

1 Introduction

In 2009, the Global Language Monitor frequently encountered ‘transparency’ in worldwide print and electronic media and therefore ranked it ‘tenth top word’ of that year (TGLM, 2010). According to their observation, transparency is an “elusive goal for which many 21st c. governments are striving” (ibid.) and will hence accompany us in the years to come. But what motivates governments to strive for transparency?

This chapter suggests that transparency is omnipresent because of its potential to function as an instrument for higher political goals, the most important of which is the establishment of political trust. On a similar note, scholars have stressed the importance of transparency in establishing trust in processes of risk governance (e.g. Löfstedt, 2005; Peters, Covello, & McCallum, 1997). My main argument is that politicians throughout Western democracies are increasingly confronted with cynical citizens and hence in search for more public confidence (cf. also Dalton, 2005; Pharr & Putnam, 2000). The underlying logic is straightforward. If someone is more open to the public, s/he is considered more trustworthy.

This logic tends to lead to an instrumental use of transparency rather than to stress transparency’s intrinsic value. Yet, to what extent is political trust actually a question of transparency? Is it that simple – does more transparency lead to more political trust?

Since these research questions are based on the idea that transparency serves as an instrument to nourish political trust, I first justify this claim. Second, I dive into theories on trust and transparency by means of a literature review. Social capital, political performance, media coverage, political scandals, demographic factors, and personal ties to government are identified as essential for political trust and ranked according to their impact. Transparency is then split up into three core interpretations (i.e. openness, intelligibility, and accountability). The identification of building blocks of trust and of the interpretations of transparency allows me to suggest a conceptual framework for analysing the relationship between trust and transparency. More precisely, I juxtapose the distinguished interpretations and factors individually to estimate in how far the specific interpretations of transparency are capable of influencing trust. Thereafter, I propose an evaluation of what transparency can and cannot achieve.

2 All About Trust

I suggest that politicians have a particular interest in gaining more political trust and hence engage with mechanisms of transparency. This section provides an account on societal trends to justify this claim.

The modern political landscape aggregates increasing (economic) interdependency, enhanced political coordination, and changing societal demands. For instance, Hardin (2000) argues within Pharr's and Putnam's (2000) framework analysis of 'disaffected democracies' that governments nowadays act in an interdependent world that limits their capacities:

People who do not like ambiguity may think they see politics clearly by focussing on a single, unambiguous issue and neglecting all the rest. [...] These citizens might still lose confidence in government if they believe that it does not share their justifiable concern with issue X. People who can handle ambiguity might be more comfortable with ill-defined candidates and parties that may do little more than look good. (Hardin, 2000, p.49)

As a consequence, Hardin suggests that we may have reached a stage of political complexity where it is not of primary concern whether governments are competent to manage problems or not. That approves of the idea that governments' accomplishments are increasingly hard to measure and that they are only clear to a small number of people. In addition, Pharr and Putnam (2000) account for a few other developments that cry for an intensified engagement with the public: a decline in institutional performance, changed public expectations, and new options of accountability.

Since it becomes more and more difficult to profile via political accomplishments, political competition increasingly focuses on personal profiles – in particular in the media (cf. Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993). Politicians are bound to communicate, one may even say to market themselves. Yet while personality is at the zenith of its political weight and has eclipsed judgments of competency, it cannot increase public confidence. On the contrary, political trust levels have never been lower (Keele, 2007; Tarrow, 2000). That is why Löfstedt (2005) claims that we live in a post-trust society, where officials can no longer assume to be trusted – even at times where personality is intensively focused on. But trust and confidence are the factors that pave the way to political offices, so politicians face a dilemma: What could be offered to the public in order to increase political trust.

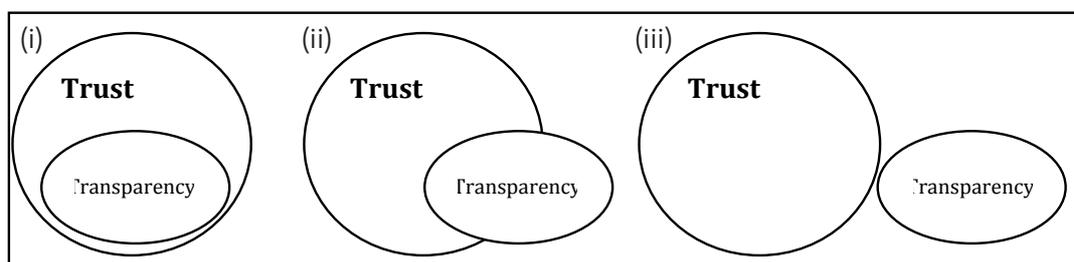
Dalton connects this *Zeitgeist* to a post-modernist change in values leading citizens to demand a more participatory democracy because “[c]asting a few votes during a multiyear electoral cycle leaves insufficient room for citizen input” (2000, p.268). In a more recent article he refers to a greater scepticism of government (Dalton, 2005). This is where transparency comes into play. If citizens demand a different role in political processes, transparency – irrespective of what it stands for after all – appears to be a suitable answer. Despite pressures for institutional change, Dalton (2005) warns that attempts to expand citizen access to information and documents (i.e. benefits) might turn out to confirm citizens’ negative images of government (i.e. corresponding costs) (ibid.). A few other scholars are also sceptical about transparency’s potential. O’Neill defines transparency as availability of information and hence expects that “[i]ncreasing transparency can produce a flood of unsorted information and misinformation that provides little but confusion unless it can be sorted and assessed” (2002, pp.72-3). On a similar note, Roberts (2006) reports that, contrary to common expectations, a ‘culture of openness’ (i.e. very open and accessible public service) hardly affected trust levels in his samples. Hood concludes that “[a]ll we can say with any confidence is that formal transparency provisions at least do not seem to have had the effect of increasing trust” (2006a, p.218).

Peters et al. (1997) advocate the opposite standpoint. From a risk governance point of view, they argue that more and/or better information allows the public to understand political decisions on risks, provided that arguments and justifications are clearly communicated. Given a high degree of public consent to those decisions, trust levels are likely to increase. Irrespective of these specific conclusions, transparency and trust are frequently brought into relation. Yet most of these debates make implicit statements about the motives behind transparency mechanisms. In light of the contemporary societal context, it is apparent that transparency is meant to counterbalance negative trends of political trust. The quoted scholars advocate this to be the case – or take it for granted.

3 Disassembling Trust and Transparency

This section unravels the interrelation of transparency and trust from a theoretical point of view. In principle, three answers can be expected: (i) Transparency might have a direct influence on trust, (ii) it might have an indirect influence on trust, or (iii) it might have no influence on trust (cf. figure 1).

Figure 1: Three hypotheses regarding the constellation of trust and transparency



In order to find evidence for any of these hypotheses, I first consider relevant stepping stones of trust. Second, transparency is conceptualized. Third, all factors are brought into interplay to develop a conceptual framework for analysing transparency's potential in building trust as evaluated thereafter.

3.1 Conceptualising 'Political Trust'

Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to *accept vulnerability* based upon *positive expectations* of the intentions or behaviour of another.
(Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p.395; own emphasis)

The concept of trust relates to different subjects in academia such as sociology (e.g. Coleman, 1990), social psychology (e.g. Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982), philosophy (e.g. Blackburn, 1998), and organizational studies (e.g. McAllister, 1995). The definition up front is representative for all of these disciplines because the two emphasised elements – accepting vulnerability and positive expectations – were identified as the two (out of three) most prevalent interpretations of trust in a study of 70 interdisciplinary definitions: The first category (40% of definitions) linked trust to consequences that require the

trustor's willingness to expose him- or herself to vulnerability (Castaldo, 2002); the second category (32%) regarded trust as an expectation; and the remaining definitions (28%) defined trust as a belief instead (ibid.). The first two interpretations thus constitute the backbone for the following analysis.

In principle, two schools of thought compete with different notions of trust. On the one hand, trusting is considered a rational choice. The decision to trust someone is made on the basis of sufficient reasons to consider one's counterpart trustworthy (cf. Coleman, 1990). Integrity, reliability, and honesty are thus assessed (Hetherington, 2005; McEvily, Perrone, & Zaheer, 2003). On the other hand, trusting is categorized as a psychological impulse that is subject to social and moral bonds; therefore, factors such as group identification constitute grounds for trust (Turner, 1987). In that regard, everyone bases his or her *positive expectations* and *willingness to accept vulnerability* on different factors¹. Obviously, neither standpoint can claim to provide the ultimate truth. Trusting is governed by individual experiences and expectations after all (Breeman, 2006).

When speaking about political trust in this chapter, I refer to interpersonal trust in one or a group of politicians. Trust in government is thus a form of interpersonal trust. Yet, a difference is to be made when speaking about trusting institutions without referring to persons. Within the ongoing debate on whether one can or cannot trust objects, some scholars treat institutional trust differently (e.g. Breeman, 2006; Hardin, 2000; Warren, 1999).

To make complexity perfect, it has to be noted that we are prone to adopting different perspectives, depending on the strength of collective identification: Sometimes we speak as individuals ('I') and sometimes on behalf of a community ('we') (Breeman, 2006). In the following, I focus on the question how individuals (i.e. 'I's') come to trust politicians. Still, trust is also influenced by collective factors. Trust might be built on remarkably fertile ground if a group feeling makes it easier for individuals to formulate positive expectations and to accept vulnerability. According to Breeman, diffusion of ideas, beliefs, and expectations multiplies among members of particular social networks such as, for instance, in political groupings or among colleagues (pp.31-4). Whereas it appears logical that ideas and beliefs spread among those that already share collective identity or belief, Breeman also acknowledges that in modern pluralistic societies and in the age of digital social networks, the diffusion mechanism's influence is rather limited (p.32). Given the uncertainty surrounding this variable and its – arguably – decreasing influence, collective dynamics are initially neglected in the following.

1 Factors are not to be confused with reasons for trusting. Reasons are subject to a different category of trust research. As Luhmann (1979) notes: "[T]he one who trusts is never at a loss for reasons" (p.26).

When it comes to political trust, I consider the following aspects to be influential:

- Social capital
- Evaluations of political elite, parties, and institutions
- Framing in media coverage / Attack advertising ('going negative')
- Political scandals
- Demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, ethnic background, or education)
- Personal ties to government

The order resembles the significance of the individual aspects in establishing trust. I ranked these elements on basis of the argumentation behind these mechanisms, empirical evidence brought forward, and the mechanism's ability to influence political trust on a large scale.

According to Putnam, **social capital** resembles the (inter-)connectedness of and within a community (Putnam, 2000). That means that social capital measures the relationship of citizens with their community as well as the collective value of all social networks within the community and therewith indicates citizens' inclination to engage for and with another (ibid.). That is why high levels of social capital equate to high levels of civic or voluntary engagement (ibid.; Keele, 2007). Civic engagement, in turn, triggers a better understanding of political institutions and allows for a different contact to representatives. Social capital thus brings about the belief that social change is possible and that personal commitment manifests in form of control within the established political process (ibid.). A second aspect is that interacting with other volunteers requires and therefore increases mutual trust. As a result, people begin to trust another, which has a substantial influence on the willingness to trust politicians (ibid.).

Putnam (2000) as well as Brehm and Rahn (1997) emphasised the importance of social capital and found empirical evidence for their claims in micro level data. Keele (2007) was tempted by the covariance of declining levels of social capital and trust in the USA. If – against contrary beliefs – it was not government performance that mainly influences trust levels, it would have to be social capital:

Here, trust is not a manifestation of how the public views political leaders but a result of how much the public engages in civic life and the attendant attitudes of trust and reciprocity that develop in civic activity. When citizens disengage from civic life and its lessons of social reciprocity, they are unable to trust the institutions that govern political life. (Keele, 2007, p.241)

Using macro level data, his empirical analysis demonstrates that while both government performance and social capital have a bearing on trust levels, the massive decline in trust in the American government² seems to have been initiated by the force of social capital. In light of declining social capital in precedence to declining trust levels, he argues that social capital – both for reasons of timing and logic – must have (had) more influence. As a result, social capital is a top scoring factor when it comes to trusting government. In the following, it will also become obvious that different factors are somewhat linked to social capital.

Keele's analysis also considers government performance, i.e. the **evaluation of the political elite, parties, and political institutions** (2007). Traditionally, economic stewardship and therewith economic performance are considered a major concern of citizens (Chanley, Rudolph, & Rahn, 2000; Hetherington, 1998). Prosperity is linked to trust while distress is connected with distrust. In light of globally intertwined economic structures, this indicator might still play a role from a citizen's point of view, but it is certainly more difficult to achieve for the governing elite (cf. section 2.).

Alternatively, Citrin and Green (1986) suggest that national parliaments and heads of states have a formative influence on political trust levels. Given the intensified media scrutiny, this factor is of considerable importance when it comes to trust. After all, the constituents (want to be able to) trust their leading politicians – or at least be provided with good reasons that justify their mandates (ibid.).

In addition, the state administration plays a crucial role. Christensen and Laegreid (2005) draw upon a Norwegian general mass survey to find that a positive image of one institution extends to other public institutions and hence government. Their argument is that satisfaction with specific public services yields higher trust levels. At the same time, they introduce two other factors, albeit of marginal influence: general satisfaction with democracy and demographic factors. Obviously, citizens cannot be expected to have faith in a politician if they are dissatisfied with the political system itself. Hence, this factor is disregarded. Demographic aspects however are considered below.

The performance appraisal ranks second because citizens tend to trust politicians that perform according to their expectations but need a point of reference for their judgement. In the end, most arguments for (dis-)trust are connected to hitherto performance. Given the important role of the media, (biased) news coverage has an impact on how the public

2 It should be acknowledged that empirical conclusions stemming from one Western democracy are assumed to apply to all Western democracies, irrespective of differences in political culture (cf. also Pharr & Putnam, 2000).

evaluates its political elite. Hence, the political performance factor already subsumes the next two aspects.

Framing in media coverage and **attack advertising** are instruments of public relations. Either these tools are used in the own favour or employed by a competing faction to distort a trustworthy media appearance. Patterson (1993) and Capella and Jamieson (1997) find that the focus of news coverage has shifted from 'substance' to the 'game of politics'. Hence, the media is receptive for 'negative' stories, controversy, and conflict. Further on, the scholars criticize the way that news is covered and blame media for deep voter cynicism. Although this explanation actually accounts for distrust rather than trust, it makes clear that an enormous power rests with the media; their messages influence the way politics and government performance are evaluated. Except for the media-driven change in reporting, this also breeds a chance of abuse: Negative campaigning is a technique used to try to win an advantage over a competitor by focusing on his or her negative attributes rather accentuating one's own positive traits (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995). Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) studied the impact of negative advertising on voter turnout, which is not equivalent to trust, but implies a similar mechanism. If politicians employ in attack advertising, they seem to perceive the strategy of winning the battle for trustors by way of making the competition appear less trustworthy (instead of improving their own visibility and trustworthiness). These changes in media reporting and political competition indicate how vital and critical the role of media is. If dominant media actors frame a particular (political) issue in a biased way, it is likely to have a substantial bearing on how this issue is viewed and discussed in public.

The next factor is **political scandals**. It is quite obvious that major political scandals erode political trust. Among others, Miller and Borelli (1991) and Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn (2000) identify political scandals as relevant for political trust. However, dimensions and impacts of scandals need to be differentiated. Parallel to a change in political culture, personal mistakes are increasingly pardoned since making mistakes is human. (Note for instance that members of cabinet are less likely to clear their seats only due to minor misconducts these days.) Additionally, the media play a role in this process as well. If the focus is set on conflict and controversy, one is not shocked by minor scandals anymore.

Analysing the downturn in trust in the Reagan administration after 1984 has led Miller and Borelli (1991) to conclude that lower trust levels were mainly triggered by Reagan's lacking compassion and a growing dissatisfaction with domestic and foreign politics rather than the Iran-Contra scandal of 1986.

Another factor is **demographic characteristics**. It is quite obvious that age, ethnic background, education, work, income, or gender can have a bearing on the willingness

to trust others and hence to trust politicians (cf. Abramson, 1983; Christensen & Laegreid, 2005; Hetherington, 1998). In other words, people feel as part of a particular community ('we') due to distinct demographic factors. Even within our increasingly pluralist societies, political parties claim to speak for their 'classical' clientele that is usually identified along demographic lines. For instance, social democratic parties are said to represent the interests of the working class while liberal parties represent those of top earners. A community-feeling may thus arise along one particular or a number of collective demographic factors. Arguably, these groupings are prone to trust one 'of their kinds'.

Still, demographics are introduced as correction factors in most analyses of political trust; they are considered to explain divergence rather than correlations. Accounting for demographics factors in detail would moreover require identifying influences of sub-elements (e.g. gender) and trust. However, in this framework, sweeping factors are needed. That is why demographic factors are not exhaustively considered in the following. The last element is **personal ties to government**. Similar to the influence that social capital has on trust, Brewer and Sigelman (2002) expected employees of governments (at all levels) as well as their family and friends to have more trust in government than the public on average. Whereas their theory stands the empirical test, trust only varied marginally between sample groups. The authors argue that a combination of self-approval, self-image enhancement, and having experienced government workings increases political trust levels (ibid.). Given the weak correlation, the small number of persons concerned, and the similarity to social capital, personal ties to government ranks last.

Although this overview is a product of an extensive literature review, it is not all-encompassing. Trust is a complex social as well as individual construct, which makes it likely that personal factors play a bigger role than can be accounted for in the context of this chapter. Likewise, the order of ranking is subjective and only based on the clearness and lastly persuasiveness of trends and correlations that have been identified by scholars. What may be considered as an ultimate truth about trust though is that it is built up over time as long as the counterpart proves trustworthy. Trust requires coherence in behaviour; the trusted is constantly observed. Moreover, if decisions cannot be understood without explanation, a dialogue might be required for trust to be built. That makes trust a fragile good which is hard to gain but easily lost (O'Neill, 2002).

3.2 Defining ‘Government Transparency’

Next, the focus is set on government transparency, which is to be understood as “allowing others to see the truth, without trying to hide or shade the meaning or altering the facts to put things in a better light” (Oliver, 2004, p.3). The crucial elements in this quote are the (i) availability and accessibility of facts that have (ii) not been extenuated. Hood (2006b) takes this a step further and categorizes transparency in three strains. Within each category, Hood then outlines forms of transparency (2006b; own arrangement):

Transparency in...

(i) ...international governance:

1. Open diplomacy (rather than secrecy)
2. Public deliberation of (intelligible and auditable) government positions

(ii) ...national and sub-national government:

1. Accountable government according to rules and institutions
2. Openness of information to citizens (i.e. freedom of information)

(iii) ...corporate governance:

1. Limitation of information asymmetries between management and shareholders
2. Limitation of information asymmetries between departments and offices

Subsequently, I rely on three interpretations of transparency: **openness**, **intelligibility**, and **accountability**. These interpretations are motivated by the fact that they capture Hood’s categories while each interpretation has an exclusive character.

Openness means to open the doors to the public and make information available (i.e. quantity). This interpretation corresponds to Hood’s openness in diplomacy (cf. (i), 1) and to the availability of information to citizens (cf. (ii), 2) (Hood, 2006b). Intelligibility, on the contrary, enables a smooth processing of accessible information (i.e. quality). Similarly, Hood speaks about intelligible position papers in the realm of intergovernmental negotiations (cf. (i), 2) (ibid.). Accountability is closely linked to intelligibility because it presumes an understanding of political processes and their dynamics, yet without concerning the provision of information. Accountability it is to be equated with political predictability: If (in-)formal rules, arrangements, and institutions are publicly known, governmental action is accountable. Hence, interpreting transparency as accountability is not meant to conflict with the democratic principle of a representative’s accountability towards the public.

Hood's reference to corporate governance resembles a combination of these three interpretations. A limitation of information asymmetries requires that all actors have access to the same information (openness), are able to process the information (intelligibility), and understand what the relevance of the information is within the company (accountability). Theoretically speaking, the actual degree of transparency thus varies among employees as well as shareholders due to his or her access to information, the individual ability to process information, and the personal understanding of company structures. This differentiation in interpretation is crucial to the conceptual framework developed hereafter.

3.3 Developing a Conceptual Framework: Trust and Transparency in Interplay

Based on the previous elaboration, this section intends to draw logical conclusions as to whether transparency does have an impact on trust. Therefore, I highlight interplays between all three interpretations of transparency and all building blocks of political trust. Table 1 summarises the conceptual framework at the end of the next section.

Since social capital was considered to constitute the most important precondition for political trust, a direct influence of transparency on social capital yields most support for hypothesis (i) (cf. figure 1 on p.4). Considering the categories of transparency – openness, intelligibility, and accountability – however, one comes to realize that all three versions resemble what is otherwise thought to constitute the personal 'reward' of social capital. That is because civic engagement brings about more insights (i.e. openness) as well as a better understanding of political structures and political considerations (i.e. intelligibility and accountability). If transparency achieves all of these elements successfully, this might have an influence on political trust as long as the second significant factor of social capital/ civic engagement, i.e. increase in interpersonal trust, is neglected in this context. (Obviously none of these categories can establish interpersonal trust.)

Nevertheless, an increase in transparency could also be said to be counterproductive. If the motivation behind civic engagement is to 'look behind the scenes', the majority of volunteers will be deprived of their motive. That, in turn, probably amounts to a greater loss in political trust levels than the gains that all three transparency types could generate in sum. Hence, a careful distinction is needed. I suggest that 'openness' has the most adverse side effect because an increase in availability of information is most visible to citizens and hence most deterrent to potential volunteers.

Alternatively, transparency can have a direct influence on the trust factor political performance if a citizen's evaluation of political performance is prone to change due to e.g. more information. In principle, we should think that more information allows for a better evaluation. However, without information asymmetry between the public and its representatives, trusting becomes impossible. If trust implies to rely on someone else's decision or judgement without always knowing the arguments, transparency will actually deprive politicians of the chance to prove themselves trustworthy (cf. Dyck, 2009; Löfstedt, 2005). Moreover, more information could, despite the latter concern, only have a somewhat positive impact, if citizens are capable of processing the given information – else wise openness only triggers an information overload.

Increases in intelligibility, on the contrary, can have a positive effect when it comes to judging a politician's competence and trusting him as a result. Moreover, accountable institutions and structures make it easier on citizens to derive at positive expectations. If political structures – such as the complexities of modern politics – are understood, trust is based on different (favourable) expectations. That might affect trust levels positively.

The relevance of media in building trust corresponds to two interpretations of transparency. Openness would lead to an information overload and thereby open the door for misinformation, which remains unnoticed within huge volumes of documents and data. This in turn reinforces recent media trends (i.e. unconventional focus on controversy and conflict) and thereby increases distrust rather than trust (O'Neill, 2002). If, however, clear-cut information is provided (i.e. intelligibility improved), a critical scrutiny of media coverage will be possible and the media will no longer have a monopoly to process information.

The classical solution to fraud and corruption, which are the most common scandals linked to transparency, is an increase in openness. However, as was established earlier, the influence of scandals depends on their magnitude. 'Significant' scandals can thus have a positive effect on trust if openness manages to prevent them in the first place; yet, such scandals do not occur daily. Hence, openness' influence on trust could be large at times but just not constantly.

The problem with demographic factors is that any transparency mechanism yields higher trust levels only if the individual situation is receptive for either an increase of information, information of higher quality, or an understanding of institutional workings. Hence, measuring influences would require knowledge about individual factors such as education and personal interests. A universal interplay can thus not be established.

The last factor that might yield higher trust levels is personal ties to government. In the case of openness, civil servants would take side with the political elite. The public demand would require the support of public administrations and hence intensify the identification

with that particular administration or institution. This would translate into (slightly) higher trust levels. At the same time, accountability provides civil servants with a better understanding of how decisions are made. Depending on the individuals' interpretations, political trust might increase or decrease in response.

3.4 Evaluating Transparency's Potential in Building Political Trust

What can be derived from the individual conclusions above is that all categories of transparency have a bearing on political trust levels, though not all of these mechanisms necessarily build trust. Consequently, hypothesis (iii) is dismissed which narrows it down to hypotheses (i) and (ii) (cf. figure 1 on p.4). Transparency's impact varies along with the choice of trust factors; however, the impact is always indirect. For transparency to have a direct influence, any of the types of transparency (e.g. openness) would have to directly relate to a factor of political trust. In the case of openness that would be the case if, for instance, availability of information was a factor of political trust. Since not a single category of transparency matches a factor of trust, transparency only has an indirect influence, which approves of hypothesis (ii).

With regard to effectiveness, only one of the three transparency categories has the potential to serve as a meaningful policy. Openness, which is probably the most common association with transparency, does not have the potential to increase trust levels at all. On a similar note, O'Neill suggests that "[i]f we want to restore trust we need to reduce *deception and lies* rather than *secrecy*" (2002, p.70). Hence, the focus shifts to the potential of intelligibility. Although quality of information is probably the hardest to improve, the juxtaposition has shown that intelligibility is capable of yielding higher trust levels without jeopardizing current political trust. Accountability has also proven to be of added value, yet its relevance is limited to two (arguably three) building blocks of trust only: social capital and political performance (and personal ties to government).

Whether a coupling of intelligibility and accountability would contribute to more political trust is nevertheless subject to a number of variables: Would social capital decrease? Can these mechanisms be practically implemented? Hood (2006a) identifies three common outcomes stemming from attempts to implement mechanisms of transparency: futility, jeopardy, and perversity. None of these elements was observed in extreme, but "the devil is always in the bureaucratic detail, and prudence seems to justify a strong element of 'practical scepticism' about the way transparency measures work out on the ground" (p.224).

Table 1: Conceptual framework for estimating transparency's influence on trust ³

Trust Transparency	Social capital	Political performance	Media coverage / framing	Political scandals	Demographic factors	Personal ties to government
Openness	If civic engagement is motivated by a 'look behind the scenes', more openness correlates negatively with social capital	If openness increases during a crisis, it impacts credibility and trust (N.B. selective openness cannot be justified)	If information increases, information overload enables misinformation to remain unnoticed; decreases trust	Openness limits fraud and corruption; yet these scandals rarely occur; increases trust marginally	Interplay depends on individual cases, e.g.: Openness triggers new insights if information;	Openness indirectly reveals how public administrations function; increases personal commitment of civil servants and hence trust
Intelligibility	If both intelligibility and accountability increase at once, volunteers are deprived of their 'advantage' (i.e. better understanding of political processes)	Intelligible documents and statements correlate positively with competence judgement; increases trust	Allows for critical scrutiny of media coverage, increases confidence and reduces media dependence; increases trust	/	Intelligibility improves trust levels if the trusted is perceived as decent representative (e.g. with same background);	/
Accountability	If only one category of transparency increases, less adverse side effects appear	If politicians act within accountable structures, favourable expectations are likely	/	/	Accountability is relevant to politically interested/ educated citizens and increases trust	Accountability enables civil servants to evaluate e.g. how decisions are made; evaluation might be positive or negative; in- or decreases trust

3 Note: Read table as follows: Which influence does [factor of transparency] have on [stepping stone of trust]? All estimates are based on logical reasoning.

4 Conclusion

It has been shown that an increase in public cynicism is accompanied by decreasing political trust levels. In search for more trust, politicians tend to rely on transparency. Yet, the conceptual framework has proven that transparency is hardly capable of establishing trust. Strictly speaking, openness is likely to decrease political trust for reasons of discouraged civic engagement (and decreasing social capital via less civic engagement) as well as causing information overload. Paradoxically, it is also openness that is understood as a legitimate demand to increase the accountability of politicians (e.g. Stiglitz, 1999).

All the same, intelligibility and to a lesser degree accountability have an influence on political trust but are not easy to implement. It is the definition of transparency as intelligibility that does not require more documents but a better understanding because it concerns the quality of information: The audience has to (be able to) process information similar to the sender, which requires sensibility for and familiarity with political processes and perhaps a forum for dialogue to clarify misapprehension.

In short, the potential of transparency to solve the post-trust dilemma is picayune. More transparency cannot yield more trust; in fact, too much transparency can have a counter-productive effect. Hence, we are left with the question of how much trust is actually needed. Warren (1999) for instance states that critical distrust is healthy for political systems; trust and distrust may vary as long as trust levels are high enough to allow politicians to govern. Similarly, Tarrow (2000) suggests that we have to accept low trust levels: “Less trust about government and more activism interacting with government: these may be the ingredients of a less comfortable but more robust democracy” (p.289). Ironically, interaction also links to civic engagement and the mechanisms that foster intelligibility, both of which have the potential to actually increase trust levels. In other words: Although transparency is all around us, politicians that wish to become trusted for legitimate reasons should not jump the bandwagon of blind advocates of openness. One simple answer to the post-trust dilemma is to mobilise and attract citizens to actively engage within communities and with representatives.

Another understanding of interaction might be to enter into dialogue with the public. With an eye on transparency, this chapter is limited in the sense that I did not account for the effect of ‘transparency talks’. Arguably, politicians preach transparency without ever wanting to implement it. In light of the present findings, one could expect that speaking about transparency is more efficient with regard to short term trust levels than implementing transparency mechanisms that are doomed to imperfection (cf. Hood, 2006a).

What this chapter really suggests is to abstain from the idea of seeking more trust by overloading citizens with information. The lesson to be learned is that citizens trust politicians if they are able to understand and critically reflect what is going on, i.e. if intelligible information is provided. Further research should thus be devoted to the feasibility of implementing transparency mechanisms aiming at improving intelligibility (and accountability), because only these factors have the potential to influence political trust substantially and enduringly.

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