you take these observations into consideration, you will have finally inaugurated true popular representation, you will have chosen representatives that will never consider themselves as your masters.”

*Hôtel de Ville de Paris, March 25, 1871, Comité Central de la Garde Nationale*

These recommendations have not been fully followed since one may count from the beginning of the Third Republic about forty major political/financial scandals. (Garrigou, 1993)
Low esteem for politicians when political life becomes a judicial chronic

In France political life has been since 1996 largely a judicial chronicle, as testified by a content analysis that I have done of one of the most prestigious French newspapers, *Le Monde*, which is read by almost the entire French political class. This newspaper has published during the eight years between June 1996 and June 2004, 2400 issues of the journal (300 issues per year). The readers of this acute observer of the top of French society have found articles and reports on political-financial corruption and scandals in more than half of these 2400 days. In many cases the articles concerning political-judicial affairs took long columns or even entire pages. In about 360 issues political financial affairs were presented on the front page. If a content-analysis would be done of other newspapers similar findings would be obtained. Television networks have also reported assiduously on the prosecution of political personalities.

In concocting a list of the most important actors in French politics during the period from 1990 to 2004, I have selected the 500 most visible and renown politicians having occupied prestigious positions (presidents, prime ministers, cabinet ministers, leaders of political parties, the most prominent deputies and senators, mayors of the largest cities, executives of regional councils). Of course, these 500 politicians have not been on the stage front continuously during each of these fourteen years, because of changing majorities and alternation of parties in power. I have found about 135 were somehow involved in affairs reported by the media, but only 115 of the 500 politicians have been officially investigated by judges. The exact figure depends on the definitions and criteria, and I must confess that the criteria has not been precise enough in all cases. For instance, how does one determine who is and who is not on center stage or how to choose the “largest cities,” given their sprawling suburbs. The figure given above of 115 is minimal, since it is almost certain that many other cases of wrong doing have not been disclosed. The proportion of more than 20% (115 of 500) may appear too high or low, but this is not the main point. What should be stressed is that most of these 115 dignitaries were inside or around the apex of power. Their high political position explains why the newspapers and weekly magazines have dedicated such an enormous amount of printed space to the intricacies of their investigations. French political life truly has been a judicial chronicle (but much less so than in Italy, and at a certain moment Belgium; a comparison with Russia would not be valid because the freedom of press in this country is not as well guaranteed as in France).

Among the personalities directly *mises en examen* (under investigation)
by the French judicial authorities or mentioned by the media prior to 2004 are the following: the current president of the Republic; the entourage and family members of the previous deceased president (François Mitterrand); a former president of the National Assembly; a former president of the Constitutional Council, (who was obliged to resign); a former mayor of the city of Paris; three former prime ministers (one was obliged to resign); thirty-two former cabinet ministers (two have committed suicide and one has been assassinated, probably to keep his secrets buried); many leaders of the main political parties; many mayors of the largest cities; many executives of regional councils.

Survey research conducted in the last three decades shows that two of every three French citizens believe that “most politicians are not honest.” In 1990 and again in 1998 the National Assembly decided on an amnesty for illegal financing of political parties. But, these amnesties have been condemned by a large majority of the adult French population with such severity that a new proposition of amnesty formulated in spring 2000 had been considered “harmful,” “insupportable” by the general public, as “a provocation which runs the risk of generating demonstrations in the streets” (several surveys of public opinion). The project of a third amnesty has been cancelled from the agenda.

The image that many parliamentarians give of themselves has substantially deteriorated under the Fifth Republic. To the following question asked by SOFRES: “As a whole, do deputies fill their function ‘more or less consciously’ or ‘not very consciously?’”, the proportion of those who responded “not very consciously” went from 32% to 52% between 1969 and 1999. To the question “Do the deputies play a key role?” the proportion of people believing that they did dropped from 80% to 68% between 1985 and 1989. At the same time, only half of the interviewed citizens judged that the deputies were “more or less honest,” the other half judged them “more or less corrupt” or abstained from responding (SOFRES, 1990, p. 66).

The suspicions of a large part of the public toward elected representatives are shown by the responses to questions concerning the necessity of controlling their properties and incomes at the beginning and end of their parliamentary mandate. A study by SOFRES conducted in 1988, found that 70% of those interviewed were favorable to such a financial control of government members; 67% for the deputies; 63% for the presidents of regional councils; and 62% for the mayors of large cities.

During the last two decades many books on the theme of corruption have been published in France: at least thirty written by journalists (most of which were very well documented), a dozen by magistrates, and at least eighteen by political scientists and historians. Several journals have
dedicated special issues to the phenomena of political corruption, as did for instance *Esprit* in October 1997.

Mistrust of whom? We can distinguish several kinds of politicians. First of all, mistrust of politicians holding power at any given moment. But if such mistrust persists in spite of the alternation of parties in power it becomes a chronic attitude. What surveys constantly show is the negative attitude of a large part of the public toward political elites in general, whatever their political bent. As already discussed in a chapter above on Europe, many voters do not vote for a party, instead they chose to vote against the candidates that they most dislike.

According to several surveys the majority of French citizens thought that “politicians do not listen to what the people have to say.” In 1996 a large majority believed that they were not represented by any political party (67%), nor by a union (77%), nor by a political leader (68%). Many had the feeling that “most” politicians were “corrupt.” This perception can be explained by the pernicious effects of an insufficient reaction within the political sphere itself against the black sheep. Through magnifying mirrors the media contributes to the diffusion of such perceptions but does not engender them. Sociologically however only a minority of politicians fall under the category of “corrupt.” We shall return to this point in the conclusion.

How high can the level of unpopularity of a president or a prime minister go without undermining the legitimacy of the regime? The level of positive public opinion dropped to less than 20% for the prime-minister Alain Juppé, and the level of negative opinion reached more than 70%. Nevertheless, such unpopularity did not challenge the legitimacy of the regime. But, if the gap between support and rejection persists, in spite of the alternation of parties and teams in power, does legitimacy itself not suffer? The experience of the last half century demonstrates that democracy can accommodate itself to limited, partial and fluctuating confidence even if mistrust becomes chronic and massive. Only rarely did the regime lose its legitimacy, as for example happened on the eve of the fall of the Fourth Republic (or in Italy in the 1990s). It is a difficult task to determine when a regime passes furtively from discredit of the “political class” to the discredit of the institutions themselves.

**Testimonies of political personalities and their rhetoric**

Political leaders are aware of the suspicion they arouse: “We must rehabilitate the political function and fight against the discrediting that weighs heavily on the political class” (Jacques Chirac, newspapers, November 6, 1994). The newspaper *Le Monde* replied to this comment: “Under the Fifth Republic justice is left at the steps of the presidential palace . . . the
chief of State is irresponsible in regards to common law . . . to do nothing is to accentuate the discredit of politicians, allowing the belief that government parties agree in order to bury affairs . . . ” (Le Monde, editorial, “Un président irrésponsable,” March 21, 1999). In a book sponsored by the National Assembly on the relationship between “politics and money” one reads that “the confidence of citizens in their representatives is shaken,” that “the basis of republican legitimacy is “undermined,” and that “elected representatives are “victims of rumors, insinuations and calumnies” (Seguin, 1994). Phillipe Séguin, as president of the RPR, declared to a seminar: “Each one amongst us is aware of the growing discredit of the political representatives . . . Is it necessary to uncover the cancerous consequences of corruption?” (newspapers, October 17, 1998). The editor-in-chief of Le Monde denounced “the cynicism and amorality revealed for fifteen years by the investigation of judges and by journalists undermines the trust given to the elected representatives and their parties” (Le Monde, July 14, 2001). The president of the Cour des Comptes, Pierre Joxe, suggested the adoption of a State agency in charge of surveying deals made by businessmen in order to “keep politicians from receiving a commission for themselves.” Are the words gangrene, cancer, or irresponsibility used by these personalities excessive?

A former prime minister judged a former president of the Republic in these vitriolic terms: “François Mitterrand was not an honest man” (Michel Rocard, Revue de droit public, November 1998). In an interview in June 1994 former president of the Republic Valéry Giscard d’Estaing commented the jokes concerning political leaders: “Corruption does exist. It is indispensable to extirpate it, because otherwise the political class would be eliminated.”

The Protestant Federation of France in a document entitled “Reflections on Corruption” declares: “The multiplication and amplitude of the revelations concerning corrupt affairs have profoundly tarnished the image of the political class and economic circles. When these affairs reach the ministers or the leaders of large industrial groups, one has the right to ask if the French society has not reached a profound evil that is corroding it from the inside. The shock between the world of social exclusion and of the ruling class, partially infected by corruption, is carrying serious consequences” (Fédération Protestante de France, 1998).

When in 1994 a former minister and mayor of Grenoble was arrested after “getting caught with his hand in the cookie jar” a socialist leader declared “the government is falling apart with five ministers under the magnifying glass of the courts” (Ségolène Royal, the newspapers, October 14, 1994). Considering the public opinion at that moment such a statement should not be considered as a polemical attack but rather as a diagnosis. A few years later an attentive observer of the political forum wrote:
“corruption has set the pace for political life since the end of the 1980’s: the state has mobilized the judges, and elected representatives have been condemned. Nonetheless, the movement has run out of breathe.” This statement was made at a panel on “la France est-elle un pays corrompu?” (Thomas Ferenczi, *Le Monde*, April 8, 2002)

Patronage, favoritism and nepotism are not unknown in France. They are undoubtedly one of the main sources of political mistrust particularly for those who are well enough informed. Seemingly, most of the French citizens, namely those living in rural areas, lack the necessary information. What should be emphasized here is that, according to one interpretation of the constitution, the president of the Republic has the discretionary power of personally appointing about 140 dignitaries to occupy positions at the peak of the public administration, or of the greatest public services. He also intervenes unofficially in the selection of the top managers of banks, insurance companies, and other prestigious positions in French “stateist society.” He can even appoint outsiders to positions in the *Conseil d’État*, in the *Cour des Comptes*, or in the *Corps des Préfets*. Dozens of examples have been mentioned by well informed journalists (Closets, 1977; Closets, 1982; Wickham and Coignard, 1986; Grangé, 1996). Hundreds of pages could be compiled with examples of patronage, favoritism and nepotism at the highest levels of the State. The editorial team of *Le Monde* commented the condemnation of one of the sons of former president of the Republic François Mitterrand, who appointed his own son as “official councilor for Africa” at the presidential palace: “Africa has been a family affaire (where) the *déli"es d’"initi"é* and easy enriching outweighs putsches . . . the picture that just came about under our eyes is insupportable: in the heart of the state, socialist and post-Gaullist networks associate with one another to enrich themselves by facilitating the trade of arms to countries already war-torn. This is a shame for France and for Africa” (*Le Monde*, editorial from December 24, 2000 entitled *Une honte pour la France*).

Looking toward the political arena the academician Bertrand Poirot-Delpech expressed a disdainful opinion of politicians: “political discourse serves to dissimulate and to lie . . . our Fifth Republic so profoundly monarchical is swarming with schemers . . . power is acquired and conserved by meanness and servility, misunderstanding and tricking . . .” (*Le Monde*, May 15, 1996). I cite this statement as an illustration of many other famous writers who have expressed their worry and pity over the behavior of many politicians. Classic French novelists have also painted figures of fictitious politicians, personages known even to the populace. It is difficult to evaluate the impact of this imagery on popular mistrust but is certainly not negligible.
Who’s to blame? This is an enormous and complex question. Some sociologists, philosophers and historians tend to blame the elites, as did Jacques Julliard in his “La Faute aux Elites,” 1997, and Michel Crozier in “La Crise de l’Intelligence: Essai sur l’impuissance des elites à se reformer.”

These testimonies do not single out France as an exception and similar testimonies could be given for neighboring countries. Such a similarity could be presented on two columns. There is an equivalent in Germany to what a former French prime minister said about a former president. The former chancellor Helmut Kohn referring to his successor, chancellor Gerard Schröder, said on the 23 of September 2002: “those who speak well on television do not need to be competent.” Is this simply a superficial polemic or reflective of something more profound?

A step forward in understanding the phenomenon of mistrust is to make a clear distinction between political skepticism and mistrust. Skepticism escapes the control of the political elites, such as pollution or health crises. Mistrust stems from the behavior of politicians themselves.

Political corruption always involves as partners politicians or high civil servants. Their interlocutors are frequently bankers, industrialists, managers of enterprises. We are referring here only to actors invested with political authority, because political mistrust is generated by their behavior, and not by the actions of the businessmen who often have no choice but to follow the requests of the holders of public authority, be it on the local or national level. For the delinquency of the economic actors see P. Lascoumes, Elites irrégulières, 1997.

The privatization of some state enterprises seems to be one of the most lucrative domains, where money and politics converge. The nationalization or privatization of enterprises frequently offers the opportunity, not only in France, to carry out skilled transactions in elegant and discrete manners. Governmental officers, in particular those in the financial nucleus of the State, completely escape the judicial authorities because their decisions are made by “discretionary powers” according to a subjective constitutional interpretation, not obvious to all citizens.

Being that we are not interested in individual cases but rather in what they reveal about hidden solidarity, clandestine practices, or the mentality of a minority of political elites, I shall abstain from presenting a gallery of top politicians, who through their scandalous behavior tarnish the image of the entire political class. Since most French laymen have neither the time nor the necessary information to make the distinction between the few weeds and the flowers, they have the tendency to allow the handful of dirty politicians to darken their entire perception of politics. Their tendency to generalize weakens the legitimacy of the regime.
Politicians are vulnerable because they are on the stage front and have many rivals and enemies. In politics, associated actors may become, from one day to the next, rivals rather than associates. Most of the time political history of every country is a history of competition between rivals. As remarked by François Bourricaud, who has concocted the notion of “associated-rivals,” in democratic regimes when the number of political actors is relatively small, as is the case at the summit of power and at the higher ranks of the political hierarchy, no one is capable of imposing his will in a durable manner to his rivals more or less equal, particularly when the outcome of political competition is uncertain (Bourricaud, 1961). To become the chief of a party the competitor must first defeat his rivals. To become a cabinet minister one must set aside several friend/rivals who aspire to the same position. Then the intrigues flourish. The example of the central committee of the Communist party in the Soviet Union, where rivals were eliminated physically, is not appropriate for our discussion because the notion of associated-rivals has a real meaning only in democratic pluralist democracies.

The competition among associated-rivals may take different forms depending on the social context. When a competitor obtains what he wants at the detriment of his rivals, and after behaves in an ingratiating manner with them, the former associates end up becoming enemies. In democracy the success of a politician is almost never total and definitive, because rivals are mutually limiting their power in situations of instable equilibrium. The relations between associated-rivals may be in some cases ferocious. One single person could become president of the parliamentary group or be appointed governor of the Bank of France, but many ambitious leaders can aim toward the same function. The competitors may follow the same road during a long period of time, they may even be good childhood friends, but at the crucial moment of choice, one, and only one, can be the winner, and all others are losers, even if temporarily. It is in this way that one could explain why very often illegal acts and corrupted practices may reach the ears of judges or of journalists by denunciation, generated directly or indirectly by former associates and partners-in-connivance or accomplices, who reveal previously well-kept secrets. As a good observer noticed “many affairs are not discovered by hazard or by unexpected circumstances but by a divorced spouse, by a book keeper who kept two parallel compatibilities and so on. Known and divulged corruption is only an infinitesimal fraction of the reality” (Mény, 1999, p. 138).
The vulnerability of politicians and of other personalities “politically exposed” became even greater in March 2005, when it was made known that the Banking Commission seated at the Banque de France controls, at the discrete request of the government, the accounts of ministers, deputies, senators, chief of parties and other public figures, even managers of state enterprises. Each transaction igniting suspicion should be reported but there is no public knowledge as to whom this information should be delivered. The political authorities have waited many long decades before taking this initiative. This decision, among many others, shows that the French State and many of its political leaders are able to react, even if late, whereas their Italian counterparts have failed to take such an initiative, which would have immensely facilitated the work of Italian judges in the 1990’s.

High and middle level bureaucrats may be considered as part of the political class. The literature criticizing the bureaucrats is so enormous that it is pointless to add any supplementary lamentation here. Of course, there are exceptions, as there are to every rule. The point to be stressed here is that there is a mutual mistrust between citizens and bureaucrats. The mistrust of the people is in response to the bureaucratic inertia. Here it would be easy to cite several dozen French political scientists and sociologists who have objectively studied this old malady. Certainly, it is to be found to varying degrees in all countries. “Only the European bureaucracy in Brussels could tomorrow outperform that of France!,” would say some observers in strategic places within the labyrinth of the European Commission.

We are concerned here with the top level of the political pyramid but we should not completely neglect the lower range of public bureaucracy. It is true that “one can live in France without having to bribe a civil servant” that “it is possible to never experience corruption personally and directly... (corruption) is not a fundamental characteristic of the political administrative system” (F. Medard, pp. 115-32). What citizens reproach to these modest bureaucrats is the tendency to manifest a kind of arrogance, which becomes particularly visible when they do not really seem to be competent. Such behavior generates frustration, but not necessarily mistrust.

The nexus judges/journalists and the civil deaths of politicians

A prosecution becomes a political event only from the moment when journalists report and comment on it. Revealing, interpreting and investigating by the media are a continuation of the work of the courts. The
so called “secret of judicial instruction” is too often a pretext for hiding political/financial scandals. In democratic regimes the alliance between magistrates and journalists is the most efficient counter-power. Even in France, where many judges are placed under the control of politicians, the journalists are the best protectors of the magistrates, who in turn, help the journalists in playing their role as objective informants and as opinion-guides.

Because they are so vulnerable most cases of political corruption arrive to the ear of the magistrates and journalists by denunciations formulated by political enemies, associated-rivals, partners-in-connivance and complices-in-pacts. Among political enemies the fight is played out according to the democratic rules, but enemies do not share secrets. They know how to protect themselves from frontal attacks. On the contrary associated-rivals are, in normal times, allies and rivals simultaneously, as factional leaders within the same party for instance. In some circumstances associated-rivals may become dangerous enemies because they can hurt each other by revealing secrets, notably about matters of corruption.

The tandem between judges and journalists has favored the appearance of a new kind of hybrid journalism: investigative reporting. These journalists play a double role. They exercise a control over the political and economic personalities, institutions, enterprises, and also control the judicial authorities themselves by reporting about the correctness of procedures, the courage of judges and their capacity to conduct the investigations (Charon, 2003).

A particular credit is owed to the editors of the weekly satirical magazine, Le Canard Enchained, which during the last four decades has brought to light hundreds of cases of abuses of power, corruption, nepotism and privileges, and which has described and explained many “mysterious affairs.” Because of its satirical bite it is not well received in the elitist circles for official citations and referential purposes. But as in Greek tragedy it is a chorus always proclaiming the truth, whatever it may be. This weekly magazine also plays a psychological role by buffering the frustrations shared by so many, particularly in the middle classes.

In the last two decades French magistrates have played a crucial role by denouncing and prosecuting corruption at the highest level of the State hierarchy. One of the main reasons for this role, assumed by magistrates, is related to the change in the social recruitment of a new generation of judges. Another important reason is the connection, the cooperation between magistrates and journalists, the building of a functional tandem between these two relatively autonomous actors in the highly advanced democracies. They need each other: journalists without magistrates are blind and magistrates without journalists are mute. Eric de
Montgolfier, one of the most courageous French prosecutors, declared that the press plays a protective role: “if we do not speak to them we run the risk of seeing the investigation smothered.” Another courageous prosecutor Thierry Jean-Pierre was coldly disposed of by the government when he was on the point of revealing an embarrassing scandal for top leaders.

To give one of the many examples of the impact of the media let us consider the newspapers from February 23 and 24, 2005. On the 23rd of February *Le Monde*, for instance, reserved an entire page for the announcement of the abandoning of the judicial prosecution of the former mayor of Paris, Jean Tiberi. This affair has been present in the media since 1978, when Tiberi was *mis en examen* for complicity in fraud concerning municipal contracts with various enterprises during many years for illegally financing his party and for personal money laundering involving some 49 intermediaries. The former mayor had benefited from the prosecution’s abandonment, but meanwhile has been severely wounded politically: he has lost the mayorship, been excluded from his party, seen his career ruined, and been perceived by some of his colleagues as plague-stricken. So, an affair which has lasted for 27 years has suddenly been smothered, but few people in the political circles, in the media and in the populace have been really persuaded of his innocence.

The following day on the 24th of February the same newspapers Headlined an embarrassing affair of the then minister of economy and finance and also pointed out, in a full page spread, that he got a *résidence de fonction* for which the monthly rent was higher than the annual income of the majority of the French taxpayers. We do not need to enter here into the vicissitudes of this affair. It suffices to stress that in a country where the housing shortage is dramatic the people have been extremely sensitive to the waste of taxpayer money for housing a minister who has been appointed with the specific goal of reducing public expenses. Dozens of reactions coming from political enemies, from neutral journalists, from academic circles and from concerned citizens have spread through the printed and electronic media. At this occasion the public has learned about the housing privileges enjoyed by cabinet ministers and other high ranking civil servants. This politician has not committed any illegal act, so there was no reason for a judicial prosecution. Nonetheless, the people were outraged, not by an act of corruption (to which they were well accustomed) but by a conspicuous privilege of the “rulers,” by a kind of politically unacceptable ostentation. It is for this reason that the media, feeling the popular reaction, has dedicated so much space to this affair which had been concluded by a forced resignation of the minister and by his exclusion from the political forum, at least
temporarily. This case is an example of the impact that the media can have even without the intervention of judicial authorities. In the following weeks the National Assembly, at the request of its president, abolished the old privilege of *résidence de fonction* in luxurious palaces of the Republic including the Versailles castle. Here we have the proof that political scandals revealed in mass media can be redemptive acts, and are sometimes useful for a healthy functioning regime.

Most of those who were amnestied, or have benefited from prescription or who succeeded to delay a formal and final condemnation are politically wounded. From the very first day when their name appeared in the media for corrupted behavior, their political credit and influence are abruptly diminished. Even if someone is not formally condemned, even if he is not in jail, by the simple fact of “being under investigation,” he is severely wounded and excluded from political circles, at least temporarily. A judicial prosecution or journalistic information are sanctions by themselves, damaging the prestige and authority of the politician, even if subsequently the suspected cabinet minister or mayor is found “not guilty.” In France, a non-written ethic rule and the jurisprudence oblige the incriminated holder of an important political position to resign immediately. If he is found not-guilty it is already too late, the damage has been done.

A vicious cycle is perceived by millions of citizens. Powerful politicians appoint the prosecutors who often protect their appointers. The entire French political class, friends and enemies of the supreme power, do not ignore this circuitous self-protection. The president of the Republic, at a moment when the president of the constitutional council was under investigation for wrong-doing, made a statement declaring that the president of the constitutional council has the right, as does any citizen, to be protected by a “presumption of innocence,” because until someone under investigation is formerly condemned “he should presumed to be innocent.” He received pay back, shortly after by a decision taken under irregular procedures by the constitutional council declaring that the president of the Republic cannot be placed under penal investigation by the *Haute Cour de Justice* as long as he is fulfilling his functions. This decision does not take into consideration that, according to the constitution, a clear distinction is made between wrong-doing as president and wrong-doing as a private citizen. This imbroglio has been discussed in dozens of newspapers and academic journals. It is clearly summarized by Arnaud Montebourg in his book *La Machine à Trahir: Rapport sur le Délabillement de nos Institutions* (see chapters “Irresponsable et Coupable” and “Un Président en Enfer”). Both presidents were experiencing legal difficulties, as Montebourg (p. 235) writes, “the wrong doings in one’s official position
help to protect the other in his own official position, as a mutual reciprocal service.” This was not enough. The general prosecutor of the Cour de Cassation, one of the highest ranking judges in France, who was appointed by the president of the Republic, had to come to the rescue to protect him from the consequences of an infraction of the electoral law. We have here three dignitaries at the summit of the State, each watching one another’s back. The hyper presidential system is constructed in such a way that this is possible.

Finally, a small proportion of guilty politicians are in jail. Partners-in-connivance establish transversal alliances, they protect each other. But such a connivance at the summit of the State has been frequently denounced by the French media. This led an important politician, leader of a party and candidate to the presidential election in May 2002 to recall in September 2001 that “the fish becomes rotten by the head.” Complicity-in-impact is another type of vulnerability. When a member of a chain becomes a loser, there is a high risk of scandal for the entire chain.

Such a vulnerability appears only in democratic regimes. In dictatorships corrupted politicians are less vulnerable, at least most of the time. Ironically, the blowing over of a political-financial scandal is, for a democratic regime, a positive act.

Judges involuntarily get a social promotion by prosecuting the wrong doers. They become popular because their task is noble, that is to fight against dishonesty, and to defend the democratic values. Some judges have become well-known and very popular figures, more visible than most politicians. They entered involuntarily into the sphere of social elites. (Roussel, 1998)

For various reasons politicians against whom judicial action has been carried out are never condemned formally. Some benefit from presumed innocence. Others are escaping thanks to shadow of doubts. It may happen even a connivance between influential politicians and accommodating judges. Many are escaping by prescriptions. Many have benefited from amnesties.

Nonetheless, most of those who according to the judicial vocabulary have been « mis en examen » or whose name had been mentioned in the newspapers for imprudence or wrong doings do not get off unwounded. The simple fact of being « mis en examen » by the judicial apparatus or to be mentioned in the media is sufficient to wound political personalities. From the very moment when their names appear in the newspapers, their political credit and their reputation suffers. Even if the scandal blows over, it always remains something in the public mind. People believe rightly or wrongly that there’s no smoke without fire. Many political careers have been broken because of a scandal, even if later their
innocence has been proved. When culpability is obvious the scandal appears as a redemptive act by itself. In the recent history of France dozens of politicians who at a certain moment have been under judicial investigation, have been excluded at least temporarily from the political forum, even in the absence of a formal penal condemnation.

How many politicians have been condemned to civil death? Depending on the concept and criteria that we adopt, the size of the French political class may be estimated permanently at 30,000 to 50,000 individuals (Dogan, 2003). The natural metabolism of the political class is about 1,000 per year (entry-exit). Only a small number of these individuals have been excluded from the political sphere for wrong doing or for political defeats, maybe a few hundred every year in the 1960s and twice that in the 1990s. Yearly, this is an insignificant proportion, but becomes more significant if it is considered throughout an entire decade. A few hundred every year become in ten years several thousand. Thus the biological renewal of the political class has been more important than the renewal by political defeat or civil death.

Considering all categories, from scientists to bishops, from footballers to lawyers and from the greatest industrialists to the union leaders, what is the position of political elites among the highest strata within the French society? To venture to reply to such a question we have to make a clear distinction between superficial visibility and actual achievement. It suffices to open a newspaper to find many names of politicians currently in power. But, if instead we open a book on social history we will find relatively few politicians. For instance, if one consults Qui était Qui: Les grands disparus du XXème siècle (Who Was Who in France) (2005) the proportion of politicians among all other elites diminishes shortly after their exit from the public eye. Among 8,000 names appearing in the second edition of this dictionary only between 5 and 8 percent belong to politicians.

There are several kinds of intelligence. The ability of politicians is not identical to that of a surgeon, an artist, an industrialist, or a lawyer. The shoulders upon which France reposes, with all her achievements and mishaps, are not primarily those of politicians. By such a distinction we may better understand why politicians do not remain in the collective national memory as long as some composers, writers or industry builders. This is true for all countries, excepting periods of deep crisis. Britain, for instance, was lucky to have a Churchill and France, a de Gaulle at crucial moments. Only a very tiny proportion of politicians are condemned to civil death by their own mistakes. But many more are destined to reach oblivion faster than most other categories of elites, excepting world-class athletes, who disappear even more rapidly.
Concluding interrogations

Most middle ranked politicians have an excuse. It is only fair to recognize that they lead a harassed life, particularly in their electoral constituency. Because their work is so fragmented, few of them succeed in concentrating their efforts into a particular domain, which would permit them to become true builders or creators. The most regretful aspect of such a life is that ones does not have enough time to think because they are obliged to talk so much. One reproach that cannot be made to politicians is that they are lazy people. On the contrary, they are worn out from all their duties. Electoral popularity does not necessarily imply excellence.

In a country where more than half of the national product is, directly or indirectly, collected and redistributed by the political class, such a redistribution is necessarily a matter of continuous discord. A wealth of empirical evidence shows that the majority of the people at the left side and right side have become skeptical and no longer trust the rhetoric of politicians, as indicated by a lower turnout at elections, by decreasing numbers of party members and by the humor with which the people treat the politicians and take revenge. Political mistrust denotes a disconnection between the masses and the rulers. People get skeptical and immunized.

Why is political mistrust spread more largely in France than in most other European countries, even though the political participation is not weak? In this country nearly half a million citizens are members of municipal councils. The capacity to defend sectoral interests is obvious. Cynicism and irony are strong weapons: when an unpopular leader appears on television screens in millions of households unpleasant reactions are instantaneous. To understand why mistrust is so wide spread in France it would be better to look at the institutional configuration. The French political system is the most centralized system among the advanced democracies. It is a hyper presidential system without counter-powers, without what in the United States is called “checks and balances.” This system was adopted in a crisis situation after the fall of the Fourth Republic and personally tailored for an exceptional man in exceptional circumstances (Dogan, 2005). Since 1968 France has experienced one of the most rapidly accelerated changes in contemporary social and economic history. But the political system built more than a third of a century ago has remained basically unchanged. Power is concentrated at the apex of the political pyramid to such a degree that instead of having a poliarchy, we have instead a configuration of interconnections, interlockings and clusters of networks. Such an overlap is the opposite of what Guillermo O’Donnell calls “horizontal accountability,” a concept
meaning that in addition to the vertical accountability (periodical elections) a political system also needs a mutual supervision between the various branches of government. The judicial branch is not protected enough against political manipulations of judges by politicians in power themselves threatened with being prosecuted. Even the Court of Accountancy (Cour des Comptes) who reveals yearly many dysfunctions in the higher strata of the public administration has not used its constitutional power as much as it would have been desirable. Obviously the printed media is free, but the electronic media is not entirely independent. The judicial branch is one of the least well greased wheels in the system of checks and balances. As a matter of fact in the last few decades politicians in danger of potential prosecution have displaced judges according to their own self protective strategies. The public perceive these manipulations and their perceptions are reflected in the empirical evidence presented in this essay.

In some countries the State is strong and the civil society weak. In other countries we observe the opposite: the civil society is much more vigorous than the State. In France, both the civil society and the State are extremely strong. Since 1789 the civic society has overturned the political system eleven times, and the history of this country is a long succession of crises, most of them beneficial to the civic society. The clash between the State and the civic society appears with particular clarity at the heights. The two elites, even though internally diversified, are distinguished one from the other by their recruitment and socialization patterns, except for the interlocking triangle of mandarins at the apex, where hybrids mesh: partly politicians, partly higher civil servants, partly economic managers. The periodical discord between these two elites generates political mistrust by waves. One may ask; Is France a true democracy with such a State centralization of power? The response is undoubtedly yes, for the very simple reason that the civic society is strong and democratic and limits the state.

This essay focuses on France, which may appear here as an exceptional case. On the contrary, there is not a single European country (except maybe Norway, see chapter by Gulbrandensen) nor state within the United States, nor single country in Asia, Latin America or Africa which escapes the phenomenon of political mistrust, largely and variously nourished by corruption and scandal. This is the political picture of our world today!
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Nigeria: Trust Your Patron, not the Institutions

JEAN-PASCAL DALOZ

ABSTRACT

In Nigeria, trust and mistrust remain a permanent and sensitive issue. This obviously concerns elite-population relationships or rather – when considering the personalized and particularistic aspects of political life- between patrons and their dependants. This issue of trust is also crucial when it comes to relations among “Big Men” leading factions cutting across communities. Emphasizing the lack of confidence in the institutions and the difficult question of reliance within informal clientelistic networks, this article proposes interpretations based on the study of socio-political relations in a long-term perspective.

South of the Sahara, trust and distrust remain a permanent and sensitive issue. The failures of many countries are often interpreted as being the consequence of the malpractices of dishonest rulers. This obviously concerns elite-population relationships or rather – when considering the personalized and particularistic aspects of political life – between patrons and their dependants. This issue of trust is also crucial when it comes to relations among “Big Men” leading factions. Finally, it also affects relations with the outside world. If Sub-Saharan Africa plays such a small role in international economic exchanges, this is partly due to the fact that foreign investors hesitate in committing themselves within an unsure environment where rules are uncertain and apparently always renegotiable according to fluctuant power realities.

Because of its exceptional size, its unstable history and its extreme levels of corruption, Nigeria is a very remarkable case for those interested

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1 I refer here to the corruption league table established by the organisation, Transparency
in socio-political relations south of the Sahara. Beyond the “Giant of Africa” cliché, which Nigerians like to endorse, it is very important to realize that we cannot place this country on the same scale as other parts of the continent. For instance, ethnic groups regarded as a minority in Nigeria are more numerous than some West African “nations”. This may be an asset, as is often asserted, but it must be acknowledged that many dysfunctions common in Africa are also frequently exacerbated. The mentalities and behaviour we are going to look at concerning Nigeria are not pathological. I would rather say that they are quite banal in this part of the world. But due to the exceptional size of the country, they are even more visible than in some other countries.

In order to understand how the issue of (dis)trust is raised in Nigeria, I think it necessary to underline two closely linked phenomena: the enduring primacy of particularistic ties and the ensuing weaknesses of institutionalization. I will consider these in turn. Then, in a third part, I will propose historical, cultural and instrumental explanations differing from standard interpretations.

I The enduring primacy of particularistic ties

Unlike expectations of developmentalist authors, even after 40 years of independence, African countries have hardly moved towards more universalistic types of socio-political relations. In Nigeria, infra-national identities (more particularly ethnic and religious) remain undoubtedly preponderant. National consciousness has just become juxtaposed to pre-existing ones but did not supplant them. Furthermore, divisions in terms of social roles or positions are much less meaningful than the vertical networks between “Big Men” (Daloz 2003a) brokers and supporters.
Many radical intellectuals have been trying to deconstruct these so-called “primordial” identities insisting on their sometimes artificial and instrumentalized nature. Yet they have rarely been created ex nihilo. Socio-political identities often depend on selective memory and possibly regroupings consecutive to external threat. Whatever the case, we have to admit that communal awareness is still very crucial, which unfortunately leads to frequent inter-religious or inter-ethnic violence.

Contemporary Nigerian history clearly demonstrates how, since independence, political leaders aspiring to national office have found themselves torn between their need to transcend the country’s ethno-regional divisions and their inability to operate politically outside. What ensues is permanent negotiation and, consequently, loyalties are constantly called into question.

A) From primordial solidarities to factional politics

In Nigeria, political life is spontaneously about fractions (based on primordial solidarities) and necessarily about factions (more precarious alliances cutting across communities). As a matter of fact, the pressures of political competition at the national level demand that political leaders surround themselves with an ever-larger number of dependants, beyond their own community reference.

Social relations prevailing at the grassroots level remain a kind of permanent model and ideal for Nigerians all over the country. Relying on strict calls of solidarity, they generally prove to be reassuring since they belong to a “circle of trust” where betrayal normally should not occur. On the contrary, as soon as the circle is exited, it is difficult to trust anybody. Outsiders are often perceived as potential abusers and it is vital to constantly remain on one’s guard when dealing with them.

Within factions, leaders often endeavour to cultivate this type of sentimental atmosphere and it may be considered that relationships at that level are culturally related to such principles. Nigerian political life is always considered in terms of loyalty and disloyalty. These words are omnipresent when referring to the vertical relations interwoven from the highest elites to the more modest supporters, going through countless intermediaries. The tie of kindship – and at a slightly less constraining level, community links – are still the best guarantee of fidelity. There is, therefore, a lasting nepotistic tendency.

However, factional relations are based on an ersatz of primordial solidarities. They certainly do not have the indefectibility of the latter. A

5 Admittedly, the term “community” is rather vague and may refer to more or less wider entities nevertheless significant from an emotional point of view.
client considering that he does not enjoy enough favours from his patron may look for a more generous one: hence, the relative fragility of networks and coalitions. Still, people try hard to create an atmosphere of *reciprocal trust*, emphasizing exchanges beneficial to all, and recalling the type of relation usually favoured among communities bound by the feeling of sharing a common identity.

The extreme multiplicity and inter-crossing of identities seriously complicates factional competition and the gathering of support. These would constantly appeal to all kinds of solidarities but in the long-run mainly to loyalty bargaining and to the distribution of considerable amounts of money as well as key positions – particularly related to the oil business.6

In this regard, the formation of political parties in Nigeria – an exercise that is often organized as a consequence of regime changes7 – offers a very good illustration. Ordinarily very small associations are created to regroup people sharing common micro-identities. Then we witness the formation of groupings that have enough visibility to be included in one of the major political organizations at the national level. In other words, small clientelistic networks, more or less isolated, endeavour to form larger associations, according to a vertical amalgamation process where power balance, unequal resources and presumed loyalties play a major role.

Let me give an illustration. There were no fewer than 215 official candidates at the primaries of the 1993 presidential election (that is over 100 for each of the two competing political organizations).8 Some candidates certainly are a bit naive or pretentious and have absolutely no chance of winning, but it appears that the strategy of a lot of them is to take a stand. Most of them are more or less conscious that their mobilization capacities are limited because of a lack of resources or identity issues. However, they aim at demonstrating that they potentially represent support wide enough to interest the main factions’ leaders. They

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6 The military elite (often in power since 1960) did not escape these logics. Whoever has power in the oil business may acquire enormous amounts of money, through informal commissions. Some army generals even arranged the filling of oil tankers at night in exchange for a deposit in their Swiss bank account.

7 On several occasions in the country’s recent history, the junta was to lift the ban on political parties in the perspective of progressive return to a civilian regime. That was the case for instance in 1989 and 1993. It was then necessary to create new parties seeking visibility. But the phenomenon of micro-grouping coalitions we are going to describe was already existing just before and after independence. Cf. Sklar (1963); Mackintosh (1966); Post & Vickers (1973); Joseph (1987).

8 Without mentioning the 71 other candidates previously disqualified by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) for various reasons.
frequently try to exchange the votes of the people they claim to represent for an official post corresponding to their ambition (and that of their respective followers expecting recompense). Bargaining starts at the very beginning of the competition and becomes extremely intense towards the end. Even for those candidates who have been eliminated at a certain stage, it is important to have given an image of a powerful patron whose potential should not be neglected in later negotiations. For their part, the “Big Men” at the top of the major networks try to convince innumerable sub-leaders and brokers championing various causes. These fragile clientelistic arrangements are extremely sensitive to political evolutions. For instance, realignment would quite often occur consecutive to the sudden rise of a major political actor.

B) Fluctuating loyalties

Like others on the continent, Nigeria is a country in which most of its people would claim multiple identities – each one of which is determined according to different criteria. The saliency of any particular aspect of this identity changes according to the particulars of a given situation. For example, when religious violence breaks out, people identify with members of their own faith. Thus, conflicts between “Christians” and “Muslims” momentarily override any other attribute, whether ethnic, regional or social. A similar process occurs when ethnic identities come to the fore. According to circumstance and what is at stake, a certain polarization will prevail (Nicolas 1987). This may be very spontaneous or at times the result of agitation aiming at reviving some crucial identities (pan-ethnic, etc.) on the instigation of various leaders.

Modernization processes are often analysed as corresponding to new scales of perceptions, to the discovery of distant competitors and possibly new cleavages which did not use to make sense in local communities (Peel 1983). In this regard, the feeling of being in a minority position may lead to the elaboration of new identities. Studying the attitudes of immigrants within Nigeria, Ulf Himmelstrand (1971) hypothesized three possible options. Either the outsider tries to be assimilated (even if this means giving up some external signs too obviously showing his community of origin); either he would endeavour to minimize differences and refer to a cross-cutting identity (saying for instance “We are all Nigerians” or “We are all creatures of God”); or he would try to upgrade the status of the dominated diaspora to which he belongs. These three possibilities might be combined according to circumstances.

However, according to my own research, a fourth option is more commonly preferred. It consists in joining those are closest to one’s original identity. If the community from which one originates proves to be
well established, it is likely to remain the claimed identity. When this is not the case, people will try to associate with the ones that are the closest to them.

This can be illustrated by referring to the issue of local associations regrouping Nigerians coming from another region than the one in which they live. In this case, strategies are all the more pragmatic as people find themselves in a weak minority position. Frequently, groupings of a very limited size are obliged to seek alliances with other ones in order to be acknowledged. The situation depends upon two factors: the distance from the area of origin and the size of the city where one lives.9

The farther the distance from one’s homeland, the more regroupings are necessary. This situation may lead to the creation of new identities (like the Easterners to refer to people coming from the South-Eastern part of the country).10 In a giant metropolis like Lagos, which totals over 10 million inhabitants, original identities were never to disappear. Yet, as several social scientists emphasized, they sometimes had to be rearranged (Baker 1974) (Barnes 1975). Conversely, but according to the same logic, the closer one gets to his homeland, the more refined perceptions are. The neighbouring environment appears in all its heterogeneity, whereas distant groups may frequently be amalgamated.11 If external threats or minority positions oblige regroupings, the absence of such factors exacerbates the most primordial collective identifications (Paden 1973) (Wolpe 1974).

To summarize, whether we have a sociological or a political perspective, it is obvious that collective representations remain highly particularistic. Admittedly, both social and political life developed at the

9 For instance, I discovered that in a city like Ife (medium size Yoruba city of roughly 250,000 inhabitants in the South West of the country), there is a “Local Union” regrouping all the people originating from the southern part of “Igboland” (South East). By contrast, in Ibadan (a South Western city totalling several million inhabitants) the people coming from the South Eastern area we just mentioned are numerous enough to be regrouped town by town. In cities much closer to their homeland, for instance in Calabar on the coast, they would join associations corresponding to even smaller identities (a clan) whereas in their own regional capital it is possible to find organizations representing the respective villages of origin.

10 Here, I would like to refer to the ambiguous but symptomatic appeal to “brotherhood”. It is striking to see that in a compound the word “brothers” is normally used between children born from the same parents (or even between half-brothers or cousins). Within a local area, it may be used to designate people from the same village. In faraway cities, this word expressing proximity and calling for (primordial) solidarity is likely to be used among people sharing a pan-ethnic identity or even a vague geographical common origin. Overseas, it may refer to Nigerianity or even negritude.

11 For instance, the term “Hausa” is a generic way to design any Muslim living in the Northern part of the country.
regional level, by the end of the colonial period, and then at the national one. But Nigeria was never to become a mass society and political relations can hardly be analyzed as organizations competing on an ideological basis and citizens. Obviously, this is crucial when one considers the question of (mis)trust. In this part of the world, there is no “erosion of confidence” as in “advanced democracies” (Dogan 1997) but a permanent and durable lack of confidence.

II The weaknesses of institutionalization

One of the important corollaries of the trends we have just analyzed is the rejection of a real State institutionalization. Nigerians still adjust very badly to formal and universalistic norms. Since political success is very much related to the capacity to please such and such a fraction/faction of supporters, almost on a daily basis, the idea of public interest hardly makes sense. And in a system where socio-political relations are so personalized, to expect some assistance from the State also proves meaningless. Either people are in a position to play on certain solidarities and to benefit from the help of top actors or they should not hope to get much from “public” organizations.

Consequently, trust in institutions, at the national level but also at the level of Federal States and Local Governments, depends a lot on who is concretely holding power. This largely explains why the populations feeling excluded and frustrated are eager to claim their own governments. The adoption of a federal structure brought some recognition and a relative autonomy to various ethno-regional groups. However, these requests are endless and the country has been divided into more and more member States and Local Governments. This certainly does not favour stability and national construction.

A) The State that does not make sense

In Nigeria, political exchange was never structured according to abstract and impersonal criteria through the development of political parties able to transcend identity allegiances or transactional arrangements. The constant reassertion of a “Big Man” status goes through the meeting of grateful client expectations and targeted favouritism. Admittedly, a proper institutionalization of the State would obviate the continuous need to have to display the substance of one’s power. If political domination

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12 Mass society refers to an atomization of populations, a homogenization of social behaviour and to the progressive disappearance of community structures. These trends are hardly observed in Nigeria. Therefore, I think that the term “masses” should be avoided.
became embodied in the recognized juridical universe of the bureaucratic State, political elites would no longer have to justify their prominence through the fulfilment of their patrimonial duties. What this would mean, however, is that they would have to accept both the supremacy of institutions over individuals and the temporary nature of their political eminence. Such is the price of institutionalized legitimacy. Maintaining a form of infra-institutional accountability presents advantages and disadvantages. Non-institutionalization leads to relative fragility. In a situation of (economic/political) crisis, the leader will often be considered as the one personally responsible. But infra-institutional accountability can also prove to be instrumentalized because the leader is constantly called upon (Chabal & Daloz 1999). By preserving a deliberately opaque system, where subtle and fluctuating loyalties prevail, particularistic links are maintained and exploited.

Nigerian “bureaucracy” is very revealing in this respect. Those holding key power positions are very rarely neutral actors. Most of the time, they only have their own interests or those of co-ethnic friends and patrons/clients in mind. They commonly seek to exploit the average visitor, except when they are dealing with relatives or allies.

In any case, it should be underlined that civil servants’ loyalty is seldom pledged to their administration in a Weberian bureaucratic logic. What is at stake here is the non-assimilation of impersonal norms. Officers do not consider themselves to be part of an overall structure. Neither do they look at the people coming to them as a “general public”. External observers have often realized that impersonal relations do not mean anything for most Nigerians (e.g. Peil 1976) since they live in a very patrimonial type of environment. Only those who have been in Europe or North America, for instance, seem to protest against the prevailing system and against the absence of reaction from the larger part of their countrymen who have never experienced anything else.

The more resources civil servants have, the more they are likely to consider their office as their little kingdom. But even low-level employees may control groups of “touts” hanging around administrative buildings, trying to act as unavoidable mediators. Their goal is to intercept people and to make them understand that the service or the form expected from the administration will not be delivered unless one goes through them. Many Nigerians, knowing full well that if they do not have a personal contact in that place, it is useless to try another approach, tend to accept this type of transaction, profitable for both the civil servant and his intermediary.

There is a kind of latent fatalism in this respect or rather a total incapacity to think that things could be different. Bureaucrats have power and abuse it. This is routine. People are less likely to criticize the system than to find an informal arrangement, generally paying for it.
Within an environment where central institutions never embodied protection nor providence, unequal particularistic exchanges remain understandably crucial and the survival of some people often proves to depend on them.13

B) Frustrations, separatism and instability

The Nigerian State is illusory because the rule of law is feebly enforced and the ability to implement public policy remains most limited. Obviously, public service remains personalized by way of clientelism and nepotism. On the other hand, as “neo-patrimonialism” specialists would show (e.g. Médard, 1982) access to the public institutions is important, being perceived as the main means of personal enrichment. This is why the issue of territorial unity is very sensitive. It is essential to enjoy some autonomy and not to be amalgamated with powerful neighbours likely to appropriate resources for themselves. The colonial period, although it was based on an indirect rule policy,14 had led to new territorial arrangements more or less respectful of prior divisions.15 Quite early, especially through the initiatives of Western educated local elites and of traditional rulers, new hierarchies among cities (some of them becoming administrative capitals whereas others became subordinate) were to be contested.

Any group placed in a minority situation within a politico-administrative unit will sooner or later claim autonomy. Hence, an endless fragmentation of political space through a process of “scissiparité” (Bach 1989): any new division bringing about a situation causing other separatist claims. At the local level, any community aspires to govern itself without having to share power, institutions and a territory with a rival group. One can only trust one’s people and it is important to be as close to them as possible. The problem is that those who used to be former allies vis-à-vis a third predominant group may suddenly become opponents, following the creation of a smaller territorial unit. Whenever a new Local Government is established, new headquarters have to be set up and this is likely to exacerbate fresh sensitivity and frustrations.

Central powers (especially military regimes) have often advocated the end of further territorial subdivisions. But it must be acknowledged that most governments did not succeed in preventing such a trend. At best, surveys have been conducted in order to understand the reason for violent outbursts and the claims for new boundaries. It should be stressed that,

13 This raises much doubt on voluntarist perspectives seeing civil society as the panacea. See Diamond, Kirk-Green & Oyediran (1997).
15 These, of course, having gone through considerable evolutions over centuries subsequent to conquests, etc.
from a national point of view, the increasing number of Local Governments is very costly. It means constructing new official buildings, recruiting more personnel. But, unlike the hopes raised, new arrangements rarely bring stability and often lead to new protests and disorders.

After a short period of celebration, problems are likely rapidly to occur. Many new Local Governments have to wait for years before being equipped with basic infrastructures. They often depend on the goodwill of the former headquarters to get staffed. Local patrons may donate vehicles, furniture and other essentials. This illustrates the important issues of localism, patrimonialism, ostentation and redistribution in the absence of a clear distinction between private and public spheres.

If these logics pertain to collective interests, it is obvious that movements in support of such claims are led by local “Big Men”, eager to obtain the new power positions to be made available in the case of a successful operation. This type of opportunity mostly benefits people lacking resources and having been unable to have a successful political career. A new Local Government, or for some, a new Federal State gives them a chance finally to fulfil their ambitions.\textsuperscript{16}

This issue of divisions must also be considered from the point of view of the elites at higher levels. During the second Republic (1979-1983) grants from the Federal Government were linked to the number of Local Governments in each State. It was, therefore, in the interest of Federal States to create more territorial units, since the money intended for the Local Governments had to go through them.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, though the official discourse emphasized the necessity to please a lot of communities, it should not be forgotten that this process also permitted a large distribution of jobs, which was something essential for the patronage policy of the dominant political party in each State. My own enquiries show that in many cases the “carving up” of the territory actually met the requests of powerful Big Men, eager to obtain made-to-measure local units,\textsuperscript{18} much more than divisions based on historical claims. This does

\textsuperscript{16} As it is very well described in the novel \textit{A State of our Own} (1986) by Nigerian writer T.M. Aluko. According to one of his characters: “Those of us who wanted new states wanted them primarily because we wanted to become governors and deputy governors, commissioners and corporation boards chairmen and board members” (page 171). This type of view does not only concern political careers but also academic ones for instance. He gives the example of lecturers who have no chance of becoming professor, dean or vice chancellor in their own university. Their only hope is the creation of a new university within a new territorial unit in their area of origin.

\textsuperscript{17} For instance, the number of Local Governments in Cross River State (South Eastern part of the country) was to go from 17 to 59!

\textsuperscript{18} That is encompassing precisely, according to their wishes, the sub-communities supporting them.
not mean that borders were completely artificial but that political effects (in terms of voting and local support) were taken into account.

I frequently met defeated candidates at local elections estimating that their only chance of obtaining power one day would be a split in their local government. Therefore, all their efforts were directed to this end. But if an intense lobbying is developed in favour of such fragmentation, counter pressure groups may also try to stop the process. Leaders of majority groups certainly have no interest in seeing the territories and the institutions they control being broken up, as this would weaken their power vis-à-vis their own opponents.

III Distrust: an analysis

Three types of interpretations are predominant in analyzing this type of situation. The first one is developmentalist. It posits that the progressive erosion of particularistic relations and the advent of a social, political and economical western-type model are ineluctable. Nevertheless, it would take some time to finally overcome traditional mentalities. The second type of analysis is the one favoured by neo-Marxist authors. In their view, a country such as Nigeria indisputably has a genuine potential but has been constantly betrayed by a “dominant class” exploiting populations and masking its own interests behind ethno-regional ideologies, instrumentalized so as to maintain its ascendancy.19 Thirdly, a lot of local scholars keep attributing Nigeria’s enduring crisis to colonization, considering that the artificial nature of the country would be a kind of original defect from which all major ills derive (e.g. Osaghae 1998).

I would like to propose a challenging interpretation, based on the study of socio-political relations from a “longue durée” perspective.

A) Historical roots

In Nigeria as elsewhere, the understanding of the relations between politics and social structure has varied over time. Yet, I think that studies on this country tend to underestimate the persistence of ancestral conceptions of power, which were not seriously eradicated under the colonial era – whose impact should not be exaggerated. As for the post-independence period, far from having consolidated a process of Westernization that would have begun in the first half of the 20th century, it has been marked by an evolution of politics that has followed predominant and enduring cultural codes. By this, I do not mean that there was no development but that the dynamics of the country have been very dependent

19 Classical works following these developmentalist and neo-marxist views are presented in my annotated bibliographical study (Daloz 1992).
on a matrix of deeply anchored perspectives, able to adapt to the contemporary world.

In one of my books on Nigeria (Daloz 2002), I look at the issue of political representation in this country on the basis of years of observation and enquiries. I also propose a new interpretation of its trajectory. Basing their analysis on anthropological and historical data, most scholars studying Nigeria have reached the same conclusion. Through colonial conquest, a number of political units and population groups, which admittedly did not live in isolation but differed in many respects, were suddenly put together. Proposing a detailed comparative analysis, I challenge this type of view by stressing a certain number of common features, which contradict the relative impression of heterogeneity often given of the pre-colonial era. Whether one considers the Bornu political model, that of Hausa cities derived from it, the system later predominant in the Northern part of the country after the “jihad”, the “classical” or militaristocratic Yoruba organizations, the necessity to “hold one’s rank” through redistribution within Igbo communities etc., differences are more a question of degree than nature when one precisely considers the respective elites’ modes of legitimation. It was all about appeals to primordial solidarities, loyalty bargaining and particularistic exchanges between patrons and their more or less reliable clients. A large confusion between “private” and “public” spheres, a weak differentiation of political affairs and the absence of genuine (State) institutionalization can also be noted everywhere.20 It will definitely be possible to discuss this generalization by putting forward some undeniable contrasts (for instance as regards accumulation). Yet, from a comparative point of view, similarities are obvious and should not be neglected.

Furthermore, it has to be admitted that the colonial era undoubtedly contributed to the Westernization of leadership and political authority. Indeed, British conquerors reorganised the territories, introduced a new language, a market economy, a new religion and a lot of other disturbing elements. However, it would be exaggerated to speak of a complete revolution. This is obvious when considering the perception of socio-political relations either because the indirect rule system contributed to the preservation of traditional arrangements or because the new rules and codes brought about by the colonizers were very largely reinter-

20 Power centres have certainly been created and enable the exercising of more or less effective controls over some territories. However, this does not mean that some of the political units under consideration were actually differentiated states if one is rigorous about definitions. On this question and the confusions resulting from too loose conceptions, see Chabal & Daloz (1999) Chapter 1.
interpreted and adapted locally. In fact, the British never tried to impose new types of politico-administrative attitudes to indigenous populations. Their preoccupation was rather to adjust pragmatically London’s instructions in order to fulfil their mission in the best possible way. Since the bureaucratic and political structures put in place were primarily designed to maintain order at the lowest possible cost and to ensure the profitable exploitation of the country, colonial officers tried to enjoy legitimacy by implementing a rather informal control over occupied territories.

Only the very first African generations educated in missionary schools were really, though not durably, to be exposed to the ideals of the European way of life (Kopytoff 1965) (Ayandele 1974) (Cole 1975). Inevitably, they were torn between the white man’s universe, which they tried to imitate – the latter considering them as poor and often comical copies of themselves (Smythe & Smythe 1960), and the rest of the African population which rejected them. The British, who were few in numbers, relied on these educated Africans, many of them serving in the administration under the supervision of a handful of white officers. In a few cases, they were even able to reach top positions (Olunsaya 1975). Everything was to change in 1890 when it was finally decided to colonize the hinterland. This so-called modern African elite was rapidly removed from higher posts, henceforth reserved for the whites. Angry at suddenly having lost their advantageous position, often the victims of racial discrimination, they protested in vain and in reaction were to turn towards the rest of the indigenous population. For the first time, those whose education had convinced them of the white man’s superior ways, found themselves proud to be Black. More precisely, they now wished to draw out the best of what Europeans could bring whilst assuming their Africaness. The policy excluding them from central administration was to exacerbate the White/Black cleavage and to incite them to join the liberal profession. They became (and after them their children) the medical doctors, lawyers, journalists that would be found at the head of nationalist movements, struggling for independence and eager for revenge.

Historical developments in the 1950’s and in the wake of independence represent a key-period in the demonstration of the very incomplete transformation of the formal political system. The latter was to simply lead up to a relative adaptation of mentalities but certainly not to genuine mutations. All in all, through resentment or more commonly because of their inability to abandon former cultural models, Nigerians were never to adopt a fully Westernized political system, characterized by the impersonal functions, rules and procedures. These foreign ideals, very superficially instilled during the colonial era, could hardly survive after decolonization.
When one accepts the ins and outs of this heterodox analysis, then it is possible to provide meaningful interpretations of the mental representations and of the recurrent attitudes that remain at the heart of Nigerian political life.

B) Trust, redistribution and political support

Factionalism and patronage constitute a considerable obstacle to a hypothetical Westernization. Under the Second Republic, some people looking for prebends did not hesitate to join three political formations successively, not caring at all about political labels or official programmes. The average Nigerian is always obsessed with the idea of “mixing with people that matter”. In the absence of a neutral State, the solidarity of one’s own people, or the protection of a Big Man, represent the only social security available in a merciless world. Nigerians are eager to follow leaders who claim to be successful and prove to be more convincing than others, in the sense that they have the means to satisfy at least partly the expectations of their dependents. Besides, as I have emphasized in many of my studies (e.g. Daloz 2003b), the extreme ostentation generally displayed by Big Men is rarely criticized. On the contrary, external signs of wealth and power tend to reassure putative clients, thinking that one may expect a lot from such showy personalities. Political representation is very much related to the expectation of particularistic redistribution by leaders and sub-leaders who are more or less trusted.

According to both his means and ambitions, somebody with a relatively good position must prove his generosity towards those who depend on him. Popularity and eminence are very closely linked to the capacity of satisfying them. Beyond the nuclear family, the first circle is the one of the extended family. It appears as essential regularly to give money to relatives, to contribute open-handedly to major expenses (births, anniversaries, weddings, claims of a chieftaincy title, burials, religious events) when the image of the group is at stake. People who have been to university, who enjoy prestigious and lucrative jobs (quite often after having been helped by their family who have so-to-speak invested in them) are particularly requested to take a major part in the family’s collective prestige. The second circle corresponds to those with no blood ties but closely attached to the predominant actor, dependent on him and ready to support him. These may currently be his tenants, neighbours, or local peo-

21 A formation such as the National Party of Nigeria, by trying to recruit people from all areas, finally imposed itself as a trans-ethnic organisation whose success was to attract a lot of opportunist members. However, the real selections took place at the stage of the primaries according to the usual particularistic ways. Cf. Joseph (1987).
people having become his clients. The third circle is that of the community, a notion that may refer to hometown people or much larger units.

When local leaders have enough resources, they are meant to take care of “their people”, donate public equipment, sponsor projects and contribute to the development of their ward or village. Their legitimacy will be all the greater if they manage to please a large number of people. At the very top of Nigerian society, tycoons behave in the same way, offering large amounts of money to communities, making up for government deficiencies and trying to attract supporters within their respective faction. Ignoring pressures and demands from those who try to exploit this relation of protection would rapidly lead to less respect or even real hostility, which would be disastrous for anyone with political ambitions.

If any selfish behaviour would be suicidal, in this type of environment, leaders, especially when they have a limited amount of resources, are constantly compelled to make difficult choices between the necessary redistribution to their people and the preservation of funds in order to reach their goals. It is thus all about knowing how resourcefully to manage one’s generosity.

In Nigeria, the prestige of communities is very much dependent on the interventions of their respective elites. Beyond the authority bestowed on them (due to traditional beliefs or more modern criteria related to their competence), the reputation of these elites is always undermined by the need to meet expectations according to one’s calibre. Those who used to be acclaimed may quickly be despised and even sanctioned when they fail to take care of their people (Peace 1979).

On the other hand, the communities are not at all concerned with the origin of the elites’ acquired fortunes so long as part of it is redistributed. Those who do not show themselves sufficiently munificent following their appointment to public office are ipso facto deemed to be “suspicious”. They are seen as either inept or selfish – neither of which is acceptable.

Beyond all the official speeches against kleptocracy and corruption, the embezzlement of “public” funds is perceived as legitimate if the

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22 Here, one should mention “Self help projects”, that is community projects realized under the responsibility of “Progressive unions” where potential or established leaders compete as regards propositions and financing. One of the main problems is that these projects frequently correspond to very communal logics. The lack of coordination at a higher level leads to aberrations as far as harmonious developments are concerned (Cf. King, 1988).

23 Virtually all Nigerian regimes have launched propaganda operations in support of greater probity. Can it be seriously argued that the “Ethical Revolution” under the Second Republic; Buhari’s “War against Indiscipline” or Babangida’s “Mass Mobilization
person involved allows his followers and his home people to benefit from them. He is likely to be denounced only by those left out. In this regard, the main objective is to obtain the largest possible part of the “national cake” — to use an expression which is very common in Nigeria — and to have one’s people profiting by it. When I worked on electoral campaigns, I often realized that if supporters cared very much about their candidate’s honesty and somehow trusted him, they did not view this in terms of integrity as such, but hoped that he would not personally disappoint them.

As Ken Saro-Wiwa (1991) rightly noted, Nigerians will readily applaud when one of their own political leaders appropriates millions in the capital city but will at the same time expect him to be scrupulously honest in the management of his village finances. Expectations of probity, therefore, appear to be limited to one’s kith and kin, the members of one’s community, but they obviously cease to apply beyond.

The history of post-colonial society shows that such a strategy of prebendal exploitation is mutually beneficial, provided those who profit redistribute appropriately. African States would undoubtedly stand to benefit from a more regulated economy but the main political and economic elites are able to use the absence of transparency as a most valuable resource. Such is the efficacy of the existing system that it has survived unscathed all generational and social change — adapting as it goes along to the demands of modernity. In an environment where informal compacts weigh more than institutional regulations, venality can thrive and evolve over time.

for Self-Reliance” and “Economic Recovery and Justice”, have in any way modified the rules of the political game in that key West African nation? An apparent adherence to the Western values currently in force across the world merely serves to obscure the perpetuation of the self-same informal political norms. In truth, a careful empirical study of the reality surrounding the publicity about corruption scandals shows that such charges are invariably deployed as political instruments. They do not indicate in-depth institutional changes.

24 In Nigeria, corruption is rarely centralized and it concerns the whole of the population: everyone, everywhere tries to benefit. Examples abound: in airports, each official (passport, health, customs, baggage, etc.) wants his/her cut, making progress to the exit an obstacle course. Driving from Lagos to Cotonou, for instance, the traveller is likely to encounter at least a dozen road blocks, manned by different police forces, various army corps, flying customs officers, local authority officials, etc., each duplicating the same control of “papers and documents” and transported goods — less, let us be clear, in the interest of safety than of extracting revenue from their power to obstruct further progress down the road.


26 Ken Saro-Wiwa was hanged, following a show trial, by the Abacha junta at the end of 1995.
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HIMMELSTRAND, U.

JOSEPH, R.


III

From Mistrust to Crisis of Legitimacy
Argentina: Economic Disaster and the Rejection of the Political Class

FREDERICK C. TURNER AND MARITA CARBALLO

Summary

The Argentine economic crisis of 1999-2003 caused GDP to drop precipitously and levels of poverty and unemployment to rise greatly. Although more profound, this crisis resembled three others since 1966, and it led Argentines overwhelmingly to reject the members of their political class. In 1999, the confidence of Argentine citizens in politicians and political institutions was already very low, reflecting in part the earlier crises and the fact that income distribution in the country had become far more unequal in the 1990s. Causes for the economic crisis include economic policies, political constraints, and the structure of Argentine society and values. Although some economic growth has returned under the presidency of Néstor Kirchner since 2003, the depth of the rejection of the political class is so great that it may lead to some change in Argentine values.

In 1999-2003, a profound economic crisis led to the almost complete rejection of the political class in Argentina. Policies of presidents Carlos Menem (1989-1999) and Fernando de la Rúa (1999-2001) led to a situation in which Eduardo Duhalde became the fifth president of the Argentine Republic in a matter of weeks, and Duhalde’s government was only able to stabilize the economy somewhat before Néstor Kirchner was elected in May, 2003. Data from Gallup Argentina in 2002 demonstrate that 84 per cent of the population felt that no current politicians represented them, while 87 per cent said that no party or political group
represented them.1 With one out of five Argentines unemployed, with social programs unfunded and misallocated, with tax revenues having dropped substantially after four years of recession, many Argentines feared that an increase in social violence would inevitably accompany the homelessness and the rise in criminal activity that had become so evident, both in Buenos Aires and in the provinces.

This situation that the Kirchner government inherited must be seen in both short-term and long-term perspectives. Remembering the broad changes in Argentine wealth in the twentieth century, Argentines have been tremendously frustrated, because in the 1920s they had enjoyed the seventh highest level of per capita wealth in the world. Looking back today over the decade from 1995 to 2005, Argentines are able to see that they overcame the Tequila crisis of 1995, and after that they enjoyed three years of rapid economic growth until 1998. At that point, however, the combination of an abrupt end to the inflow of capital and a drop in the value of exports worked to create an adverse atmosphere that economic policies could not correct, causing a major drop in GDP and an increase in unemployment and poverty in the following years. Argentines described this economic disaster as the worst in their history, so that it naturally led to the rejection of the politicians associated with it.

When viewed in a longer term perspective, however, the situation appears similar to three others that have occurred in the lifetimes of many Argentine adults who are alive today. In each, the leaders of the government have been discredited. In 1966 Arturo Illia, a president from the Radical Party who had been elected three years earlier, was ousted in a military coup, after he had been subjected to an intense campaign to discredit his government and after he had encountered numerous strikes and conflicts with the labor unions. In 1976 it was the turn of María Estela (Isabel) Martínez de Perón, who as Vice President had risen to the presidency with the demise of husband, Juan Domingo Perón, the leader of the Peronist movement who had been elected to the presidency in 1973. The most notable dimension of this case was the sense of incapacity with which the members of the political class — including the leader of the principal opposition party — recognized that they too lacked the solutions necessary to resolve the acute economic crisis and the institutional difficulties that a few weeks later brought an end to democratic government in Argentina. In each of these cases, the leaders of the government were thoroughly discredited.

Subsequently, the military governments (1976-1983) were so broadly

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1 “En política, la mayoría es independiente,” La Nación, June 30, 2002. The survey was conducted between the 20th and the 24th of June, 2002, and 1251 people were interviewed nationwide.
rejected that leaders of the armed forces started the Malvinas/Falklands War in a desperate attempt to stay in power, only to lose the war and to find that both the size of the military and the levels of military pay were cut dramatically. As a result, the institutional military became a thin shadow of its former self, now both unwilling and unable to take control of the country. Then, in 1989, Raúl Alfonsín, the President elected to power after the military dictatorship, gave up power to his successor many months early, as hyperinflation made his remaining in office impossible. The Menem administration was finally able to end hyperinflation, and Menem won reelection. He privatized a large part of the public sector, and at first many Argentines applauded the privatizations as a reasonable way to curtail large and sometimes inefficient state companies. But many were later to blame the privatizations and the excessive spending of the Menem years for increasing the public debt, for corruption in the privatization process, and for bringing on a recession at the end of Menem’s decade in office.

In retrospect, therefore, these earlier Argentine crises may have more in common with that of 1999-2003 than we would guess simply by looking at the events of these years. In each period, and in quite different institutional contexts, governments failed in their basic objectives, citizens suffered deep economic and psychological wounds, and they came to lose faith in a political class that was not able to meet their needs or their demands. In periods of economic prosperity, it may be possible for politicians to get away with preelectoral promises that are overly optimistic, raising the expectations of some sectors of society that their personal economic situation will soon improve. But, when these circumstances change and economic difficulties appear, it then becomes impossible to maintain social and political consensus.

To understand these crises of Argentine leadership in more detail, we may investigate whether the most fundamental causes are sociological. That is, do the causes relate most basically to the mentality of Argentine citizens and the structure of Argentine values? If this explanation is to be convincing, however, we need first to specify which values and which dimensions of society may be at fault, at least suggesting the causal paths between underlying social values and economic and political policies. Moreover, this explanation can only hold up if it passes muster in terms of comparative sociology. That is, through the large body of survey data now available on values in a variety of countries, we need to go on to ask whether Argentine values – and the patterns of values in Argentina – are in fact so different from those in other countries where no similar level of discrediting of the political class has taken place. Broadly, for example, many Argentine values are strikingly similar to those of Italy and Spain, countries from which the ancestors
of so many Argentines have come. Yet Italy and Spain have not experi-
enced the level of disaffection so evident in Argentina; in fact, these
nations are so prosperous that tens of thousands of the children and
grandchildren of the immigrants have returned from Argentina to them.
Since this is the case, how are we to interpret the exceptionalism of
Argentina? Fortunately, a rich sociological literature and ample survey
data can help us to answer this question.

The levels of Argentine disaffection

There are many yardsticks by which to measure the alienation of Argentine
citizens from the political class. As Table 1 indicates, Argentines have
exceptionally low levels of trust in politicians and in political institutions.
Two years before the resignation of President de la Rúa, confidence was
far higher in institutions of the civil society such as the Church or the
Ecology Movement than it was in any political institution per se. Some
5 per cent or less of adult Argentines expressed a great deal of confidence
in the legal system, the national government, parliament, political par-
ties or the civil service. Indeed, when it came to such vital components
of an effective democratic system as parties and the civil bureaucracy,
more than half of the Argentines said that they had no confidence what-
soever in these institutions.

Dissatisfaction is tangible in other ways, including ways that point to
how pernicious its effects could be. Two thirds of Argentine university
students say that they prefer to work outside their country after gradu-
ation,2 and large numbers of Argentines have already “voted with their
feet,” leaving Argentina to work in or to emigrate to Spain, Italy, the
United States and Israel. It has long been a sad reality that Argentines
who have achieved greatness in diverse fields of science, culture and
sports have emigrated to more developed countries, especially to Italy
and Spain, where the law gives European citizenship to anyone with a
parent or grandparent from these countries. But large numbers of the
brightest and the best trained young Argentines are deciding to emigrate
abroad, driven by the lack of economic opportunities in their own coun-
try that can provide the income or the opportunities for personal and
professional growth that they can find abroad. Thus, the economic and
social capital of the country is sorely depleted.

In order better to understand the significance of the Argentine data on
institutional confidence, the data must be seen in a comparative framework.
Table 2, for example, indicates great differences between Argentine atti-

2 These data come from Taylor Nelson Sofres, Buenos Aires.
### Table 1

Levels of Confidence in Basic Institutions in Argentina in 1999 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>A Great Deal</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Not Very Much</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecology Movement</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Forces</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Movement</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal System</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Government</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parties</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Values Survey, Gallup Argentina, with a national sample of 1280 interviews conducted in February 1999. The survey covers adults over seventeen years of age. Personal interviews were carried out in the home, with a level of supervision of 20 per cent.

### Table 2

The Levels at Which Citizens Expressed a Great Deal of Confidence in Basic Institutions in Argentina and Chile, 1990-1993 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Argentina</th>
<th>Chile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Forces</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal System</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: From the second wave of the World Values Study.
tudes and those in Chile, which shares a long border with Argentina. Data from the World Values Study suggest that Argentine attitudes are far more similar to those in Spain and Italy, the countries from which most people emigrated to Argentina, than they are with those of Chile. In Spain, Italy, and Argentina, about one citizen in four expresses a great deal of confidence in the Church, whereas this proportion declines to one out of ten in France. In Chile and the United States, this proportion reaches about one out of two. In terms of more directly political variables, the levels of confidence in the legal system, the police, parliament and the civil service are much greater in Chile than they are in Argentina, Spain or Italy, and this is true as well for confidence in private companies, in trade unions and in the press. Spain, Italy and France have not, of course, experienced the shattering economic disruption or the thoroughgoing discrediting of the political class that characterized Argentina in 2001 and 2002. But it is nevertheless thought-provoking to note that, just as institutional confidence in Chile was much higher in 1990 than it was in Argentina, so Chilean economic growth and stability came significantly to outpace those of Argentina from 1990 to 2002.

These contrasts become even clearer when the Argentine data are analyzed in a Latin American context. Table 3 compares institutional confidence in seventeen Latin American countries in 1998, that is, before Argentina entered into the recessionary phase of its economic cycle and a year before the end of Menem’s mandate. As the average confidence levels for these eight institutions shows in the column on the far right, Chile stands at one extreme, and Argentina stands at the other. Compared with citizens in sixteen other countries of their region, Argentines in 1998 had absolutely the lowest levels of confidence in the President, in Congress, and in the Police. For the judiciary, their confidence stood only one place above the bottom. Some Argentines are fond of pointing out that, within their own country, they have relatively high confidence in the Catholic Church, and in terms of comparisons this is true. But, when we look at the Latin American comparisons of Table 3, we see that once again the level of Argentine confidence in the Church is tied for the lowest level among all seventeen countries. The patterns evident in Table 3 certainly point to a critical lack of trust in elected officials that well antedates the contemporary crisis and that even came before the economic statistics had once again begun to show up as negative.

Naturally, at this point one wonders how institutional confidence in Argentina has changed over time, and the data in Tables 4 and 5 go far to answer this question. Coming from the four waves of the World Values Study carried out in Argentina between 1984 and 1999, these data point to unsuspected patterns – yet patterns that can be understood best in
### Table 3

The Levels at Which Citizens in Selected Latin American Countries Expressed a Great Deal of Confidence or Quite a Bit of Confidence in Basic Institutions, 1998 (in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Armed Forces</th>
<th>Police</th>
<th>Judiciary</th>
<th>Congress</th>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>56 Honduras</td>
<td>63 Ecuador</td>
<td>56 Chile</td>
<td>57 Costa Rica</td>
<td>46 Honduras</td>
<td>34 Uruguay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>88 Bolivia</td>
<td>57 Chile</td>
<td>55 Chile</td>
<td>59 Venezuela</td>
<td>49 Uruguay</td>
<td>48 Uruguay</td>
<td>41 Uruguay</td>
<td>34 Mexico</td>
<td>45 Uruguay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>88 Costa Rica</td>
<td>55 Ecuador</td>
<td>53 Paraguay</td>
<td>52 Brazil</td>
<td>43 Paraguay</td>
<td>41 Honduras</td>
<td>40 Chile</td>
<td>29 Costa Rica</td>
<td>45 Paraguay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>87 Guatemala</td>
<td>53 Nicaragua</td>
<td>48 Uruguay</td>
<td>48 Chile</td>
<td>41 El Salvador</td>
<td>41 Brazil</td>
<td>35 Paraguay</td>
<td>26 Paraguay</td>
<td>44 Honduras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>87 Paraguay</td>
<td>51 Bolivia</td>
<td>42 Costa Rica</td>
<td>41 Honduras</td>
<td>39 Panama</td>
<td>36 Chile</td>
<td>35 Mexico</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>83 Honduras</td>
<td>49 Panama</td>
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<td>40 Colombia</td>
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<td>31 Costa Rica</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>81 El Salvador</td>
<td>49 Paraguay</td>
<td>42 Mexico</td>
<td>38 Uruguay</td>
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<td>22 Honduras</td>
<td>40 Mexico</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>80 Colombia</td>
<td>47 Uruguay</td>
<td>41 Brazil</td>
<td>38 Mexico</td>
<td>42 Colombia</td>
<td>30 Venezuela</td>
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<td>20 Volvia</td>
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<tr>
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<td>79 Chile</td>
<td>46 Venezuela</td>
<td>37 Venezuela</td>
<td>38 Peru</td>
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<td>24 Colombia</td>
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<td>39 Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>78 Mexico</td>
<td>45 El Salvador</td>
<td>36 Bolivia</td>
<td>36 Paraguay</td>
<td>28 Nicaragua</td>
<td>28 Mexico</td>
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<td>20 Guatemala</td>
<td>38 Venezuela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>44 Colombia</td>
<td>35 Ecuador</td>
<td>35 Colombia</td>
<td>36 Guatemala</td>
<td>26 Ecuador</td>
<td>27 Bolivia</td>
<td>21 Guatemala</td>
<td>17 Colombia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>76 Venezuela</td>
<td>42 Argentina</td>
<td>35 Colombia</td>
<td>36 Guatemala</td>
<td>26 Ecuador</td>
<td>27 Bolivia</td>
<td>21 Guatemala</td>
<td>20 Venezuela</td>
<td>17 Peru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>75 Brazil</td>
<td>40 Mexico</td>
<td>34 Guatemala</td>
<td>35 El Salvador</td>
<td>26 Guatemala</td>
<td>27 Guatemala</td>
<td>19 Argentina</td>
<td>15 Ecuador</td>
<td>32 Venezuela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>73 Ecuador</td>
<td>40 Peru</td>
<td>26 Peru</td>
<td>35 Argentina</td>
<td>25 Peru</td>
<td>24 Nicaragua</td>
<td>19 Nicaragua</td>
<td>17 Argentina</td>
<td>35 Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>71 Nicaragua</td>
<td>37 Brazil</td>
<td>24 Panama</td>
<td>24 Panama</td>
<td>24 Venezuela</td>
<td>22 Ecuador</td>
<td>19 Peru</td>
<td>16 Nicaragua</td>
<td>33 Peru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>59 Argentina</td>
<td>31 Guatemala</td>
<td>23 Nicaragua</td>
<td>24 Nicaragua</td>
<td>24 Brazil</td>
<td>19 Argentina</td>
<td>18 Ecuador</td>
<td>15 Venezuela</td>
<td>32 Venezuela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>59 Uruguay</td>
<td>31 Honduras</td>
<td>22 Argentina</td>
<td>14 Costa Rica</td>
<td>19 Argentina</td>
<td>17 Peru</td>
<td>18 Argentina</td>
<td>15 Ecuador</td>
<td>28 Argentina</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The question read, “How much confidence do you have in . . .?” The percentages above represent those responding “a great deal” or “some.” In the percentages above, percentages ending in .5 are rounded upwards.

Source: Latin Barometer.
terms of historical changes in Argentina during this period. In both tables, which measure different degrees of confidence in the institutions, some (such as private companies and the police) have stayed essentially the same. Others, notably the Church and the Armed Forces, have seen confidence in them increase – in the case of the military, one supposes, because confidence was at such a low ebb in 1982, with the loss that year of the Malvinas/Falklands War and the end of the military government. Other institutions, however, have undergone a dramatic decrease in confidence. This is especially true for Parliament, the Civil Service, and the Legal System. From these data, it is clear that Argentine political institutions had lost their basis of citizen support long before the years of recession from 1998 to 2002. Instead, the economic collapse of the military dictatorship and the hyperinflation during the Alfonsín presidency were quite enough to cut institutions off from the confidence of their citizen base.

Table 4
Levels at Which Argentines Expressed a Great Deal of Confidence in Selected Institutions, 1984-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>The Percentage of Argentines Saying that They Had A Great Deal of Confidence in These Institutions, by Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ecology Movement</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The United Nations</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Press</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Armed Forces</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Women’s Movement</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.V.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Legal System</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Government</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parties</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Service</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The data come from the World Values Study, which has been conducted over the past two decades by the Instituto Gallup de la Argentina. The surveys were conducted in 1984 with 1005 respondents, in 1991 with 1001 respondents, in 1995 with 1079 respondents, and in 1999 with 1280 respondents.
Behind the profound dissatisfaction of Argentines with the political class lie important changes in income distribution, class structure and the situation of millions of families during the final years of the 20th century. Historically, Argentina had a large middle class and one of the most egalitarian distributions of income in Latin America, but what happened in the final decades of the century dramatically altered these realities, which in turn made family stability far more difficult for those in the middle and lower classes.

Statistics graphically document these changes in Argentine society. In 1999, the Fundación de Investigaciones Económicas Latinoamericanas (FIEL) published a detailed volume on the evolution of Argentine income distribution, including a study by Leonardo Gasparini indicating that income distribution in the country had been becoming more concentrated
since the middle of the 1970s. In 1963, the Gini coefficient for Argentina was 0.358. The coefficient remained about the same in Argentina for the decade after 1963 (being 0.357 in 1974), but it climbed in the following years to reach 0.417 in 1983, rising slowly but steadily after that to reach 0.439 in 1990. After a drop to 0.433 in 1993, the coefficient continued to climb, reaching 0.456 in 1998.

In other words, the FIEL study – which was done well before the crisis of 2001-2003 – proved that the tendency toward the concentration of income distribution antedated the economic policies of the 1990s and that it had begun in the middle of the 1970s, first under a Peronist government and later under military governments. Moreover, this tendency did not change in the 1980s under a government from the Radical Party. Probably the greatest cause of this increasing concentration of income came from persistently rising inflation, given the weak capacity of people on the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder to escape the deterioration that inflation causes in their real incomes.

The FIEL data also provide highly useful information on the Sen index of welfare, which combines the absolute level of income with the distribution of income. Having improved significantly between 1989 and 1994, this index fell slightly in 1995, when the Tequila crisis produced a short but important recession. In 1997 and 1998, the Sen index gradually improved once again. The conclusion is that, in terms of welfare, the favorable effects of economic growth offset the negative concentration of income up to 1998. This situation changed acutely after 1998, as recession combined with increasing income inequality to lower the welfare of the Argentine people.

Two other factors point to a continuing concentration of income distribution after 1998: increases in the indexes of unemployment and of poverty, which are, of course, interconnected. In May of 2001 the level of unemployment reached 16.4 per cent, and in October of that year the number of people with jobs was the same as that in 1998, when the level of unemployment had been only 13 per cent. That is, there had been no net increase in jobs for three years. By 2001, there were 2.5 million Argentines without jobs – an increase of one million since 1998 when the economy had begun to deteriorate. Moreover, by October, 2001 some 39 per cent of the people in Greater Buenos Aires lived below the poverty line, which represented an increase of 9 percentage points over that in 1998 and which doubled the percentage of 19.5 in 1994. In the outskirts of Greater Buenos Aires some 49 per cent of the people lived below the poverty line. Understandably, Argentines came to feel that unemployment had become of the principal problem of the country.

Reflecting these trends, the data in Table 6 demonstrate how much less egalitarian the distribution of income became in Argentina from
the stand-point of comparisons with other Latin American nations. In the early 1990s, the Gini coefficients of the inequality of household income showed Argentina to be at about the level of Costa Rica or Uruguay, with the inequality of distribution vastly greater in Mexico and Brazil. By 2001, however, the inequality of income distribution in Argentina approached that of Mexico, and it stood sharply higher than in the small and historically democratic republics of Costa Rica and Uruguay. Also, income distribution in Brazil and Mexico became somewhat more equal during this period, so that the trend in Argentina dramatically contrasted that in the two Latin American countries with the largest national populations, at least in this period.

Also, as appears in Table 7, workers were the great losers in the changes of income distribution in Argentina during the decade of the 1990s. The proportion of owners of capital in the total employed population of Argentine appears to have dropped significantly in this period. Yet the relative income of those capitalists who remained grew dramatically. Professionals and executives in Argentina were also far better off in 2001, and the size of this group expanded somewhat. On the other hand, although workers in the formal sector increased their share of income by a small amount, those in the informal sector lost out most severely. These are the Argentines without regular jobs, those on the margins of society, those who historically voted for Peronist candidates in the highest proportions. It is in these sectors where the impact of increasing

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**Table 6**
Gini Coefficients of the Inequality of Household Incomes in Selected Latin American Countries, 1990-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Early 1990s</th>
<th>Early 2000s</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>–2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>–1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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3 See Edgardo Catterberg, *Argentina Confronts Politics: Political Culture and Public Opinion in the Argentine Transition to Democracy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991), p. 77. In terms of voting intentions in May-June of 1982, the Catterberg data demonstrate that support for the Peronist Party was 13 per cent in the upper class, 10 per cent in the
unemployment was highest, and here the FIEL data reveal that the proportion of workers in the informal sector rose from 48 per cent to 68 per cent in 1997. Ironically, as Peronists many of them had supported Carlos Menem up to that time. The explanation for this continuing proletarian support for a president who had clearly come to favor the upper-income sectors may be that, despite the inflation that had already cut away the real incomes of the working class, it was not until the economic downturn that began again in 1998 that the working class felt the sharpest impact of unemployment.

It is important to note that these policies in Argentina were more extreme than those in the other large republics of South America. The data in Table 7, for example, contrast the experience of Argentina with middle class, 27 per cent in what Catterberg called the “structured” (i.e. formal) lower class and 42 per cent in what he termed the “unstructured or marginal” (i.e. informal) lower class. Expressed support for Peronism was in fact overwhelming in this group, because, at the end of the military dictatorship, many Argentines were still unwilling to express a party preference to public opinion pollsters. Within the “unstructured” lower class, for example, 11 per cent voiced support for the Unión Cívica Radical, 4 per cent backed other parties, and 43 per cent gave no answer to the question on party preference.
that of Brazil, the historic rival of Argentina for influence in South America. In Brazil over the period 1995 to 2001, the distance between the incomes remained greater than it was in Argentina, as the Gini coefficients of Table 6 also reflect. Nevertheless, during the 1990s, there was no great drop-off in the proportion of income going to the informal sector in Brazil, as there was in Argentina. This resulted from the different economic cycles and the different levels of unemployment in the two nations.

The data in Table 8 indicate just how severely these changes in income distribution affected public opinion in Argentina. In 2001, income distribution remained considerably more unequal in Brazil than in Argentina, yet 54 per cent of Argentines described income distribution as "very unfair" in their country as contrasted to only 36 per cent of Brazilians who did so. In Mexico, where the distribution of income remained more unequal than in Argentina in 2001, only a third of the people said that it was "very unfair." The explanation for these disparate responses appears to be that, since Argentine income distribution changed in the 1990s, Argentines found that the new distribution of income was especially unfair, and this became deeper when the economy entered into recession and the negative effects on welfare accumulated. In Brazil and Mexico, where income inequalities became at least somewhat less extreme in the 1990s — with Mexico benefiting greatly from the policies of the United States Treasury Department and the initially favorable results of NAFTA — citizens were less critical of the inequalities that still existed. In this context, many Argentines were particularly upset with the political class that had brought on these changes, their anger becoming

### Table 8

**Perceptions of the Unfairness of Income Distribution in Selected Latin American Countries, 2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Very Fair</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Unfair</th>
<th>Very Unfair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

all the more acute with the further degeneration of the economy and the lack of effective responses to this degeneration by the political class.

The abandonment of peso/dollar convertibility had further negative effects on poverty and on the distribution of income. In the first quarter of 2002, retail prices rose 30 per cent, and the inflation was greatest for the lowest socioeconomic sectors, where the cost of food went up by about 50 per cent. In part, this situation was mitigated through government policies, principally through providing subsidies to the unemployed heads of households. Despite a lack of transparency in the distribution of these funds, they nevertheless worked to lessen the impact of the devaluation of the peso among the unemployed and those in the lowest socioeconomic sectors.

As we try to gauge the impact of the prolonged recession, the devaluation and the default, one of their most exasperating legacies has proven to be their negative effects on the Argentine family and the once sizable Argentine middle class, two institutions that historically have been especially important in this country. Carmen Zayuelas, one of the leading survey researchers of Argentina, recently commented that the middle-class family was severely affected in the aftermath of four years of recession. Where the heads of the households have remained unemployed, children have seen that their fathers or mothers are unable to find work, so that respect within the family has broken down. The loss of family income means that the sense of security within the family is lost. The resulting blow was especially frustrating to members of the Argentine middle class, which was at least incubating in earlier decades, as the FIEL data indicate. Argentines once took great pride in a middle class that was large by Latin American standards. Similarly, they especially valued the family, as it at least provided more financial and psychological security than did other institutions of their society. Middle-class Argentine families once enjoyed a more comfortable lifestyle than did most Latin Americans, yet the repeated crises of the past three decades have made this lifestyle impossible to maintain for millions of Argentines, who have moved downward and out of the middle class.

Various statistics also bear out these increasing difficulties faced by Argentine families. Although divorce only became legal in Argentina in 1984, by 1991 some 3.8 per cent of the adult population was divorced.


Whereas in 1900 only 21 per cent of Argentine children were born out of wedlock, the figure rose to 44 per cent by 1995. These statistics clearly demonstrate the loosening of family bonds in the country, and this dissolution may be especially devastating in terms of education, which in the long run remains crucial for Argentines to increase their standard of living. As Ludovico Videla has written recently:

The damage of divorce is suffered principally by children and the mother, who have dedicated an important part of their time and effort to sustaining an enterprise [the family] that finally dissolves. This enterprise naturally took into account the investment in the human capital of the children, which under the new reality of divorce becomes impossible to maintain.

Historically, Argentine law has worked powerfully to make fathers financially responsible for their children, but the law can not insure support from fathers who have lost their jobs or for those who have fallen out of the middle class.

More broadly, the levels of poverty and of hunger have risen substantially in Argentina. Some estimates place the number of poor citizens at 15 million, something historically unprecedented in a country with a total population of only 37 million, with a large land area, with some of the most fertile agricultural areas in the world, and with a farming work force that has traditionally provided an abundance of high quality meat, grain, fruit, vegetables and wine at prices that were very low by the standards of Europe, North America or Japan. Although it has been in Greater Buenos Aires where the greatest numbers of people have been affected by the crises, the situation has also been especially difficult in some of the provinces. In Jujuy, for example, an Andean province next to Bolivia, unemployment is especially acute, and there began the movement of the *piqueteros*, people who block the public highways as a means of protest. These blockages have spread to other parts of the country, including the Federal Capital and Greater Buenos Aires. The *piqueteros* are themselves factionalized; some have made alliances with small parties on the left and with groups of Peronists, although most *piqueteros* still maintain political neutrality. They continue to disrupt the regularity of commerce that is necessary to provide economic growth and to meet popular demands in the long run.

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Economic policies

In the context of these profound economic failures, we should look for causation first to economic policies. Certainly, economic policies have failed to achieve their objectives over time, and it may be instructive to look at five policy areas in which problems have been especially clear: the convertibility law, privatizations, fiscal and indebtedness policy, the treatment of foreign banks, and the taxation of exports. While it is easy in retrospect to point to failures in each of these areas, that was less easy to do at the times when the policies were being conceived and implemented. Furthermore, the most instructive aspect of these policies may be not so much their outcomes as their origins, not so much their failures as the societal context in which they were conceived, a context in which it was very difficult for them to work effectively over a long period of time.

From March, 1991 until December, 2001 the centerpiece of Argentine economic policy was the convertibility law. Conceived by Economy Minister Domingo Cavallo, the law set one Argentine peso equal to one United States dollar, with Argentine government reserves in dollars sufficient to back up this convertibility at at least the 80 per cent level. The convertability law was part of a larger economic program that included liberalizing the price system, giving autonomy to the Central Bank, strengthening the prudential regulations that governed the activities of banks, opening commerce to the rest of the world, and resolving the economic situations that came with the Brady Plan, the privatizations, and the reforms of the state outlined earlier.

This collection of policies and actions constituted what economists call a “regime change” that allowed Argentines to end hyperinflation, and it helped the Argentine economy to grow impressively in the mid 1990s, leading many Argentines to believe once again in the promise of their economy and their country. Nevertheless, convertibility prevented Argentina from having its own monetary policy and obliged the government to maintain a very severe fiscal policy, since the Central Bank could no longer, as it had in the 1980s, print money to help the Treasury. In this situation, the policies were not pursued with the requisite rigor, so that the deficit persisted and was financed by increasing the internal and the external debt, which in the long run became a fundamental element in the crisis of 2001, as explained below.

The convertibility law reduced the competitiveness of the Argentine economy. Nevertheless, especially in its first years, the change in the economic rules of the game associated with Convertibility contributed substantially to increasing Argentine competitiveness for four reasons: (1) Stability made it possible to organize the economy in a more efficient manner than in the context of hyperinflation, and this increased productivity; (2) Investments and the opening of the economy to international commerce caused an impressive technological advance, although this caused a bias in favor of investors that hurt the level of employment and helps to explain the rising unemployment despite the rise in GDP; (3) The elimination of the majority of regulations, which had in the 1980s limited commercial and financial transactions (including exchange controls), made commercial activities easier and reduced the operating costs for commercial and productive activities; and (4) Financial integration reduced interest rates and opened access to credit.

Nevertheless, over the years it became evident that the economy lacked the flexibility to permit a major reduction in costs for companies, particularly given the drop in the prices of Argentine exports. But the most important element that affected the so-called “step backward in exchange” was the huge growth in public expenditures (particularly if they were measured in dollars), which was inconsistent with fixed exchange rates and whose financing required creating greater and greater public debts. Although Carlos Menem and some economists called on Argentina to make the United States dollar its national currency, the difficulties with convertibility were so great at the beginning of 2002 and the Central Bank’s reserves in dollars had been reduced so much by this time that the Duhalde government abandoned the policy of the fixed exchange rate, devaluing Argentine currency and moving to a floating system which in practice meant a depreciation of some 200 per cent in the value of the peso (after it had sunk briefly to a depreciation of 300 per cent).

This caused substantial and arbitrary reallocations of wealth in Argentina, enormously benefiting some citizens and causing great economic harm to others. Although demand deposits were generally in pesos, bank accounts (principally time deposits and savings accounts), loans and mortgages had been held principally in dollars, and the Duhalde government declared in January 2002 that these accounts were now converted into pesos. The same happened with public debt bonds in dollars, which were held by banks and by national investors, especially by insurance companies and by the administrators of retirement and pension funds. The public debt – and particularly that part of the debt held by foreigners – had been declared in default some days earlier by Adolfo Rodriguez Saa, the President fleetingly in office before Duhalde. By the last week
of March 2002, the peso traded as high as four to the dollar, so that those who still held their bank accounts in pesos had effectively lost three quarters of their money. On the other hand, mortgages could be repaid in pesos, so that – just as in the earlier periods of hyperinflation – those who could pay off their loans or mortgages in pesos made out very well. Renters and those people and companies with bank debts in the country gained to a large extent in the short run, while those with savings accounts, banks and the owners of rented properties lost dramatically. Private firms with offshore indebtedness also suffered heavy losses or defaulted. Overall, the abrupt end of convertibility brought the credibility of government promises into serious question. A great many of those who had played by the rules, those who had believed in governmental promises to respect the convertibility law, lost very heavily, not only in terms of their savings but also in terms of their faith in political leaders.

Another area where public policies have undermined public confidence has been the privatization of what once was a legion of public enterprises. At the beginning of the 1990s, many believed that reducing public enterprise was vital to making Argentina competitive in world markets. The assumption was that public companies were especially subject to featherbedding and to creating a price structure that responded to political demands rather than economic efficiency. As a result, the national railway net was broken up, and the national airline, the national oil company, and those once public enterprises providing natural gas, electricity and telephone service were sold off, in most cases to foreign companies. In the 1980s the majority of public enterprises made no profit; in fact, between 1984 and 1988 the average annual deficit of the public enterprises was 3.5 per cent of GDP, and it represented half of the national deficit. Also, in some cases public companies presented organizational problems or used obsolete technology, failed to invest, maintained excessive numbers of employees, and set rates with political rather than economic criteria in mind. For all of these reasons, at the end of the 1980s the provision of normal services had become precarious, providing difficulties for users and urgent demands for reform.

During the first years of convertibility, the initial impact of the privatizations on the economy was impressive: gas production increased 83 per cent, that of electrical energy rose 50 per cent, and the number of riders on the Buenos Aires subways jumped 65 per cent. In terms of international commerce, the volume of container traffic in the Port of Buenos Aires tripled, once the operating costs had dropped dramatically. Investments brought online 8,000 megawatts of electric power from private generators; installed lines for natural gas increased by 70 per cent; and the number of telephone lines in service doubled. In electricity costs,
costs to businesses dropped about 25 per cent, while household rates stayed the same or rose only between 10 and 20 per cent.

On the other hand, the privatizations also brought high social costs, especially for the public sector employees who were put out of work. Privatizations led to the firing of about 100,000 persons, which represented 1 per cent of the Argentine work force, accounting for about 6 per cent of the rise in verified unemployment between 1992 and 2001. Although the displaced workers generally received significant indemnification, there was no organized program to find new jobs for them. Left to their own devices to find employment, these people faced a situation that became more and more difficult as their indemnification monies ran out. While a positive consensus in public opinion at first greeted the privatizations, therefore, this was no longer true as more of their details became public. Argentines came to see that the privatizations had not been transparent and that there had been high levels of corruption in the sales of the public companies.

During the 1990s Argentina ran, every year, huge fiscal deficits, and the provinces also had large budget deficits. Under the convertibility law, the deficits were financed by issuing public debt bonds, which were sold within the country (to Argentine banks, to institutional investors and to people in general) and abroad (principally to investment funds and other institutional investors). Moreover, the Argentine government began an ambitious reform of the social security system of retirement pensions that included the possibility that workers could opt for investing their retirement funds in private companies. Although this reform implied less government spending on pensions in the medium term, it cut the current contributions of workers to fund the present payments to pensioners. The same reform recognized debts accrued in the 1980s that were paid by issuing bonds after 1992. These factors increased the need for state financial resources, and in part they explain the growth of the Argentine debt. Thus, when the recession that began in 1999 and intensified in 2000 and 2001 reduced the collection of tax revenues, there was a substantial rise of public debt to GDP.

As the debt-to-GDP ratio rose and worries about Argentine solvency increased, private external financing dried up by the second quarter of 2000. Two external events complicated the situation: (1) a change in the flow of capital which went more and more to the United States and Asia, making the acquisition of credit difficult not only for Argentina but for the other Latin American countries as well, and (2) a fall in the prices for Argentine agricultural exports, which make up much of the exports of the country, thus exacerbating the problem of the deficit and the perception of an overvalued peso. From then on, the fiscal deficit
and the rollover of the principal of the debt were financed by multilateral organisms (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Interamerican Development Bank), and private banks, most of them belonging to foreign owners.

Finally, during 2001, as the risk premium of Argentine debt skyrocketed and the level of bank deposits fell rapidly, Cavallo decided to reschedule the Argentine debt. This decision reduced even more the liquidity of the banks and their ability to return the money to depositors. Strictly speaking, it was because of the high liquidity of the banks in 2000 that the crisis was postponed. A vicious circle was created, as depositors withdrew their savings, the liquidity of the banks diminished, and the reserves of the Central Bank collapsed. At the beginning of December, the corralito (a prohibition on withdrawing deposits from bank accounts) went into effect and a few weeks later, after Domingo Cavallo resigned and Fernando de la Rúa left office a few hours later, the restrictions intensified. The suspension of payments of the public debt (a default) was announced at the end of December and, as was said with some irony, at the beginning of January, 2002, the peso was devalued and “convertibility” was abandoned.

In terms of faith in government and in political leaders, the corralito understandably incensed Argentine depositors. The government did not allow them to take all of their own money out of the bank, limiting withdrawals to the relatively small amounts that it deemed appropriate. Whereas this policy limited flight capital and the possibility of a run on the banks, while also reducing the risk of hyperinflation, it has also brought much economic activity to a halt and infuriated citizens with the restrictions placed upon their use of their own money, especially hurting the informal sector of the economy where transactions are primarily in cash.

In the long years leading up to the crisis of 2001-2003, foreign banks had seemed to perform very well. The convertibility law assured them that their loans could be recuperated in dollars, and annual loan rates ran from 14 to as high as 20 per cent. This situation has now changed categorically. With the end of convertibility, the default and the devaluation of the Argentine peso, banks have lost not only liquidity but also solvency, and some foreign banks have threatened, not only not to recapitalize their branches in Argentina, but also to withdraw from the Argentine market completely. From a borrower’s perspective, Argentines emphasize the substantial profits that the banks made before the devaluation and the end of convertibility. Furthermore, many Argentines believe that, in anticipation of the devaluation, the banks moved most of their dol-
lars out of Argentina, and that it was partly for this reason that the de la Rúa government was forced to create the corralito. But as of 2004, most of them remained in Argentina even though the bankers did not know what banking laws would be established in the long run. Depositors were very reluctant to make time deposits, while the leaders of the rest of the private sector did not need – and probably did not want – to take on new debt. This was true even though the corralito had gone on for some time and even though savers trapped with deposits in Argentinian banks had lost a great deal, both in terms of economic losses and of the loss of their confidence in the banks, the justice system, and politicians.

Finally, it is instructive to look at the structure of Argentine taxation, especially at the imposition of a tax on exports by the Duhalde government. The tax is easy to collect, since exports are easily measured, and the tax adds significantly to government revenues at a time when income taxes and sales taxes have dropped off substantially. Historically, this export tax recalls the taxation pattern under Juan Perón, who subsidized social programs by heavily taxing the export sector. Indeed, some Argentines have commented jubilantly that if the export tax is raised it can finance all of the needed social programs, eliminating the need for other taxes to be enforced so strictly. Unfortunately, however, export taxes are a classic, textbook example of bad tax policy, since they limit the sales abroad of those goods that a country can produce at a comparative advantage. In the situation of Argentina, the devaluation has made Argentine exports potentially very competitive, but the export tax undercuts the opportunity to bring more wealth into the country in this way. Like the other economic policies cited above, its motivation was conceived more in terms of political and societal considerations than in terms of economic efficiency; it was set up only for the short term, to protect against the potential risk that the normalization of international prices would restrict exports and leave the state insolvent.

**Political constraints**

As we turn to the political arena, one approach would be to look at the political motivations (or the political distortions) of economic policies in Argentina. One needs also to take into account specific dimensions and experiences of Argentine politics, partially in order to understand the difficulty and the complexity of politics in this country, but also to look more specifically at the linkages between political decisions and the norms and values of the Argentine people. In the words of an article in the *Washington Post*, it recently seemed “politically impossible for any
administration to take action and survive.” In this context, it may be useful to evaluate at least three dimensions of recent Argentine politics: the high salaries of politicians, the internal divisions within the Peronist movement, and the possibility that disaffection from the centrist elements of the Radical and the Peronist parties may lead to more support for the political extremes.

To take the case of politicians’ salaries, the policies here at first seem inexplicable, or at least paradoxical. On one hand, many Argentines criticize the high salaries and the “privileged” retirements of officials at both the federal and the provincial levels, especially when the economic situations of so many ordinary citizens have deteriorated so badly. To cite only one of the most egregious examples, in Formosa, the most impoverished province of Argentina, legislators appropriated for themselves salaries of 14,000 pesos per month at a time when the peso was legally equivalent to the United States dollar. In most other countries, the public outcry against such behavior would have prevented or reversed it, but in Formosa the salaries were allowed to stand. On the other hand, since the end of December, 2001, the top monthly salary of the ministers, secretaries and undersecretaries of the national government has been limited to 3,000 pesos, an amount far lower than a middle-level executive earns in the private sector. It is notable that Argentines do not raise the question of whether it is sensible that a high government official—in order to act honestly—must dip into his or her savings in order to enter the public service, or for such poor incentives to exist for recruiting people into high office, or for less ethical considerations to become by default the real reason that some may accept that office.

In another dimension of Argentine politics, splits within the Peronist movement also make it difficult for this once powerful organization to meet popular demands. Former Presidents Duhalde and Menem have remained at bitter odds. More fundamentally, an even graver problem has remained the nature of Peronism itself. Under Perón, the movement had championed the economic and political interests of the working class, and this class was electorally loyal to the movement decades after the death of Perón in 1974. Menem brought to the government coalition

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11 For a careful analysis of this loyalty by one of the key political advisors of Raúl Alfonsin, see Catterberg, Argentina Confronts Politics, especially chapters 7 and 8.
an important sector of high and middle-income economic groups, however, in effect turning a number of traditional Peronist orientations on their head while maintaining a surprising degree of support within the working class, which benefited greatly from the price stability that Menem imposed after the hyperinflation of the 1980s. Unions proved to be accommodationist, and this may be a fundamental reason why confidence in unions reaches the depths that appear in Table 1.

In general, Peronism in the Argentine provinces supported the processes that Menem began, but center-left sectors of the party resisted, including a small number of federal Deputies who split off from the party. In a way that is paradoxical – but one that also illustrates the instability of political coalitions in Argentina at this time – various Peronists that left the party joined the Alliance with the Radical Party, and the Alliance defeated Duhalde in the elections of 1999. When De la Rúa became the Alliance President, his Vice President, Carlos “Chacho” Alvarez, was one of these leaders who had split from the Peronist movement. The strains within Peronism that this situation illustrates have meant that the movement cannot offer the clear alternatives that it did from 1946 to 1955, thus raising further questions about the true orientations and motivations of a significant part of the political class.

Finally, there was a danger that economic deterioration might lead to support for political extremism in Argentina. With so much poverty and hunger in the country, and with the thorough discrediting of the leaders of the political center, Argentines could have voted in free elections for candidates on the far left or the far right, supporting those who at least promised to provide food and a modicum of income. In terms of the European spectrum of parties, Edgardo Catterberg is correct in his 1991 observation that “in the Argentine political spectrum, there simply are no significant leftist parties.”12 In the elections of 2003, there were three Peronist candidates, a traditional Radical Party candidate, and two former members of the Radical Party who, moving far from their party of origina, founded center-left and center-right parties that obtained important numbers of votes. In a positive sense this time, each of these parties supported the democratic system. But there exists the risk that, in the future, if candidates at either extreme were to win office, parties could coalesce around them. This makes it all the more important to investigate the interplay among politics, society and values in Argentina, especially in terms of the wings of the Peronist Party among which there has been so much tension.

12 Ibid., p. 54.
The structure of Argentine society and Argentine values

The development of values within a nation occurs within complex historical processes, of course. It would not be out of place to begin such a study in the Argentine case with investigation of the cultural influence of the Argentine upper class, a class that historically drew great wealth from agricultural holdings, having the leisure to enjoy that wealth both in Buenos Aires and in Europe. The wealth and activities of this class appear broadly in Argentine literature and even in classic Argentine films such as *Las rubias de Nueva York* (The Blonds of New York), one of the memorable films of Carlos Gardel.13 In this context, as Héctor Sanguinetti has commented, “Work was considered as something undignified and the character of the gentleman was displayed as a vaunted nobility.”14

The carryover of the prestige system from the era of the large landowners, the *estancieros*, reflects in the attitudes of many Argentines today. As Carlos Montaner writes for Latin America more broadly:

> The real tragedy in Latin America is that capital is in limited supply, and a large part of what there is, is not in the hands of real entrepreneurs committed to risk and innovation but in those of cautious speculators who prefer to invest their money in real estate and expect that the vegetative growth of their nations will cause their properties to appreciate in value. These are not modern capitalists but rather landowners in the feudal tradition.15

There are in fact “real” entrepreneurs in Argentina, such as those who have created fortunes while also improving conditions for their workers and building and creating endowments to support educational, scientific and cultural activities and to better meet the needs of those who are

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13 In this classic film, which gave rise to a famous tango of the same name, three blonds portray characters at the opposite extreme from the political correctness of the 1990s. The three (Peggy, Betty and Susie), whom we first see draped over sofas in the Manhattan apartment of the playboy that Gardel portrays, soon wake up with early-morning hangovers, and the first thing that the women do is to ask for more whiskey. Argentine films are diverse, of course, with social commentary strong in such later films as *Las aguas bajan turbias* of the Peronist era or more recently the prize-winning *The Official Story*. But it is nevertheless revealing to see that the image of Gardel is still highly prized as a cult figure in Argentina. Posters of him abound in the federal capital, and on numerous coasters for drinks appear still photographs from his films where women still swoon in his arms. In the statue of him by his grave in Chacarita Cemetery, Argentines still commonly place a lighted cigarette in the fingers of his hand.


economically marginalized. But still too many Argentines believe that economic growth stands exogenous to their attitudes and their behavior, that it is granted by some invisible hand, and that they enjoy an inborn right to its benefits.

Many Argentines also keep their savings abroad, and it is estimated that the total of bank deposits, bonds, stocks and property holdings of Argentines overseas now adds up to an amount equal to the national debt. This phenomenon is explained by the fact that Argentine investors feel that their investments are not protected in their own country, and this perception is amply justified by the fact that over the past two decades the Argentine government has twice defaulted on the national debt and at least four times changed the rules for bank deposits, the last occasion being that of the corralito. It makes little economic sense to invest money in the country when tax rules change abruptly, when there is discrimination against capital, and when the rights of private property are violated.

Argentine values are not against savings. The difficulty is not that investment capital is limited, although at times this has been true. As the huge sums that Argentines have invested abroad demonstrate, Argentines do save and invest on a major scale. What is limited is capital that can be invested in the short term. To cite one example, during the 1950s and the 1960s the tax system discriminated against agricultural holdings, and the result was a dramatic drop in agricultural production. A second example is the market for rentable apartments that was destroyed in the 1950s and 1960s by a regime that froze rents despite inflation, benefiting renters but bankrupting landlords. For the next two decades, very few rental apartments were constructed, which greatly hurt the construction trades and also prevented many newly married couples from finding an apartment that they could afford. It is thus government policies that have shaped the tendency of Argentines to place their investments in “unproductive” activities, putting their moneys in their “mattresses,” in safety deposit boxes, or in foreign countries.

Particularly in earlier decades, at a time when the state took a major role in the economy, many Argentines felt that the national government could become a “benefactor” of the people; indeed, many felt that the government had the obligation to do so and that they had a right to be the beneficiaries of the government. The successive financial crises of the state, hyperinflation and the debt crisis have changed the situation, however, precisely at the moment when poverty has been on the rise and when the need for aid to ordinary Argentines has become greater.

Another issue that helps to explain the rejection of the political class in Argentina is its corruption. Data from the Gallup International
Millennium Survey of 2000 indicate that Argentines rated the government of their country as substantially corrupt, placing Argentina somewhat even more toward the “corrupt” end of the spectrum than did the 1998 Perceptions Index of Transparency International cited by Lipset and Lenz in their study of corruption, culture and economic growth. As they document, there is considerable evidence that corruption lowers the rate of economic growth, increases income inequalities, and especially retards education. Throughout the final seven decades of the twentieth century, the growth of GDP in Argentina was vastly slower than most observers felt that it should have been, spawning a vast literature to try to explain why. These studies agree that corruption discourages investment, affects the security that the judicial system can provide, and creates an inefficient use of resources, therefore reducing the growth of GDP. From 1999 to 2004, income distribution became less egalitarian in Argentina, as much of the once large middle class lost its savings and fell back into a hand-to-mouth existence. As it did so, Argentines also suspected that political cronyism guided the distribution of public funds and that this too helped to destroy the middle class.

Corruption and economic decline are also affecting the chances for Argentines to build for the future through high quality education. In this field, Argentina has long benefited from widespread literacy, some public schools of extraordinary quality such as the Colegio Nacional Buenos Aires, and a rank in medical education and care that has led people from all over the world to go to Buenos Aires for treatment. These advantages too are being squandered, however, as funding possibilities decrease with dwindling tax revenues and as many of the best-trained young people emigrate abroad. Corruption here – along with other causes – has had negative effects, not only on the psyches of individual citizens but also on the prosperity and the institutions of the broader society as well.

Finally, it is important to see the recent frustrations in Argentina in terms of the high expectations that prevailed in the country during the 20th century. In 1998, while the overall economic growth of the Menem era still appeared to be strong, Felipe Noguera pointed out that “Argentina is a very frustrated society because it has long suffered a crisis of expectations.” Noting that the economic prosperity between 1880 and 1930 was followed by a period of sixty years in which GDP growth was low and macroeconomic volatility was high, Noguera went on to say that “So many years of frustration created an archetype of negativity, a world

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view of things being a disaster in Argentina.” Then, when the economic crisis actually came in 2001 and 2002, Argentines naturally interpreted it as a culmination of decades of frustrations and as a new and even catastrophic example of the volatility that they had long endured. Although many had thought in the 20th century that they or their children could live more like the leisured upper class, the reality for millions was downward rather than upward mobility as the new century began. Therefore, it was natural to question the most cherished values of Argentine society, since with these values the country had sunk so low for so long.

The Kirchner presidency

Coming into office in the aftermath of this crisis, President Néstor Kirchner established a number of policies that made him popular during his first year in office. In prospect, many Argentines did not hold out great hopes for Kirchner, since, in the first round of the presidential elections, he came in second to Carlos Menem but won only when Menem declined to compete in the second round. Nevertheless, as Table 9 indicates, Argentines had a very favorable view of their new president as he took office. About eight out of ten Argentines said that they had a “good” or a “very good” opinion of Kirchner at that time, contrasting sharply with the much lower favorable opinion ratings for Menem (in his second term) or for Duhalde.

Table 9

Favorable Images of the Presidents of Argentina at the Beginning and at the End of Their Presidencies, 1983-2003 (in the % of respondents who said that they had a “very good” or a “good” opinion of the President)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>At the Start of His Government</th>
<th>At the end of His Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alfonsín</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menem, first term</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menem, second term</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De la Rúa</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duhalde</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirchner</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: surveys conducted by TNS – Gallup Argentina.

Nicknamed “el Penguino” (“the Penguin”), Kirchner had served for twelve years as the Peronist governor of Santa Cruz Province, which lies closer to Antarctica than to Buenos Aires. Before the election, he declared that he believed firmly in creating a state that would be “protector and instigator,” and in the year after his election he worked to shift the Argentine state back in these directions. Kirchner moved immediately to replace the upper echelons of the military and the federal police, using rhetoric that revindicated human rights, social inclusion, and the transparency of government contracts. On August 21st, the Argentine senate voted to rescind two laws of the Alfonsin era that offered amnesty from prosecution for crimes that military officers committed during the Dirty War of 1976-1983. Together with the President’s reputation for personal honesty, these actions worked to bolster his prestige in the country.

Another positive element was a strongly positive rate of economic growth in 2003. Whereas the economy declined by 10.9 per cent in 2002, it rose by more than 7 per cent in 2003 and seemed likely to maintain this momentum in 2004. Even if Argentina continues to grow at this pace, however, it will not reach the 1998 level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) until 2005, and at the end of 2003 the Argentine public debt still stood at 143 per cent of GDP. Nevertheless, following policies put in place by President Duhalde and Economy Minister Roberto Lavagna, President Kirchner could point to dramatic economic gains during his first months in office. Furthermore, he has emphasized that – unlike the economic growth of the mid-1990s under Carlos Menem – the growth of the Argentine economy now must improve the situation of all citizens:

This time the Argentine recovery must encompass and help all the Argentine people. A recovery like the one we had will not do. Argentina grew in the decade of the 90s, I think in 1997 it grew by 7.5 per cent, one of the most important [years]. Nevertheless, the concentration of economic wealth became deeper and very few Argentines were better off and the majority was in very bad shape.... In Argentina that [pattern of growth] is definitely over.

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18 For background information on President Kirchner, see “Kirchner: President by Default,” BBC News, May 15, 2003, which may be consulted at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/ameriocas/2981797.stm.
20 For a thoughtful analysis of the causes of this growth, see José Luis Espert, “Claves para mantener el crecimiento,” La Nación, 28 de diciembre de 2003.
We must grow with harmony and responsibility, because we have sectors of our society that need us to create the mechanisms and instruments so that they can take part in this recovery.\footnote{Weber afirmó que la recuperación argentina debe regar a todo el pueblo,” Sitio Web de la Presidencia de la Nación, http://www.presidencia.gov.ar/presniaoficial/mostrar_news.php?id=703.}

The conditions of economic growth make it difficult to keep this pledge in Argentina, just as in other countries they frustrate attempts to secure higher earned incomes for the lowest socioeconomic status groups. But here President Kirchner takes a clear stand. Both he and former President Menem are Peronists, but Kirchner has sought to differentiate his administration from those of the past emphasizing transparency, social inclusion, and a more equitable distribution of the results of economic growth. During his first months in office, his government raised the minimum wage by some 75 per cent, so that at least in the short run he has worked to make good on his promises.

An important part of the economic growth of 2003 and 2004 was the “rebound” produced after the major fall experienced during the four previous years, a fall that had left great productive capacity idle. Month by month, this capacity was gradually brought back into service. This recuperation, which was led by internal consumption and to a lesser extent by investment, favorably impacted employment and tax receipts, which were crucial in order to finance social welfare projects. At the same time, inflation in 2003 remained initially low (about 3 per cent) after the jump seen in 2002.

These favorable elements should not obscure three dimensions of the economy that will determine its evolution. These dimensions are: (1) the reconstitution or replacement of the economic institutions destroyed in the crisis, such as the banking system and the negotiations with the privatized companies on rates and investments; here, particularly important will be negotiations with foreign creditors, relations with the International Monetary Fund, and the role of Argentina in Mercosur; (2) the evolution of commodity prices and international interest rates, since the recuperation of 2003 was achieved with extremely favorable conditions in both areas that will not be repeated over the long run; and (3) domestic limitations on the recovery, such as bottlenecks in productive capacity, inflationary pressures, or an energy crisis like the recent one that reduced Argentine exports of energy to Chile and Uruguay.

These three conditioning elements are clearly interrelated. When world grain prices are high and Argentine exports to Brazil are strong, it is
easier to meet internal demands and overcome bottlenecks. When the
damage done to economic institutions is repaired, the confidence of
investors goes up and this makes it possible to finance increased pro-
ductive capacity, which in turn mitigates bottlenecks and inflationary
pressures. What happens in these economic areas will influence Kirchner’s
political strategy and the levels of support that he receives. The great-
est risk is that results in these three areas could be negative.

Over time, the appropriate actions of the Kirchner government have
begun positively to influence the relationship of the government to the
society. Along with the short-term crisis in energy, there has been a rise
in crime that preoccupies many people, as public opinion surveys show.

The future: optimism or pessimism?

Is there a realistic chance that Argentines can turn around the crisis of
2001-2003? Some Argentines see the crisis as so acute that, if it is not
resolved, it could bring about a shift in fundamental values. For instance,
Fernando Oris de Roa, an Argentine entrepreneur, wrote in 2002:

We have a severe cultural problem. We cannot manage any institution of
public interest. We always choose our own short-term benefit in detriment
to the long-term personal and public interest.

Cultural changes are difficult. If they ever happen, they occur after extreme
crises. At this point I hope this crisis gets even worse, to the point at which
we may have to change our culture. I am afraid that, if by some miracle,
we come out of this one soon, it will only be to get back into a new one
in the near future, unless we change our mindset.23

At least the depth of the crisis has brought home the need for funda-
mental change to some of the most thoughtful Argentines, including
young college graduates who have decided to stay in their country rather
than emigrate. The recognition of the need for fundamental changes –
and change basically in the area of Argentine values – forms a sub-
stantial basis on which the nation could reform. In this sense, it may
be premature to say, as have Antonio Negri and other observers, that
a “rebirth of the Argentine spirit” is impossible.24

If a rebirth of Argentine achievements and the Argentine spirit are
to occur, however, Argentines must essentially maximize their strengths

23 Email of Fernando Oris de Roa to Frederick C. Turner, January 16, 2002.
24 Antonio Negri, “Toni Negri en Buenos Aires,” in Antonio Negri, César Altamira,
y Alejandro Horowicz, Diálogo sobre la globalización, la multitud y la experiencia argentina (Buenos
while eliminating the most detrimental features of their political culture.

James Neilson, a particularly thoughtful analyst of Argentine politics, wrote of his country that “All the ingredients for a vigorous and decent society are there. What is lacking is the ability to mix them properly.” Leaders are needed who can lessen corruption, increase economic growth, fund education and social programs, reduce poverty and make the distribution of income more egalitarian once again. To lead effectively, such people will need to inspire the confidence of the Argentine people over a long period of time. This is a very tall order in a nation where the political class has been as thoroughly discredited as it has been in Argentina.

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How Civil War Was Avoided in France

MATTEI DOGAN

Abstract

At the end of May 1968 France has found herself on the brink of a civil war. The role of key characters is observed as in a Greek tragedy. The crisis started in a flammable social contexture – a significant part of the population have been persistently manifesting deep mistrust of the rulers, the same faces again and again without responding to the aspirations of many social categories. A survey conducted immediately after the crisis by the author gives the voice to the silent majority and shows what could have been the behavior of the masses in the eventuality of a popular uprising or of a military intervention. The recourse to elections has mobilized passive masses and appears retrospectively as the miraculous solution to avoid a civil war by hushing the active minorities.

Keywords: May 1968 Tempest, political mistrust, silent majority, active minorities, Communist party, general strike, popular uprising, fall of charisma.

The history of modern France is mainly a history of crises. According to the criteria adopted, it is possible to count between twelve and fifteen major crises, each one having opened a historical period. The interpretation in terms of long processes given by the famous Ecole des Annales is not sufficient to fully describe most of these crises. The revolution of 1789 can not be understood without the economic and social trends which preceded it, but other major crises in French history request an interpretation in terms of historical turning points: 1830, 1848, 1870, 1958, and 1968. These major crises have been bloody, but the 1968 crisis saw no blood shed, even if it remains in the history of France as one of the most significant political earthquakes, at least in sociological terms.
France found itself on the brink of civil war at the end of May 1968. This analysis is based on two sources: the memoirs of the key actors who made history, and the results of a survey taken immediately after the crisis. The roles played by the leading historical actors resemble those in a Greek tragedy. The survey gives voice to the “silent majority,” and indicates what the behavior or the masses would have been if a popular uprising or a military intervention had occurred. The recourse to elections – that is, the mobilization of popular masses – appears in retrospect to be the miraculous solution by which the agitating minorities were subdued, and civil war avoided.

The crisis of May 1968 in France had not been predicted by any sociological school or ideological faction. It fell from the sky, so to speak, on a nice spring day, on a country in full economic prosperity, which during the previous ten years had apparently resolved all major political issues (constitutional reform, decolonization, war in Algeria, financial consolidation, and so on). This was a crisis without prophets. “I had not forecast what happened,” confessed the prime minister. It had not been forecasted, but it is still necessary to find grains of explanation. Retrospectively, it appears that a persistent political mistrust of the prominent leaders by a significant part of the population – at least 1 of every 3 citizens – constituted a flamable contexture. The decade of Gaullist rulership has generated a deep political polarization. Power was strongly personalized as never in French history since Napoleon. A substantial number of French citizens perceived de Gaulle as the source of all difficulties, concerning particularly the economic and social inequalities. The case of De Gaulle shows that even a charismatic leader may become some time later the target if mass political mistrust.

**Deficit of confidence by polarization**

According to surveys conducted by the Institut français d’opinion publique, during the Gaullist decade one-third of citizens were supporting resolutely de Gaulle, another third manifested repeatedly their hostility against him, and the last third, like an accordion expanding or contracting, according to the political circumstances, moving to and from the category of hesitators and abstainers.

Parliament has become a powerless institution. The gap between the aspiration of large sectors of the civil society and the possibilities to fulfill them was widening. A dusty civil code ensured the survival of old traditional norms. A significant part of the population aspired to what some sociologists call “pluralist liberal society”, and other social scientists call “post-materialist society”.

A clear distinction must be made between conservatism and tradi-
tionalism. De Gaulle was much more a traditionalist than a conservative. In a country where abortion was forbidden one in every four pregnancies was interrupted by a clandestine abortion, with many alienating consequences. One third of the marriages ended at that time in a divorce (in 2004 almost half) but divorced politicians and other prominent personalities were excluded from invitation at dinners at the Elysée Palace, under the influence of Mme de Gaulle. The government believed itself to be the guardian of the virginity of the female students. It is not by accident that the spark of the student revolt on May 3rd came from an apparently minor bureaucratic decisions taken by the then minister of National Education who forbid the visit of men in the girl dormitories on campuses. The extremist leftist students profited from the agitation generated by this antiquated ruling. Already in 1965 de Gaulle had fallen into a ballottage: he obtained only 45 percent of the votes at the first round of the presidential elections of 1965. Two years later “his party” had obtained a very narrow majority. So, there were a few early indicators. The fact that the crisis spread so rapidly across the urban population

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Too Concerned with His Personal Prestige</th>
<th>Too Authoritarian</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communists and revolutionary left</td>
<td>81 19 1</td>
<td>88 8 5</td>
<td>85 10 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialists and radicals</td>
<td>72 25 3</td>
<td>82 12 6</td>
<td>79 15 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Center</td>
<td>52 40 9</td>
<td>65 28 7</td>
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<td>Gaulists</td>
<td>27 67 6</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Moderates, independant, right</td>
<td>48 52 –</td>
<td>60 36 4</td>
<td>53 43 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Without political tendency</td>
<td>44 32 25</td>
<td>53 29 28</td>
<td>40 30 29</td>
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<td>Entire sample</td>
<td>59 35 5</td>
<td>69 23 9</td>
<td>64 27 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
The Fall of a Charismatic Leader

Do you think that general de Gaulle is . . .
and particularly in the intellectual milieu revealed a deep disenchantment with de Gaulle. The fact also that one year later in June 1969 a majority of the French people rejected his referendum, largely perceived as a plebiscite, denotes also that the previous charismatic leader has become progressively “l’homme à déboulonner,” the man to unbolt off his pedestal. The periodical of l’Institut français d’opinion publique, published during the entire period, brings a wealth of information about the declining popularity de Gaulle, beginning in 1965. It is not necessary to recall here this trend in detail. One indication should suffice. Between June 1965 and April 1968, through about forty surveys the majority of the French citizens declared themselves dissatisfied by the government headed by de Gaulle.

The leader had progressively become more authoritarian in tone. A certain arrogance in his attitude became more and more pronounced. Even cabinet ministers noticed it. There is not a careful study on this evolution. Of course the sneering reaction of people in their homes looking toward the leader on small screens has not left traces.

In a national survey conducted by IFOP in August 1967, only half of the interviewed citizens responded that they would like to see de Gaulle remain in power until the end of his mandate, that is until 1972; the other half preferred his resignation “as soon as possible”, or at most in one year. In the Parisian region only one-third of the people wanted him to continue in power. Between July 1958 and the first months of 1968, across some 80 surveys the gap between the number of citizens dissatisfied with the Gaullist government and those who declared being satisfied has narrowed progressively, with a small advantage for de Gaulle.

The hostility of part of the French people against de Gaulle is in fact an older phenomenon. Already in 1946-7 the two most hated politicians were the communist leader Maurice Thorez, and de Gaulle himself at the other extreme of the curve in the form of a U. From 1948 to 1953 the majority of French citizens did not want de Gaulle to return to power; only about one-third hoped for his return.

**Four days of tempest**

The tempest of May 1968 went through several phases that can be recalled here in a few words. The first phase (that of the student barricades), which began on May 3, ended on May 13 with a demonstration organized primarily by the Communist party and the Communist-controlled union (C.G.T.). They mobilized between 500,000 and 700,000 individuals. The most resounding of their slogans was “Ten years are enough!” The second phase was characterized by a degree of violence unknown
since 1934, by the rapid transformation of the student movement into a socio-drama and its subsequent ostracism, and, simultaneously, by an increasing unrest among the industrial workers. The third phase began on May 20, with strikes that spread with startling rapidity. The workers occupied the factories. Work stopped everywhere except among the purveyors of foodstuffs. Power was in the hands of the picketers and the strike committees. Some observers compared them to soviets. The country was completely paralyzed, with more than 10 million people on strike. It was the largest general strike in modern times. The general strike in England in 1926, which lasted for nine days, mobilized only 6 to 7 million people. The general strike in Poland in 1980 extended throughout the country, but Poland is a smaller country than France. It was in this quasi-insurrectional climate that the representatives of all the unions and those of the employers met with the prime minister on Saturday, May 25. This meeting lasted 36 hours, ending at 7 a.m. on Monday, May 27. An important agreement was reached. One detail gives an idea of the political tension that prevailed at this meeting. The prime minister leaned toward one of his collaborators and said in an undertone: “Make sure that there are no keys in the locks; I don’t want to be incarcerated here.” One hour after the end of this meeting, the two most popular leaders of the C.G.T., Benoit Frachon and Georges Séguy, appeared before an assembly of 25,000 strikers at the Renault factory and set before them the terms of the agreement with the prime minister. They stressed the importance of the concessions they had obtained, yet “the workers unanimously opted for the continuation of the strike” (Séguy, p. 117); consequently, the agreement was rejected.

The Communist leaders were no longer in control of the situation. The news spread like wildfire throughout France, and in a large number of factories the assemblies of strikers decided in their turn to continue the strike. What a splendid illustration of the dynamics of social conflict! The shadow of Rosa Luxemburg lowered over the assemblies of strikers: a general strike as the first step toward revolution. The situation became explosive. Here is how the chief of police perceived it: “These giants – the government, the C.G.T., the Communist party, the socialist left, and the Gaullists – are here in the dark, like wild beasts who scrutinize each other in silence before joining battle. None of them is sure of his strength. We are truly on the razor’s edge” (Grimaud, p. 291). On the following day a new wild beast sprang from the shadows to join the fray – the army.

In this essay I refer exclusively to the fourth and last phase, the most dramatic, when France found itself on the brink of the abyss and almost fell. Only four days will be considered here: from Monday, May 27 to
Thursday, May 30. In the manner of a Greek tragedy, these four days constitute a unity of time.

By checking each testimony against all the others, the historian can now ascertain what happened at every minute during these days. One has the impression that almost the entire truth is known; the political leaders became transparent.

I intend to reply here to this double question: Was France really on the brink of civil war during the last days or May 1968, and, if so, how was civil war avoided? To do this I choose to confront the testimonies and the confessions of the principal actors with the results of a survey taken right after the crisis, before the dust had settled. This survey gave a voice to the active minorities and to the silent, anonymous majority.

After the blow had fallen, the “crisis” was covered by an immense literature: 1200 books, essays, and articles (not counting, obviously, the thousands of articles that appeared in magazines throughout the world). There is no self-respecting French sociologist who has not written a book or an article on the “crisis,” most of them focusing on the student agitation. Much has been written with imagination but with little substance. Most of these publications – there are notable exceptions – are now buried in the libraries and will be used tomorrow for a study, not on the “Crisis,” but on the alienation of a certain intelligentsia and the futility of words; on the utopia of “groupuscules” of youths and on the frustration and anomie of large sectors in a so-called consumer society. But the essential reason for the oblivion into which this literature has fallen is the publication, many years later, of testimonies and memoirs of some of the most important actors, those who actually made history, especially the following:

5. One of the most intimate collaborators of the prime minister in May 1968 (and later general secretary of the Presidency of the Republic, and after prime minister himself), Edouard Balladur, 1979, *L’arbre de mai*; Paris, Marcel Jullian.

To these testimonies made by key actors themselves must be added important testimonies published by acute eyewitnesses:

(2) Aron, Raymond, 1968, La révolution introuvable, Paris, Fayard, p. 168
(4) Barjonet, André, 1968, La révolution trahie, Paris, Didier.

These are the sources I shall cite. I shall quote also from books written by journalists, which, having been published shortly after the crisis, contain some gross errors, but also a wealth of information based on interviews with important politicians: J.R. Tournoux, Le mois de mai du Général (Plon, 1968) and Pierre Viansson-Ponte, Histoire de la République Gaullienne, (Fayard, 1971) (the second volume covers the period 1962-1969).

Only one testimony is missing: that of Charles de Gaulle himself. His most faithful aide-de-camp urged him in 1970 to write his interpretation of the crisis before continuing with his Mémoires, which would cover a decade. “Why should I do so?” asked de Gaulle. The aide-de-camp courageously replied that there were those who wanted to give a tendentious interpretation: “According to this interpretation you were completely out of the picture, you came forward to reap the benefits of actions carried out by others without you and even without your knowledge” (Jean
d’Escrienne, *De Gaulle de loin et de près*, Plon, 1978, p. 135). It is true that de Gaulle admitted in his famous speech of May 30, and later in June, that he had “considered all possibilities,” from resignation to military intervention.


I shall condense in a few pages what I found to be most significant in thousands of pages. Better to give the floor to the makers of history themselves, rather than to paraphrase them.

**De Gaulle: a statue in clay**

On May 24 de Gaulle made a speech which, according to almost all politicians, journalists, and demonstrators had been perceived as a failure. I cite here only one among many testimonies “Old, the general engaged himself in pseudo-philosophical considerations, the same inconsistent palavers usually made by street people (Aron, 1983; p. 473). On the afternoon of May 28, general de Gaulle received several close followers. They found him bitter, discouraged, and broken. The previous day Mme de Gaulle, in an official car, had been recognized and insulted at a red light by the driver of a luxury car. It seems that this unpleasant incident had a marked psychological effect on de Gaulle himself. His son-in-law said as much.

An important demonstration organized by the Communist party and the Communist-oriented union was announced for the following day. According to unfounded rumors, the Communist party intended to occupy some official buildings, and even to attack the Elysée palace.

De Gaulle had set an appointment with the prime minister for an unusual hour, after dinner. About this meeting we have no detailed testimony. De Gaulle said nothing, and Pompidou was always very vague about it. In the president’s entourage it has been suggested that this discussion was dramatic; that the general accused the prime minister of having been too optimistic; that the workers’ refusal to return to their jobs indicated a failure of strategy on Pompidou’s part. Such a hypothesis is plausible, but there is no evidence to support it. Pompidou’s account is as follows:

What I told him was more or less this: the Communist party is going to carry out an important demonstration. The problem posed is its intentions. Will it really attempt a revolutionary act? It is possible. The fact that the rallying point is behind the city hall might suggest that it intends to take it over and re-create the Commune of Paris. In that case, I said, if you agree
And he adds “At no moment did I suggest or request that the General resign” (Pompidou, p. 191). When he left, de Gaulle said “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Minister of the Interior Christian Fouchet arrived a few minutes later. He had been invited only hours before by a personal telephone call from the general (an exceptional occurrence): “Come to see me this evening at 9:30.” “It was not the minister of the Interior that he wanted to see but his old companion” (Fouchet, 1971, p. 261). They discussed the situation, and at one point de Gaulle asked Fouchet: “Can you guarantee me, Fouchet – can you really guarantee me that there is no possibility of the forces of order being overcome by the uprising? No possibility, no matter what might happen?” (Fouchet, 1973, p. 23). The reply to this question is not public knowledge, but it was not reassuring enough, as the events of the following day suggest.

The minister of the Interior left the palace at 10:15 p.m. and, after a night of meditation, wrote a letter to de Gaulle, which the latter received the following early morning. In this letter Fouchet suggested the dissolution of the National Assembly and the holding of national elections. “Otherwise the entire population – there are signs of this already – will collapse, no longer feeling itself guided and protected. The referendum is too far off, and probably won’t change anything” (Fouchet, 1971, p. 262).

The council of ministers was scheduled to meet on Wednesday, May 29, at its usual time of 10 a.m. At 9:15 a.m. the general secretary of the government phoned the prime minister and told him that de Gaulle was leaving for Colombey and that the council of ministers was postponed until Thursday at 3 p.m. Some of the ministers were then arriving at the Elysée palace, and, having been told of the postponement, had to retrace their steps. Others were informed just as they were leaving for the palace. De Gaulle was in conference with his son-in-law, general de Boissieu, who later revealed an important point of their conversation. Referring to the Communist demonstration to be held that afternoon, de Gaulle said, “I do not want to give them a chance to attack the Elysée. It would be regrettable if blood were shed in my personal defense. I have decided to leave: nobody attacks an empty palace.”

Pompidou immediately called Bernard Tricot, general secretary of the presidency, and told him that he wanted to talk to de Gaulle. He added that it was absolutely imperative that a decree calling for the dissolution of the National Assembly be signed by de Gaulle before he left. An hour
passed and his call was not returned. Pompidou called again, and Tricot told him that de Gaulle was about to leave and that it was too late. A few seconds later, de Gaulle called Pompidou directly and told him that he had not slept for the past three nights and needed to reflect in peace. Pompidou tried again to obtain from him the decree of dissolution; but de Gaulle replied that if it was so difficult to hold a referendum and win it, it would be as difficult to hold elections unless they were meant to be lost. Then he added these astonishing words, often repeated by Pompidou: “I am the past; you are the future; I embrace you” – and hung up.

Early in the morning de Gaulle, without divulging any information about his own intentions, ordered the chief of his military cabinet, general Lalande, to leave immediately to see general Beauvallet in Metz, general Hublot in Nancy, and general Massu in Baden, in order to get information about the morale of the army. Lalande was supposed to bring a reply the same evening (Viansson-Ponté; p. 534).

At 2 p.m. the general secretary of the presidency arrived at Matignon, pale and disheartened, and exclaimed to Pompidou, “It’s awful, the general is not at Colombey and nobody knows where he is!” The news about the cancellation of the council of ministers, about the general’s precipitate departure and disappearance, fell on the country like a thunderbolt. Only a few persons at the pinnacle of power knew that a truck containing de Gaulle’s personal papers had left the Elysée palace for Colombey that day.

Two helicopters arrived at Baden-Baden two hours after de Gaulle’s departure from the Elysée palace. From the first helicopter the missing leader emerged with his wife and said to general Massu, who ran up to greet him, “Everything is lost. I no longer control anything. I am withdrawing” (Massu, p. 121). The second helicopter, with his aide-de-camp, was packed with files and de Gaulle’s personal effects. We do not have a verbatim account of the two generals’ conversation, but after one hour of confidential discussion general Massu came out of his office for a moment and told his aides-de-camp, captains Delclève and Richard, “We are not out of the woods yet: he is as stubborn as a mule and adamant in his decision to give up everything! He described the Apocalypse to me. I countered with several arguments, but he wouldn’t hear of them. We won’t be able to hide his presence here for long. Richard, you go find our ambassador in Bonn. As for me, I haven’t given up yet...” (Massu, p. 92).

Massu succeeded in convincing de Gaulle to return to Paris – or nearly so – for when de Gaulle came out of the office he asked general Mathon, chief of staff of the French army in Germany, and colonel Moniez, director of Massu’s cabinet, if they approved of his decision to return to Paris. He was still hesitating.
De Gaulle’s son and daughter-in-law remained for a few more days in Baden, and Mme de Gaulle told Mme Massu that she had to entrust the safekeeping of the family jewels to her daughter-in-law. These jewels, even if they were not intrinsically valuable, have a historical significance: They show that de Gaulle did not intend to return to Paris, or, at least, that he considered such a possibility.

This hesitation of de Gaulle’s “has been classified by the military commander and two presidents of the Republic as secret. It was not, before 1982, my secret, but a State secret which I kept, that is all, and which I would have continued to keep if others had not divulged it” (Massu, p. 153). Before this secret was divulged, most of those who wrote about the crisis, including brilliant journalists, believed that de Gaulle’s disappearance was a ruse conceived by this master artist in political strategy, this wizard of dramaturgy, in order to inspire the French people with panic and a sense of loss. We now know that this interpretation is totally wrong. But it is important, from a sociological point of view, to stress that the psychological effect, though not intended, was real. This spontaneous psychodrama upstaged the “students’ carnival.” Politicians may be the unwitting vehicles of historical forces.

Soon after the publication of the book by general Massu, Baden 68, François Goguel, who edited the speeches of de Gaulle in several volumes, and who had been appointed by de Gaulle as member of the Conseil constitutionnel, felt it his duty to present his own interpretation of what had happened during these four crucial days (Goguel, 1984, Charles de Gaulle du 24 au 29 mai 1968 p. 340). One of the main points of his analysis is a semantical distinction between the words “decision” and “temptation.” For Massu, de Gaulle had arrived to Baden in Germany decided to give up, and that he himself had persuaded him to return to Paris and to impose order since he had the army behind him. For François Goguel it was on de Gaulle’s part only a “temptation” to abandon the power, only one possibility among several. For Goguel the words pronounced by de Gaulle when he came out of the helicopter were only intended to provoke the reaction of general Massu. Goguel does not give a lot of importance to the fact that de Gaulle, before leaving Paris gave to his son-in-law Alain de Boissieu two envelopes (one of them being his testament), that the second helicopter was full of his personal belongings, that Mme de Gaulle brought herself the families jewels, that a truck full of his personal documents left Elysée palace for Colombey, and many other significant details. What is missing in Goguel’s article is the important news which arrived in the middle of the afternoon indicating that the communist manifestation was held in order and there was no attempt to occupy public buildings. Only then had de Gaulle decided to return to Paris.
On this crucial day, the man who ten years before had appeared to the masses as a charismatic leader (Dogan, 1965) reduced himself to a statue in clay. De Gaulle himself confessed to Pompidou that “for the first time in my life, I faltered. I am not proud of myself” (Pompidou, p. 201). What was the prime minister doing in the meantime?

**The prime minister:**

**the rock in the tempest**

When Pompidou learned that de Gaulle had disappeared, he shouted “He has fled the country!” (Pompidou, p. 193). He asked the Aerial Defense of the Territory (D.A.T.) to investigate. The D.A.T. discovered by radar that the two helicopters had gone to Saint-Dizier, a military airport. From there they could not be traced. But shortly afterwards the minister of Defense called to tell him that the helicopters had arrived in Baden.

The Matignon, headquarters of the prime minister, became the nucleus of the regime. The dukes and barons of the Gaullist establishment were there. They took into consideration all the possibilities, including the resignation of de Gaulle. It is interesting to note that the chief of police (who was not present) was so well informed that he was able to take count of fifteen dignitaries there.

“The government no longer existed as an organ of deliberation and decision. It was just an incoherent group of confabulators” (Balladur, p. 249). “Pompidou by himself was the whole government” (Balladur, p. 264). Pompidou announced that he would make a declaration to parliament the following day at three o’clock.

Pompidou had two overriding preoccupations: first, the rejection by the strikers of the agreement reached with the union leaders. The strike, with the occupation of factories, continued, and in some places committees of strikers acted like soviets. Was the general strike threatening to become a revolutionary one? This was the hope of the extremists, as we shall see. Such a possibility was not farfetched, in spite of the fact that at this very moment, in the middle of the afternoon, Pompidou was informed that the Communist demonstration was being carried out in an orderly fashion, without any attempt to occupy public buildings.

His second preoccupation was the dissolution of parliament. A few days before, a vote of no confidence was avoided by a slender margin. The elections of 1967 had made the balance between the majority and the opposition very precarious. At each of his meetings with de Gaulle, Pompidou insisted on the dissolution of parliament, but he never openly explained the reasons for his insistence.

What in retrospect appears as the miraculous solution to the crisis,
the way to avoid civil war – namely, by giving a voice to the people, source of the regime’s legitimacy – was not recognized as such by either de Gaulle or Pompidou. De Gaulle was afraid of losing the elections. The fact that the democratic opposition was also demanding elections seemed to confirm his apprehensions. Pompidou, on the other hand, regarded the elections as a means of ensuring his own survival as prime minister. At least in his Mémoires, Pompidou nowhere mentions the elections as a way of reaffirming the legitimacy of the regime. The thought may well have crossed his mind, but he did not write it down. His immediate concern was the fact that the leader of the Independent Republicans, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, was proposing the resignation of the government, and had informed the general secretary of the presidency that he was proposing this in order to thwart Pompidou’s maneuvers.

Was this an intrigue or a well-considered move on Giscard’s part? We cannot neglect the following testimony by general secretary of the Presidency Bernard Tricot: “On the morning of the 30th of May, doubtless around ten o’clock, I received a telephone call from an especially important political personage telling me that his friends had been contacted, not by the prime-minister, but by persons speaking on his behalf, who suggested that they take up positions in expectation of General de Gaulle’s resignation” (Gilbert Pilleul, ed., L’Entourage et de Gaulle, Plon, 1979, p. 322).

The same afternoon, Pompidou received a delegation of Gaullist and independent parliamentarians. He told them that the situation was really revolutionary and that the Communist party had changed its tune (Viansson-Ponté, p. 536).

Pompidou, in a letter sent to Raymond Aron, who has published just after the crisis a series of articles in Le Figaro, concentrating his analysis on the student movement, wrote: “could you imagine a procession of half a million people going from the Place de la République to the Place de Denfert . . . none has ever forbidden a crowd of this size from penetrating in a building such as the Sorbonne . . . even the army would not suffice for that, and moreover who would command soldiers to fire into such a crowd? . . . as you know very well in a conflict of this proportion everything depends on the public opinion.” Justifying his reluctance to turn to the violence against students, but admitting it against communist demonstrators, Pompidou added “contrary to what was the case for the students, the government had the possibility to use force because the public opinion would approve, and the army would obey without hesitation.” This letter was written almost two months after the curtain fell and it is reproduced in Aron’s Mémoires (1983, pp. 476-7). In this book Raymond Aron confesses: (p. 473) “Myself as well, on the 29 and 30th
of May, I feared that the revolt would turn into utter revolution.” (There is here maybe an error of date surprising for a man so well informed and in contact with important politicians. He probably meant the 28th and 29th and not 30th, because late in the evening of the 29th the balance of forces reversed.) Denouncing the strategy of the Communist party, inspired by the myth of Sorel, Aron wrote, in one of his articles that such a strategy would allow “the inevitable risk of the intervention of the army and consequently of a civil war” (Aron, June 1968, p. 186).

The leaders of the Communist party

Did the Communist party, this “serious enemy, well organized, capable of attempting to seize power,” as Pompidou perceived it (Pompidou, p. 186), really intend to seize power by insurrection? It is difficult to answer this question without first clarifying the word “insurrection.” If it is taken to denote something along the lines of the “Winter Palace in St. Petersburg” scenario, or Trotsky’s belief that one thousand determined men are capable of taking over the State, the answer is clearly negative. Nothing permits us to entertain such a hypothesis. But if by “insurrection” we mean the attempt to bring the fall of the regime of the 5th Republic by the agitation of organized minorities, without respect for constitutional rules, the reply is confidently positive.

The Communist leaders have vigorously denied having intended a popular insurrection: “If we are not now under a dictatorship, it is because we did not allow ourselves to be led by our impatience,” said François Billoux, prominent member of the Politburo (Tournoux, p. 370). “Although the workers were on strike, many of them didn’t want to go farther... Were we able to take power? Maybe for twenty-four hours. And afterwards, a blood-bath, the blood of the workers” (François Billoux, public statement, June 20, 1968). The general secretary of the Communist party, Waldeck Rochet, declared: “At no moment did the workers intend to fight with weapons against the army. At no moment!” (Tournoux, p. 340). “As the military and repressive forces were on the side of the government, and the mass of the people were absolutely hostile to such an adventure, it was obvious that to take such a course would have been to lead the workers to slaughter and bring about the suppression of the working class and its avant-garde, the Communist party” (Waldeck Rochet, pp. 32-33).

A few weeks after the crisis, another Communist leader, Pierre Juquin, wrote: “In the present situation a civil war is not possible. To start it and to win it one must have the support of the masses and the active participation of a part of them. Now, the French masses do not want a civil war” (France Nouvelle, July 24, 1968).
But in reality the situation was much more complex. The entire economy of the country was paralyzed, as well as the entire administration of the State; most of the factories were occupied by voluntary or involuntary strikers, a minority having forbidden the majority of workers to work even if they wanted to. Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators were not asking for a raise in salary but for the resignation of the president of the Republic and for the establishment of a “popular government,” meaning a government imposed by agitating minorities. The strikes and the occupation of factories and even ministries were decided upon at meetings without secret ballot. Small groups imposed their will. Bolshevik slogans such as “Soviets everywhere!” came to many people’s minds.

Even granting that the leaders of the Communist party had no intention of seizing power by force, might not the crisis have become uncontrollable if it had been prolonged? A civil war is never planned – if it were possible to predict one, it would be possible to prevent it. But civil war can break out even without being preceded by an armed insurrection. It would have been enough if various groups, acting on “initiatives coming from the bottom,” had started to occupy public buildings, and, once the example had been given, more occupations had occurred. If strategic buildings were attacked, the situation could have come to a critical point.

This critical point was nearly reached on May 29. The most intimate collaborator of the prime minister believed that “doubtless the Communist party had not correctly measured, in time for its own purposes, the fragility of general de Gaulle’s power” (Jobert, p. 53).

Like the revolutions of 1830, 1848, and 1871, the uprising had as its theater the city of Paris and contiguous suburbs. In the provinces, the cities, with some exceptions such as Nantes, escaped from the agitation. If the situation had deteriorated further, the scenario of a re-conquest of the territory, starting from Strasbourg, Mulhouse, or Nancy, could have become a reality. This is precisely the interpretation that many have given – wrongly – of the de Gaulle-Massu encounter.

**The leaders of the Leftist union**

The Communist leader who, as general secretary of the C.G.T. played the most significant role, is also the one who wrote the longest and most detailed testimony: Georges Séguy. He gives roughly the same account as the other Communist leaders, even if he emphasizes his own role as a union leader.

“The question was to learn why the workers participated in the strike: to improve their situation, or to destroy capitalism and establish socialism by insurrection? . . . If by an absurd hypothesis we had listened to
the leftist sirens and proposed to the workers to try to seize power, the
majority of them wouldn’t have understood us, and even fewer would
have followed us” (Séguy, p. 180). Concerning the Communist demon-
stration on May 29, which was so dreaded by the establishment and
which was one of the reasons for de Gaulle’s disappearance and for the
military preparations, the Communist leader rejects any suggestion that
this demonstration was the starting point of a Communist plot: “So it
is not at city hall or at the Elysée palace that the C.G.T. ends its march,
as a sudden foolish rumor suggested, but at the St. Lazare station”
(Séguy, p. 134). This union leader was convinced that the Gaullist power
would not have hesitated to quell in blood what it saw as an insurrection
of the extreme left. Consequently, he took measures to prevent provo-
cation. Contrary to the expectations of some, the demonstration was car-
ried out in perfect order. Was it so because, as Séguy admits, he was
informed about the troop movements from the east of France toward
Paris? “At several points around the capital the tanks appeared” (Séguy,
p. 134). What he does not emphasize in his book is that the demon-
stration had a clear political purpose. The banners bore slogans that
were clearly political: “De Gaulle démission! Gouvernement populaire!” He
does mention, however, the declaration of the executive bureau of the C.G.T.
asking the workers to participate in the demonstration “without giving
up the occupation of factories” (Séguy, p. 131). It is certain that on this
day of May 29, at 2:30 p.m. when the demonstration started, the
Communist leaders did not know that de Gaulle was in Baden.

In a book published immediately after the event, the chief of an
important office of the C.G.T. wrote, “during fifteen full days, that is
until Thursday, May 30, when de Gaulle started to react, France went
through a characteristic revolutionary period, when literally everything
was possible... We are in a revolutionary situation from the moment
when the functioning of the economy, of the social organizations and
of the administrative and political institutions are blocked” (Barjonet,
1968, p. 33, p. 36). An acute observer Jean Ferniot gave a similar diag-
nosis: “the government was collapsing, tottering between incapacity and
incoherence. His action of turning authoritarian decisions and capitula-
tions is typically a Kerensky scenario” (Ferniot, 1968, p. 185).

The leaders of the Democratic Left

Between the two great enemies – the government and the Communist
party – stood the democratic opposition. The president of the Federation
of Democratic Left, François Mitterrand, gave a press conference on
May 28 in the presence of the representatives of the “counter-government,”
the leaders of the Federation and about 300 journalists. The text of his declaration was approved by the ruling group of the Federation. Mitterrand declared, “There is no more State, and that which has taken its place does not even possess the semblance of power.” He declared himself ready to take responsibility for a new government, being at the same time ready to efface himself before some more qualified person, such as Pierre Mendès France. By this declaration he reacted in a way to de Gaulle’s speech of May 24, when the latter proposed a referendum on “participation.” Mitterrand placed himself in a hypothetical situation: a referendum on June 16, the possible power vacuum at the top, a presidential election within seven weeks (according to the Constitution), and in the meantime a temporary government. The same day Mitterrand met with a delegation of the Communist party. According to Communist accounts, Mitterrand did not promise the Communists any crucial voice in the prospective new government. Many reproached Mitterrand for having demanded the resignation of the president of the Republic. He stated, after the crisis, that he had to consider the possible vacancy of the presidency and prepare for the succession.

On the following day, May 29, in the evening, just as general de Gaulle had returned to Colombey and was preparing his famous speech, at the moment when important military preparations were being made, Pierre Mendès-France declared that he was ready to assume the responsibilities that might be given to him by the “entire unified left” (this included the Communists). How could a man of his stature be so badly informed about the situation? “He still believed,” commented Raymond Aron, “in a revolutionary outcome” (R. Aron, Mémoires, 1983, p. 481). Two days before, on May 27, at the Charléty stadium, in front of 20,000 to 30,000 people, and in the presence of Pierre Mendès-France, a union leader (Barjonet) declared, “Today the revolution is possible!” The presence of Mendès-France at this meeting was considered by many politicians as the biggest mistake of his life.

The leader of a faction of the Socialist Party, Michel Rocard, made a similar evaluation of the situation. “With millions of workers on strike, with the entire country deadlocked, it would have been possible to induce a general paralysis” (article in Le Nouvel Observateur, June 26, 1968).

It is interesting to indicate here how the Communist leader Séguy perceived at that moment the leaders of the democratic left: “Some of them were so excited that they went so far as to say: ‘Power is not to be seized but to be picked up!’” (Séguy, p. 133).

At no moment did the leaders of the democratic left pose a real danger to the government. They had no organized force behind them. They were unable to mobilize significant masses in the streets (at the Charléty
stadium the most visible were the anarchists, the Trotskyists, and other extremists). But they did have a certain audience in the country. According to the survey, they represented 21% of the electorate. The slogan “Mitterrand-Kerensky,” shouted during the Gaullist demonstration on the Champs-Elysées, gives an idea of the deep cleavage that prevailed at that moment.

The Leftist extremist groups:
the troublemakers

Public opinion was favorable to the student movement at the beginning. The reversal of the attitude of the largest part of the population concerning it was accomplished in a matter of hours. The prime minister suggested to a few television journalists that the three rebellious leaders be invited on television: Geismar, Cohn-Bendit, and Sauvageot. They fell into the trap the prime minister had adroitly set for them. In front of millions of dumbfounded spectators, they behaved like irresponsible utopianists who wanted to destroy the “consumer society.” A few days later one of them, when invited to join the demonstration organized by the Communists on May 29, replied “Only a march on the Elysée palace would satisfy us” (Séguy, p. 131). The student movement forthwith ceased to enjoy the sympathy of the population, and its leaders instantly became fringe elements. Specialists on the political role of the mass media should not fail to consider this trap as an outstanding example of televised democracy.

How could these extremist groups have played a decisive role in the dynamic of the crisis? By provoking a blood bath. There are in Paris some ten or fifteen strategic buildings, among them the Elysée palace, the ministry of the Interior, the ministry of Defense, the Eiffel Tower (from which television programs are broadcast), the telephone exchange, the power plants, and some symbolic buildings such as the Parliament or the City Hall, which were protected by the police and/or the army. During the May crisis it would have been impossible to penetrate these buildings without firearms. If a determined group of demonstrators had tried to occupy one or several of these buildings, the inevitable result would have been many deaths. For young, inexperienced revolutionary idealists, influenced by books on French revolutions, or Leninist-Trotskyist literature, dead bodies are the strongest weapons. Imagine the funeral. If an assault had been made, the intervention of the army would have been inevitable, and the situation would have become rapidly uncontrollable. Already on May 13, utterly by surprise, a few hundred demonstrators led by well-known Trotskyist and anarchist leaders were
approaching the Alexandre III bridge, a few hundred meters from the Elysée palace. “After assembling on the Champ-de-Mars, the demonstrators arrived at the Alexandre III bridge, which had been hurriedly fenced off by a few police lines to protect the palace. I thought anything was possible. If the crowd had pushed through this final barrier, no one, at that point in time, would have given the order to fire. It would have got through, and in its wake, history would suddenly have been accelerated” (Jobert, p. 41).

These extremist groups, being well organized, had a disproportionate impact during the entire crisis, and particularly at the rally at the Charléty stadium. If they did not create an irreversible situation, the credit belongs to the chief of police and the leaders of the C.G.T. (the Communist union.) The police officers maintained a permanent contact with them, either by keeping up a kind of dialogue or through spies. They were constantly informed about their intentions. As for the union leaders, they considered the extremists to be provocateurs, and did their best to exclude them from their own demonstrations.

Human sacrifice is needed for a true revolution. The May crisis had no blood to offer the ideological gods.

The military chiefs

By protecting the radio and telecommunications system on behalf of the police, the army had already helped the police before May 28. As he did every day, the prime minister had on the previous day summoned together those responsible for maintaining order, and, in anticipation of the Communist demonstration, had given the order that “the tanks at Satory should be brought nearer to Issy-les-Moulineaux,” a suburb of Paris (Pompidou, p. 190). The question asked at Matignon was, what effect would the intervention of the military have on the Communist unions? “Wouldn’t that give the Communists a pretext for rallying all the malcontents behind them against the army?” (Balladur, p. 302). But “the army would still obey the Prime Minister” if the Communists tried an “insurrection” (Balladur, p. 328). If the army were to hesitate “the next uprising could sweep everything away” (Balladur, p. 302). Be that as it may, the army played a role of dissuasion by deliberately leaking some information about troop movements. Were the leaders of the Communist party really informed about the military preparations? It is highly probable that they were already informed by the evening of May 28.

The following day, May 29, when de Gaulle “disappeared,” minister of Defense Pierre Messmer was seriously examining the situation with the head of the joint chiefs of staff, general Michel Fourquet, who telephoned
general Massu in Baden-Baden. The minister was on the same line; here is the conversation as it was revealed by general Massu:

General Fourquet: “The Minister wants to know if Lalande is with you and what he is doing.”

General Massu: “Lalande has come to see me on an information-gathering mission. He has already left to Metz.”

General Fourquet: “Have you seen the other one? The big one?”

General Massu: Affirmative. But he has already left.”

General Fourquet: “Watch out, Massu don’t make a blunder!”

And Massu (p. 110) adds this comment: “Did he think that general de Gaulle had come to me asking that I should launch the army on Paris? Or at least, to consider such a possibility?”

There is no reason to doubt general Massu’s sincerity. He had no motive to conceal the truth. From this short dialogue we can infer that the minister of Defense and the head of the joint chiefs of staff did not know where de Gaulle was, that they did not completely trust the commander of the French army stationed in Baden, and that in case of de Gaulle’s resignation, a handful of men – including evidently the prime-minister, the minister of Defense, and the head of the joint chiefs of staff – would have been resolved to resist any Communist uprising with force, but without calling on the main body of the army, particularly that part of it stationed in Baden. A few minutes before, general Massu had told general Lalande that the military governor of Paris should prepare for battle against the “anarchists, to be eliminated by any means,” and that Bigeard, a former paratroops commander in Algeria, should be appointed deputy to the military governor of Paris.

The military chiefs, then, seem to have been determined to start a re-conquest of the territory, in case a new Paris Commune should arise nearly one century after the first.

The chief of the Paris police

During the crisis the chief of the Paris police, one of the highest civil servants in France, kept his cool. He showed moderation and flexibility. He feared the worst: “Little would have been needed – a volley of rifle fire, for instance, moving down thirty bodies in the Place St-Michel . . . for five hundred thousand demonstrators to be unleashed the following day, overwhelming everything in front of a paralyzed police force” (Grimaud, p. 329).

The Communist demonstration announced for the afternoon of May
29 was to assemble in the Place de la Bastille and pass near certain buildings that had played an important symbolic role in earlier Parisian revolutions. The minister of the Interior was very worried about his demonstration, which was expected to muster at least half a million people, so he told the chief of police that he was authorized to call upon the regiment of paratroops (Grimaud, p. 281). One of the prime minister’s principal collaborators, Somveille, confessed his apprehension to the chief of police. He feared that on the occasion of this demonstration some groups might try to occupy important buildings.

On the formal instruction of the prime minister and the minister of the Interior, the chief of police got in touch with General Fourquet, head of the joint chiefs of staff. They considered the possibility of putting some military units on alert status. General Metz, commander of the army in the Paris area, set at sixty minutes the time needed for mobilization. The squadrons of the governmental reserve had already moved to Satory, a military camp not far from Paris. “Naturally, the spectacle of tanks moving towards Paris did not go unnoticed. It fed the rumor that the government had brought out the tanks in Paris to put down the rebellion” (Grimaud p. 283). The chief of police admits that “the police could have been overwhelmed and, as it was not possible to let the rebels take control of the streets, it might well have become necessary, that day, to call on the army” (Grimaud, p. 251). In the office of the prime minister it was even wondered whether “the police would obey the orders they were given” (Balladur, p. 294).

In the middle of May the prime minister and the chief of police had, for obvious reasons, different strategies. The latter had to protect various strategic points, prevent the building of barricades, and forestall the use of violence. The former was concerned with mobilizing the bourgeoisie; he would have preferred to allow the leftist demonstrators free access to the beaux quartiers, so as to inspire the bourgeoisie with fear. It is true that the upper strata were late in reacting to events, in part because their own sons were on the barricades, at least until things became serious.

The chief of police had to fight against an invisible enemy that totally escaped his control. The radio directed fighters to the barricades in the Latin quarter and mobilized participants in demonstrations, simply by informing the population about what was happening. Thousands of militants and agitators would not have come to the hot spots if they had not been informed by radio journalists who became involuntary recruiters. In crisis situations, radio and television, by their instant effect, can play a decisive role. For instance, the decision in one factory to reject the agreement between the union leaders and the prime-minister and to continue
the strike, once broadcast on the radio, inspired hundreds of assemblies of strikers to persevere. Political germs were transmitted by radio.

In a country paralyzed by general strike, the instantaneous dissemination of information by highly technological mass media allows the non-participating masses to watch the revolution on television or hear it on the radio in their cars, in the factory, or at the beach. The May 1968 crisis was in large part a broadcast revolution. Even the most indifferent were kept informed. The police were visible on the small screen every day.

The panic around the power

What was happening during these days at the Palais Bourbon? On May 27, Pisani, speaking as representative of the parliamentary majority, made what appeared to be a speech in opposition. But in fact the parliament had “as always at dramatic moments reduced itself to a shadow-theatre, where a few figures make political combinations in view of a change of government” (Pompidou, p. 186). Some parliamentarians came naively to Matignon, asking the prime minister to put pressure on the Elysée “so that the Old Man would agree to retire” (Jobert, p. 50). Most parliamentarians had the feeling that they were “witnessing the fall of the regime” (Balladur, p. 294). In the government buildings, particularly in the ministries, an atmosphere of decomposition prevailed. “Fear was taking its place in the heart of the State” (Grimaud, p. 279). “Someone came to tell Jobert that one of the prime-minister’s collaborators was burning papers in the fireplace. The smoke had already drifted into the Matignon gardens” (Balladur, p. 303). “Sometimes in these painful days I allowed myself to imagine what would become of the Matignon if things turned out badly. I could almost see which offices would he occupied till the last moment, and which would be speedily deserted” (Jobert, p. 51). “A devoted and well-intentioned person came to see the prime-minister. ‘I bring you a weapon,’ said he. ‘Now that we are expecting them, you will need it.’ ‘My poor friend,’ replied Pompidou, ‘you must be exhausted. You ought to go home’ (Balladur, p. 304). “It is not very clear who supports the government besides the police” (Grimaud, p. 279). One of the ministers asked himself: “What is going on around me? Will not the insurrectional power install itself on the upper floor? What then would be the use of a few machine guns? And what is happening in the other Ministries? . . . I asked Christian Dublanc [his principal collaborator] if there was any gasoline left in case the Ministry’s depot should fall into the hands of the strikers. He gave me a figure. How far could we go with that much gas? ‘As far as Limoges,’ he replied,
thinking of Perigueux [the Minister’s constituency]” (Guena, p. 240). “No one could ever hope to see his own country entrenched in a civil war. But if one day we were to kill each other, it would be him (de Gaulle) who would have fired first” (Françoise Giroud, 1968, p. 12).

Outside of government circles there were unmistakable signs. It became difficult to withdraw money from the banks. A few people tried to rent private planes. The most fearful ones tried to obtain false identity cards.

From a theoretical point of view, it should be emphasized that parliament had not played a significant role. In crisis situations, the parliament remains the symbol of legitimacy, but ceases to be the site of decision making. If Vilfredo Pareto were still alive he would have been delighted to underscore the division of the political class: Some suggested that the prime minister resign, while others saw in him the last hope. The government itself ceased to function as such. There were meetings in the prime minister’s office, but only a few ministers were convened to attend. The highest-level civil servants remained mute. As for the “capitalists,” they made themselves invisible. The only ones in the privileged strata of society who were outspoken were the intellectuals.

The silent majority and the active minorities

What were the states of mind of the various social strata at the end of May? How closely did the leaders’ attitudes correspond to those of the masses? To try to answer this question I shall refer to the results of a survey that I monitored with a national sample of 3289 men between the ages of 20 and 70 (Dogan, 1968). Since one of the objectives of the survey was to analyze political behavior – particularly that of the agitating minorities – in a crisis situation, I thought it preferable to limit the survey to males, given that relatively few women were involved in violent actions or occupation of factories. However, this is not to say that women were not present in large numbers among the demonstrators and strikers.

Since the survey was made immediately after the crisis, the results may be regarded as strongly marked by the turmoil, inasmuch as the questions asked referred to events experienced personally by the people interviewed, particularly union activities (occupation of factories, picketing, demonstrations, and so on). The replies to several questions help us to form an idea of the attitudes of the masses, and how they would have behaved if the situation had deteriorated into an armed conflict.

To understand what happens in a profound social crisis it is necessary to observe separately the social groups that threaten to clash. Ten
categories were differentiated: Communists, members of the Communist union, workers (among them many Communists and C.G.T. members), employees in the largest factories, Parisians and inhabitants of the great cities, farmers, young people, old people, non-believers, and practicing Catholics.

Table I shows for each category the relation between the altitude that the interviewed person would have had if the C.G.T. had launched a general insurrectional strike, and the course he would have taken in case of a popular uprising.

If a general insurrectional strike had been launched, 71% of Frenchmen would have condemned it, 19% would have approved of it, and 10% were undecided about their probable attitude. If a popular uprising had occurred, 20% of Frenchmen would have supported it, 23% would have resisted it, and 57% would have done nothing (including 17% who were undecided). This does not mean that the absolute majority would have remained neutral or indifferent; they would simply have chosen not to take part physically in the conflict.

The following analysis is based on the replies to these questions:

1 – Do you approve or disapprove of a strike occupying the factory?
2 – If there were a popular uprising to overthrow the existing social order, what would you personally do? Would you support it, fight it, or do nothing at all?
3 – If there were a military uprising, what would you personally do? Would you support it, fight it, or do nothing at all? If the C.G.T. had decided an insurrectional strike in May 68, would you have approved?

It is the hypothetical behavior of certain social categories that is of concern here. First, the Communists (not only party members, but also those who declared that they voted Communist): 55% would have approved of a general insurrectional strike and 57% would have obeyed the impulse to support a popular uprising (see Table 1). The members, and even the fellow-travelers, appear in this survey to be more revolutionary than their leaders, who, as we have seen, behaved very prudently by considering not only the potential position of the Communists themselves but also that of the non-Communists. It is important to note that, in fact, most of the non-Communists were anti-Communist.

A total of 40% of the Communists declared themselves in favor of a general insurrectional strike and at the same time were disposed to support a popular uprising. The other 60% would have remained passive in either of the two hypothetical cases (see Table 1). Similarly, one-third of the members of the C.G.T. were in favor of both a general insurrectional strike and a popular uprising.
Table 1
Popular Uprising and General Insurrectional Strike

If there were a popular uprising to overthrow the existing social order, what would you personally do? Would you support it (S), fight it (F), do nothing at all (N)?

If the CGT had decided on insurrectional general strike in May 1968 would you have approved?

### Popular Uprising

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### Older than 60 years (380)

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It is worth noting that 14% of the Communists would have supported a popular uprising but would not have obeyed a command to participate in a general insurrectional strike. These 14% apparently attached a very literal meaning to the word “insurrectional,” and shared the cautious altitude of the union leaders and the leaders of the Communist Party. But it was not merely a question of semantics. A popular uprising would involve large sectors of the population, as it did in Poland in 1981; a general insurrectional strike, on the other hand, would involve mainly, or at least initially, the working class through its organizations.

A comparison of the figures for the Communist party and those of the population as a whole clearly shows that the party was an isolated minority within the nation. These figures tend to justify the caution of the Communist leaders, who did not allow themselves to be driven by their most active militants. As Table I shows, the revolutionary potential of the other categories was considerably lower, especially for farmers, old people, and practicing Catholics.

Those who would have supported a popular uprising and those who would have supported a general insurrectional strike are not necessarily the same individuals. To approve or disapprove of a general insurrectional strike is not the same as to be willing to participate personally in the case of a popular uprising. The one is a mere expression of opinion, while the other entails a hazardous personal commitment. Psychological factors interfere that need not be discussed here. It is enough to say that we are not dealing with incoherent altitudes or contradictory behavior.

Strikes, including occupation of the factories, were always considered illegal in France. Never before May 1968 had so widespread an occupation of factories occurred. According to certain ideologists, the occupation of factories is the most effective strategy for the initiation of a revolutionary movement. As Table 2 indicates, 80% of the Communists approved of the strike with occupation of factories; only 14% disapproved, while 6% did not reply. Three-fourth of the members of the C.G.T. were in favor of this actions, as were a little more than half of the industrial workers. These figures must be contrasted with those for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 (cont.)</th>
<th>Non-Believers (645)</th>
<th>Practicing Catholics (730)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>
Table 2

Popular Uprising and Strike by Occupying the Factory

If there were a popular uprising to overthrow the existing social order, what would you personally do? Would you support it (S), fight it (F), do nothing at all (N)?

Do you approve (A) or disapprove (D) of a strike by occupying a factory?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strike by Occupation</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Communist Voters</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFN ? %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 17 4 13 4 38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D 3 18 24 8 53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>? 1 1 4 3 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 51 3 17 9 80        |   |   |   |   |   |
| D 5 1 6 2 14          |   |   |   |   |   |
| ? 1 0 1 4 6           |   |   |   |   |   |

| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 57 4 24 15 100     |   |   |   |   |   |

| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 46 7 35 12 100     |   |   |   |   |   |

| Industrial Workers    |   |   |   |   |   |
| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 25 4 20 5 54        |   |   |   |   |   |
| D 4 10 18 7 39        |   |   |   |   |   |
| ? 0 1 3 3 7           |   |   |   |   |   |

| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 29 15 41 15 100    |   |   |   |   |   |

| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 27 23 37 12 100    |   |   |   |   |   |

| Largest Factories     |   |   |   |   |   |
| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 24 6 19 6 55        |   |   |   |   |   |
| D 4 13 18 6 41        |   |   |   |   |   |
| ? 0 1 2 1 4           |   |   |   |   |   |

| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 28 20 39 13 100    |   |   |   |   |   |

| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 14 19 49 19 100    |   |   |   |   |   |

| Rural Areas           |   |   |   |   |   |
| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 9 2 7 5 23          |   |   |   |   |   |
| D 3 16 34 10 63       |   |   |   |   |   |
| ? 2 1 8 4 15          |   |   |   |   |   |

| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 11 24 51 14 100    |   |   |   |   |   |

| Older than 60 years   |   |   |   |   |   |
| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 9 2 11 4 26         |   |   |   |   |   |
| D 2 21 34 8 65        |   |   |   |   |   |
| ? 0 1 6 2 9           |   |   |   |   |   |

| SFN ? %               |   |   |   |   |   |
| A 11 24 51 14 100    |   |   |   |   |   |
the whole of the population: only 38% of all Frenchmen approved of
the strike with occupation, and 53% disapproved.

Table 3 shows the relation between anticipated behavior in case of
a popular uprising and in case of a military action. The hypothesis of
a military intervention should be interpreted in the context of the crisis
of May 1968, that is to say, the possibility of army intervention at the
request of the government to re-establish order, and not a military coup
such as took place in Spain and Chile. It is true that the term “upris-
ing” is ambiguous, but most of the Frenchmen interviewed interpreted
it in light of the national convulsion through which they had just lived.
In addition, there are many ways to resist a social movement or a mil-
tary action. These ambiguities are difficult to erase from a mass survey.

The figures in Table 3 cannot be examined on a kind of scale to find
out whether the popular uprising or the military would have mobilized
the greater number of people or provoked the greater resistance. This
was not the objective of the survey: military hardware weighs too much.
The reply “I would fight against a military intervention or uprising” has
to be interpreted as an indication of opposition to a military rule, either
of a few weeks’ or a few months’ duration, or as a disapproval of a dec-
laration of a state of emergency, as allowed for in Article 16 of the
Constitution, to which de Gaulle alluded in his brief speech of May 30.

Only 5% of the French would have supported military intervention,
33% would have fought against it, and the absolute majority would have
done nothing at all. It is on account of this reluctance that the gov-
ernment refrained from calling in the army except in case of absolute
necessity.

The hostile environment

The majority of Communists would not only have supported a popular
uprising, but also would have fought against a military uprising. For all
other categories, the potential active participants, in either of the two
### Table 3

**Popular Uprising and Military Intervention**

Popular uprising: Same as in Table 1

If there were a military uprising (intervention), what would you personally do? Would you support it (S), fight it (F), do nothing at all (N)?

<table>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Largest Factories</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>?</th>
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<table>
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<th>F</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>%</th>
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</table>
hypotheses are in a minority, even among the members of the C.G.T. In all social strata and throughout the entire political spectrum (except the Communists and the non-believers), the majority would have remained passive and silent in both circumstances. Only one in four Frenchmen would have participated in both actions, supporting one uprising and fighting against the other; and only one in ten would have fought against popular uprisings.

It is worth noting, in terms of political culture, the anti-militaristic tendency of most of the non-believers. They distrusted the church as much as the army.

The Frenchmen who would have supported a popular uprising were hardly less numerous than those who would have fought against it: 20% versus 23%. The majority showed their desire to remain outside of the fray. We can infer from these figures that the start of a civil war would have been, in the first place, as the word plainly indicates, a conflict between civilians, before the eventual intervention of the military on the side of one camp. As can be seen from the figures for the various categories, the Communists, the members of the C.G.T., and the non-believers were in the majority in one camp, whereas all the other categories were in the opposite camp. The survey shows (though these figures are not reproduced here) that many socialists and liberal democrats expressed their willingness to resist a popular uprising, and many conservatives and moderates would have been hostile to a military intervention.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Less than 30 years old} & \textbf{Popular} & & & & \\
\hline
S & F & N & ? & \% & \\
\hline
S & 1 & 4 & 1 & 1 & 7 \\
F & 25 & 10 & 6 & 5 & 46 \\
N & 5 & 6 & 19 & 3 & 33 \\
? & 3 & 4 & 2 & 5 & 14 \\
\hline
34 & 24 & 28 & 14 & 100 & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Older than 60 years} & \textbf{Popular} & & & & \\
\hline
S & F & N & ? & \% & \\
\hline
S & 1 & 2 & 1 & 1 & 5 \\
F & 6 & 9 & 6 & 3 & 24 \\
N & 4 & 10 & 41 & 1 & 56 \\
? & 0 & 3 & 3 & 9 & 15 \\
\hline
11 & 24 & 51 & 14 & 100 & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Non-Believers} & \textbf{Popular} & & & & \\
\hline
S & F & N & ? & \% & \\
\hline
S & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 4 \\
F & 34 & 7 & 7 & 7 & 54 \\
N & 7 & 2 & 19 & 3 & 31 \\
? & 2 & 1 & 2 & 6 & 11 \\
\hline
44 & 11 & 29 & 16 & 100 & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Practicing Catholics} & \textbf{Popular} & & & & \\
\hline
S & F & N & ? & \% & \\
\hline
S & 0 & 5 & 1 & 1 & 7 \\
F & 7 & 13 & 3 & 2 & 25 \\
N & 3 & 9 & 31 & 4 & 47 \\
? & 1 & 8 & 3 & 9 & 21 \\
\hline
11 & 35 & 38 & 16 & 100 & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{(cont.)}
\end{table}
In a pluralist and complex society such as France in 1968, most of the cleavages cut across each other, and few overlapped enough to create a deep division in the nation, with the notable exception of the Communist Party.

As we have seen, only one quarter of the workers would have approved of a general insurrectional strike started by the Communist C.G.T. and at the same time would have supported a popular uprising. As the workers represented 40% of the active population, it follows that at least 10% of Frenchmen were in favor of a revolutionary movement — more than enough, according to some ideologists. They claim that a revolution is always made by a small minority, that it does not need a majority, which is required only in electoral competition. Was this minority an avant-garde of the majority, benefiting from the neutrality of the majority or an isolated faction in a hostile social context? On this point the survey offers a clear diagnosis. Asked shortly after the crisis which political tendencies they disliked the most, the French gave the following reply: Communism, 33%; revolutionary left, 19%; socialism, 1%. In all, 53% were against the left. Another 30% were against the extreme right and the remaining 17% against various tendencies: Gaullism, conservatism, and centrist. (These figures were calculated after the elimination from the sample of those who did not reply or gave a confusing reply.) The revolutionary left was singled out by so many Frenchmen because of its violent actions during the crisis were still present in the collective memory. Nearly all of these Frenchmen were also strongly anti-Communist, in a degree that entitles us to combine the two figures: 33% + 19% = 52%.

The working class was divided: 26% expressed hostility toward Communism in the first place, 14% were against the revolutionary left, and a mere 3% against socialism. The extreme right was the most hated tendency by 29% of the workers, Gaullism for 23%, and the independents and centrists for 3%. Clearly, the Communist party and revolutionary left had to face the hostility of 40% of the “working class” and the absolute majority of the entire nation.

This hostility was reinforced by the opinion of 80% of the French that the Communist party was not “the only authentic representative of the working class,” and that it was “too closely tied to the U.S.S.R.” (70%). A majority (60%) thought that “it was no longer a revolutionary party,” but this figure should be interpreted with caution, because the survey was done after and not before or during the crisis.

The working class perceived the situation in very much the same way: 66% did not consider the Communist party to be “the only authentic representative of the working class”; 59% judged that it was “too closely tied to the U.S.S.R”; and 56% said that it was “no longer a revolutionary party.”
In other words, the Communist leaders, supposing that their perception of the reality was clear enough, had to take into consideration the revolutionary potential of the majority of their members and followers on the one hand, and the hostility of the rest of the nation on the other. They gave more weight to the hostile environment than to the revolutionary minority. But within the party this minority was the majority. How efficiently did the mechanism of “democratic centralism,” which should inform the leaders of the reactions of the base, function during these days? The leaders have been well informed, and their decision not to start a general insurrectional strike was transmitted by virtue of the same « democratic centralism » through the militants to the cells and beyond.

The final act:
the clamorous voice of the electorate

Having completely changed his mind, and being assured of the support of the army, de Gaulle returned by helicopter from Baden to a military camp and from there to Colombey. At about 5 p.m. on May 29, he telephoned Pompidou and told him that he would return to Paris on the following day. The meeting of the council of ministers was scheduled for 3:00 p.m. The entire nation learned that he would speak at 4:30 p.m. At 2:30 p.m. de Gaulle met with Pompidou and read him the declaration that he intended to make to the nation. Each statement was as if engraved in marble, but the miraculous solution was not there: the resort to the people, by elections. The referendum that de Gaulle wanted so much, and that the opposition denounced as a plebiscite, was postponed, promised for later. Pompidou asked for an immediate election and threatened to resign if it was not held.

Here we have a prestigious chief, a man who on many occasions had shown himself to be a great political strategist, a man who always addressed himself to the people, going over the heads of the political class. This is the man who now was so strongly reluctant to accept the only solution that could save him – to give voice to the people, to the silent majority, to the immense electorate that alone was capable of renewing his legitimacy by democratic election (and not by a referendum perceived as a plebiscite). Here we have a man who unquestionably had a great vision of history, a man who by his foresight and perspicacity had successfully guided France in dramatic circumstances, and who, on this momentous day was blind to the crucial issue: he did not see the deep source of legitimacy that he could obtain, if not for himself at least for the regime, by dissolving parliament and holding new legislative elections. He himself admitted on television that it had been difficult for
him to “seize the situation.” Even in later days he never publicly acknowledged that France had avoided civil war by holding elections.

Finally Pompidou obtained from de Gaulle the insertion in the declaration of these few words: “I dissolve the National Assembly. . . . legislative elections will be held within the time-limits fixed by the Constitution, unless some should seek to muzzle the whole French people by preventing it from expressing itself.” He also denounced (thinking of the leaders of the democratic left) “the ambition and the hatred of professional politicians,” and “the party which amounts to a totalitarian enterprise.”

At 4:30, when de Gaulle spoke, it was known that troops were standing at the gates of Paris. The information had been discreetly given to various radio stations to be broadcast. Suddenly, in a paralyzed city, without means of public transportation, even without gasoline for private cars, hundreds of thousands of people converged by foot on the Place de la Concorde. How many were there to march up the Champs-Elysées? Maybe a million; at least 800,000. For the first time in several weeks the national flag replaced the red and the black flags. This demonstration was not spontaneous. It had been decided several days before with the agreement of the prime minister, and was carefully prepared for by the Gaullist organizations.

A few hours later the political bureau of the Communist Party made public a declaration in which the holding of elections was accepted. The threat of civil war was dispelled.

Two days later the Parisians, furnished once again with gasoline, left by the hundreds of thousands on vacation for the long Pentecost weekend. During the four weeks of turmoil no one had been killed, but during this sunny weekend of relief, 70 people would die and 600 would be injured on the roads of France.

In the election of the June 23 and 30, 1968, the people, having recovered from their fear, elected 353 Gaullist parliamentarians out of a total of 486. The Communists retained only 34 seats and the democratic left 57. Never in the existence of the Republic had the French people voted in so great a majority in favor of one single party. Contrary to de Gaulle’s doubts, the new parliament was a miracle.

Those who said in the survey that they would do nothing in case of a popular uprising of military take over, the silent majority, were eager to vote. Many of them voted in a sense against the agitating minorities. The silent majority spoke imperatively.

Many observers have wondered, what was Moscow’s position? Only speculations are possible. There is not a single written document but an important testimony comes from the leaders of the other great Communist party in Europe, the Italian. In a report published soon after the end
of the crisis the general secretary of the Italian Communist party, Luigi Longo, gave a report to the Central Committee, in which citing the French communist leader Waldeck Rochet, he wrote: “In advanced capitalist and well organized societies, it is childish to think that the change of the system could be achieved from morning to evening, by occupying during 48 hours public buildings, the police offices, the radio and television. The turning over of the advanced capitalist system in which the vital centers – economic, administrative, political, military, are strongly organized, could be only the result of a vast process... the Leninist law about the maturation of revolutionary struggle takes into consideration not only the forces decided to act but also the popular forces... we are considering that the attitude of the French party has been conform to the real possibilities... we have always been guided by one major pre-occupation: not to give to the Power the possibility to suffocate the struggle of the working classes” (report to the Central Committee of the Italian Communist Party, 1968, p. 33).

**Gaullism without de Gaulle: routinization of charisma**

If de Gaulle had not returned from Baden, if he had resigned, presidential elections would have been held within a few weeks according to the Constitution. According to the surveys it is highly probable that in such a case, Pompidou, as candidate for the presidency, would have received a large majority of votes. In the legislative elections the people voted for order more than for de Gaulle.

If a “referendum plebiscite” had been held on the same day as the legislative elections, the majority of Frenchmen would have said “yes”, because de Gaulle’s presence as head of state was still indispensable: In many factories the workers, or a minority of them, continued their strike for one or two weeks after the curtain had fallen on the revolutionary stage – at a moment when the political class, including its Communist wing, was involved full time in the electoral campaign. But it would have been a reluctant yes. The survey, taken at that very moment, leaves no doubt about the metamorphosis of the hero into a historical figurehead. The majority of Frenchmen (and undoubtedly of Frenchwomen) judged that de Gaulle was “too sure of himself” (70%), “too old to govern” (59%), “too authoritarian” (64%), “too concerned with his personal prestige” (69%), “too conservative” (63%), and “too anti-American” (69%). Only a minority thought that he was “too hostile to European unification” (37%).

The politicians realized long before the masses that de Gaulle’s shrewdness was no longer what it once had been. This was underscored in
some degree by his rigidity and by the occasionally authoritarian tone of his comments in the council of ministers. Even those who were most devoted to him have testified to this effect in their memoirs, though with infinite delicacy. In May 1968 he sometimes even gave the impression of having lost touch with reality. For example, the prime minister and the chief of police thought it advisable to allow the insurgents to occupy the Sorbonne and the Odeon theater, where it was easy to keep an eye on them, rather than turn them out into the streets and thereby force them to direct their revolutionary fervor at buildings of more real importance. The police couldn’t be everywhere at once. But for de Gaulle it was a question of “the dignity of the State.”

The crisis of May 1968 is a prime example of institutional routinization of charisma. The institutions that de Gaulle had built were then, approved of by a very large majority of the French people and leadership (including the Socialist leaders who inherited these institutions in 1981). But the builder himself, around 1965, just when he seemed to have accomplished his historical mission, began to suffer a progressive decline in popularity. The results of the survey and the memoirs of the leaders converge on this point: In May 1968 the moment had arrived for a Gaullism without de Gaulle. The referendum of 1969 ratified a judgment that leaders and masses had already formulated one year before.

The paradox is that leaders and masses alike were thrown into panic by the disappearance, on May 29, of a man whom they no longer regarded as a providential guide. (cf. M. Dogan, 1965, “Le personnel politique et la personnalité charasmatique”, Revue française de sociologie, July-September VI); and M. Dogan, 1960, “Changement de régime et changement de personnel”, 1958, in Association Française de science politique, L’établissement de la Cinqième République: Les référendums et les élections de 1958, Paris, FNSP, 241-278). They would reject him by referendum; yet eighteen months later, when he died, they would mourn him with a solemnity not seen since the funeral of Victor Hugo. How fragile is charisma, and how fickle the people! Not only the French people – Winston Churchill met a similar fate. The same nation that rejected him in 1945 observed his passing years later with great respect at the most impressive State funeral of the century.

The paradox may be expressed as follows. France had changed enormously since the war; de Gaulle had not. The leader behind whom a united nation had rallied, and again during the Algerian crisis, became a focal point for dissent as social issues assumed the first priority. In a sense, de Gaulle was a victim of his own success: If he had not resolved so many crucial problems successfully, the social issues that replaced them in the public mind would not have arisen so soon.
If the nose of Cleopatra . . .

If general Massu had not succeeded in convincing de Gaulle to return to Paris, if the prime minister had not remained solid as a rock, if the leaders of the Communist party had judged that power was to be picked up effortlessly, if the chief of police had not been a moderate man who knew how to behave with circumspection, if there had been a hundred or so corpses on the pavement, if it had rained a lot during the month of May – things might have turned out very differently.

It is better not to indulge in speculations, but one cannot be resisted here. If Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg had both been present in Paris at that crucial moment, whose lead would the “working class” have followed? Their action gives us the answer. They opted for a general strike – more suitable in a highly industrial society – rather than for a Leninist putsch, which would have involved attacking the Elysée palace or the city hall. Leaders and followers alike resisted the Leninist temptation. The fate of the St. Petersburg palace would seem to be unique in the history of Europe since the storming of the Bastille in 1789.

Even if we admit that history never repeats itself, because historical factors never combine in an identical way, a comparison can still be made. Two days before the military putsch in Chile, which occurred on September 11, 1973, president Allende called general Pinochet and told him that he intended to organize a referendum. He waited too long to make such a decision, and Pinochet precipitated the putsch in order to avoid the referendum.

A conjunction of factors analyzed in this essay helped to prevent a civil war in France; but they would not have been sufficient without two major decisions proposed by the prime minister – decisions in a sense at odds with what de Gaulle had in mind. First, the decision to draw attention to the danger instead of concealing it, particularly by deliberately leaking information about military movements. This played a crucial role in the strategy of the Communist leaders. But even more important was the decision to give the silent majority a chance to let its voice be heard, by calling legislative elections. The lesson, in short; is that a popular uprising by agitating minorities or a military coup is possible only if there is some doubt about the will of the majority of the population. When electoral results are clear-cut and plain to all, the agitating minorities must become silent in their turn, and the extremists withdraw again into the shadows.
Methodological note

The survey has been sponsored and financed by the Délégation Générale à la Recherche Scientifique and conducted by myself, with the fieldwork done by the Institut Français d’Opinion Publique, in June 1968. Part of the survey has distinguished ten social categories: young people under the age of 30, old people over the age of 60; large factories and rural areas; Paris and the largest cities; industrial blue-collar; Communist voters; members of the leftist oriented union (mostly Communist voters); practicing catholics and non-believers. These categories are not all mutually exclusive; some of them are overlapping, they are neither on a continuous dimension since the intermediate category is excluded (excluded from this analysis even if they are included in most of other aspects covered by the survey). Some categories are ecological variables in the sense that they indicate a place and not a group, for instance Paris and the largest cities, or large factories.

It might be argued that since the survey was conducted after the crisis, the high percentage of bystanders reflected in the survey does not suggest a “true” picture of behavior in a deep crisis situation, because the survey was conducted after the crisis when the temperature had already cooled. A distinction has to be made between the refusal to reply and the reply “I would do nothing.” This last reply means a definite position taken in full view of alternative behaviors. “To do nothing” is a sociological statement. It is a deliberate choice meaning that these people did not want to be involved in the struggle, either in the “popular” side or on the military side.

The ecological approach allows for a clearer perception of the potential behavior. It appears from the results that the crisis has not been felt in all social strata. It has attracted a much higher proportion among the young people than among older citizens. It had mobilized the city dwellers more than people residing in rural areas. As always in French historical crisis it was first a Parisian turmoil. It had reached much more of the non-believers than the practicing catholics. These dichotomic categories represent more than one-third of the French male population leaving out of the analysis the two thirds who are neither practicing catholics nor agnostics.

The survey focused on active minorities. It is for this reason that the sample has been limited to the male population, since we know from other sources that the capacity for mobilization among female population was much lower at that time. If the sample had been half male half female it would have reduced by half the size of the ten sociological categories that we have distinguished. What could be said nonetheless
is that the gap between the political behavior of men and of women had been significantly narrowed in the 1960’s in comparison to the 1940’s and 1950’s, particularly the incidence of religious beliefs affecting political attitudes (cf. M. Dogan and J. Narbonne, 1955, Les françaises face à la politique. Paris, Colin). The main result of this survey confirms what philosophers have always claimed and what political sociologists have repeatedly demonstrated: history is made by active minorities, even if it is also well established that these minorities are not immune to the influence of large masses.
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