

Institutions and Trust in Legislatures*

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Abstract

Conservatives and liberals disagree with each other about the speed at which “good” government should operate with the former favoring slower government activity than the latter. The way in which institutions are designed can affect government’s ability to act quickly. How, then, does institutional design shape public opinion about government institutions? We focus on citizens’ political trust attitudes as directed towards state legislatures. Our argument is that these attitudes are shaped by citizens’ ideologies, their interest in politics, and three types of legislative institutions: legislative supermajority institutions, legislative professionalism, and legislative term limits. We find empirical support for our theory using data drawn from a team content module on the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study; trust attitudes are influenced by the collective effects of respondents’ ideologies and interest in politics along with supermajority institutions and legislative professionalism, but not by legislative term limits. Our results highlight the potentially key role played by institutional design in shaping public opinion.

*We will make the full model code and data to replicate our numerical results available upon publication of the article.

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Democratic governments cannot function efficiently if the citizens they govern are distrustful of government institutions. The trust citizens hold toward their government is fundamentally affected by the actions taken by the government. At its core, democracy requires that citizens exchange some degree of consent for coercion in the form of government action. Citizens who trust government should be willing to cede greater authority to the government, which in turn should allow the government to take more actions because office holders who are trusted should find it easier to successfully act than should those who are distrusted (Hetherington, 1998, 2005).

Much of the research on political trust has focused on citizens' feelings towards the national government and on how trust attitudes have substantially declined over the past several decades, but a few notable exceptions have focused on (1) different levels of government and (2) specific government institutions. Wolak and Palus (2010), for example, show that citizens are generally more confident in state and local governments than they are in the national government. Kelleher and Wolak (2007) further explore the determinants of citizens' levels of confidence in state legislatures, state courts, and governors. It is particularly important to understand the dynamics of trust in state legislatures because they are the institutions that create most of the laws by which citizens in the U.S. must abide. Furthermore, the variance that exists among state institutions provides researchers with the opportunity to observe how various constellations of institutions influence political outcomes and attitudes in ways that cannot be done by focusing solely on the national government.

We begin with a simple question: how do citizens' ideological dispositions affect their levels of trust in state legislatures? While conventional wisdom suggests that trust declines as ideological conservatism increases among citizens, we argue that the effects of ideology on trust attitudes are conditioned by the institutional characteristics of legislatures and by citizens' interest in politics. More conservative citizens should trust their legislatures at higher levels as the number of legislative supermajority institutions increases because conservatives

prefer slower government than do liberals. As citizens become more ideologically conservative, we also argue that they should express lower levels of trust in state legislatures as their legislatures becomes more professional. This is because professional legislatures tend to generate more policy changes at a faster rate than do amateur legislatures. More conservative citizens should also express higher levels of trust in state legislatures than more liberal people in states with legislative term limits because term limits lead to lower levels of legislative experience, which in turn leads to slower legislative activity. Last, we argue that these effects should be larger among citizens who are more politically interested than among those who are less interested because the former are more likely to be aware of the speed at which the state legislative process operates.

We test our theory of trust in state legislatures using data drawn from a team content module embedded in the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Elections Study (CCES). Our analyses largely provide support for our theory; citizens' ideological views, their level of interest in politics, and legislative institutions in the form of supermajority protections and legislative professionalism jointly influence trust in state legislatures. We find no evidence of direct or conditional effects of term limits on trust attitudes. The results we present suggest that the institutional environments that citizens experience can powerfully shape their views of political institutions.

1 The Roots of Trust Attitudes

Trust has traditionally been conceptualized as an evaluative orientation focused on the political system as a whole (e.g. Stokes, 1962; Easton, 1965). Some scholars (see Miller, 1974) argue that trust attitudes are primarily driven by citizens' normative expectations about how the government has and should operate. Researchers have largely treated trust as two conceptually different entities: political trust — which captures the trust attitudes

that citizens feel towards government, government institutions, and political actors — and social trust — which captures the trust that citizens feel towards other people. We focus on political trust in this research.

Scholars are interested in political trust for several reasons. First, citizens who trust the government are more likely to consent to and comply with government activity (Levi, 1988; Tyler, 1990; Scholz and Pinney, 1995; Scholz and Lubell, 1998*a,b*; Levi, 1997; Tyler, 1998). Trusted governments should be able to operate more freely than governments that are distrusted because citizens will grant the former more discretion in the policy making process. Second, citizens who express low levels of political trust and high levels of political efficacy are more likely to participate in politics relative to other citizens (Easton, 1965; Gamson, 1968; Bandura, 1982). Third, incumbent politicians tend to be viewed less positively when people feel more distrustful of government (Sigelman, Sigelman and Walkosz, 1992; Hetherington, 1998, 2005). Distrust encourages voters to support challengers and third party candidates (Aberbach, 1969; Rosenstone, Behr and Lazarus, 1984; Hetherington, 1999). Fourth, the descriptive representation literature suggests that citizens are more likely to trust the government when they are represented by officeholders who share their racial, ethnic, or gender identities (Abney and Jr., 1981; Howell and Fagan, 1988; Gay, 2002; Scherer and Curry, 2010). Last, aggregate levels of political trust are low in the contemporary political environment (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993) in part due to low levels of social capital (Keele, 2007) and citizens' evaluations of political institutions, especially the U.S. Congress, have declined over the past several decades (Craig, 1993; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995). On the whole, the extant literature suggests that political trust can affect both the attitudes and the behaviors of citizens.

More generally, the behavior of officeholders and citizens' views of government performance inform citizens' trust attitudes. The actions taken by both the president and Congress along with the performance of the federal government affect trust in government at the na-

tional level (Erber and Lau, 1990; Craig, 1993; Keele, 2005). Scandals decrease political trust (Chanley, Rudolph and Rahn, 2000), likely because of the attention given to them by the news media (Orren, 1997). Additionally, trust in government tends to increase as citizens' evaluations of the state of the national economy improve (Citrin and Green, 1986; Hetherington, 1998; Chanley, Rudolph and Rahn, 2000).

Citizens are more likely to express feelings of trust when their preferred party controls government institutions (Citrin, 1974; Keele, 2005) because they filter information in a partisan manner (Stokes, 1966; Kunda, 1990; Taber and Lodge, 2006) and make use of partisan heuristics. They use partisan stereotypes and party cues as information shortcuts when forming and altering attitudes about political figures (e.g. Conover, 1981; Hamill, Lodge and Blake, 1985; Hurwitz, 1985; Rahn, 1993). Thus, partisan control of an institution should inform the way citizens view that institution. A citizen whose party controls both chambers of a state legislature, for example, should trust the legislature to a greater extent than should a citizen whose party is in the minority. This is because the citizen whose party is in control can expect the legislature to create policies that are generally congruent with her preferences. A citizen whose party is in the minority, on the other hand, can expect the legislature to produce consistently displeasing policy outcomes.

2 The Institutional Bases of Trust in Legislatures

While much of the extant research on political trust focuses on trust in the national government, we are interested in the trust that citizens feel towards state-level political institutions, such as state legislatures. We argue that these trust attitudes are driven in large part by three factors: citizens' ideological positions, the institutional characteristics of state legislatures, and citizens' levels of interest in politics.

In order to connect individual citizens' trust in their legislature to that legislature's

institutional design, we begin with a few simple assumptions. First, we assume that citizens' trust in any governmental institution is prospective. That is, a citizen trusts an institution to the degree that they believe that institution will handle issues or problems that arise in the future in the way the citizen prefers. In this way, trust in an institution reflects the degree to which a citizen feels compelled to monitor the behavior of an institution moving forward and reflects the monitoring costs often inherent in principal-agent problems. Government institutions then are agents acting on behalf of citizens, and citizens can trust those agents to the degree that those citizens can avoid the monitoring costs associated with overseeing their agents' decisions.

Second, we also assume that conservative and liberal citizens hold different preferences for how government institutions respond to issues or problems. More specifically, we argue that conservative citizens prefer that government institutions respond to problems that arises in the public sector in a slow and predictable manner because they tend to be resistant to change (Jost et al., 2003). An inherent distrust of government and preferences for limited governmental intrusions into the private lives of citizens are hallmarks of the traditional conservative ethos. Liberals, on the other hand, prefer a less constrained government that is capable of responding to public issues and crises quickly. That government provides an effective solution to many collective action problems is also a foundational belief among liberal adherents. Thus, we suggest not only that conservatives should trust government institutions less than liberals, but also that conservatives should trust slow and largely passive government institutions more than they should trust active institutions that are rapidly responsive. Liberals, on the other hand, should trust institutions that are more active and distrust institutions that are slow to make policy changes.

Our third assumption is that legislative institutions play an important role in determining the speed with which a legislature might respond to issues or problems. Indeed, the importance of legislative deliberation and a potentially slow response to public problems was one

of the primary motivations for the bicameral design of the U.S. Congress,¹ and James Madison discussed the potential for tyrannical behavior by too-easy-to-implement majoritarian politics in *Federalist No. 10*. Some of the contemporary dislike of the U.S. Congress is likely related to the failure of Congress to respond to public problems, a failure directly linked to the numerous veto points in Congress.

These simple assumptions lead to several predictions about citizens' trust in their own legislature. In particular, the logic implied by our assumptions suggests that conservative citizens will trust legislatures laden with many veto points more than legislatures with few veto points, and legislatures that lack the resources to respond to problems quickly more than a legislature that has the resources to respond to problems quickly. The reverse relationship should be true for liberals' trust in their own legislatures. In particular, there is a large amount of variation in the supermajority requirements of U.S. legislatures. Legislatures that emphasize majoritarian decision-making are necessarily more responsive to public problems than legislatures that emphasize supermajority consensus. While research on supermajority requirements in legislatures has focused primarily on veto overrides (Krehbiel, 1998; Brady and Volden, 1998), Squire and Hamm (2005, 119) point out that supermajority requirements may extend to a number of steps in the legislative process, including, but not limited to suspending chamber rules, enacting emergency legislation, adopting tax bills, and passing a budget. Thus, a legislature's emphasis on supermajority decision-making has the potential to slow down its responses to public issues in a variety of ways. Given our assumptions, this implies that conservative citizens trust legislatures that emphasize supermajority decision making more than legislatures that emphasize majoritarian decision making, while the opposite relationship should hold for liberal citizens.

While the supermajority requirements of a legislative chamber are a primary impediment

¹George Washington famously noted that the Senate would serve as the saucer on which the overheated policy responsiveness of the House cooled.

to speedy legislative responses to public problems, legislatures also vary dramatically in the resources they make available to legislators to respond to problems. In particular, U.S. state legislatures vary in their levels of professionalism (Squire, 1992). Legislative professionalism is often associated with legislative capacity (Bowen and Greene, 2014), and prominent measures of professionalism reflect a legislature’s salary for its members, time in session, and staffing levels. Each of these components ought to play a key role in the ability of legislatures to both anticipate and respond to public problems. Legislators who receive low salaries have little monetary incentive to be effective and responsive, and legislators with small or nonexistent staffs lack the administrative capacity to research issues. With a limited time in session, legislators in amateur or semi-professional chambers also lack the time needed to introduce and deliberate over legislation. When paired with our assumptions about ideological variance in preferences for legislative responses to public problems, this implies that conservatives ought to trust amateur legislatures more than professional legislatures, while liberals should trust professional legislatures more than amateur ones.

Legislative term limits offer an additional setting in which to observe potential differences in the ways that liberals and conservatives trust their state legislatures. Term limits lead to higher turnover in the membership of state legislatures not only due to the limited number of years that a given politician is permitted to spend in a legislative chamber, but also because of the ambitions of strategic politicians. The “best” politicians, then, are less likely to be interested in holding a position in a state legislature with term limits because they do not view the position as a career. Such positions are less valuable, which suggests that ambitious politicians either run for different offices or strategically leave for a higher office soon after becoming a state legislator. In other words, due to the loss of institutional memory and high levels of turnover created by legislative term limits (Carey, Niemi and Powell, 2000; Sarbaugh-Thompson et al., 2006), term limited legislatures lack the legislative capacity of their non-term limited counterparts. This implies that legislatures that have term limits

should be less productive than are those without because they are likely to be filled with less qualified and less experienced politicians. Conservatives, then, should trust legislatures with term limits more than liberals.

The conditional relationships between self-placed ideology, legislative institutions, and trust in legislatures emerge from the notion that citizens develop trust in legislatures prospectively and that conservatives should trust slow moving government processes more than quick processes while the reverse should be true for liberals. However, for citizens to actually be aware of the speed with which their legislatures respond to public problems, they must pay attention to the behavior of those chambers. This is unlikely to be true for many citizens, whose interest in and attention to politics is generally quite low (e.g. Campbell et al., 1960; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). This implies that the conditional relationship between citizen ideology, legislative institutions, and trust in legislatures that we hypothesize ought to be strongest among citizens whose interest in politics is highest. Citizens who are uninterested in politics are unlikely to learn about the speed with which their legislature handles issues, and thus, are unlikely to demonstrate much ideologically-driven trust in those legislatures. Citizens with high levels of interest in politics, alternatively, are likely to be keenly aware of how quickly their legislatures respond to issues, and thus, the conditional relationships we hypothesize ought to be quite strong for highly politically attentive citizens.

In summary, our account of citizens' trust in legislatures implies the following hypotheses:

- H1:** Conservative citizens trust their legislatures less than liberal citizens.
- H2:** (A) Conservative citizens trust legislatures with high supermajority requirements more than those with low supermajority requirements. (B) Liberal citizens trust legislatures with low supermajority requirements more than those with high supermajority requirements.
- H3:** (A) Conservative citizens trust amateur legislatures more than professional legislatures.

(B) Liberal citizens trust amateur legislatures less than professional legislatures.

H4: (A) Conservative citizens trust legislatures with term limits more than those without term limits. (B) Liberal citizens trust legislatures without term limits more than those with term limits.

H5: (A) The relationship between ideology, supermajority requirements, and trust in legislatures will be stronger for citizens highly interested in politics than for those with low levels of interest in politics. (B) The relationship between ideology, legislative professionalism, and trust in legislatures will be stronger for citizens highly interested in politics than for those with low levels of interest in politics. (C) The relationship between ideology, legislative term limits, and trust in legislatures will be stronger for citizens highly interested in politics than for those with low levels of interest in politics.

3 Research Design

We test our theory using data drawn from the University of Missouri team content module (see Richardson Jr., Konisky and Milyo, 2012) on the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). The CCES is a large-scale survey of a representative population of adult citizens in the U.S. The University of Missouri team content module includes responses from 1,000 people. Respondents were tasked with reporting their political trust attitudes on several different dimensions. The questions were presented as follows:

“How much of the time do you think you can trust each branch of government?
Please answer for each branch of the Federal or your state government listed
below.”

Each response was coded 1 for “hardly ever,” 2 for “some of the time,” 3 for “most of the time,” and 4 for “just about always.” We use respondents’ reported trust attitudes in their

state legislatures as the dependent variable in our analyses. Only 12 respondents reported trusting their state legislatures “just about always,” so we recoded this response as a 3, combining these people with those who said they trusted their state legislatures “most of the time.”² Thus our dependent variable is an integer-level measure ranging from 1 to 3; higher values indicate higher levels of trust in the respondent’s state legislature.

Our analyses utilize several independent variables of interest. First, the CCES included a question asking respondents to place themselves on an ideological scale ranging from 0 to 100 on which higher values indicate that higher levels of ideological conservatism.³ Second, respondents were asked “How interested are you in politics and current affairs?” We coded their responses 0 for “not much interested,” 1 for “somewhat interested,” and 2 for “very much interested.”

The institutional characteristics of state legislatures make up the third portion of our primary independent variables of interest. We use data on three types of legislative institutions. First, we include the number of supermajority institutions in each legislature summed across the two chambers. This measure ranges from 6 to 16 and are drawn from Squire and Hamm (2005).⁴ Second, we use Squire’s 2007 measure of legislative professionalism, which ranges from about 0.03 to 0.63. Last, we include a dummy variable in our models that is 1 for respondents who live in states that have legislative term limits and 0 for those who live

²This did not alter the substance of our findings.

³The question was worded “One way that people talk about politics in the United States is in terms of liberal, conservative, and moderate. The scale below represents the ideological spectrum from very liberal (0) to very conservative (100). Where would you place yourself?” The CCES also included a more standard 7 point ideological placement question, but we chose to use the 101 point measure because it offers the potential of more nuanced self-placements. We replicated our analyses using the 7 point scale and found substantively similar results.

⁴Squire and Hamm (2005) code whether a particular legislative chamber requires more than a constitutional majority for each of the following: recommending constitutional amendments, overriding a veto, suspending chamber rules, passing a budget or appropriation bill, adopting tax bills, enacting emergency legislation, expelling a legislator, impeaching an executive official, removing a judge, censuring a legislator. For a particular chamber, we add together the number of these institutions that require more than a constitutional majority, and add the score of a state’s two legislative chambers to arrive at that state’s level of supermajoritarianism.

in states without term limits. We dropped respondents living in Nebraska from our analyses due to the state’s nonpartisan and unicameral state legislature.

We also include several control variables accounting for the demographic characteristics of respondents. We control for potential differences in trust driven by partisanship by including a seven point measure which is coded 1 for “strong Democrat,” 2 for “weak Democrat,” 3 for “leaning Democrat,” 4 for “independent,” 5 for “leaning Republican,” 6 for “weak Republican,” and 7 for “strong Republican.” To account for differences in trust driven by differing levels of education, we include a measure ranging from 1 to 6 in which higher values correspond with higher levels of education. We include dummy variables indicating whether or not respondents are women or white to account for sex and racial differences in political trust. We include an indicator capturing the age in years of respondents, which should allow us to account for differences in levels of trust across age groups. We also control for respondents’ perceptions of the strength of the national economy because more positive perceptions have been linked to higher levels of political trust. This variable is coded from 1 to 5 with higher values indicating more positive views of the economy. Finally, we also include two control variables tapping into the contextual environments surrounding respondents in their states: we control for the number of legislative chambers in the state that are controlled by respondents’ parties — ranging from 0 to 2 — and the state unemployment rate. The former controls for the possibility that trust increases when respondents’ parties control one or more legislative chambers while the latter taps into the likely dissatisfaction that citizens will hold towards government institutions when unemployment rates are higher. Table 1 contains the summary statistics of each of the variables that we use in our analyses.

Our dependent variable, trust in state legislatures, is ordinal in nature. Because of this, we use ordered logistic regression models.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

| | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
|--|-------|--------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Trust in state legislatures | 933 | 1.933 | 0.672 | 1 | 3 |
| Self-placed ideology | 938 | 55.477 | 27.801 | 0 | 100 |
| Level of political interest | 991 | 1.555 | 0.647 | 0 | 2 |
| # of supermajority protections in the legislature | 989 | 10.592 | 3.038 | 6 | 16 |
| Legislative professionalism | 998 | 0.258 | 0.154 | 0.027 | 0.626 |
| Legislative term limits | 998 | 0.355 | 0.479 | 0 | 1 |
| Partisanship (seven point scale) | 965 | 3.880 | 2.319 | 1 | 7 |
| Level of education | 1,000 | 3.363 | 1.495 | 1 | 6 |
| Respondent is female | 1,000 | 0.512 | 0.500 | 0 | 1 |
| Respondent is white | 1,000 | 0.825 | 0.380 | 0 | 1 |
| Age in years | 1,000 | 47.288 | 16.083 | 18 | 93 |
| # of legislative chambers controlled by respondent's party | 1,000 | 0.887 | 0.909 | 0 | 2 |
| State unemployment | 998 | 5.710 | 1.106 | 3 | 8.3 |
| Perceptions of the national economy | 994 | 1.492 | 0.671 | 1 | 5 |

4 Results

We present three models estimating respondents' expressed trust in their state legislatures in Table 2. We first note that legislative term limits do not appear to influence trust in state legislatures independently or in conjunction with self-placed ideology or respondents' levels of political interest. As we describe below, legislative supermajority institutions and legislative professionalism, on the other hand, do appear to inform these trust attitudes.

Model 1 is the most simple; here, we estimate only the direct effects of self-placed ideology, political interest, and our three legislative institutions measures on trust in state legislatures. The only independent variable of interest that has a statistically significant ($p \leq .05$) effect on trust is legislative professionalism. As respondents' state legislatures become more professionalized, respondents' levels of trust in the state legislature decline.

We plot the predicted probability of respondents expressing the lowest level of trust as estimated by Model 1 in Figure 1. We estimate these predicted probabilities along with their 90% confidence intervals across the range of legislative professionalism. We held the remaining covariates in the model constant at their medians. The predicted probabilities

Table 2: Predicting Trust in the State Legislatures

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Self-placed ideology | 0.000 (0.005) | -0.005 (0.012) | 0.006 (0.038) |
| Level of political interest | 0.084 (0.151) | 0.094 (0.150) | 0.220 (1.112) |
| # of supermajority protections in the legislature | 0.044 (0.028) | -0.028 (0.068) | -0.125 (0.194) |
| Legislative professionalism | -1.982* (0.561) | 0.121 (0.996) | 2.147 (2.551) |
| Legislative term limits | 0.011 (0.221) | -0.198 (0.430) | 0.141 (1.205) |
| Self-placed ideology × supermajority protections | | 0.001 (0.001) | 0.002 (0.004) |
| Self-placed ideology × legislative professionalism | | -0.041* (0.017) | -0.057 (0.048) |
| Self-placed ideology × legislative term limits | | 0.004 (0.007) | 0.003 (0.023) |
| Self-placed ideology × political interest | | | -0.008 (0.021) |
| Supermajority protections × political interest | | | 0.065 (0.110) |
| Legislative professionalism × political interest | | | -1.426 (1.609) |
| Legislative term limits × political interest | | | -0.249 (0.697) |
| Self-placed ideology × supermajority protections × political interest | | | -0.000 (0.002) |
| Self-placed ideology × legislative professionalism × political interest | | | 0.012 (0.030) |
| Self-placed ideology × legislative term limits × political interest | | | 0.001 (0.013) |
| <hr/> | | | |
| Partisanship (seven point scale) | -0.051 (0.059) | -0.058 (0.059) | -0.041 (0.064) |
| Level of education | 0.084 (0.063) | 0.089 (0.062) | 0.088 (0.064) |
| Respondent is female | -0.061 (0.170) | -0.065 (0.170) | -0.077 (0.172) |
| Respondent is white | -0.081 (0.253) | -0.075 (0.256) | -0.090 (0.264) |
| Age in years | -0.007 (0.006) | -0.006 (0.006) | -0.006 (0.006) |
| # of legislative chambers controlled by respondent's party | 0.402* (0.098) | 0.336* (0.107) | 0.340* (0.112) |
| State unemployment | -0.064 (0.096) | -0.057 (0.096) | -0.058 (0.097) |
| Perceptions of the national economy | 0.164 (0.123) | 0.149 (0.124) | 0.161 (0.130) |
| <hr/> | | | |
| Cutpoint 1 | -1.222 (0.650) | -1.458 (0.930) | -1.277 (1.871) |
| Cutpoint 2 | 1.514* (0.632) | 1.296 (0.926) | 1.490 (1.875) |
| <hr/> | | | |
| BIC | 1,608.468 | 1,620.795 | 1,663.274 |
| N | 853 | 853 | 853 |

Note: Cell entries are estimated coefficients generated using ordinal logistic regression. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. The models reported here utilized the CCES survey weights.

* p-value ≤ 0.05 (two-tailed test)

† p-value ≤ 0.1 (two-tailed test)

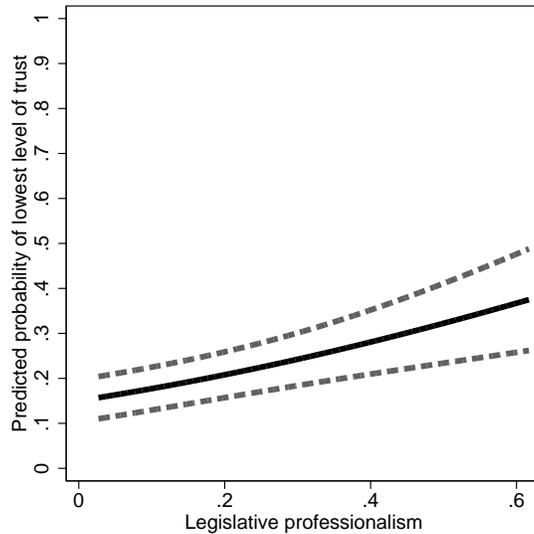


Figure 1: The effects of legislative professionalism on the predicted probability of being in the lowest category of trust in state legislatures

across the range of legislative professionalism runs from about 0.18 for respondents living in states with the least professional legislatures to 0.38 among those living in states with the most professional legislatures.

While these results on their own are substantively interesting, our theory is more nuanced than what is captured by the specification of Model 1. In Model 2, we interact respondents' ideological positions with the three measures of legislative institutions because our theory leads us to expect respondents' ideologies to condition the effects of the various institutions on trust in state legislatures. Our expectation turns out to be true for the number of supermajority institutions in the legislature and legislative professionalism, but not for legislative term limits. Because we are interacting several continuous variables with one another, it is difficult to directly interpret the coefficients presented in Table 2. We present marginal effects plots in Figure 2 as suggested by Brambor, Clark and Golder (2006) to account for this lack of clarity. Because we are primarily interested in observing how citizens' ideological positions condition the effects of legislative institutions on trust in state legislatures, we plot

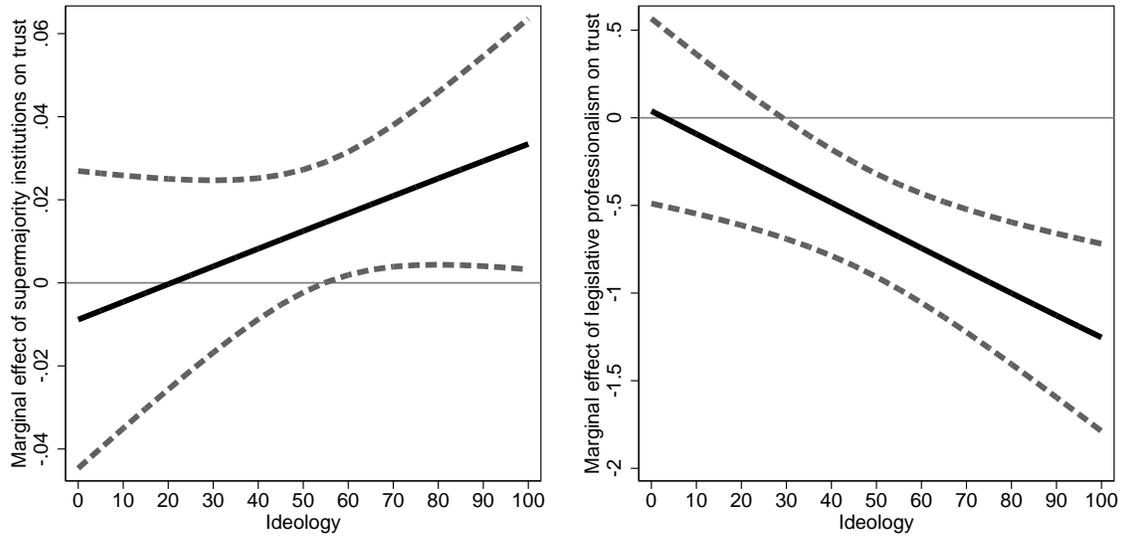


Figure 2: The marginal effects of number of legislative supermajority protections and legislative professionalism on trust in state legislatures across ideological self-placement

these effects and their 90% confidence intervals across all values of self-placed ideology.

As shown in the first panel of Figure 2, the marginal effect of the number of legislative supermajority institutions on trust in state legislatures is negative at low values of ideology — i.e. among more liberal respondents — and increases as ideology increases — i.e. as respondents identify themselves as more conservative. Note that the marginal effects do not differ significantly ($p \leq .1$) from zero until respondents place themselves at an ideological position of about 55 or higher. In other words, the number of legislative supermajority institutions has a positive and statistically significant effect on trust in state legislatures among more conservative respondents who placed themselves at least at 55 on the 0 to 100 scale. The marginal effect of legislative professionalism on trust in state legislatures is slightly greater than zero when ideology is zero, but rapidly becomes increasingly negative. These effects differ significantly from zero at and above approximately 30 on the ideological scale.

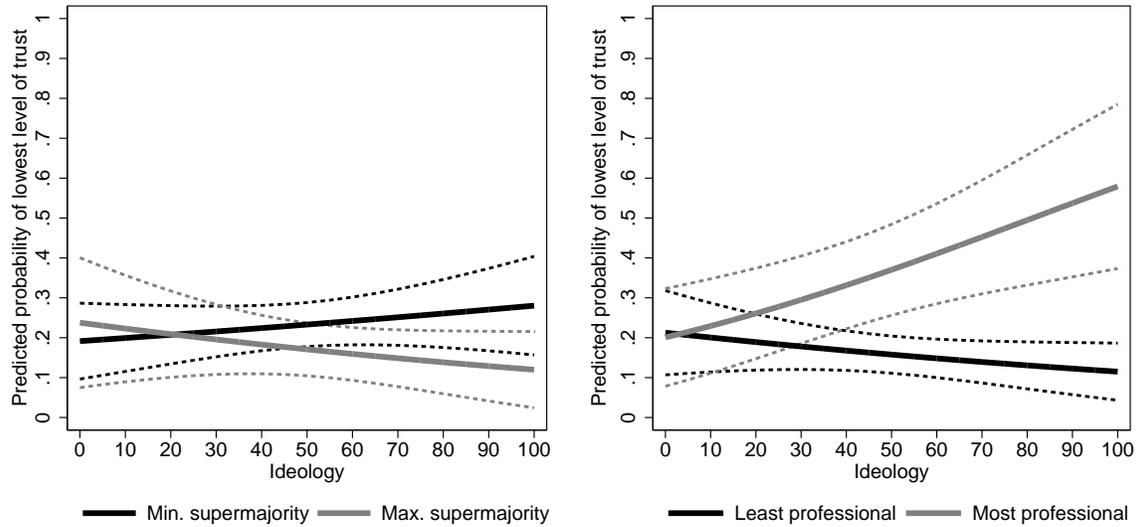


Figure 3: The effects of supermajoritarian institutions and legislative professionalism on the predicted probability of being in the lowest category of trust in state legislatures across ideological self-placement

Next, we present some predicted probabilities generated by the estimates of Model 2 in Figure 3. We vary respondents' ideological positions and the characteristics of the legislatures in their states as indicated. The remaining variables are set to their medians. The first plot shows that respondents who live in states with the fewest legislative supermajority institutions predicted probability of expressing the lowest level of trust in state legislatures increases as their ideological positions become more conservative. These predicted probabilities range from 0.19 to 0.28 respectively among the most liberal and conservative respondents. The predicted probabilities among respondents who live in states with the most legislative supermajority institutions run in the opposite direction across self-placed ideology: 0.24 for the most liberal respondents and 0.12 among the most conservative respondents. In other words, more conservative people on average appear to be less trusting of their legislatures when those legislatures have fewer supermajority institutions, but more trusting when a larger number of supermajority institutions are present.

We report predicted probabilities of expressing the lowest level of trust in state legislatures across the ideological scale among respondents living in the states with the least and most professional legislatures in the second plot in Figure 3. The predicted probability of falling into the lowest category of trust ranges from 0.21 among the most liberal respondents to 0.12 among the most conservative people. The predicted probabilities among respondents with the most professional legislatures, on the other hand, range from 0.20 to 0.58 across the ideological scale. This suggests that, in states with highly professional environments, increasing levels of conservatism predict lower levels of trust in state legislatures. Respondents who live in states that have legislatures with low levels professionalism, on the other hand, trust their state legislatures more as conservatism increases.

Next, we test the degree to which respondents' levels of interest in politics condition the statistical interaction between self-placed ideology and the institutional characteristics of state legislatures. This requires a series of three way interaction terms, which we included in the specification of Model 3 reported in Table 2. We once again report a series of marginal effects plots to better communicate the substantive impact of Model 3's various coefficients, this time in Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4 shows the marginal effects of the number of supermajority institutions in a respondent's state as conditioned by self-placed ideology at low and high levels of political interest. The marginal effects shown in the first plot for respondents with the lowest levels of interest are negative for more liberal people and slowly increase. They become positive at approximately 85 on the ideological scale, but these effects do not differ significantly from zero at any point. The marginal effects of supermajority institutions on trust in state legislatures among participants with the highest levels of political interest, on the other hand, are always positive and become larger as ideology increases. These effects differ from zero at and above approximately 45 on the ideology scale. These marginal effects indicate that highly interested and more conservative people respond to larger numbers of legislative

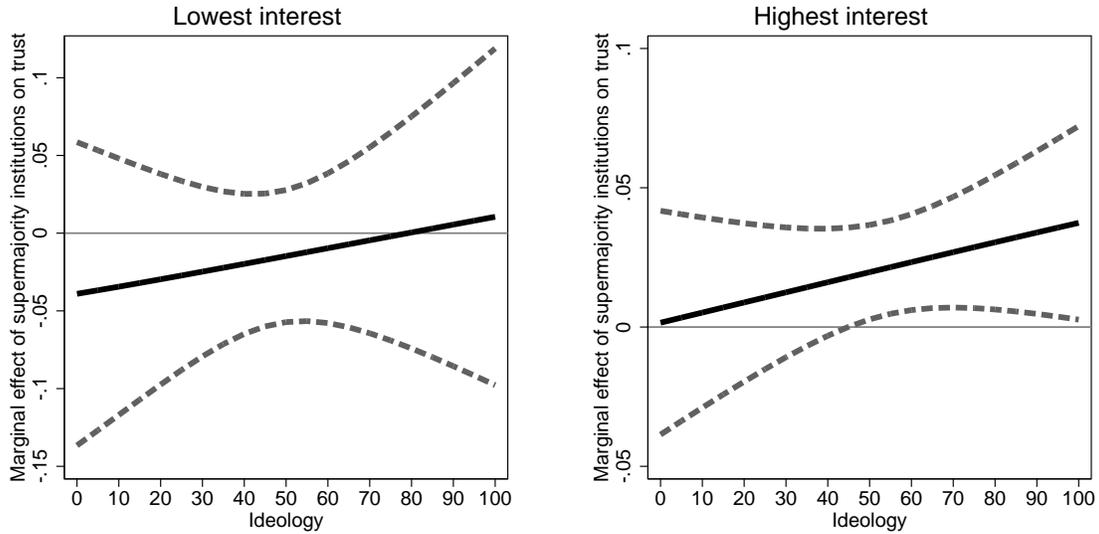


Figure 4: The marginal effects of number of legislative supermajority protections on trust in state legislatures across self-placed ideology as conditioned by political interest

supermajority institutions by expressing higher levels of trust in state legislatures.

Next, we turn to the marginal effects of legislative professionalism for low- and high-interest respondents across the ideological scale. First, note that the marginal effects for low-interest respondents once again fail to be statistically distinguishable from zero. Among high-interest respondents, the marginal effects are negative across all values of self-placed ideology and continue to decrease as ideology increases. These effects differ from zero beginning approximately at 25 on the ideological scale. Legislative professionalism appears to lead to decreasing levels of trust as respondents become more conservative, at least among those who are the most interested in politics.

Figure 6 shows the predicted probability of expressing the lowest category of trust in state legislatures among respondents living in the states with the fewest and the most legislative supermajority institutions for both low and high-interest respondents. We turn first to low-interest respondents. These results show that the predicted probability of having the

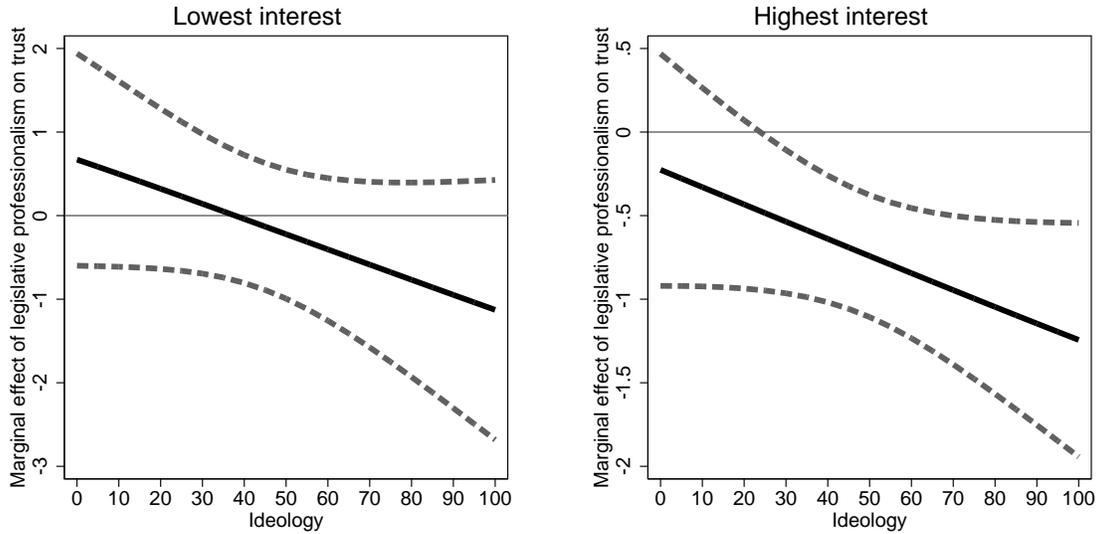


Figure 5: The marginal effects of legislative professionalism on trust in state legislatures across self-placed ideology as conditioned by political interest

lowest level of trust ranges from about 0.28 to 0.20 respectively among the most liberal and the most conservative respondents living in states with the fewest legislative supermajority institutions. For those living in states with the highest number of these institutions, the predicted probabilities range from 0.58 to 0.15 among the most liberal through the most conservative people.

The predicted probabilities generated for high-interest respondents show the same general pattern, but suffer from significantly less uncertainty. For respondents living in states with the smallest number of legislative supermajority institutions, the predicted probability of expressing the lowest level of trust in the state legislature ranges from 0.17 among the most liberal people to 0.32 among the most conservative respondents. For those living in states with the most legislative supermajority institutions, the predicted probabilities run in the opposite direction across self-placed ideology — 0.16 for the most liberal and 0.13 among the most conservative people — but these effects are substantively modest. On the whole, these results suggest that citizens are more likely to express lower levels

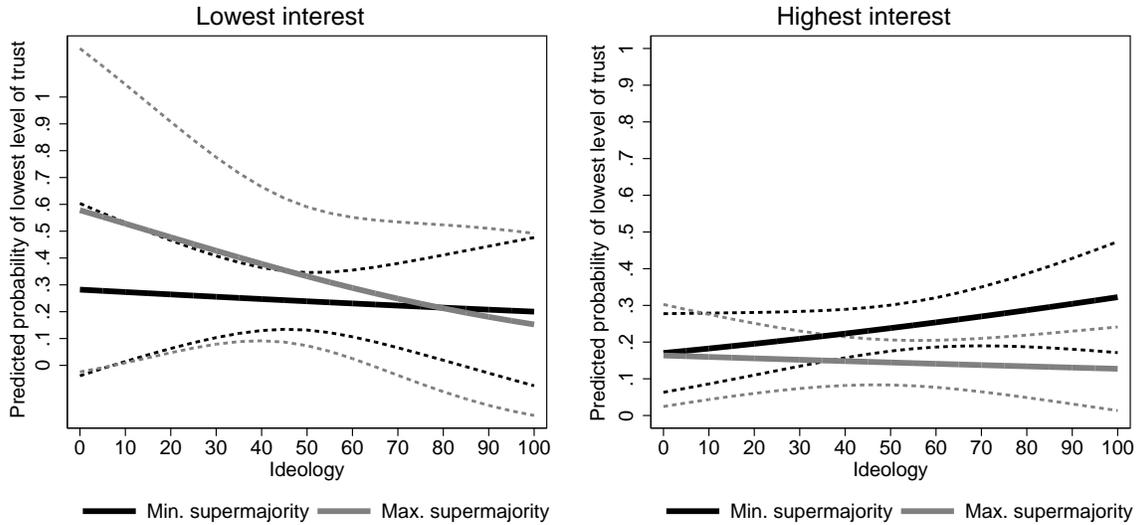


Figure 6: The effects of supermajoritarian institutions on the predicted probability of being in the lowest category of trust in state legislatures across ideological self-placement by level of political interest

of trust in state legislatures as their degree of ideological conservatism increases when the number of legislative supermajority institutions in their states declines. These effects are more pronounced and less uncertain among higher interest respondents than they are among those with the lowest levels of interest in politics.

Finally, we present the predicted probability of expressing the lowest category of trust in state legislatures among respondents living in the states with the least and most professional legislatures for both low- and high-interest respondents in Figure 7. Turning first to the subset of respondents with the lowest level of political interest, we observe that the predicted probability of having the lowest level of trust among those who live in states with the least professional legislatures ranges from 0.48 to 0.11 from the most liberal to the most conservative individuals. We observe the opposite effect as conservatism increases among respondents living in states with the most professional legislatures; the predicted probability of expressing the lowest level of trust is 0.21 among extremely liberal respondents and 0.50

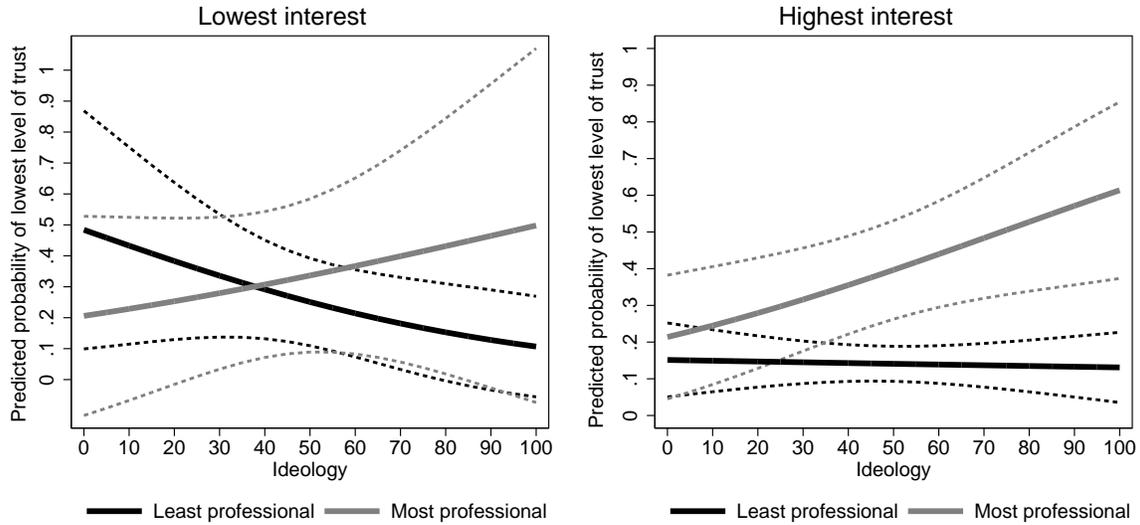


Figure 7: The effects of legislative professionalism on the predicted probability of being in the lowest category of trust in state legislatures across ideological self-placement by level of political interest

among extreme conservatives.

We observe similar, but more statistically certain, patterns among high-interest respondents. The predicted probability of those living in the least professional states range from 0.15 among the most liberal respondents to 0.13 among the most conservative respondents. This shift is substantively weak, but the change in predicted probabilities that we observe among high interest respondents holds more substantive importance given the marginal effects reported above. The predicted probability of expressing the lowest level of trust in state legislatures range from 0.21 for the most liberal high-interest respondents to 0.61 among the most conservative high-interest respondents. These predictions suggest that (1) political interest magnifies the impact of the ideology and legislative professionalism on trust attitudes and (2) more professionalized legislatures are trusted at lower levels as respondents become increasingly ideologically conservative.

5 Conclusion

In summary, our analyses show that respondents' trust in state legislatures are jointly informed by their self-placed ideologies, their levels of interest in politics, and two institutional characteristics of state legislatures: the number of supermajority protections in the legislature and the level of legislative professionalism. A third legislative characteristic, legislative term limits, did not appear to inform respondents' trust attitudes. As a respondent's level of conservatism increases, their trust in their state legislature increases as the number of supermajority institutions associated with their state legislature increases. When there are few such institutions, higher levels of conservatism appear to lead to lower levels of trust. Trust also appears to decline at higher rates as conservatism increases among respondents who live in states with highly professionalized legislatures. Among respondents who live in states with amateur legislatures, on the other hand, ideology appears to have very little influence over trust attitudes. In general, higher levels of interest among citizens appears to magnify the above effects.

Our results imply that the design of state institutions, specifically of state legislatures, can affect public opinion about those institutions. The results of our analyses suggest that institutions influence trust, but not uniformly. Institutions that promote slow-moving and incremental legislatures promote trust among conservatives. Institutions that promote a flexible and responsive legislature, on the other hand, encourage trust among liberals.

If reformers wish to encourage higher levels of trust in government institutions, they might design amateur legislatures because most people across the ideological spectrum appear to express higher levels of trust in such institutions than they do in more professional legislatures.⁵ Reformers have a more difficult decision to make when it comes to the number of legislative supermajority institutions in their states; more conservative states would likely

⁵That said, there is some evidence amateur legislatures lead to worse political outcomes (e.g. Lax and Phillips, 2012).

experience higher levels of trust with more supermajority institutions while more liberal states may see greater trust with fewer such institutions. Given that the degree to which citizens trust government and government institutions affects the ease with which government can enact new policies, reformers should take seriously the decisions they make when creating new or altering existing political institutions.

Future research might examine the degree to which other characteristics of institutions affect citizens' levels of trust in the institution as a whole. For example, how are citizens' levels of trust in state courts of last resort affected by the various methods of judicial election and selection? To what extent do governors' formal powers drive citizens' trust in their governors? These and other important questions should be addressed in future research.

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