

Abstract

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What explains political trust? Many researchers have presented various theories and explanations to this question. Therefore the number of answers according to previous research has been numerous and ambiguous. In contributing to this line of research, this dissertation uses a multi-level definition by David Easton and Pippa Norris and her colleagues. I continue to choose two theories that particularly have been presented as possible answers to why political trust varies among citizens. The first is the social capital theory and the second is the theory on procedural fairness.

I continue to test the relevance of the selected theories, where the data on the micro-level is a) a national sample in Sweden evaluating national political trust, and b) a regional sample covering 50 municipalities of West Sweden, evaluating municipal political trust. Several results are found. First, social capital theory is primarily valid in terms of generalised trust, while associational activities do not result in any significantly higher political trust at all. Second, the civiness hypothesis is confirmed but with marginal effect. This means that people living in areas where they think their neighbours are more willing to give a helping hand at emergencies, or do some extra work for the benefit of the local community, have a significantly higher political trust. However, this effect is quite marginal in size.

When the second theory is tested, the role of procedural fairness, I find that persons who believe that the courts are working in a fair and foreseeable way across the country have significantly higher political trust. This is true together with the social capital theory, and the analyses have also been controlled for the home-team hypothesis presented by Holmberg and others, that implies that you tend to trust those that you have voted for. For the micro-level, I conclude that generalised trust and perceived procedural justice are the primary relevant explanations to the variance of political trust, under control for the home-team hypothesis and other background variables.

The two theories are also being tested on the macro-level, since it has been argued by social capital theory that the relevant effects should be detected at aggregate levels. The results in this regard are meagre; there are no social capital effects to be found across municipal populations where I investigate the variation of mean political trust. What could be detected was an important effect of the perceived possibility to affect political decisions. This result gives credit to Tom Tyler's argument on process control, which was confirmed on micro level as well. Following this part of the analyses, I conclude that social capital theory is not valid to explain political trust at the macro-level, at least not within the same country. Another important result was that the working definition of political trust transferred well from the national to the municipal level.

Keywords: political trust, generalised trust, social capital, procedural justice, multi-level analysis, municipality, micro-level, macro-level, political attitudes, Sweden, West Sweden, SOM-data.