Distrusting Citizens: Revisiting the Concept and Measurement of Political Distrust and its Consequences

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Abstract

At the heart of the often-decried 'democratic crisis' lies citizens' distrust towards their political institutions and leaders. Yet, despite broad consensus on widespread political distrust, there is no scholarly agreement on what it entails and how it is structured. This article presents a conceptual model of political distrust based on technical, moral and interest-based evaluations of agents and tests it empirically in the UK, offering empirical confirmation for the structure of distrusting attitudes. The measures we propose outperform the traditional trust indicator in capturing variance among distrusting citizens. We show that the three underlying evaluative dimensions create valid and reliable measures, which provide insights into citizen distrust and accurately predict protest behavioral intentions.

Keywords: political trust, distrust, democratic support, measurement

Word count: 8650

The concept of political trust has received considerable attention in the academic literature going as far back as classical Greek political theory and the treaties of John Locke, to studies of diffuse support and the survival of democratic systems (Easton, 1965; 1975; Norris, 2011; Braithwaite and Levi, 1998). Whilst this has led to abundant scholarly work based on empirical (mostly survey) evidence, there is a growing dissonance between the analytical tools and concepts used to study trust on the one hand, and political phenomena across established democracies, which clearly point to citizen distrust, on the other hand. The election of Donald Trump in the US and the discourse following the EU membership referendum in the UK, as well as the electoral rise of anti-systemic and populist parties across European democracies all showcase the need to better understand what is in the heart of attitudes of distrust towards politics, parties and institutions. In 2016, only about 20% of Americans claimed to trust the government in Washington to do what is right "most of the time" or "just about always", while only 38% of UK citizens said they "tended to trust" their National Parliament (attitudes in other European countries are yet more negative, with only 15-17% of citizens in France, Spain or Italy trusting their Parliaments).[1]

However, most scholarship still speaks about and measures political trust. For years, scholars have measured political trust and interpreted its absence as implicit evidence of distrust, leading to contested claims regarding the health of democratic systems. Nevertheless, the question of what political distrust means and how to interpret it is now urgently looking for insights. Lower values on trust scale are taken to signify citizen distrust (Paul and Gronke, 2005; Mishler and

[1] Data for the US trust in government obtained from Pew Research Center (http://www.people-press.org/2017/05/03/public-trust-in-government-1958-2017/). Data for the UK and EU average trust in Parliament obtained from Eurobarometer 86.

Rose, 1997), but this may lead us to miss crucial variance in the negative end of the attitudinal continuum where most citizens place themselves. More importantly, the nature, scope and object of distrust are often questioned (Miller, 1974a, Citrin, 1974). In their review of the field, Levi and Stoker pointed out that "we have yet to question whether all of this research is really about trust" (2000: 483), referring notably to the US National Election Study's 'trust in government' indicator.[2] Others have expressed doubts on whether such measures can ever provide an indication of political distrust (Bertsou, 2020; Larry, 2002; Stokes, 1962).

Similar limitations plague indicators in Europe which aim to capture trust and distrust 'by intuition', that is, by asking survey respondents how much they trust various political institutions, essentially conceiving trust and distrust as purely expressive. These approaches are useful for monitoring trends and comparing levels of 'trust' across time, but citizens' rationale for distrusting and the kinds of evaluations they follow when judging political agents to be untrustworthy remain contested, as does the dimensionality of this construct (Hamm, Smidt and Mayer, 2019; PytlikZillig et al., 2016; Fisher et al., 2010; Zmerli and Hooghe, 2011). Recently, Intawan and Nicholson (2018) showed a substantive difference between implicit trust and explicit distrust of government, adding more voices to the discussion of how best to interpret 'declining levels of trust in politics'. While Cook and Gronke (2005) used an extended scale to show how the NES measure conflates distrusting with skeptical citizens in a US study. Their argument was that traditional measures do not capture distrusting attitudes because they are truncated. We argue that existing measures are not only less precise in measuring the attitude of consequence (that is, distrust rather than trust), but also that they cannot illuminate the evaluations that underpin distrusting attitudes.

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[2] For GSS and NES question phrasing see Appendix 1 in the Online Appendix.

This article addresses precisely these questions in an effort to better understand and study distrusting citizens: What does political distrust entail? Can we measure it explicitly and reliably, without relying on expressive measures or equating lack of trust to distrust? We find that, by unpacking distrusting attitudes and tapping on technical, moral and interest-based evaluative judgements regarding key political institutions we are able to capture political distrust attitudes with more precision and less error. We are also able to shed light to the significance of a distrusting stance and what evaluations motivate different types of political action. In the next sections, we present the concept of political distrust, rooting it in existing psychological literature, and construct a model identifying the three underlying components: technical (evaluations of technical incompetence and inability to fulfill political roles); moral (evaluations of political conduct that is morally wrong, unjust or produces unfair outcomes); and interest-based (evaluations of incongruent interests between the citizen and political agents). We then operationalize distrust and its components and validate this measurement model and data structure through multi-item indicators, using an original survey of British respondents. We conclude with an assessment of how distrust affects different aspects of citizens' attitudes and behavior and implications for future research.

UNPACKING POLITICAL DISTRUST

Scholarly interest in political trust and distrust reaches back to Easton's identification of political trust as a component of diffuse support for democratic systems (Easton 1965, 1975). However, the trust literature has largely neglected political distrust. According to work on system support and political culture, distrust of political institutions is inimical to democracy,

as it inhibits voluntary compliance with legislation and cooperation between citizens and political agents. One of the key reasons why unpacking political distrust is of high importance for political scientists is precisely its hypothesized impact on democratic governance. A large body of work has explored the relationship between trust levels and voting behavior, various modes of political participation and mobilization, support for policy programmes and law compliance. Hetherington and colleagues have shown that political trust affects perceptions of incumbents, policy preferences and support for redistributive policies (Hetherington, 2005; Hetherington and Husser, 2012; Hetherington and Rudolph, 2015). Research across Europe and the US has also found evidence that political trust affect compliance with the law and tax avoidance (Scholz and Lubell, 1998; Hooghe et al., 2011). These studies use mostly available 'trust in government' survey data, yet the questions regarding the role of citizen distrust remain and multiply as distrusting attitudes become more widespread and provide fruitful ground for disruptive political entrepreneurs and movements.

Interestingly, political distrust was the object of much scholarly investigation in the 1970s and 1980s. Political scientists became alarmed by the mounting evidence of citizens' democratic alienation and attempted to understand the phenomenon of disaffection and its implications for the stability of democratic values and systems (Hart, 1978; Parry, 1976; Sigelman and Feldman, 1983; Craig et al., 1990; Gamson, 1968; Finifter, 1970). This work gave rise to competing definitions of political distrust. Miller (1974a) emphasized the importance of political outputs, explaining political distrust as "a statement of the belief that the government is not functioning and producing outputs in accord with individual expectations" (952). Sigelman and Feldman (1983) focused on citizens' personal interests and defined political distrust as "the belief that government is not being run in one's interest" (119). More comprehensively, Hart (1978) wrote "that which I call political distrust is, in a democracy, an

unfavourable evaluation of the processes of their polity based upon the perception by citizens of a discrepancy between the actual operation of the political system and the democratic norms publicly accepted as its standards" (2).

Most understandings of political distrust are in agreement over these two key characteristics: first, that distrust is based upon citizens' *perceptions* of their political system and second, the perceptions are evaluations of the *political system*, its agents, processes and outputs. Apart from this consensus, there is still a debate on what precisely is being evaluated (the government, processes, politicians, the political system in its entirety) and on what basis untrustworthiness is judged (individual expectations, best-interest or democratic standards).

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

We propose a conceptual model of political distrust that identifies three underlying evaluative components for judging untrustworthiness. We base this on existing psychological and sociological work on trust and distrust (Luhmann, 1980; Gambetta, 1988; Hardin, 2002). We hold that political distrust is an attitude held by a citizen towards political agents, institutions and even the political system as a whole, and reflects perceptions of technical incompetence, unethical conduct and incongruent interests. Citizens use all the information available through their cognitive and affective reservoir, including past experiences, stimuli and new information regarding the actions and qualities of political agents, to make these technical, moral and interest-based evaluations.

The first – technical – evaluative component of distrust is based on citizens' perception of incompetence where politics and power positions demand particular types of knowledge, competencies and skills. In the absence of such skills and competencies institutions, processes and indeed the democratic polity fails to function properly and to provide citizens with important public goods. Political distrust does not reflect an apathetic stance towards politics or the belief that it is not relevant for citizens' lives. On the contrary it shows a recognition that governments and state actors matter and that given their roles in regulation, the economy, security, healthcare and other domains, their failure to perform in the technically complex business of governing is detrimental to citizens.

The strategic theory of trust developed by Russell Hardin (2000) suggests that the basis for trusting relations is a strategic calculation and consideration of a specific task. Although this tripartite understanding of trust relations (A trusts B to do X) is problematic in separating distrust from simple lack of trust, citizen testimonies of anger, frustration and specific demands indicate that political distrust is often underscored by assessments of technical failures, incompetence and the inability to provide goods. Citizen distrust based on evaluations of technical incompetence can be applied to the government, to institutions or to the political system in general, for their failure to produce the required outputs, address problems effectively and fulfil their function. This evaluative component of political distrust is based on assessments of performance and political track record, but it also extends in the future in the form of expectations of negative outcomes.

Even more pronounced in attitudes of distrust is a sense of political misconduct of an ethical nature. This second – moral – underlying evaluation highlights the inherently normative element of political distrust. Attitudes of distrust entail the belief that there is something

fundamentally *wrong*, unfair and unethical about the processes, intentions and/or outcomes produced by the political agent or system in question. Societal relations of trust and distrust have been explained using the notions of ethical reciprocity and the belief that if one places themselves in a position of vulnerability, they will be met with reciprocated goodwill - or in the case of distrust, with punishment (Braithwaite and Levi, 1998; Blackburn, 1998). Political roles and government functions are positions of power, and as such, they are bound to strong moral norms considered to be objective and shared by the entire political community. Evaluations of unethical conduct refer to violations of such norms and the vulnerability of citizens towards those with more power. Importantly, moral norms transcend the individual preference framework of any one citizen or group (even if citizens produce different outcome judgments regarding the ethical standing of some political agents). Distrusting attitudes very often reflect perceptions of deception, bias, inequity, prejudice and manipulation, which are judged to violate *universal* ethical norms of a community. Political distrust as a consequence of earlier trust betrayal also carries a distinct moral judgment and poses a particular challenge for altering future expectations of misconduct.

The third – interest-based – underlying evaluation entailed in political distrust emerges from the relational nature of distrust and is based on perceptions of incongruent interests between the citizen and the political system or its agents. Considerations of interests have also been highlighted in earlier analytical approaches to trust as 'encapsulated interest' (Hardin 2002, 2004), however this component stems from the perceived distance between citizens and political agents. Perceptions of incongruence mean that the intentions and outcomes of political processes directly or indirectly harm a citizen's personal interests and preferences.

Citizens often perceive politics as a competitive arena where resources, values, and issue prioritization are allocated based on a contest of groups, interests and ideologies. Citizens may develop their own understanding of their best-interest, either on individual terms that encompass themselves and their family or, most often in a pluralistic society, in line with a social group or sociotropically (Bruter and Harrison, 2018). Trust scholars have previously highlighted the role of social identification in shaping repetitive social relationships that involve risk mitigation (Tyler, 1998; Scheidegger and Staerklé, 2011; Hooghe and Marks, 2005). The existence of positive and negative norms of reciprocity (such as 'special relationships) are often motivated less by considerations of functional competencies or moral norms and more by considerations of proximity and congruence. In existing studies of trust in government, a consistent finding is that partisans express less trust towards an out-party government (Hetherington and Rudolph, 2015). Of course, they may also perceive the government to act incompetently and unethically, but their perception of untrustworthiness is based on the belief that the government's conduct will go against their interest. Beyond partisan politics, minority groups often report distrust towards political or law and order institutions that believe function against their interests.[3] This aspect of distrust is particularly prominent in divided communities and polarized systems, where groups and interests are clearly delineated and out-groups easily identified and distrusted.

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[3] In the case of minority groups, perceptions of a political system that systematically undermines issues concerning their rights and welfare will undoubtedly give rise to distrust from a moral evaluative perspective as well, as well as interest-based perspective. Groups that do not enjoy descriptive representation in government, often express distrust along those lines.

Though distrust based on assessments of incongruence tends to be expressed in more specific terms, it can become comprehensive when the political regime as a whole is perceived to represent and pursue interests that are diverging from those of large parts of the community. Populism, for example, thrives on a rhetoric that places political elites and the system on a contrasting path to the 'ordinary' citizens, their will and best-interest. A number of public figures have seen their appeal surge using such rhetoric, capitalising on and further fuelling attitudes of political distrust based on incongruence and normative judgments.

The conceptual model of political distrust we propose posits that when citizens claim to distrust politics or politicians, what it means is that they perceive them to be technically incompetent, in violation of moral norms and in pursuit of interests that contravene their own best-interest. In the case of distrust addressed towards institutions, they reflect both assessments of the institutional design or capabilities and the people in key roles within these institutions. These evaluations are not distinct types of political distrust. Ontologically, they represent components of distrust that may overlap, may be fused together and may be difficult to disentangle even for citizens who express them. Many phenomena that contribute to political distrust, such as perceptions of corruption, cronyism or discrimination, tend to combine expectations of unethical, ineffective and damaging outcomes for citizens. Further, citizens may formulate their evaluations in retrospective terms, as assessments of past technical incompetence and failures, unethical conduct or incongruent interests, as well as in prospective terms, as future expectations of such interactions with political agents. Both these time projections are important for distrusting judgments, with retrospective distrust being more assessment-driven and prospective distrust being driven more by behavioral and future action concerns. In the following section we discuss this in more depth and take both time projections into consideration when operationalizing political distrust towards political institutions.

Finally, we turn to the target of political distrust – the agent or institution a citizen judges to be untrustworthy. While trust and distrust were originally conceived as measures of diffuse support and therefore, attitudes targeted at the entire political system, they have traditionally been measured using evaluations of political institutions and governments (leading to heated debates on how to best interpret survey results, see Easton, 1975; Fisher et al., 2010; Hooghe, 2011). The aim of our conceptual model is to rely on citizen evaluations and to be applicable equally to cases of distrust towards individual politicians or groups, institutions and processes, as well as the political system as a whole. While systemic or diffuse distrust is what threatens the stability of democratic systems, qualitative evidence show that it is not conceptually different in its evaluative underpinnings from political distrust that is targeted at specific actors, though the level of distrust may vary. Repeated instances of distrust in specific governments or legislatures spill over to the systemic level and feed perceptions of a system that as a whole functions in an ineffective, unethical and incongruent manner. The purpose of this exercise of 'unpacking' political distrust has been to provide conceptual clarity based on theory and qualitative research, with the aim of measuring political distrust empirically and examining how it affects relevant behavioral intentions of citizens.

METHODS AND MEASUREMENT

In this article we treat political distrust as a latent construct and take a different approach from existing works which rely on asking respondents "how much" or "how often" they trust different political institutions, so as to illuminate the different elements of distrusting attitudes.

We operationalize the three components of distrust by creating multi-item indicators that tap into all underlying evaluations using two time projections. We used attitude statements for each underlying dimension and asked respondents to register their level of agreement or disagreement on a seven-point scale.[4] The items were included in an online survey of UK respondents that took place in spring 2014, with a sample representative in terms of age, gender and rural-urban residence (N= 785). The survey was conducted by a research institute that specialises in online survey research and maintains a panel of UK respondents.[5] Attitude statements were phrased positively to limit acquiescence bias that would lead to more negative evaluations (all responses are recoded for the analysis, with higher values on the composite scale recording distrust). Though there are potentially unlimited ways to construct attitude statements that capture political distrust, we decided to tap into each evaluative dimension without referring to specific instances of technical failures, unethical conduct or incongruent interests (for example, the decision to go to war, handling the economy or the National Health Service). Phrasing items in general terms poses the disadvantage of not really activating salient moral, technical or congruent-based judgments, but offers the advantage of avoiding partisan cues, time and context specific constraints.

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[4] The use of seven-point scales for attitude measurement offers an appropriate number of response categories, wide enough to gather ample information on the strength and distribution of respondent attitudes, yet concise enough to avoid a central tendency bias (Miller, 1956; Uslaner, 2013; Alwin and Krosnick, 1991; Schwartz, 2003; Petrzelka et al., 2013).

[5] Full information on sample demographics and sample comparisons are available in Appendix 2 in the Online Appendix. N= 785, mean age=47.6 years, gender=50.4% women. Lower education status was underrepresented in our sample (12.3% as opposed to 23.1% nationally) and higher education slightly overrepresented (38.9% compared to 32.1%).

The relational nature of political distrust makes it necessary to assess it in consideration of specific targets (or political agents). In this study, we measure all aspects of distrust in relation to two different agents in an effort to into high and low thresholds for political distrust: National Parliament, and the citizen's preferred party. The National Parliament is the most frequent proxy used to capture attitudes towards the political system (Zmerli and Hooghe, 2011). However, considering a citizen's preferred party offers a higher threshold of distrust in that it operationalizes distrust in relation to the political agents that are supposedly in greatest sync with the citizen's own perceived interest. The focus on a 'most liked' (or 'least disliked') political target provides a stronger test for distrusting attitudes and maps its lower boundary. Comparing distrust expressed towards these two different political targets also reveals citizens who may distrust Parliament in its current form (and current Parliamentary majority), but whose distrust could be redeemed if political institutions came closer to their preferred political agent. Perceptions of preferred political party provide insights on the role political parties play in linking citizens to the political process and the political system as a whole, while avoiding the pitfall of asking about political parties in general (routinely scoring the highest distrust scores of all political agents in survey research). Further, it allows us to test whether political distrust is cumulative, when considering political actors that are easier and harder to distrust.

We use multivariate analysis to explore the structure of the data and assess dimensionality of the latent construct of political distrust. We expect that following the conceptual model, the three underlying evaluations of distrust load on a single factor dimension, both in retrospective and prospective time projections. We rely on Item Response Theory (IRT) to analyse the properties of the new scale and determine whether responses on the scale items accurately capture the latent trait of political distrust (Allen and Yen, 2001; De Ayala, 2013; Samejima,

1970). We also test for a hierarchical structure within our data, to examine whether registering distrust for one political target over the other is consistently 'easier' across all respondents (Mokken, 1971; 1997) and compare distrust levels between the two targets. Further, following IRT and applying a Graded Response Model for polytomous data (Samejima 1974) we test how much information is added to the overall scale by each item and at what level of the latent trait this information is added, to check if our measures are more reliable at capturing negative attitudes of distrust. Finally, we confirm the validity of the new indicator of political distrust by comparing it to a traditionally phrased single item Trust in Parliament indicator and assessing its associations with antecedent attitudes, citizen characteristics and behavioral intentions of protest.

THE STRUCTURE OF DISTRUSTING JUDGMENTS

Table 1 shows all 12 items used in the survey, along with descriptive statistics. As expected, the preferred target of the political system (one's preferred political party) is evaluated more positively than the National Parliament across all items. Interestingly, retrospective assessments of political untrustworthiness are more severe than prospective evaluations (or perhaps, prospective evaluations are less negative). This difference may reflect genuine belief in political changes (political personnel replacement, new processes, system reforms) or reflect a psychological tendency to maintain some degree of hope and belief in a more favourable future – or at least no worse than past indicators would suggest. Prospective assessments are expected to mirror one's expected future political behavior and interactions with the political system, whereas retrospective assessments reflect attitudes shaped by existing outcomes and

outputs. This also highlights that distrusting attitudes should not be simply equated to an assessment of past governing effectiveness.

Evaluations of incongruent interests are the most negative of all three dimensions, though only when it comes to distrust in National Parliament. Citizens are more likely to doubt Parliament has acted/will act consistently with their preferences than they are to worry it will act in an incompetent or immoral manner. This may just reflect Parliament's representation of a society's pluralistic interests rather than alignment with the interests of one group. Nevertheless, evaluations of incongruent interests do contribute to the overall political distrust scale.[6] Preferred party-specific items show that respondents meaningfully differentiate between the two political targets; here congruence evaluations are in line with technical and moral evaluations.

Considering the reliability and dimensionality of the new indicators, all associations between the 12 items are positive though the strength of the correlations varies (ranging from .854 to .257, available in the Online Appendix). Factor Analysis (EFA) shows that, as expected, the evaluations of technical incompetence, unethical conduct and incongruent interests tap into the same underlying latent attitude and do not represent distinct dimensions of distrust for each political target. Similarly, the two time projections also load onto the same construct, although there are some differences between retrospective assessments and expectations of future conduct as mentioned above. Table 2 below shows factor loadings for each item per political

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[6] Reliability analysis and item-scale correlations available in Appendix 3 the Online Appendix.

target extracting a one-factor solution. The correlation between the two indicators is strong and

positive (r=.552), in line with theoretical expectations and existing research.

Table 1: Item phrasing and descriptive statistics

Item Phrasing	Item	Mean	SD
When you think of Parliament as an institution, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?			
In recent years, I would say that Parliament has usually acted in a competent manner in the case of technically complex questions	Parliament Technical Retrospective	4.43	1.41
In recent years, I would say that Parliament has usually acted in a moral manner in the case of ethically difficult questions	Parliament Moral Retrospective	4.44	1.5
In recent years, I would say that Parliament has usually acted in accordance with my political preferences in the case of ideologically divisive questions	Parliament Interest Retrospective	4.69	1.44
When the country faces a technically complex challenge, I believe that Parliament would be likely to take the competent decision	Parliament Technical Prospective	4.27	1.41
When the country faces a morally difficult decision, I believe that Parliament would be likely to take the right decision	Parliament Moral Prospective	4.29	1.44
When the country faces a question on which many people may have different opinions, I believe that Parliament would be likely to take a decision that is close to my preferences	Parliament Interest Prospective	4.45	1.36
Now, think of the party you would be most likely to vote for in the next general election. Thinking of this party, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?			
In recent years, I would say that this party has usually acted in a competent manner in the case of technically complex questions	Party Technical Retrospective	3.76	1.35
In recent years, I would say that this party has usually acted in a moral manner in the case of ethically difficult questions	Party Moral Retrospective	3.72	1.38
In recent years, I would say that this party has usually acted in accordance with my political preferences in the case of ideologically divisive questions	Party Interest Retrospective	3.74	1.43
When the country faces a technically complex challenge, I believe that this party would be likely to take the competent decision	Party Technical Prospective	3.63	1.33
When the country faces a morally difficult decision, I believe that this party would be likely to take the right decision	Party Moral Prospective	3.57	1.39
When the country faces a question on which many people may have different opinions, I believe that this party would be likely to take a decision that is close to my preferences	Party Interest Prospective	3.57	1.39

Note: Items measured through a seven-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 7=strongly disagree), higher values denote higher distrust, N=785.

In subsequent analysis, we test whether responses follow a cumulative structure between the "easier" and "harder" political targets to be distrusted. The two targets represent different layers of the political system, and expressing distrust towards one's preferred party should be "harder" than expressing distrust in Parliament. We use Mokken scale analysis (MSA), to take into account the relative 'easiness' or 'difficulty' of items within the scale. MSA can provide evidence as to whether the scale follows a Monotone Homogeneity model, where the order of item 'easiness' differs among respondents, or a Double Monotonicity model, where items are ordered in the same manner by all respondents. Table 3 presents the results of the Mokken analysis for the items capturing evaluations of National Parliament and preferred party combined, which we expect to be "easy" and "hard" measures of distrust respectively.

Table 2: Factor analysis of political distrust items

	National Parliament Factor 1	Preferred Political Party Factor 1
Parliament Technical Retrospective	0.766	
Parliament Moral Retrospective	0.74	
Parliament Interest Retrospective	0.743	
Parliament Technical Prospective	0.876	
Parliament Moral Prospective	0.875	
Parliament Interest Prospective	0.808	
Party Technical Retrospective		0.676
Party Moral Retrospective		0.659
Party Interest Retrospective		0.685
Party Technical Prospective		0.907
Party Moral Prospective		0.938
Party Interest Prospective		0.89
Eigenvalue	4.25	4.34
Variance Explained	78%	72.30%
LR Test	χ^2=651, p<.000	χ^2=1126, p<.000

Note: Entries are factor loadings from Exploratory Factor Analysis using Maximum Likelihood estimation for factor extraction. EFA was calculated separately for the two layers of political distrust: distrust in Parliament and distrust in preferred party.

Table 3: Mokken scale analysis for distrust items

	Item Hi	Homogeneity Criteria	Non-intersection Criteria
Parliament Technical Retrospective	0.546	8	241
Parliament Moral Retrospective	0.539	80	236
Parliament Interest Retrospective	0.518	13	278
Parliament Technical Prospective	0.571	-2	235
Parliament Moral Prospective	0.575	0	239
Parliament Interest Prospective	0.492	29	255
Party Technical Retrospective	0.539	15	241
Party Moral Retrospective	0.532	14	238
Party Interest Retrospective	0.558	17	260
Party Technical Prospective	0.555	13	291
Party Moral Prospective	0.504	31	278
Party Interest Prospective	0.546	8	241
Scale	H= .541 (.021)		

Note: Scale Loevinger's coefficient H (st.error in parenthesis) and item Hi calculated in R programme using Mokken package. N=785

Evaluative items for the two targets form a strong unidimensional scale measuring general attitudes of political distrust; the scale Loevinger's coefficient is H=.541 and each item has a strong individual coefficient, between Hi=.492-.575.[7] However, we do not find any evidence that items are ordered hierarchically. The assumption of non-intersecting item step response functions is violated, and all of the criteria are substantially above the conventional threshold value of 80.[8] Items measuring negative evaluations of preferred party do not capture more

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[7] These values far exceed Mokken's suggestions for the threshold value of a medium-strength scale (H=.400) and the threshold value for a strong scale (H=.500). To test the Monotone Homogeneity (MH) model we look at the homogeneity criteria. Values under 40 are considered acceptable for the homogeneity model and in our analysis all item criteria, bar one, fall below this value, meaning that the higher you score on the scale, the stronger your attitude of distrust.

[8] According to Hardouin et al. (2011) strong evidence for non-intersecting item step response functions come with criteria values below 40, while values between 40 and 80 are acceptable. An investigation of the non-intersection criteria for the Parliament scale shows all of the criteria

distrusting attitudes than negative evaluations of Parliament in our sample. Thus, while more negative technical, moral and interest-based evaluations of Parliament and preferred party capture higher distrust towards those agents, a negative evaluation of one's preferred party does not capture 'stronger' distrust than similar evaluations of Parliament. Calculating the distrust difference between the two targets for each responded shows that 68.4% of our sample registers what we would term as 'redeemable' distrust in the political system, with their distrust of their preferred party being lower than distrust of Parliament.

MEASURING TRUST AND DISTRUST

As a next step, we investigate whether the new items are able to measure negative attitudes towards political targets more reliably than widely used 'trust' items. We first compare the measurement properties of the distrust in Parliament scale and the information captured by the six items to a traditionally phrased single item measuring trust in the British Parliament.[9] We then create separate histograms for each response of the trust in the British Parliament measure to see at what levels the new items are better at adding granularity.

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values below 80, although most items fall between 40 and 80. For distrust in preferred political party, we find there is mixed evidence, and weaker than in the case of items referring to Parliament, with three of the item criteria with values of 80 and below and three above 80.

[9] The exact question read: "Please indicate how much you trust each of the following institutions to usually take the right decisions: The British Parliament?" Answer: 1 - "Do not trust at all" to 7 - "Have complete trust". Responses to this item were recoded for this analysis so that higher values capture less trust and can be directly compared to the new items.

We apply a Graded Response Model (non-Rasch model for polytomous data, Samejima, 1974) and generate an information function (IIF) for each item based on the information provided by each item's response categories (see Online Appendix for each item's option response function and overall scale information). The analysis and plots were created using the ltm package in R (Rizopoulos, 2006).

In the case of polytomous items, we would expect multi-peaked information curves, whereby each peak represents the location on the underlying latent trait at which the item provides the most information, i.e. where it measures distrust more reliably and with less error. Figure 2 shows the information curves for all six items used in the distrust in Parliament scale, plus the traditional single item used in most survey research. The x-axis represents the full range of the latent trait of political distrust (here ranging from -4 to 4). The positive end of the x-axis represents higher levels of distrust, the zero mid-point represents middling levels and the negative end (closer to -4) represents low levels of the latent attitude. Thus, an information function which peaks closer to 4 is better at capturing high distrust, while a function which peaks closer to -4 better measures low distrust. The distance between peaks on an item's information function indicates the information lost between the two adjacent peak points in the measurement of the latent trait. The closer together the peaks, the smaller the information loss.

Ideally, items should capture maximum information and cover a wide range of the latent trait being measured. Figure 2 shows that both technical and moral prospective evaluations of National Parliament (light and dark blue lines) capture considerable amounts of information, and far more than any single item, including the traditional 'trust in Parliament' item (yellow line). They peak on the positive side of the latent trait, confirming that these two items are good at capturing higher levels of distrust, indeed much better than the traditional survey question.

Lower peaks on the negative side of the latent trait also indicate that these items are good at capturing a wider range of the distrust latent trait continuum as a whole. The item taping on interest-based prospective considerations also provides information on a wide range of the distrust scale, less reliably than the moral and technical specific items but more so than the traditional survey question. Retrospective evaluative items seem to add a little more information at the extreme negative end of the distrust scale, but overall they are weaker than prospective items.

Figure 2: Item information curves for evaluative items of National Parliament plus the traditional "trust in British Parliament" measure
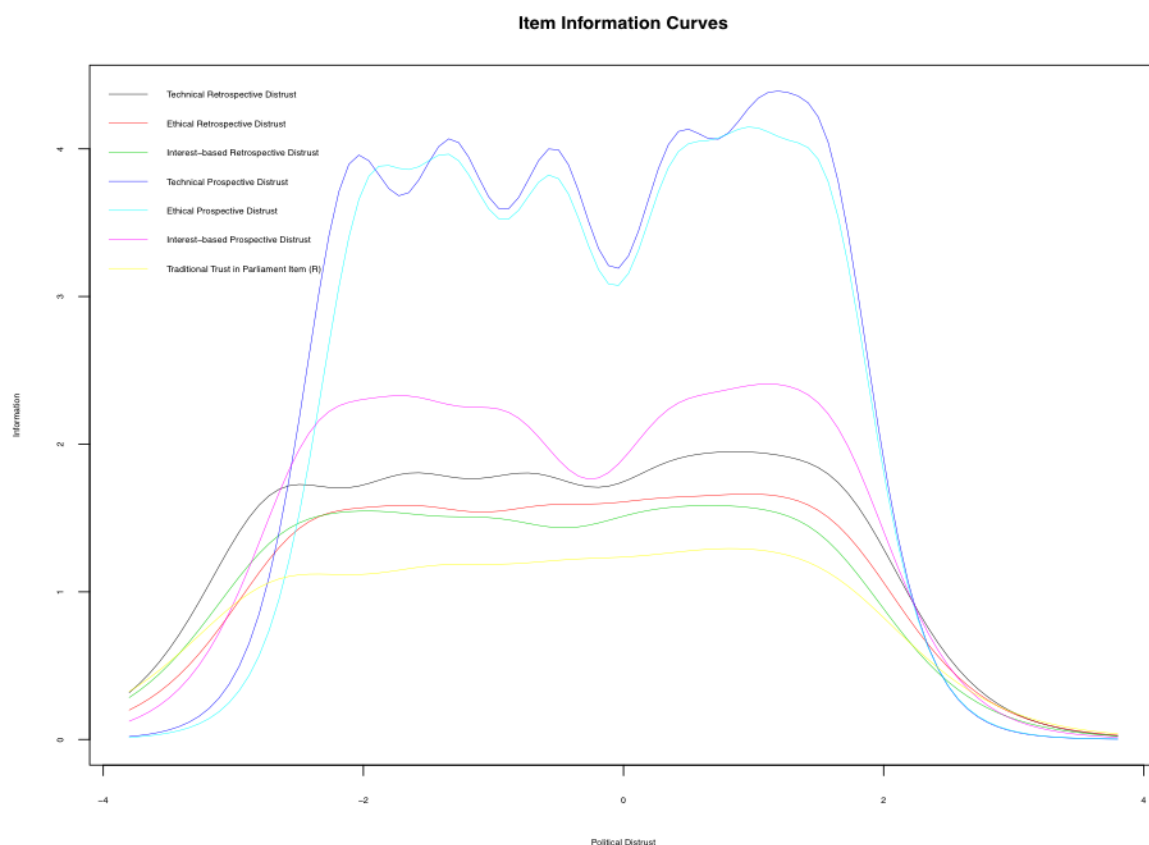
Comparing the IIF of the six evaluative items capturing technical, moral and interest-based considerations to a standard 'trust in Parliament' survey item, we thus find that the latter is by

far the weakest both in terms of the information provided and the range of the latent trait covered. Particularly at the positive end of the distrust scale, the prospective technical and moral evaluation items significantly outperform the 'trust in Parliament' item (recoded so that higher values indicate lower trust).

The following figures show separate histograms for the prospective items referring to Parliament (figure 3) and preferred party (figure 4) for each response on the traditional item. Figure 3 confirms the evidence obtained from the item information functions, showing that the lower values of the traditional item encompass a wider range of responses on the items taping on technical, moral and interest based evaluations. Figure 4 plots responses to attitudes towards one's preferred political party, which we argue should provide a lower threshold for the measurement of political distrust. As expected the correlation between these measures and the traditional "trust in British Parliament" item are lower, but again we do see more differentiation in the responses that fall on the lower end of the scale.

The comparison between the technical, moral and interest-based evaluative items and this 'trust in British Parliament" provide the hardest test against the former, given that they are all answered on a seven-point scale. If we pitted the new items against other commonly used survey indicators of political trust, such as the dichotomous Eurobarometer item or the four category confidence item used in the World and European Values Survey, results would have been even more striking at distrusting levels. [10]

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[10] See Cook and Gronke (2005) for a similar exercise in the US and Mishler and Rose (1997) for Central and Eastern Europe.

Figure 3: Histograms comparing National Parliament items to traditional "trust in British Parliament" measure
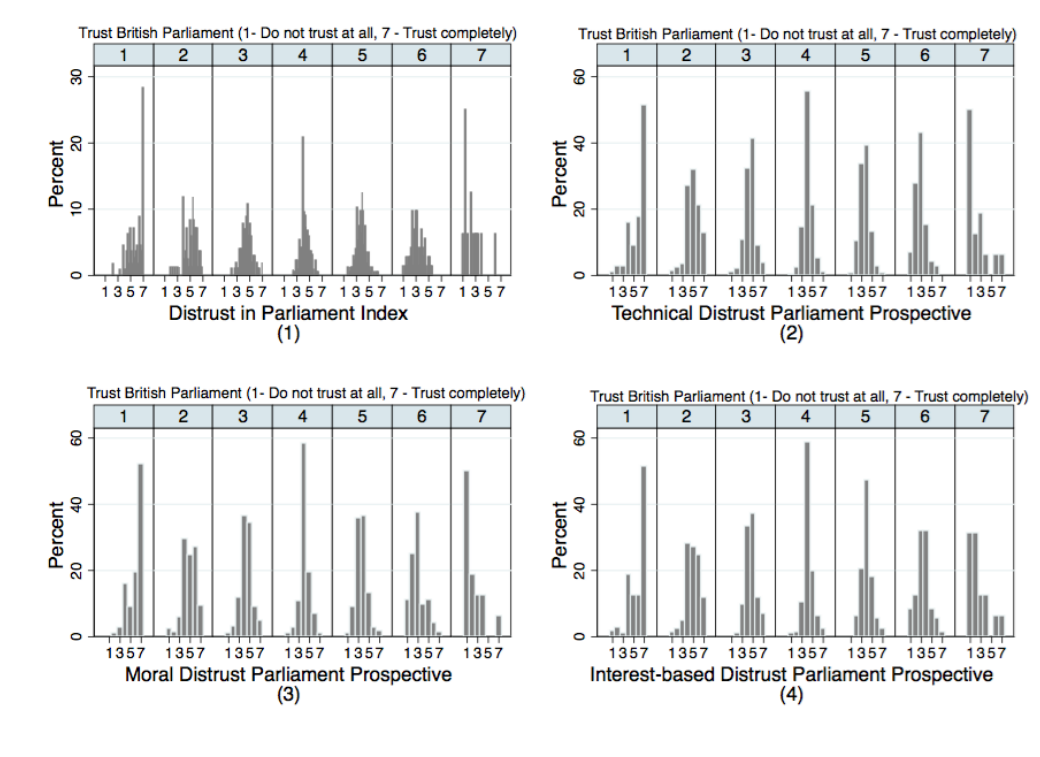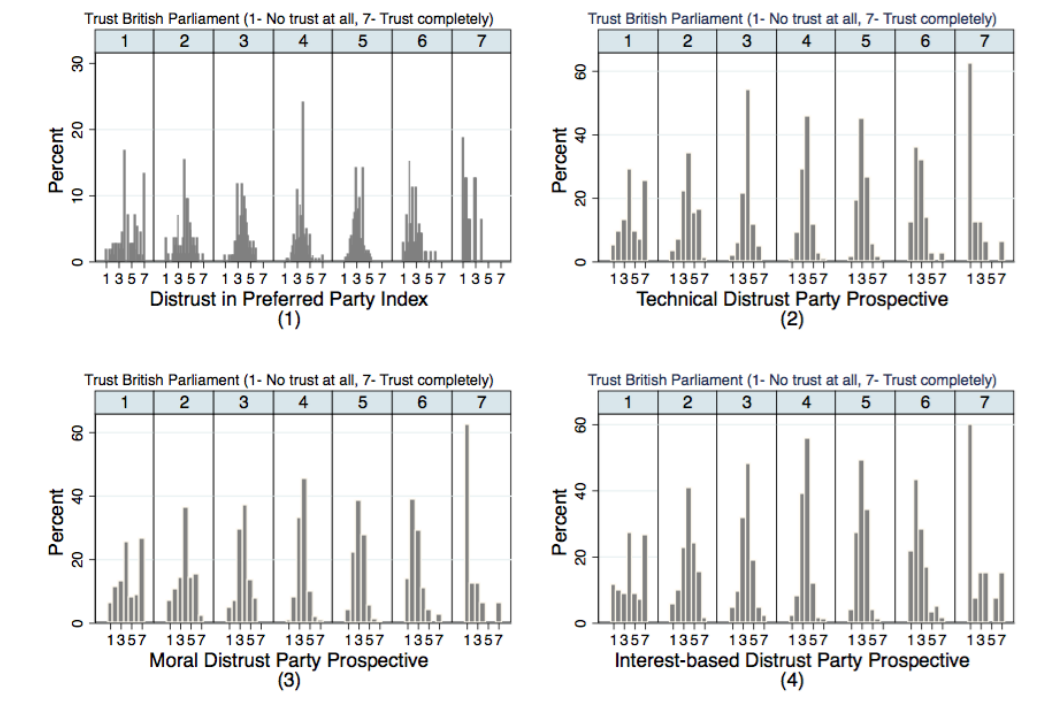

Figure 4: Histograms comparing new preferred party items to traditional "trust in British Parliament" measure

Therefore, overall, the six-item composite 'distrust in Parliament' variable covers an unprecedented range of the latent trait and enables us to capture nuances of distrusting attitudes particularly amongst high-distrust respondents which are far more informative and precise than the traditional single item trust measure (overall scale information function available in Appendix 4 in the Online Appendix). Especially the items that refer to prospective expectations regarding technical competencies and moral conduct are most insightful for studying political distrust. We would argue that having a more precise instrument for distrusting levels is an important advancement, especially since that is the where the problem plaguing established democracies currently lies.

ASSESSING THE VALIDITY OF THE NEW MEASURE

None of the above exercises would be informative if the latent attitude being measured was something other than political distrust. Apart from face validity, which we argued conceptually at the beginning of this article, we also examine construct validity using two sources of comparison for the new measure: 1) the association between the new scale and the traditionally phrased single item measuring trust in Parliament and 2) theoretically informed expectations regarding the association between political distrust and external variables.

Table 4 displays correlations between the new political distrust index (including all evaluative items for Parliament and preferred party, and separate scales per political target), and antecedent characteristics previous studies found to be associated with trust or distrust. The new index behaves as expected. The correlations between traditional 'trust in Parliament' item and each of the six new distrust in Parliament items range from r= -.620 (technical prospective evaluations), to r= -.517 (interest-based retrospective evaluations). Our distrust index is

positively and strongly associated with political cynicism, and negatively with efficacy, political knowledge and right-leaning ideology, consistently with theoretical expectations.

Table 4: Bivariate correlations between distrust indicators, political attitudes and citizen characteristics

	Distrust Parliament Index	Distrust Preferred Political Party Index	Political Distrust Index	Single Item Trust British Parliament
Political Cynicism	.478*	.314*	.450*	-.519*
Political Efficacy	-.267*	-.459*	-.411*	.300*
Political Knowledge	0.02	-.160*	-.078*	.097*
UK Identification Strength	-.237*	-.239*	-.270*	.343*
LR Ideology	-.247*	-.179*	-.242*	.208*
Age	0.05	-.091*	-0.022	0.063
Gender (Male)	0.055	-0.039	0.01	0.015
Education	-0.044	-0.027	-0.041	.087*
Traditional Trust British Parliament	-.632*	-.461*	-.643*	1

*Note: Entries are Pearson's correlation coefficients. * Correlation is significant at the .05 level.*

POLITICAL DISTRUST AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

Finally, existing research on political trust and distrust has highlighted the consequences distrusting attitudes have on citizens' behavior and overall system stability. In this final validation exercise, we examine associations between the new measure of political distrust and a series of protest intentions. We also look into each item to identify which evaluations play a bigger role in motivating different types of behavior.

We included eight items asking respondents about politically motivated actions in our survey: these were; participating in a violent or peaceful demonstration, abstaining or casting a blank vote in an election, voting for a radical or revolutionary party and leaving the country. The

items were then grouped into an index of protest intention (Cronbach's alpha=.739, for item and scale information see Appendix 2 in the Online Appendix). In addition, we look more closely at election related behavior, the intention to abstain and to vote for an anti-system party, which currently pose important challenges in democratic systems, and the intention to participate in a peaceful demonstration as more productive and engaging form of protest behavior. We also include the single traditional trust in Parliament item to assess how the new distrust indices compare in their associations with protest intentions.

In table 5 below, we use the distrust indices to predict protest intentions outcomes. We control for a series of citizen demographic characteristics that are associated with political behavior (age, gender, level of education and ideological self-placement on a left-right spectrum). Overall results show that political distrust has a motivating effect on political protest, driven mainly by attitudes of distrust towards National Parliament. The likelihood of abstaining from voting increases as distrust in Parliament and distrust in one's preferred party increases (Figure 5). In the case of peaceful demonstration attendance however, we see that distrust in one's preferred party decreases the likelihood of reporting such intentions, showing that political parties can still form a link between citizens and the political process and possibly explaining the non-significant results found for the aggregate protest index.

The intention to vote for a radical or extreme party is also associated with political distrust in the hypothesized way: perceptions of national Parliament as untrustworthy increase the likelihood that respondents will consider voting for a radical political party. The effect is complicated somewhat in the case of distrust towards one's preferred political party, simply because supporters of radical political parties tend to evaluate their party in a very positive

Table 5: OLS regression results predicting protest intention

Dependent Variable: Protest Intention

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Distrust Parliament Index	.014***		
	-0.004		
Distrust Preferred Political Party Index		0.003	
		-0.004	
Traditional Trust in Parliament Item			-.016***
			-0.003
Controls			
Left-Right Ideology	0.0002	-0.002	0.0003
	-0.002	-0.002	-0.002
2. Middle level Education	-0.002	-0.002	-0.001
	-0.015	-0.015	-0.015
3. Higher Level Education	-0.006	-0.007	-0.0002
(ref.cat. Low Educ)	-0.016	-0.016	-0.016
Age	-.003***	-.003***	-.003***
	0	0	0
Male	.036***	.038***	.038***
	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
Constant	.482***	.538***	.496***
	-0.031	-0.03	-0.03
R-squared	0.144	0.131	0.13

Note: Entries show OLS regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. Significance *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10.

manner. Even in the limited multi-party context of the UK party system,[11] voters can choose to support radical or anti-systemic political parties, such as the British National Party (BNP), the UK Independence Party (UKIP).[12] One can also think of equivalent political parties in Europe, both on the extremes of the political spectrum and radical in the sense of promoting an anti-systemic agenda. In our sample, the effect of distrust in one's preferred party is not significant

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[11] For a discussion on the transformation of the UK party system following the 2010 election see Kavanagh and Cowley (2010).

[12] An analysis of potential BNP and UKIP voters shows that they evaluate their preferred party much more favourably than mainstream party voters by a margin of .7 and .15 on a 7point scale respectively.

once we control for key respondent demographics and ideology. Predicted probability plots for different values of distrust are presented in Figure 6.

Regarding participation in a peaceful demonstration, such behavior is associated more strongly with distrust in one's preferred party. The likelihood of participating in a peaceful demonstration, as seen by the separate item, is inhibited by distrust in one's preferred political party, while distrust in Parliament has non-significant, but slightly positive effect. Figure 7 shows the predicted probability for the intention to demonstrate peacefully, along different values of distrust in Parliament and one's party. It thus appears that engaging with the political process constructively, making your voice heard and mobilising peacefully can be adversely affected by negative evaluations of the partisan actor citizens would normally look to.

However, not all evaluative dimensions are equally telling. In a final test, we disaggregate distrust indices to look at the effect each distrust item separately on respondents' protest intentions.[13] Figure 8 (I) shows that for evaluations of national Parliament, neither retrospective nor prospective assessments of incongruence are enough to motivate protest intentions. The belief that national Parliament has acted and is likely to act in a manner that goes against a citizen's best-interest is not sufficient to make them consider abstaining in an election, voting for a radical party or leaving the country. By contrast, the belief that Parliament is acting in an incompetent and immoral manner has a significant effect on behavioral intentions, with retrospective evaluations of untrustworthiness having a stronger effect than prospective considerations. This provides a more optimistic image of citizens' behavior. If the political class in its entirety and major representative institutions show commitment to shared

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[13] Coefficient plots for each protest intention (abstaining, voting for a radical party, attending a peaceful demonstration) are shown in Appendix 6 in the Online Appendix.

democratic norms and the competence needed to manage technical political issues, citizens are less likely to consider engaging in protest behavior. Respondents in our sample appear to understand that when it comes to a representative political institution that includes all of society's preferences, perceptions of untrustworthiness based on incongruent interests can be accepted more easily and would not drive them to disruptive types of political action.

Figure 5: Predicted probability plots for intention to abstain in an election
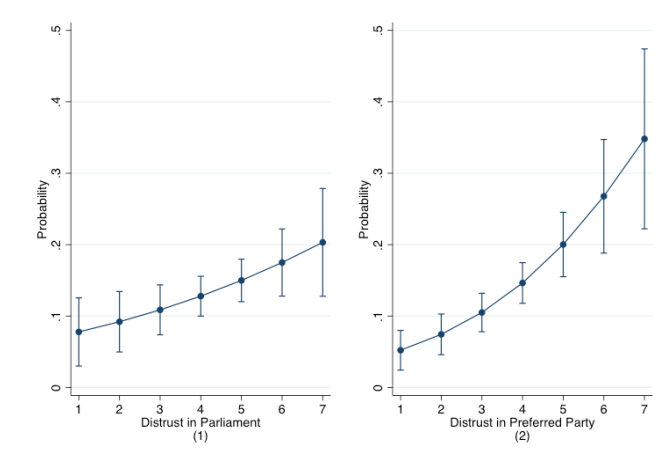
Figure 6: Predicted probability plots for intention to vote for a radical party
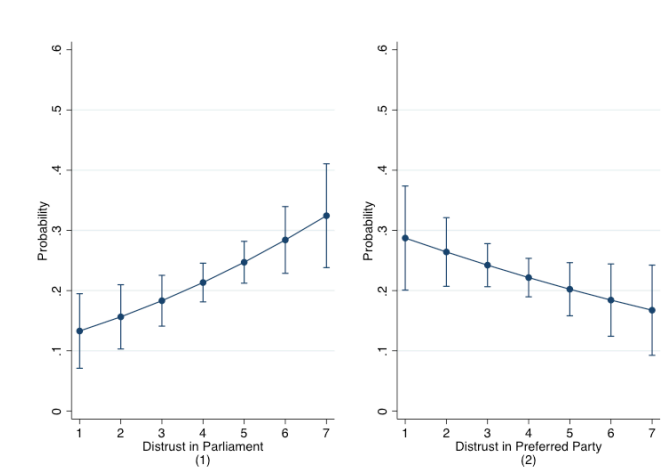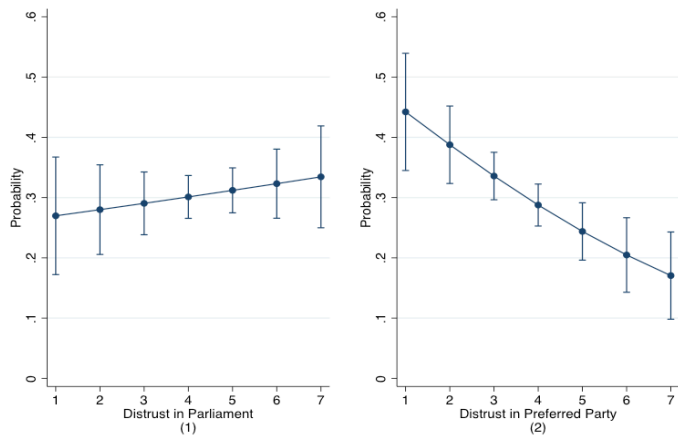
Figure 7: Predicted probability plots for intention to attend a peaceful demonstration

Note: Plotted predicted probabilities calculated from separately run logit models predicting protest intentions with the following controls: age, gender, education, l-r ideology. Full regression results in online appendix.

Figure 8: Coefficient Plots from OLS regression models predicting protest intentions

(I)   (II)
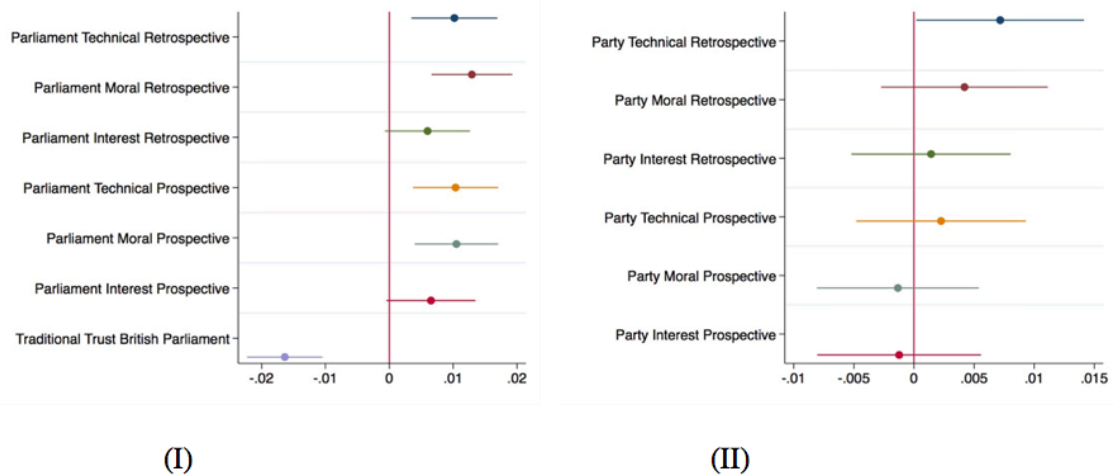
Note: Plotted coefficients are from separately run OLS regression models predicting protest intentions and with the following controls: age, gender, education, l-r ideology. Full regression results in the online appendix.

Evaluative items for one's preferred political party are less meaningful due to the motivating and demotivating effects distrust in one's party has on protest intentions. None of the individual evaluative components are significant, and we ought to note that the strength of the associations between these distrusting attitudes and measures of behavioral intentions are weak. The

challenges of linking attitudes to behavior in social science research are numerous. In the context of this survey we have relied solely on the respondents' self-declared likelihood of acting in certain ways, capturing only behavioral intentions and not realized behavior. This makes the interpretation of our findings straightforward and methodologically less complex, but does not provide a conclusive link what affects citizens' actual behavior.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have highlighted a mismatch between the rich literature on political trust and a democratic world in which 'distrust' seems to be the norm. Our aim was to drawn attention to the need for a more comprehensive understanding of what political distrust means for citizens. If pervasive distrust is to be addressed, it must first be understood then accurately measured, and then remedial actions can be devised. We have focused on the conceptualization, measurement, and validation of political distrust, showing that a conceptual model based on technical, moral and interest-based assessments can translate into multiple item indicators providing a valid and reliable measure of distrust that captures both retrospective and prospective assessments. Not only does measuring distrust this way better mirrors the apparent dominant reality of citizens' attitudes, rather than an attitude which is mostly absent and does not corresponds to the 'problem' that democracies effectively try to resolve.

Crucially, we have showed that our multi-item distrust indicator performs better than the traditional measure of trust, notably when it comes to capturing attitudinal nuances towards the higher end of distrusting attitudes (which see ever-greater concentrations of citizens' distributions). Moreover, the informational properties of the new distrust measures largely

outperform those of the traditional trust item. A key contribution of this paper thus lies in the identification and testing of the underlying assessments entailed in citizen distrust of political agents. It identified the three dimensions of technical, moral and interest-based considerations and showed the prominence of prospective expectations for technical and moral conduct. With the inclusion of citizens' preferred political actor (preferred party), we have also been able to map a lower boundary for distrust and examine its structure.

Overall, our study adds novel evidence on how to capture and interpret citizens' increasing expressions of distrust in politics and in their institutions. It also points to those key perceptions which need to be altered to reverse current distrusting trends. Specifically, that beliefs of technically incompetent and ethically dubious conduct by the key institution of a representative democracy, the National Parliament, are the most prominent considerations in distrusting judgments, and the most likely to result in protest intentions. The technical political response to crises can be a force behind increased political distrust, which explains why economic crises often lead to a surge in political distrust, while exogenous crises managed by the government (such as a natural disaster or attack) may lead to less distrust. Further, perceptions of unethical conduct are crucial and discourses that paint institutional actors and the political class as a 'corrupt and immoral elite' are striking at the heart of citizens' distrust in politics.

While the empirical evidence presented here refer to the British political system, our aim was to create a distrust measure that can travel to other democratic systems. We believe that underlying technical, moral and interest-based evaluative components of political distrust are common for other democracies, as has been indicated by qualitative research. Further studies can easily test this conceptual model to provide additional empirical and quantitative evidence. Studying more institutions and national contexts would further enlighten us on the structure of

distrusting attitudes and highlight potential cross-national differences. Future research should also address the precise relationship between political trust and distrust, notably whether the two operate in a single continuum and whether they are symmetrical. Though existing scholarship has taken continuity and symmetry for granted, neither assumption is obvious, and exploring them would be worthwhile both conceptually and empirically. Our conceptual model and multiple survey items operationalization will hopefully make such discussion easier. Despite these limitations, we have shown that political distrust can be reliably and accurately measured using moral, technical and interest-based prospective and retrospective assessments with regards to both preferred and neutral actors, and goes a long way to predict democratic protest.

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