

Political Trust and Distrust in Switzerland: A Normative Analysis

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Abstract: *Based on data from a Swiss survey study (N = 769), this research investigated individual-level determinants of trust in political authorities from a social psychological perspective. The study demonstrates that individuals with a low level of education who feel materially at risk and politically powerless expressed the lowest levels of political trust. This relationship was explained with differential endorsement of normative beliefs. A mediation analysis reveals that normative perceptions of Swiss society as being threatened by immorality and growing social inequalities accounted for the effect of perceived material risk on political distrust. The rejection of a duty-based citizenship norm (voting), in turn, mediated the impact of political powerlessness on distrust. Political orientation was unrelated to political trust. These findings illustrate the cognitive underpinnings of political alienation and suggest that perceived lack of political agency and perceived risk of social declassification are key factors in understanding political distrust.*

KEYWORDS: Trust-in-Government, Social-Order, Social-Representations, Social-Status, Political-Integration

Introduction¹

In contemporary democratic societies, trust in institutions is at the heart of the political debate. Opinion polls and survey research regularly find cause for alarming claims concerning the vanishing trust in political authorities and low voter turnout (for Switzerland, *e.g.*, Brunner and Sgier, 1997). Against this background of supposedly threatened ties between the government and its citizenry, the analysis of the determinants of political trust has attracted strong attention in political science research (*cf.* Anderson and Singer, 2008; Cantril and Cantril, 1999; Citrin and Muste 1999; Cook and Gronke, 2005; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2001; Lipset and Schneider, 1987; Mishler and Rose, 2001). In the present research, we propose an original normative analysis of political trust based on shared beliefs about citizenship and various types of threats to social order held by members of high and low status groups. We argue that these shared beliefs serve as normative reference knowledge in political debates on the basis of which citizens make up their minds on political authorities.

The study of normative factors underlying political trust is amazingly scarce (*e.g.*, Devos et al. 2002). The present research aims to contribute to fill to this gap by proposing an analysis of trust in the Swiss government and political authorities informed by social

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representations theory (Augoustinos et al. 2006; Doise et al. 1993; Moscovici, 2000; 2008[1961]). The goal of this approach is to reconstruct the cognitive foundations of citizen opinions on political institutions, and thereby to gain a better understanding *why* citizens trust or distrust political authorities. In other words, if social positions predict the level of trust, the reasons are to be found in the differential endorsement of normative beliefs shared by individuals as a function of their membership in status categories. Controlling for classical predictors of political trust such as gender, age (*cf.* Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Citrin and Muste 1999; Kelleher and Woldak, 2007), and political ideology (*cf.* Citrin and Muste 1999; Grönlund and Setälä, 2007), our approach articulates two categories of determinants of political trust. Political trust will first be analysed as a function of social position, composed of social status (defined by education level, income and subjective personal risk assessment) and political integration (perceived powerlessness in political decision-making and political interest). Second, in order to understand why social status and political integration affect political trust, we investigate the extent to which normative beliefs about social order mediate, *i.e.* account for, the effects of social status and political integration on political trust. More specifically, citizenship norms (Dalton, 2008) and social order beliefs concerning moral values, alleged free riding, menacing cultural diversity and illegitimate social inequality (Staerklé, 2009) are expected to account for the effects of social status and political integration on trust.

Social Representations and Political Attitudes

Our approach goes a step further than studies which have investigated the role of values and norms as predictors of institutional trust (*e.g.*, Devos et al. 2002; Grönlund and Setälä, 2007; Catterberg and Moreno, 2005; Hetherington, 1998; Brunner and Sciarini, 2002), since it aims to simultaneously account for the social origins of norms and values and their impact on political trust. Thereby, norms and values are not conceived of as arbitrary individual preferences, but as socially constructed reference knowledge which orients citizens' political attitudes according to their position in society (Bourdieu 1984[1979]; Bourdieu and Boltanski 2008[1976]; Staerklé, 2009; Van der Waal et al. 2007). This approach is grounded in social representations theory which studies collective definitions of reality and socially situated cognition as the result of everyday communication within and between social groups (Augoustinos et al., 2006; Elcheroth et al. (in press); Wagner and Hayes, 2005). In this view, observed differences in political attitudes between social categories reflect differences in social experiences and in the interpretations of these experiences which are to a large extent determined by positions in the social hierarchy (Clémence, 2001; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2002; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Groups develop normative beliefs and values which reflect and deal with everyday experiences and contingencies; group members then draw on such shared knowledge—social representations—to form political attitudes (Staerklé et al. in press). Political attitudes such as trust in institutions are then seen as the outcome of a process whereby citizens position themselves toward shared normative knowledge (Clémence, 2001). Social representations can therefore be defined as normative organizing principles of political attitudes (Bourdieu 1984[1979]; Doise, 2005; Doise et al. 1993).

This process of opinion formation is based on the assumption that present-day political attitudes of individuals are “anchored” in past experiences. Two forms of anchoring (Moscovici 2008) can be distinguished. First, *social anchoring* refers to the influence of experiences in pre-existing social groups and categories on political attitudes, in particular the impact of membership in high and low status groups (*cf.* Van der Waal et al. 2007). In the

present study, such groups are defined by social status and political integration. *Normative anchoring*, in turn, refers to the assumption that political attitudes are “anchored” in pre-existing beliefs which are generated by social groups and shared to various degrees by its members, in particular normative beliefs concerning contrasting principles of social order. In this study, political trust is expected to be normatively anchored in two sets of beliefs: perceived threats to social order (Staerklé, 2009) and citizenship norms (Dalton, 2008). We therefore expect that membership in low- or high-status categories predicts different levels of political trust because of category-specific endorsements of these two types of normative beliefs.

Political Trust

Research has extensively studied political trust as the subjective support given to a regime (*cf.* Citrin and Muste 1999). Although there is considerable disagreement about what exactly is measured with items assessing trust (Easton, 1975; Hardin, 1993), it seems accepted that trust is associated with the evaluation of institutions (in terms of positive and negative attitudes towards them), and that the core meaning of trust is that institutions will act in the interest of the trusting (Mishler and Rose 1997). In general, it is assumed that some level of trust in political institutions such as the government is a necessary condition for a healthy democratic functioning, even though low levels of public trust in institutions, like the decline in political participation, are regularly bemoaned (Citrin and Muste 1999; Feygina and Tyler, 2009; Lipset and Schneider, 1987; Mishler and Rose, 1997; 2001; Tyler, 2001). Low levels of trust are indeed supposed to reflect dissociation or even alienation between the citizenry and the government, which in turn leads to a lack of political legitimacy and potentially to a decrease in political participation (Grönlund and Setälä, 2007). In the present research, political trust is defined as a diffuse and abstract form of trust in democratic institutions (Anderson and Singer, 2008; Citrin, 1974; Citrin and Muste 1999; Easton, 1975), as opposed to more specific forms of institutional support, for example trust in implementing institutions like the police or courts. In their everyday lives, citizens are indeed likely to have a more direct contact with the police than with the government or the parliament. Political trust was thus assessed with a measure of trust in the Swiss government and the parliament which reflects the perceived legitimacy of the Swiss governmental regime.

Social Status and Political Trust

One of the most robust findings in the literature on political trust is that objectively assessed high status positions in society are associated with greater political trust than low status positions, defined by income (Catterberg and Moreno, 2005; Hetherington, 1998; Mishler and Rose, 2001) or by higher education (Citrin and Muste 1999; Kelleher and Woldak, 2007). Conversely, low income and being unemployed were negatively related to political trust (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Anderson and Singer, 2008). These status effects on political trust are likely to reflect different experiences associated with membership in status groups. Residents of working class neighbourhoods may for example consider that while authorities protect commercial city centres from disorder, their area suffers from a lack of institutional consideration (Garland, 2001), which then translates into decreased levels of trust in authorities. Similarly, research on the development of attitudes towards authorities during adolescence has shown that low status distrust is a result of perceived social

exclusion because individuals feel let down by the system and unprotected by law and authorities (Emler and Reicher, 1995; 2005). Low status groups may therefore feel that their interests are less well served by political institutions (Young, 1999). Given their relatively secure and privileged social position, high status groups, in turn, are more likely than low status groups to believe that institutions maintain an orderly and controllable environment which serves their interests.

In addition to objective social status, subjective social *status* derived from perceptions of one's position in the social structure have also been shown to predict trust, in particular one's perceived financial satisfaction (Catterberg and Moreno, 2005; Cook and Gronke, 2005). We therefore used perceived material risk as a subjective measure of social status which assesses the perceived risk of social declassification and thus complements the objective measures of income and education (Castel, 1995). In the Swiss context of the early nineties, for instance, feeling materially at risk was linked to low trust in political authorities (Brunner and Sgier, 1997), which implies that perceived material security should lead to greater trust.

We expect members of low status groups—objectively defined with a low level of education and income, and subjectively with a heightened sense of material risk—to grant less legitimacy to political authorities and therefore to express more distrustful attitudes than high status groups.

Political Integration and Political Trust

The second set of variables which defines the social position of citizens is *political integration*, understood as the capacity and motivation to participate in the political process. In line with the general idea that political competence guides political attitudes (Converse, 1964), empirical evidence suggests that both political interest and political knowledge are positively related to trust (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Anderson and Singer, 2008; Catterberg and Moreno, 2005; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1993; Hetherington, 1998). To the extent that political integration reflects political competence and knowledge, it is highly dependent upon social status and education level. Gaxie (1978) for example showed for a French sample that the more educated citizens had more political interest and political competence than the less educated. It is therefore likely that political integration leads to higher political legitimacy, because political interest and knowledge enhances the capacity to understand the workings of the political system and thereby increases political trust.

Yet, political integration is not only determined by political interest and knowledge, but also by a more psychological feeling of empowerment and a sense of control over one's life which make political participation meaningful from the individual's point of view. Political participation was thus shown to be driven by the belief in one's power to make things change (Bennett, 2006; Dalton, 2008; Van Zomeren et al. 2008). Research on procedural justice confirms that considering oneself to be able to actively participate in political decision-making and feeling considered by institutions enhances support for political authorities (Tyler, 2001; Feygina and Tyler, 2009). Consequently, we expect people who are interested in politics who feel empowered in their political action to grant greater trust in Swiss political authorities.

The psychological processes underlying political trust cannot be directly inferred from the impact of social position and political integration on trust (Easton, 1975). A mediational model is the appropriate analytical tool which allows reconstructing citizens' thinking on

trust. Our mediation model assumes that social status and political integration are associated with two sets of normative beliefs which shape political trust.

Perceived Threats to the Social Order

In any democratic society, the principles underlying social order are debated and contested by both citizens and political actors, and within these debates citizens gradually develop their own views on the normative priorities which should organize a society. They may for example demand conformity with common values, emphasise meritocratic achievement, or object to cultural diversity. In a social representations view, such normative beliefs and values are understood in terms of shared conceptions of social order rather than in terms of individual preferences or stable personality dimensions (Staerklé, 2009). Accounting for political trust with conceptions of social order therefore requires a pluralistic approach based on multiple definitions of social order which can be found in democratic debates.

In the present study, we analyse four lay conceptions of social order as normative beliefs underlying political trust. Reflecting emblematic forms of social order, these conceptions are called Moral Order, Free Market, Social Diversity and Structural Inequality (Staerklé et al. 2007; Staerklé, 2009). Each conception is associated with a specific threat to social order, and these four types of threats will be used to account for the relationship between social status and political trust.

- (1) In the *Moral Order* conception, the social order is based on expected conformity with common moral principles. Accordingly, an orderly society is threatened by those who disrespect central moral values (as evidenced in conservative statements of lacking moral education and urban insecurity). Perceived moral order threat is expected to predict lower political trust, because authorities are not seen as dealing adequately or effectively with norm-violating and immoral people.
- (2) In the *Free Market* conception, the social order is based on economically liberal principles. Here, the social order is challenged by people who violate free market principles by allegedly abusing common goods (as expressed in perceived “free riding” and taking advantage of welfare benefits). We again expect a negative relationship between perceived free market threat and political trust: when people perceive welfare abuse as a political problem, authorities are seen as not protecting the rights and assets of hard-working people.
- (3) In the *Social Diversity* conception, social order is based on the principle of national homogeneity. Hence, social order is threatened by cultural diversity and otherness (assessed with judgements of a threatening presence of immigrants and foreigners). The more people perceive immigrants and foreigners as a political problem, the more they should distrust authorities which are seen as promoting a multicultural agenda which neglects the rights of Swiss nationals.
- (4) In the *Structural Inequality* conception, the social order is based on egalitarian principles. Hence, the threat to social order stems from social inequality and from social distance between privileged and underprivileged social categories. When people perceive inequality as a political problem, they are likely to distrust authorities because they deem institutional action in favour of a more egalitarian society insufficient.

Our general contention thus is that low levels of perceived threat to social order on these four dimensions should lead individuals to consider that institutions effectively deal with these specific threats and dangers to the social order and therefore increase political trust.

This should typically be the case for high status individuals whose trust in authorities and institutions frees them from dealing with everyday contingencies. For them, institutions “do their job” by maintaining a social order which is favourable to them. Institutional trust reduces the complexity of the world (Luhmann, 1979; 2000) and favours action and risk taking by individuals who can rely upon a relative stability of their social environment (Lewicki et al. 1998). The situation is different for members of low position groups. Greater uncertainty related to the political integration and vulnerability of low status positions gives rise to stronger perceptions of social problems and a more pessimistic outlook on society (Castel, 1995, Staerklé et al., 2007). Accordingly, we expect low position groups to experience greater threat to social order on all four dimensions and therefore also lower levels of political trust.

Citizenship Norms

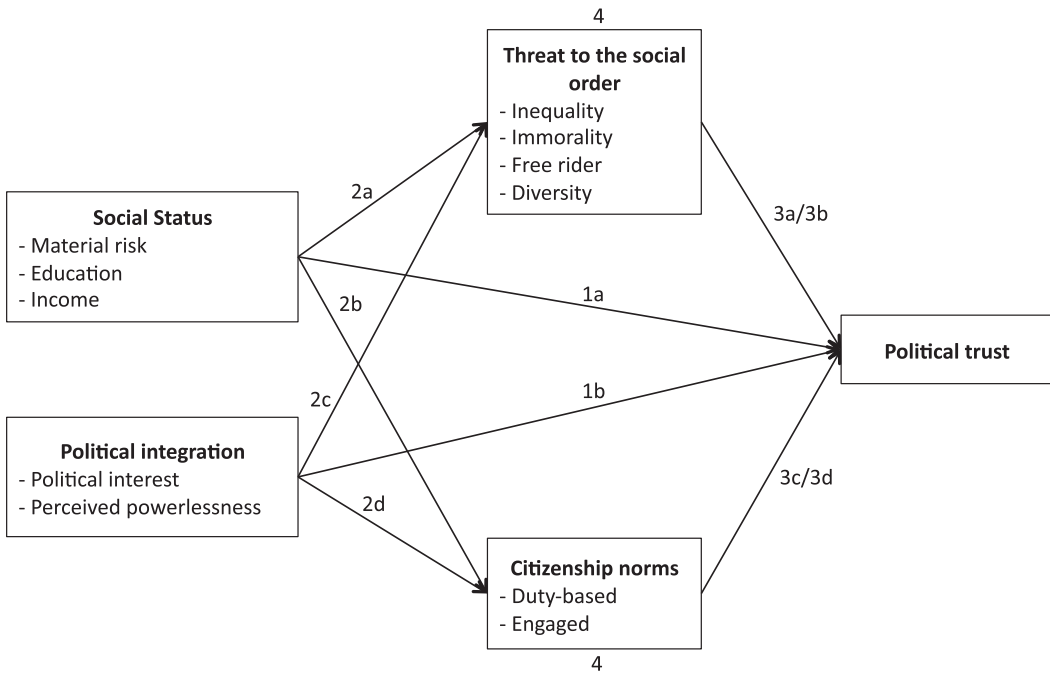
Citizenship norms are the second set of normative beliefs expected to predict political trust. Challenging the general idea that political trust is fading away in contemporary democracies, Dalton (2008) showed that political participation actually evolved towards new directions, that is, toward engaged and protesting forms of citizenship as contrasted with more traditional forms of citizenship, based on the civic duty to participate in formal political processes, in particular voting. Engaged citizenship emphasizes forms of political participation which are critical towards existing social arrangements, for example associative movements, public demonstrations against government policies, or boycotts of particular brands. Endorsing an engaged conception of citizenship represents an alternative to a political organisation based on the majority principle (*e.g.*, voting), and should therefore be related to distrust in the political system. Low status groups are more likely to endorse such an engaged conception, since less conventional forms of political participation allow them to make their claims heard in the political process. Nevertheless, Dalton (2008) showed that education was positively linked to both duty-based and engaged forms of political participation. It is thus possible that among the highly educated, both types of democratic participation co-exist, because they both represent legitimate forms of political participation. Moreover, Swiss citizenship as such is an important pre-requisite for duty-based political participation since only Swiss Citizens are allowed to participate in political decision-making at the national level. Voting, as the typical example of duty-based citizenship, should therefore be more important for Swiss citizens. Finally, a lack of interest in politics and feelings of political powerlessness should lead to the rejection of any kind of political participation, that is, of both duty-based and engaged forms of citizenship.

Hypotheses

Our general hypothesis states that the effect of social positions (*i.e.*, social status and political integration) on political trust is mediated by the endorsement of normative beliefs. We predict that lower positions in the social structure generate greater uncertainty and vulnerability which in turn give rise to stronger perceptions of social problems and a more pessimistic outlook on society. The outcome should be lower trust in the Swiss political regime. We now summarise the hypotheses, schematized in Figure 1, which will guide the analysis of the data.

1a. Anchoring of political trust in social status. Because high status groups (assessed with education level, income and perceived material risk) are more likely to perceive the

Figure 1: Conceptual Mediation Model of Political Trust.



political system as acting in their interest, members of high status groups will express greater political trust than low social status.

- 1b. Anchoring of political trust in political integration.* Because politically integrated individuals have more knowledge of the Swiss political regime and feel empowered in political decision-making, they will trust the current political authorities more than those with low levels of political integration.
- 2a. Anchoring of the conceptions of social order threats in social status.* High social status should give rise to lesser perceived threat to social order on all four dimensions, because high status participants should feel less uncertainty and insecurity in their life.
- 2b. Anchoring of citizenship norms in social status.* High social status should lead to the endorsement of duty-based citizenship norms, because traditional forms of political participation are seen as fostering a social order beneficial for their group interest. Low status citizens should favour engaged citizenship norms, because it represents an alternative type of political participation which is potentially critical towards the political establishment. Education level may however lead to the endorsement of both citizenship norms.
- 2c. Anchoring of perceived social order threats in political integration.* Politically less integrated individuals should perceive greater threat to social order, since perceived powerlessness and lack of political interest is conducive to a pessimistic and threatening outlook on society.
- 2d. Anchoring of citizenship norms in political integration.* Engaged and duty-based citizenship norms should be lower among less politically integrated people, because they do neither have much interest in politics, nor do they feel much power in political decision-making.

- 3a. *Mediation of social status by social order threats.* Perceived social order threats are expected to mediate the effect of social status on political trust. More specifically, we expect a pattern where low social status gives rise to higher perceived social order threat which in turn decreases political trust.
- 3b. *Mediation of political integration by social order threats.* We expect social order threats also to mediate the effect of political integration on trust, since political integration should lead to more serene views about the social order, and thus to greater trust in political authorities.
- 3c. *Mediation of social status by citizenship norms.* Higher social status should predict greater trust, because high status individuals should embrace traditional duty-based citizenship norms (voting and elections). In contrast, low status individuals defined with high perceived material vulnerability should embrace engaged citizenship norms. Nevertheless, highly educated individuals may also endorse engaged citizenship norms (*cf.* 2b). They may thus trust the political authorities because they believe a democratic regime also takes alternative political participation into consideration.
- 3d. *Mediation of political integration by citizenship norms.* Political integration should lead to greater endorsement of duty-based and engaged citizenship norms, because both political participation types are seen as legitimate. Consequently, this should lead to greater political trust.
4. *Specific paths between social status and social order threat vs. political integration and citizenship norms.* Because political participation is linked to political interest and agency, citizenship norms are expected to mediate in particular the impact of political integration on trust in political authorities. In contrast, social status should generate specific views on society which then translate into political trust. In other words, we expect social status to predict political trust through lay conceptions of social order, while the impact of political integration on trust should be more strongly related to citizenship norms.

Method

Data and Procedure

The data were collected in the framework of a Swiss National Science Foundation Research Programme on the Swiss Welfare State (PNR45 “Problèmes de l’Etat social”). This survey was designed to assess the perceived legitimacy of the Swiss welfare state, and contains a number of other variables which are not used in the present study. This database is particularly appropriate to test our hypotheses regarding political trust, since it contains all the items required by the model of lay conceptions of social order (for more details, see Staerklé et al., 2007).

Based on random lists of inhabitants provided by municipal administrations, data were collected for working-age adults aged between 20 and 65 years (N = 769: response rate = 49%). The data collection took place between September 2001 and February 2002 with face-to-face interviews at respondents’ homes by trained interviewers. The participants were recruited in four cities: two from the French speaking part of Switzerland (Lausanne: N = 195, and Neuchâtel: N = 198) and two from the German speaking part (Bern: N = 194, and St-Gallen: N = 182). Originally constructed in French, the questionnaire was translated and back-translated for the German-speaking respondents. Variable names, means and standard deviations, as well as item wordings and scales are reported in the Appendix.

Category membership variables

Mean age was about 41. There were 395 women and 374 men in the sample. A large majority were Swiss citizens (82.2%, $N = 632$, missing = 6), while the rest were foreigners established in Switzerland (17.0%, $N = 131$). A majority of the foreigners ($N = 92$) were citizens (in descending order) of Italy, France, Germany, Spain and Portugal (12.0%), while 39 respondents (5.0%) were citizens of other countries. This sample can thus be qualified as representative of the adult population in working age living in the four Swiss cities. Since citizenship, linguistic region, age (standardized from self-reported age), and gender of participants are variables that may affect political trust, they were controlled for in the analyses as category membership variables. Our research question does not bear on political orientation as such, but given its potential importance as an explanatory variable of political trust, we also controlled for political orientation with a measure of political ideology (left, moderate left, centre, moderate right and right).

Social Status

Two objective measures and one subjective measure were used to assess social status.

- (1) *Objective measures of social status.* The objective position was assessed through *education* level and household *income* of respondents. Education level was measured with an ordinal variable (primary school, $N = 62$, apprenticeship, $N = 244$, secondary school, $N = 259$, university, $N = 201$). Household income was measured in absolute Swiss Francs: Less than 2000 CHF per month ($N = 66$), 2000-3000 CHF ($N = 207$); 3000–4000 CHF ($N = 157$), 4000–6000 CHF ($N = 255$), over 6000 CHF ($N = 84$).
- (2) *Material Risk.* Material risk was assessed with a four-item scale ($\alpha = .77$) measuring participants' perceived likelihood to be at risk regarding their future financial situation as a function of anticipated negative life course events. As a measure of perceived risk of social declassification, this subjective measure complemented the objective measure of social status.

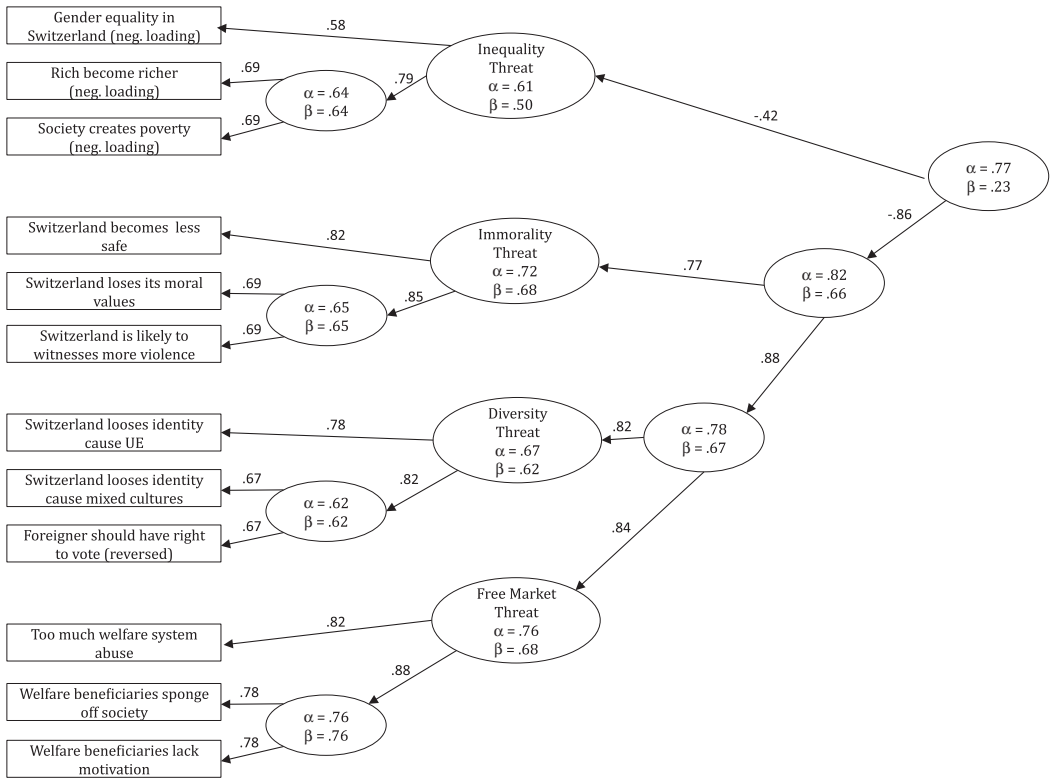
Political integration

Two measures were used to assess political integration. The first measure was the self-perception of a lack of power in political decision-making. We labelled this measure *perceived powerlessness* and consider it as an indicator of non-integration. The second measure was a proxy for *political interest* and political knowledge, assessed with a single item asking the frequency of political discussion with friends and family.

Perceived social order threats

Twelve items were used to measure the four social order threats (three items for each threat). Appendix 1 gives the wording for the items measuring immorality threat, free rider threat, diversity threat and inequality threat. To test whether the twelve items were organized according to the assumed four-dimensional structure, we ran an ICLUST analysis (Revelle, 1979; Zinbarg et al. 2005). This method checks the homogeneity of the subscales represented by the four theoretical dimensions (measured with the beta coefficient) compared to higher level sub-sets of items. It also assesses the reliability of each subscale with

Figure 2: I-CLUST Analysis on Items Measuring Perceived Threats to Social Order.



Note: Cf. Appendix for complete variable label.

Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (Cooksey and Soutar, 2006; Revelle, 1979; Zinbarg et al. 2005)². The ICLUST analysis was ran on “R” (<http://personality-project.org/r/r.guide.html> for available procedures and scripts), and plotted with the “Graphviz” open access software (Figure 2). The four dimensions were both satisfactorily homogenous (all $\beta_s \geq .50$) and reliable (all $\alpha_s > .60$)

Citizenship Norms

Following Dalton (2008) we constructed two citizenship norms. *Duty-based citizenship* was assessed with a single item asking respondents whether they agreed with the idea that elections and referenda were a good way to make citizens’ desires heard by the government. *Engaged citizenship* was assessed with a 9-item scale ($\alpha = .80$) of support for alternative paths of political participation.

² According to Cooksey and Soutar (2006: 80) “Whereas coefficient alpha is defined as the mean of all possible half-split reliabilities of a scale, coefficient beta is an estimate of the lowest or minimum value in the collection of possible half-split reliabilities that are averaged to obtain coefficient alpha”, or, as defined by Revelle (1979), “the worst split-half”. If a scale or a test “has a sizable beta as well as a sizable alpha, the test can be considered to be assessing one construct” (Revelle, 1979: 71; see also Cooksey and Soutar, 2006 for a discussion of these criteria).

Political Trust

A single item was used to assess the dependent variable *political trust*. Participants had to rate their level of trust in the Federal Council (the government) and the political authorities in general. This is a measure of diffuse political trust because it evaluated support for the Swiss political regime as a whole.

Overview of the Analyses

We first present a hierarchical regression analysis to test the direct paths between social status and political integration (independent variables) on the one hand and normative beliefs (mediating variables: hypotheses 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d) and political trust (dependent variable: hypotheses 1a and 1b) on the other. Seven hierarchical regression analyses were carried out: one for each social order threat, two for the two citizenship norms and one for political trust. Gender, age, citizenship, linguistic region and political orientation were controlled for and will be directly discussed in the results section. In a second step, in order to examine the cognitive underpinnings of political trust, a path analysis was computed to test the mediating role of normative beliefs (perceived threats to the social order and citizenship norms) in the construction of political trust (see Mackinnon et al. 2007). The goal of this analysis is to illustrate how normative beliefs – which are anchored in social positions – account for the effect of a social position on political trust. In other words, this analysis determines the extent to which normative beliefs explain the impact of the social position of respondents on political trust.

Results

Social Anchoring of Conceptions, Citizenship Norms and Political Trust

(1) *Effects of category membership.* Category membership variables (Table 1) had considerable effects on both normative indicators and political trust. Women perceived higher inequality threat and endorsed engaged-citizenship more than men. This result reflects the subordinate position of women in the social structure which leads them to perceive more social inequalities and endorse more alternative political participation norms. Older generations, in contrast, perceived relatively more conservative immorality threat, free rider threat and diversity threat, while endorsing less engaged citizenship norms compared to younger generations. They also expressed greater trust in the political authorities. Swiss citizens perceived more immorality and diversity threat than foreign residents who in turn endorsed duty-based citizenship and trusted political authorities more than Swiss citizens. Thus, the findings disconfirm the expectation that Swiss citizenship favours duty-based citizenship. Rather, foreign residents seem to endorse more strongly such citizenship norms, presumably reflecting a form of idealization of the Swiss political system on their behalf. Then, a surprisingly strong effect emerged which showed French-speaking respondents to express much lower political trust than German-speaking respondents. French-speaking respondents also perceived clearly more immorality threat but, at the same time, less diversity threat than the German-speaking majority. The German-speaking participants were thus more preoccupied by immigration than the French-speaking participants, who were more worried about urban violence and security issues. Finally, political orientation was neither linked to political

Table 1: Regression Analyses on Lay-Conceptions of Social Order, Citizenship Norms and Political Trust (N = 745)

	Immorality threat		Free rider threat		Diversity threat		Inequality threat		Duty-based citizenship		Engaged citizenship		Political Trust	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
(Constant)	3.20	.08	2.84	.08	2.37	.08	4.76	.07	4.69	.09	4.33	.06	4.04	.09
Category membership														
Female	-.04	.07	-.09	.07	-.12 +	.07	.19**	.06	.05	.08	.15**	.05	-.08	.09
Age	.09*	.04	.10**	.04	.15***	.04	.01	.03	-.02	.04	-.11***	.03	.10*	.04
Swiss citizenship	.31***	.10	-.03	.10	.47***	.09	.09	.08	-.44***	.10	-.12 +	.07	-.21*	.10
Linguistic region (French)	.40***	.07	-.09	.08	-.27***	.07	-.01	.07	-.10	.08	.08	.05	-.29***	.08
Political orientation														
Political right	.05***	.01	.07***	.01	.07***	.01	-.07***	.01	-.02	.01	-.08***	.01	.01	.01
Political integration														
Perceived powerlessness	.10**	.04	.15***	.04	.19***	.04	.12***	.03	-.18***	.04	-.12***	.03	-.25***	.04
Political interest	.07	.04	-.11**	.04	-.01	.04	.05	.04	.09*	.04	.04	.03	-.04	.04
Social status														
Education	-.09	.04	-.20***	.04	-.19***	.04	-.03	.03	-.08 +	.05	.07*	.02	.11**	.05
Income	-.02	.04	-.02	.04	-.04	.04	-.06 +	.04	.01	.05	-.07*	.03	.01	.05
Material risk	.14***	.04	-.04	.04	.06	.04	.17***	.03	-.12**	.04	.08**	.03	-.13***	.04
R ²	.15***		.19***		.23***		.13***		.08***		.20***		.13***	

Note. Parameters are not standardized. SE = standard error. Dependent variables scales from 1 (no at all) to 6. Because of missing values on household income (N = 157) and to keep statistical power, missing values have been replaced by the mean score on this variable. Results obtained without this transformation were similar to those presented here.

*** = p < .001, ** = p < .01, * = p < .05, + = p < .10.

trust, nor to duty-based citizenship. A right-wing orientation was however negatively related to engaged-citizenship norms and inequality threat, and positively to the other forms of social order threat. These findings indicate that the ideology of the political right fuels conservative perceptions of the social order, the denial of social inequalities and the refusal of alternative forms of citizenship.

- (2) *Effects of political integration.* Political powerlessness was strongly associated with political distrust and all normative indicators. Individuals who feel that they have nothing to say in the political process also experienced stronger immorality threat, were wary of welfare abuse, perceived immigrants as a threat, and denounced social inequality (H2c). Thus, feeling politically powerless gave rise to conceptions of a threatened social order in which both duty-based and engaged forms of political participation were considered ineffective (H2d) and political authorities could not be trusted (H1b). In comparison with political powerlessness, political interest was much less associated with normative beliefs, citizenship norms and political trust. We found that frequent political discussions with friends and family favoured a serene perception of the free market order in which welfare abuse is not a central problem, but increased the endorsement of traditional, duty-based forms of political citizenship.
- (3) *Effects of social status.* A high level of education and the absence of material risk positively predicted political trust (H1a), while a low household income was only associated with the endorsement of engaged citizenship principles.³ Perceived material risk generated a view of society as marred by strong social inequalities, but favoured also a conception of an insecure and dangerous society (H2a). Material risk furthermore fuelled the endorsement of engaged citizenship norms, but decreased the support for traditional forms of political participation, in particular voting (H2b). Low levels of education gave rise to welfare abuse suspicions as well as to negative apprehension of immigrants, which suggests that higher levels of education contribute to a more carefree attitude towards a free market society and social diversity. Finally, and in line with Dalton's (2008) results, respondents with a higher level of education were also more inclined to endorse engaged citizenship norms, but contrary to Dalton we could not evidence a significant relationship between education and duty-based citizenship.

In the next section we test the third (3a, 3b, 3c and 3d) and fourth hypotheses concerning the mediating function of the perceived social order threats and citizenship norms on political trust.

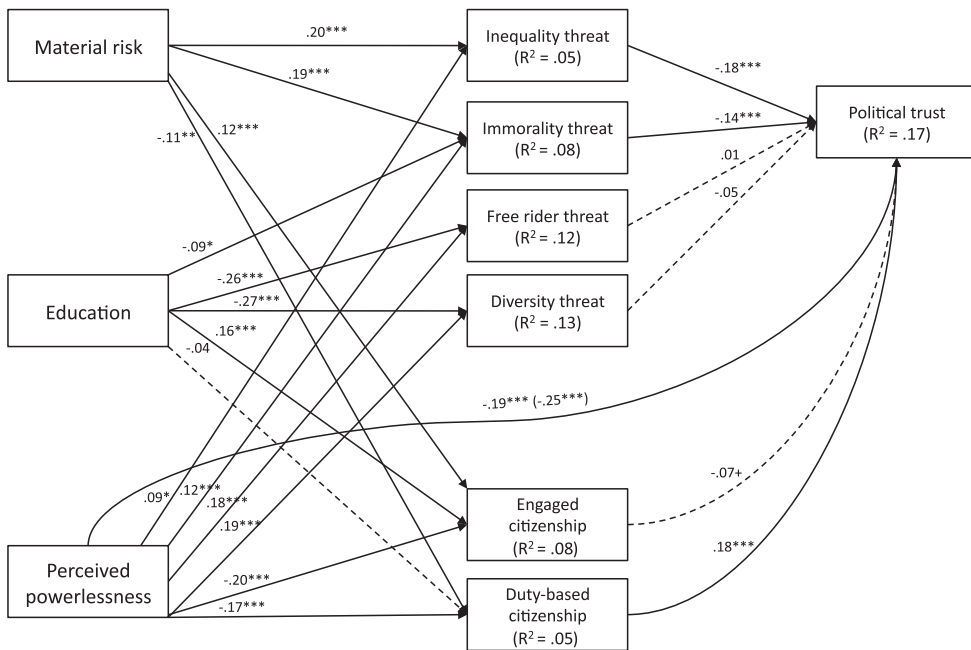
Social Order Threats and Citizenship Norms as Mediators

Structural equation modelling is the most appropriate technique to test mediation hypotheses (Iacobucci, 2008). We therefore conducted path analyses using *Mplus* software. In order to produce the most parsimonious, yet complete mediation model, we specified a theoretical model which simultaneously includes all the relevant variables, but contains only the links that were significant or marginally significant in the preceding regression models. We only used the three positional determinants that were found to be significantly linked to political trust, that is, education level, perceived material risk and perceived political powerlessness. The theoretical model then specifies three independent variables (education, material risk,

³ Additional analyses showed that the effect of income on trust was totally mediated by material risk perception: *Sobel z* variance reduction test = 4.55, $p < .001$.

Figure 3: Mediation Analysis on Political Trust (N = 765).

Khi2 = 17.367/11(p < .10); CFI = .995; TLI = .981; RMSEA = .027; SRMR = .19



Note: + p < .10. * p < .05; ** p < .01. *** p < .001. Standardized coefficients are reported.

and powerlessness), six mediating variables (immorality-, free-rider-, diversity- and inequality threat as well as duty-based and engaged citizenship norms) and one dependent variable, political trust. All measures were observed, either as single item measures or as aggregated scales (the internal consistency of indicators was presented in the method section).

The first model was a total mediation model with no additional covariates between the normative beliefs. This model did not reach satisfactory adjustment to the data. We then used the modification index provided by *Mplus* to progressively improve model fit. We proceeded step by step, adding the best and theoretically relevant improvement at each step before running another analysis. In this process, the direct effect of perceived powerlessness on political trust as well as nine covariates between the social order threats and the citizenship norms were added: Engaged citizenship was linked to inequality, diversity, free rider, and immorality threat; diversity threat was linked to free rider, immorality, and inequality threat; free rider threat, finally, was linked to both immorality threat and inequality threat. To simplify the presentation of the results, Figure 3 does not include these covariates. The predicted mediation effects are evidenced with indirect effects the β coefficient of which is comparable to Sobel tests of variance reduction (indicating the significance of variance reduction of the direct effect between the IV and the DV). The β coefficient is the product of (a) the direct link between a social position and a normative belief and (b) the link between this normative belief and trust, controlling for the direct effect of the social position on trust. A significant parameter in Table 2 thus indicates that the link between a social position and political trust is *mediated* (that is, accounted for) by the endorsement of a normative belief.

Table 2: Indirect effects of social status and political integration on political trust (N = 769)

	Material vulnerability		Education		Perceived powerlessness	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Social order threat						
Inequality	-.04***	.010	—	—	-.02**	.007
Immorality	-.03***	.008	.01*	.006	-.02*	.007
Free rider	—	—	-.00	.011	.00	.008
Diversity	—	—	.01	.011	-.01	.008
Citizenship norms						
Engaged citizenship	-.01	.006	-.01	.007	.02+	.009
Duty-based citizenship	-.02**	.007	-.01	.007	-.03***	.009

Note. Standardized parameters of indirect effects (see text), SE = standard error. — = link is not tested in the model.

*** = $p < .001$, ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$. + = $p < .10$.

The model presented in Figure 3 showed the best fit with the data: $\chi^2(11) = 17.37$, $p < .10$; CFI = .995; TLI = .981; RMSEA = .027; SRMR = .019. Table 2 presents an overview of the indirect mediation effects. Our results first illustrate that the effect of material risk on political trust was mediated by inequality threat, as well as by immorality threat and to a lesser extent by duty-based citizenship. Hence, and in partial accordance with hypothesis 3a and 4, the reason why people who feel materially at risk distrust political authorities lies first in perceptions of an unequal society in which social positions are unfairly assigned by category membership rather than by meritocratic achievement. Second, material risk fuels political distrust, because it translates into perceptions of social risk whereby the society appears ever more dangerous and people no longer respect traditional values. Finally, and somewhat less strongly, financially insecure people also reject traditional forms of political participation such as voting which then leads to higher political distrust.

Second, the effect of education was mediated by immorality threat: much like materially vulnerable people, those with a low level of education are more likely to see the world as an immoral and dangerous place in which political authorities are not doing their job. Although education is related to all but inequality threat, the direct effects of free rider and diversity threat on trust are not significant, and hence neither the predicted mediation effects.

The third mediation effects concern perceived powerlessness which was mediated, in descending order of the indirect effects, by duty-based citizenship, inequality threat, and immorality threat. In line with hypothesis 3b, people who feel they have nothing to say in the political process thus appear to distrust political authorities because first of all they reject the norms of traditional political participation. Moreover, they develop a view of an unfair society which grants undue privileges to some and keeps others in subordinate positions, and the political authorities do not enough to change this state of affairs. Finally, much like vulnerable people and those with a low level of education, they see the world as an immoral and unsafe place. It should also be noted that the direct effect of perceived powerlessness on political trust decreased, but remained powerful even when controlling for the social order threats and the citizenship norms. In contrast, the direct effects specification

of education and material risk on political trust did not improve the model which indicates a satisfactory fit with full mediations.

Discussion

The findings of this research tested a mediational model of political trust and demonstrated how social status (in terms of education level and perceived material risk) and political integration (in terms of perceived political powerlessness and frequency of political discussion) shaped trust in the Swiss political system. In line with our first hypothesis (1a), we found direct effects showing that low levels of education and high levels of material risk decreased political trust, while political orientation did not affect trust. Perceived political powerlessness massively decreased political trust (hypothesis 1b), but the fact that people would or would not discuss politics with family and friends was unrelated to trust. These results largely confirm findings of earlier studies which have also shown a consistent negative relationship between both objective and subjective social status and political trust (e.g., Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Brunner and Sgier, 1997; Catterberg and Moreno, 2005; Citrin and Muste 1999). Contrary to earlier studies, we could not find an effect of income on political trust, possibly because this effect was mediated by perceived material risk. It would seem, then, that *subjective definitions* of social status in the form of the interpretations people give to their social position are more important predictors of political trust than one's objective income situation. More generally, though, we surmise that the finding according to which high status people are more likely to trust their government and political authorities reflects the fact that their prior experiences with authorities and institutions were mostly positive, and that the political system in which they live guarantees them a relatively favourable and secure social position (Staerklé, et al., 2007). Politically integrated individuals also seem to trust political authorities because their political knowledge (Gaxie, 1978) matches the democratic principles of the Swiss political regime.

Our second hypothesis concerning the social anchoring of normative beliefs received partial support. Perceived material risk (hypothesis 2a) predicted the perception of a dangerous and inequalitarian society. People with experience (or anticipation) of financial adversity come to see the world in moral terms. It could be that such a perception would allow materially vulnerable people to see themselves on the good side of society and thus to compensate to some extent the potential social stigma associated with financial hardship (Kay et al. 2005), especially in Switzerland where social norms of hard work and self-sufficiency are strongly present (Lalivie d'Épinay and Garcia, 1988). Material risk furthermore produces perceptions of illegitimate inequality which suggests that one's own experience of financial difficulties raises the awareness of the existence of wider inequalities, and thus of the idea that one is not alone in this adverse situation. Finally, material vulnerability is positively associated with engaged citizenship and negatively with duty-based citizenship (hypothesis 2b). People feeling financially at risk favour norms of alternative political participation over more traditional political practices such as voting, because alternative modes of participation are potentially critical of political authorities who may be held responsible for one's difficulties.

A low level of education strongly determined the perception of welfare abuse and threatening diversity (hypothesis 2a), while unexpectedly neither income nor perceived material risk had an impact on these normative beliefs. It appears then that free market threat and social diversity threat are mostly "culturally" determined as higher education provides individuals with the necessary normative tools to counter prevailing ideas of welfare abuse and immigration threat.

Most consistently, political powerlessness (hypothesis 2c) predicted normative beliefs concerning a society threatened by immorality and delinquency (moral order threat), by free-riders and welfare abuse (free market threat), by immigrants and otherness in general (social diversity threat) and by social inequalities (structural inequality threat). There can be no doubt, then, that feelings of powerlessness and anomy are crucial predictors of a perception of an unfair, disorganised, and dangerous world in which authorities and institutions fail, or have failed, to bring about a better society. It fits in this gloomy picture of society held by the powerless that they oppose both traditional duty-based norms of citizenship and engaged, alternative forms of political action (hypothesis 2d). Political interest, however, assessed with the frequency of political discussion, was rather unrelated to normative beliefs, besides that it attenuates the fear of welfare abuse (hypothesis 2c) and enhances the support for duty-based citizenship (hypothesis 2d), which is consistent with research showing that political competence leads to political participation (Converse, 1964; Dalton, 2008; Bennett, 2006).

Unexpectedly, free market threat and diversity threat were unrelated to political trust (hypotheses 3a and 3b). It would thus seem that cultural norms regarding welfare abuse and immigration threat (which are strongly anchored in education level) are unrelated to political trust. More importantly, education does therefore seem to play only a minor role in shaping political trust, since the only significant mediation (hypotheses 3a and 4) is found with immorality threat (though the relationship between education and immorality threat is weak). The findings rather suggest that material vulnerability, as a proxy of a threatened social position and fear of declassification (hypotheses 3a and 3c) as well as perceived powerlessness, as a proxy of anomy (hypotheses 3b and 3d), are the key driving forces behind political *distrust*. These two subjective indicators of social position have a stronger impact on political trust than objective status (income and education) and objective political integration (frequency of political discussions).

Material risk generates a worldview of an illegitimately unequal society with which political authorities have not dealt adequately. Similarly, it gives rise to perceptions of social insecurity and immorality to which authorities do presumably not grant sufficient attention. Finally, but to a lesser extent (hypothesis 4), material risk decreases endorsement of traditional political participation norms which then also undermines political trust (hypothesis 3b). The significant mediations with perceived powerlessness as the independent variable show exactly the same picture (hypothesis 3c), but with a mediational path more strongly defined by duty-based citizenship (hypotheses 3c and 4). Nevertheless, a strong direct effect of powerlessness remains even after the introduction of all other normative beliefs. Subjective political integration thus seems to be the most important direct predictor of political trust (hypothesis 1b). To sum up, powerless and low status individuals feel less secure and face more uncertainty in their lives than high status and politically integrated individuals. They do not rely on traditional political procedures (*i.e.*, voting) to try to improve their situation, and political authorities are not seen as reliable institutional partners for their life projects (Emler and Reicher, 1995; 2005; Luhmann, 2000): they feel to be left on their own and therefore distrust political authorities.

Our research was however qualified by limitations related to the data with which we tested our models. Many studies use international surveys to examine political trust in a comparative perspective (*e.g.*, Anderson and Singer, 2008, Anderson and Tverdova, 2003, Mishler and Rose, 2001). We have used only representative urban samples in the Swiss context. While this database does not allow to study differences between urban and rural areas (*cf.* Leuthold et al. 2007), it presents the significant advantage that it contains items

which were specifically tailored to the Swiss context and which therefore presumably “make more sense” than the necessarily rather abstract items used in international surveys. The relatively high correlations between many constructs seem to support this assertion. We are not aware of any other dataset which would allow testing the model of lay conceptions of social order in its entirety. Other national (*e.g.*, SHP, Selects, Vox) and international databases (*e.g.*, ESS, ISSP, Eurobarometer) do not contain all the variables needed for such a model.

Finally, our conceptual framework holds that normative beliefs are the underpinning cognitive mechanism of political trust. Yet, within this framework it is often difficult to precisely predict which of the normative beliefs (perceived social order threats and citizenship norms) best mediates the effects of a given independent variable and why. While it was for example possible to predict that higher-status individuals would have more carefree conceptions of social order, it was more difficult to predict which exact conception would best predict this mediation effect, since to our knowledge no literature is available on this particular process. This is why our research is a hybrid between theory testing and theory building which tests specific hypotheses while leaving open the possibility to discover new and unexpected relationships.

Conclusion

Even though our database presents some shortcomings, this should not distract from the substantial findings of our research which specify the processes underlying the relationship between social status, political integration and political trust. The originality of the present research stands in its articulation between classical political science research and a social psychological perspective, which hopefully sheds some new light on the normative and cognitive foundations of political trust. It proposes a complementary view on prior analyses which have either studied the role of various demographic variables (Mishler and Rose, 1997, 2001), political integration (Cook and Gronke, 2005), citizenship norms (Dalton, 2008), or norms and values (Catterberg and Moreno, 2005) as determinants of political trust. The key contribution of this social representations approach is to provide a pluralistic and normative approach to political trust. We thus avoid the pitfalls of oversimplified models which assume that one single motivation (such as self-interest) would explain political trust. Instead, our argument is that people refer to multiple forms of knowledge shared within groups which serve as normative reference points in political debates. On the basis of this shared, but not consensual knowledge, citizens make up their minds on political trust.

In our view, there is no reason to bemoan a generalized waning of democratic legitimacy and an overall lack of support for the political system. Rather, it is important to analyse why exactly citizens come to judge the government and political authorities as inefficient, useless or otherwise inappropriate. These reasons are most likely to be found in concrete living experiences, in particular the risk of social declassification and perceived political powerlessness, which characterise the different social positions in a hierarchically structured national context such as Switzerland.

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Appendix

Overview of variables, with descriptive statistics, item wording and scales

Variable	Mean	SD	Items wording	Scale
Political trust	3.92	1.04	Degree of trust in the government (Federal Council) and the political authorities	1 = no trust at all 6 = complete trust
Inequality threat	4.57	.87	In Switzerland, there is still a lot to do to reach true gender equality Rich people become richer, poor people become poorer The way our society is organised creates more and more poverty	1 = totally disagree 6 = totally agree

Appendix (Continued).

Variable	Mean	SD	Items wording	Scale
Immorality threat	3.55	1.01	Switzerland becomes less safe, because street delinquency is rising Switzerland loses its moral values, because a good education is no longer a priority Switzerland is likely to witness more violent and chaotic mass protests	1 = totally disagree 6 = totally agree
Free rider threat	3.02	1.05	The problem with our welfare system is that there is too much abuse Welfare beneficiaries have chosen to sponge off the society Welfare beneficiaries lack will and motivation	1 = totally disagree 6 = totally agree
Diversity threat	2.38	1.03	Switzerland loses its identity, because it becomes too close to the EU Switzerland loses its identity, because too many cultures mix up Foreigners should have the right to vote at the municipal level if they have lived in Switzerland for at least 10 years (reverse coded)	1 = totally disagree 6 = totally agree
Duty-based citizenship	4.17	.75	Voting and elections are a good way to make the government aware of citizens' desires	1 = totally disagree 6 = totally agree
Engaged-citizenship	4.67	1.03	<i>In order to influence political decisions, to what extent is it important to:</i> Boycott particular products Get media attention Participate in public demonstrations Participate in illegal protest actions <i>- Importance of the citizen rights movements and associations:</i> Environment associations	1 = not at all important 6 = very important 1 = not at all important 6 = very important

Appendix (*Continued*).

Variable	Mean	SD	Items wording	Scale
Gender			Citizen movements against free market economy Women rights movements Antiracist associations Trade Unions	0 = Male 1 = Female
Age	40.74	12.24		Age in years
Citizenship				0 = non Swiss 1 = Swiss
Linguistic region			According to the City where the survey took place	0 = German speaking 1 = French speaking
Perceived powerlessness	3.40	1.47	People like me don't have any influence on the government action	1 = totally disagree 6 = totally agree
Political discussion	3.27	.82	How often do you speak about politics with friends or family members	1 = never 5 = at least 30 min./ day
Political orientation	3.96	2.97	What are your political preferences on a left-right scale	1 = left 3 = centre 5 = right
Income			Category of household income in CHF	1 = Less than 2000 2 = 2000 – 3000 3 = 3000 – 4000 4 = 4000 – 6000 5 = Over 6000
Education			Highest level of completed education	1 = Primary school 2 = Apprenticeship 3 = Secondary school 4 = University
Material risk	3.11	1.00	Likelihood - to get unemployed - to have difficulties to make ends meet - not to be able to adapt to changing working conditions - to need help from social institutions	1 = not at all likely 6 = very likely

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