Introduction

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"So when we talk about Skid Row … there's law enforcement agencies that have created a whole lot of trauma…."

—President of Los Angeles Skid Row Neighborhood Council

"We have to have a level of trust just by looking at you [the police], walking, you know, observing you because you got a car, you got a badge, you got a gun."

—Advocate for Skid Row

"We will get together and do a citizen's arrest on every single human being that goes against freedom of choice. You cannot mandate, you literally cannot mandate, somebody to wear a mask knowing that mask is killing people…. And every single one of you [pointing at Palm Beach County Commissioners] that are obeying the devil's laws are going to be arrested. And you, doctor, are going to be arrested for crimes against humanity. Every single one of you."

—Witness at the County Commissioner Workshop on COVID Mask Mandates, Palm Beach County, June 23, 2020

"I voted early and it went well except for … can't really trust the software, Dominion software all over."

—Participant at the January 6th Demonstration for Trump, Interviewed at the Demonstration[1]

Should we trust major American political, economic, and social institutions when the people associated with those institutions are fallible and even, on occasion, venal or criminal? Do they really operate as trustworthy tribunes of the people? The public is doubtful.

It is well known that trust in American government, especially in Congress and the executive branch, has been declining since the 1960s and 1970s: a period of social ferment, movements for political and social change, an unpopular war, and major government scandal.[2] What is less well known is that the erosion of trust seems now to have spread to many supposedly nonpolitical institutions, including business, journalism, science, police, religion, medicine, and higher education.[3] Concern about the reliability and competence of these institutions is stoked by

news stories – and, more recently, social media attention – reporting malfeasance on Wall Street, errors in the media, fraud and conflicts of interest among scientists, misconduct by police, abuse of children by clergy, conflicting advice from public health experts, and admissions scandals in higher education. Efforts as varied as vaccinating the American public against a raging virus, reforming police departments tainted by racism, validating a presidential election, and addressing climate change have been thwarted by distrust in institutions and experts.

The consequences of lack of trust depend not only on the level of trust and the range of institutions over which it extends but also on the extent to which the fault lines of distrust map onto other political, social, and economic conflicts. In a democracy, political parties function to organize social and economic conflict and make it relevant for politics. The extent to which party competition in the United States involves not just division but distrust has varied across history, but partisan distrust goes back to the nation's founding and the emergence of our first political parties. Jeffersonian Democrats vilified and distrusted "big government" Federalist John Adams when he became president. In turn, the Federalists distrusted Thomas Jefferson once he was in the White House. The culmination of this long history, partisan polarization is currently at its highest point in at least a century.[4]

Partisan polarization over the past half-century has produced significant mutual distrust between the parties. What is perhaps more surprising and more worrisome, the pattern of partisan polarization of trust now maps onto trust in many supposedly apolitical institutions, including those that purport to cultivate and disseminate knowledge and information, provide security and protection, and establish and uphold fundamental social and ethical rules and norms. Where once political partisans had the same level of trust in most nonpolitical institutions except for business and labor, Democrats are now more likely than Republicans to trust higher education, journalism and TV news, public schools, medicine, and science. In turn, Republicans tend to trust the military, the police, and religion more than Democrats do.

Should declining trust and polarized trust in nonpolitical institutions cause concern? Do they portend widening ideological battles, an erosion of institutional legitimacy, an increasing propensity to second guess experts and authorities, and an inability to get things done in society? The development of a partisan divide in trust in nonpolitical institutions places additional hurdles in the path of productive public debate and successful public policy. Governing becomes much more complicated when closed communities that differ on facts, science, morals, the rules of society, and worldview fail to communicate with one another, much less agree on compromise solutions. And institutions embroiled in constant partisan battles are hard-pressed to carry out the tasks they were designed to do. In short, distrust anchored in partisan, institutional, and cultural conflict hampers our capacity to come together to meet common challenges and solve shared problems.

Central to our concerns in this issue of *Dædalus* are what institutions do and why trust matters for their success.[5] Although we can trace some governing, religious, military, medical, and educational institutions back thousands of years, the modern profusion and rationalization of institutions dates to the nineteenth century with the rise of corporations, universities, hospitals, public education, nonprofit organizations, philanthropy, and the professions in response to urbanization, industrialization, and specialization.[6] Scholars tell us that institutions structure, facilitate, and regulate behavior in particular areas of economic and social interactions, among them business, law, religion, education, journalism, the military, medicine, science, and policing.[7] In higher education, for example, there are formal rules and informal norms that vary across universities and across fields of inquiry that define appropriate ways of interacting with students, disclosure of conflicts of interest in conducting scientific research, treatment of evidence that disconfirms hypotheses, and recognition of the contributions of those who assisted with research. Similarly, policing has standards for the training of police officers, the methods used to patrol a city, rules for interacting with the public and with suspects, guidelines for the use of force, and review boards to examine force incidents. All institutions have special rules and procedures that order and discipline them so that they can provide goods and services to people in acceptable ways.

For institutions to be successful, these rules, standards, norms, regulations, training methods, and procedures must be seen as legitimate both by the stakeholders associated with them and by the public at large. Legitimacy can stem from four basic sources, and different institutions rely on different mixes of them.[8] Legitimacy may stem from the political system sharing its *regulatory authority* with an institution – such as the military, police, or a corporation – based upon government's power of coercion to defend the nation, keep the peace, and to enforce contracts. As long as the institution conforms to the rules established by the government, it draws legitimacy from its relationship to the government in the form of laws or charters. Legitimacy may also come from adherence to *culturally approved and accepted meanings and logics* that are shaped by what is culturally appropriate for each institution, for example, in the practice of medicine, religion, education, and science. It may reside in *moral and normative beliefs* about how those in institutions behave, for example, in professional codes of ethics for law, medicine, religion, higher education, and journalism. Finally, it may come from *pragmatic authority based on efficiency and high performance* in, for example, corporations, science, or banks.

To be seen as trustworthy, an institution must be seen as legitimate in at least one, and usually more than one, way. For example, corporations are legitimate if they stay within regulatory frameworks and do not overstep their authorities by becoming monopolies or watering their stock; if they reflect the standard, cul-

turally acceptable practices for a corporation within a particular society by producing products that conform to cultural models and address cultural needs; if they adhere to the ethical and normative standards for businesses not only by eschewing bribery and other illegal practices but also by treating their employees, suppliers, and customers fairly and ethically; and if they produce an economically successful product. Failing on any of these dimensions risks a corporation's legitimacy, and hence its trustworthiness. Universities must also stay within regulatory frameworks and be financially viable, but evaluations of them are based more upon their cultural acceptability as centers of teaching and learning and their professional standards: their adherence to norms of free inquiry, freedom of speech, and seeking truth. Religious institutions must be especially attentive to their cultural legitimacy and their adherence to ethics and norms. Each institution holds or loses legitimacy according to its own weighting and mix of criteria.

Presumably, if an institution is trustworthy, then people are more likely to trust it, have confidence in it, and accept its advice and decisions as legitimate.[9] They expect that it will do the right thing in an uncertain future with respect to weighty matters that range from protecting their health and safety to providing them with information about public issues.

During the last three years, COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, and election controversies brought into bold relief the importance of institutions to our health and well-being. Lack of trust in government, medicine, science, police, and election administration has made it difficult to overcome a pandemic, resolve concerns about public safety, and settle issues regarding an election. While the essays in this volume explore these issues in assorted contexts, a central theme is the challenge to institutional legitimacy given the overall decline in the public's trust and the polarization of that trust between Democrats and Republicans – at a time when we most need expertise and institutional capacity to face crises as one nation.

Our confidence in institutions is based upon both what we know about them and upon what we know about how they know what they know. Using insights gained from the field of science and technology studies (STS), Sheila Jasanoff's essay, "The Discontents of Truth & Trust in 21st Century America," examines the relationship between knowledge and society. Her STS framework asserts that "it is not that expert institutions find and purvey truths from some 'outside' that exists independent of society." Hence "standards of epistemic correctness do not stand outside of politics but are configured through the same processes of social authorization as political legitimacy." The same four criteria that legitimate institutions – regulatory, cultural, normative, and pragmatic authority – also legitimate science and all knowledge. Despite the storybook version of science in which a better-performing theory bests an old one, in fact, what

often matters are such preexisting cultural factors as scientific paradigms or even religious beliefs, such normative concerns as the prestige of a researcher or the status of the methods that are used, and even such factors as the relationship of the researcher or research institute to power.

In order to develop commonly accepted knowledge, Jasanoff explains, societies develop "civic epistemologies," which "are the stylized, culturally specific ways in which publics expect the state's [or an institution's] expertise, knowledge, and reasoning to be produced, tested, and put to use in decision-making."[10] Doing so involves meeting three challenges: *representing problems* in the world (like climate change and income inequality) in a way that resonates with those who are affected; *aggregating disparate views* from diverse sources and viewpoints to achieve consensus (or "objectivity") about what causes these problems (such as emissions of greenhouse gases for climate change and technological change and tax policy for income inequality); and *bridging to fill gaps* between what is known and what is needed for problem-solving (for example, simulations to tell us how far greenhouse gas emissions must be cut to prevent a climate catastrophe, or economic models to indicate how to deal with income inequality). Jasanoff tells us that solutions to these problems, especially the aggregation problem, can come from three standpoints: "the view from *nowhere* (sanctioned by the methods of empirical science and quantitative analysis); the view from *everywhere* (sanctioned by inclusive representation and fair deliberation); and the view from *somewhere* (sanctioned by individual witnessing and moral authenticity)." Typically, combinations of these methods are needed in a social process that legitimates knowledge and decision-making, for example, through peer-reviewed research, expert panels, public hearings and comments, media commentary, commissions, and court cases.

The remaining essays explore how well we have legitimated different institutions and the consequences of falling and polarized trust. In "Fifty Years of Declining Confidence & Increasing Polarization in Trust in American Institutions," Henry E. Brady and Thomas B. Kent summarize the findings from fifty years of data from three repeated surveys that asked about "confidence" in the institutions or the people running them: the Gallup Poll, NORC's General Social Survey (GSS), and the Harris Poll. Together, these surveys provide information from 1972 on for four political institutions – the presidency, executive branch, Congress, and the Supreme Court – and for sixteen nonpolitical institutions: those associated with the economy such as business, banks, Wall Street, and organized labor; those related to knowledge and information production, including the press and TV news, television, public schools, education, higher education, and science; those enforcing norms and standards such as the police, the military, and religion; and those providing professional services such as medicine and law.[11]

The drop in confidence in political institutions over the past fifty years has been especially pronounced for Congress, significant for the presidency and the executive branch, and more modest but real for the Supreme Court. Less well known are the declines in confidence in nonpolitical institutions. As with the political institutions, the declines have not been uniformly steep. Comparing the period from 1972 to 1979 with the period from 2010 to 2021 shows that average confidence has decreased for fourteen of these nonpolitical institutions, stayed the same for one (science), and increased only for the military. In most cases, the decline proceeded relatively steadily over time. Wall Street, TV news, banks, and the press sustained the most substantial deterioration in confidence – comparable to that for Congress. For public schools, medicine, television, business, and religion, the drop in average confidence was more moderate – comparable in magnitude to those for the presidency and executive branch. The decline in average confidence was even smaller for law, education, and the police – roughly equivalent to that for the Supreme Court. There were still smaller declines for higher education and labor.

In effect, nonpolitical institutions have moved from being trusted quite a lot to being trusted only somewhat. On a four-point scale with responses of "a great deal of confidence," "quite a lot," "some," and "hardly any at all," in 1972 – 1979, the American public expressed "quite a lot" of confidence in thirteen nonpolitical institutions. Just three institutions (labor, law, and television) inspired only "some" confidence. By 2010 – 2021, only six institutions – the military, science, higher education, police, education, and medicine – still enjoyed "quite a lot" of confidence, and ten institutions warranted just "some" confidence. Recent data suggest that Americans probably have only "some" confidence in higher education as well. Thus, Americans have gone from believing that thirteen of sixteen institutions deserved quite a lot of confidence to believing that only five of sixteen merit a lot of confidence, with eleven deserving only some confidence.

Substantial increases in partisan polarization of trust have accompanied the significant declines in trust. In the 1970s, only business and labor showed significant polarization, with Republicans trusting business more than Democrats, and Democrats trusting labor more than Republicans. By the 2010s, assessments of every nonpolitical institution except banks were more polarized – with Republicans especially likely to trust police, religion, business, and Wall Street, and Democrats more trusting than Republicans of TV news, press, labor, television, and public schools.

Considering all the nonpolitical institutions in which trust has fallen – except for Wall Street, banks, business, and labor – shows an interesting pattern.[12] Confidence among partisans of the currently less-trusting party dropped especially precipitously, while the confidence of the other, more-trusting party either declined only slightly or even increased somewhat. In the one case in which trust among partisans of both parties and independents has increased – the military – the re-

sult is largely driven by the substantial increase in confidence among the partisans of the more trusting Republican Party. The changes in trust for the four institutions related to the economy are about the same across the two parties, with little change in trust for labor but significant declines for Wall Street, banks, and business. Finally, confidence among political independents is either lower than that of both Democrats and Republicans or between the levels for the adherents of the two parties. The declines in trust among independents track quite closely those for the entire population.

These data reveal several different patterns of change for nonpolitical institutions. In some cases, changing confidence in a particular institution may be linked to a large-scale event with society-wide consequences; for example, across individuals and groups, a war might affect confidence in the military, or a financial crisis might diminish confidence in banks and Wall Street. In other cases, individual life experiences might have implications for confidence in a particular institution; for example, being the victim of police harassment or the victim of a crime might influence trust in the police. In a quite different pattern, a set of general nonpartisan forces – affecting independents especially strongly – produces an overall decline in trust in almost all nonpolitical institutions. Although different groups, including different party groups, vary in their initial levels of confidence in various nonpolitical institutions, such forces operate more or less uniformly across groups to diminish confidence in institutions. In a still different pattern, there is a partisan interaction. A set of factors leads to a decline in trust among members of one party or the other, depending upon the institution, resulting in polarization in confidence. The forces at work probably interact in complicated ways, and to understand what is going on, we must consider both the multiple forces that have led to a secular decline in trust and those that have led to partisan polarization of trust.

These changes are worrying, but are these data capturing something real? In her essay "Trustworthy Government: The Obligations of Government & the Responsibilities of the Governed," Margaret Levi expresses concern about the meaningfulness of survey responses. Answers to questions about confidence in government may simply reflect which party is in power, with supporters of the in-party evincing trust and those of the out-party expressing lack of confidence. This criticism seems quite relevant for trust in government, but it is hard to see how it applies to trust in ostensibly nonpolitical institutions. More to the point, Levi worries that responses to survey questions are not behaviors, just attitudes. She prefers to look at protests, compliance with laws, and other behavioral manifestations of lack of confidence.[13]

Our authors provide abundant evidence that confidence in institutions has behavioral consequences. Brady and Kent show that lack of trust in an institution is

highly correlated with an expressed unwillingness to have kin or friends pursue a career in or marry someone associated with that institution.[14] C. Ross Hatton, Colleen L. Barry, Adam S. Levine, Emma E. McGinty, and Hahrie Han demonstrate that lack of trust in science was related to unwillingness to follow public health guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, but that greater trust in local government was associated with willingness to follow local public health dictates. Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway argue that distrust in science is associated with rejection of policies to address climate change. Tracey L. Meares indicates that increasing trust in the police "is a better, more efficient, and lower-cost way to achieve crime reduction and law compliance." Robert Wuthnow shows that trust in religion is a concomitant of church attendance. Max Margulies and Jessica Blankshain find that a proxy for trust – namely, "warmth toward the military" – is positively correlated with willingness to increase defense spending, to use force abroad, to employ more bellicose military strategies, and to evaluate wars positively. In short, survey data appear to be capturing something that is very real.

What then are the general factors that cause changes in trust for institutions? In his essay "What Does 'Trust in the Media' Mean?" Michael Schudson focuses on the centrality of changes in journalism, arguing that declines in trust follow from increasing journalistic skepticism about government and other institutions over the past fifty years. The pivotal moment was the Watergate scandal of 1972 to 1974 – the years in which our data begin – that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. Schudson tells us that "Journalism has changed substantially at least twice in fifty years, and the technological change of the early 2000s should not eclipse the political and cultural change of the 1970s in comprehending journalism today." Through studies of media content, Schudson documents the turn from "who-what-when-where" reporting to "how" and "why" reporting in which "skepticism is approved, encouraged, and taught." He even implicates colleges and universities. More journalists (and more of the public) have a college education, which encourages criticism and skepticism. Furthermore, nonprofit organizations, the twenty-four-hour news cycle, and the internet facilitate continuous monitoring of actions by government and other institutions. Schudson's diagnosis is a counterpoint to that of Jasanoff. If becoming trustworthy requires the development of civic epistemologies, then journalism's current mode may undermine these efforts through its constant exposure, criticism, and complaint.

Lee Rainie considers the role of the internet in his essay "Networked Trust & the Future of Media." The decline in trust and polarization of trust began in the 1970s and 1980s before the internet and social media had become part of American life. The internet began to take off in the mid-1990s with the advent of the World Wide Web, browsers, multiplexing, and fiber optic cables. About 50 per-

cent of Americans used the internet in 2000, half had broadband by 2007, half used social media by 2011, and half had a smartphone by 2013.[15] Although levels of trust began to erode in the 1970s, survey data suggest that, for many institutions, acceleration in the decline in trust and increase in polarization of trust took place at various times between about 1997 and 2020, as the internet became increasingly significant. Watershed events – among them, impeachments, 9/11, the rise of the surveillance state, prolonged wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Tea Party, Occupy, and Black Lives Matter movements – also affected trust, but each was also in part shaped by the growing importance of the internet.

According to Rainie, the internet matters because "every decision a person makes about who or what to trust is a social calculation" so "there is deep intersection between changes in information and changes in social arrangements." Consequently, "in the age of social media, the members of users' personal and professional networks are key conduits of civic information and serve as key commentators on that information." Perhaps because of the creation of these new and less familiar social networks and the concomitant damage to the media from the internet's cannibalizing of its advertising, "Americans believe the civic information ecosystem is collapsing" and public confidence in social media is very low. Almost two-thirds of the American people believe that social media has a mostly negative effect on where the country is going, and three-quarters of Americans believe that political partisans do not operate in a shared reality or shared moral universe.

Still, it is worth noting, as our authors observe again and again, that broad expressions of distrust in major institutions get at only part of the truth about trust. As Rainie notes,

> The same people who say they do not have confidence in the news media in general can also cite news operations they trust, which is often tied to the partisan composition of news organizations' audiences. Republicans and conservatives particularly gravitate to Fox News, while Democrats and liberals say they trust multiple sources such as CNN, *The New York Times*, PBS, NPR, and NBC News.

Robert J. Blendon and John M. Benson, meanwhile, tell us that, while Americans distrust medicine, they trust the nurses and doctors with whom they interact. And Charles Stewart III remarks that voters trust their local election administration.

Declines in trust may also follow from the actions within specific institutions that violate one or more criteria for legitimacy. In "Religion, Democracy & the Task of Restoring Trust," Wuthnow paints a vivid picture of how religious institutions have been compromised by corruption and scandal precisely because they are the arbiters of moral virtue, and he discusses attempts to repair lost trust through confessions, independent advisory commissions, and

litigation. None of these is entirely effective as "insincere confessions [are] staged for media consumption," investigative committees produce "toothless reports that languish in bureaucratic darkness," and litigation "drags on for years before inconsequential penalties are levied."

Meares, in "Trust & Models of Policing," notes that despite their instrumental effectiveness in crime fighting, the police are distrusted by Black adults, which she traces to a history of injustice against African Americans. In their essay "Race & Political Trust: Justice as a Unifying Influence on Political Trust," Cary Wu, Rima Wilkes, and David C. Wilson argue that trust depends upon perceptions of fairness and social justice and that, given their history, racial and ethnic minority groups judge institutions through that lens:

> African Americans experience higher levels of police-stops and incarceration, and this pattern is contextualized against the history of a society that has used police to control, segregate, and denigrate Black people. Because of this history, African Americans do not see stop-and-frisk practices or mass incarceration as indications of government performing well, although many Whites do.

Blendon and Benson suggest that, even though the public trusts doctors and nurses, the high cost of health care is a source of distrust in the medical system. In January 2020, before COVID, the public's top two domestic priorities among a list of twenty-two possibilities were lowering the cost of health care and reducing prescription drug prices – objectives shared by Democratic and Republican members of the public. In parallel, declining trust in higher education seems to be related to high costs.

In their essay "Specific Sources of Trust in Generals: Individual-Level Trust in the U.S. Military," Max Margulies and Jessica Blankshain explore trust in the military through five Ps, which are closely related to the four criteria for legitimacy: performance, professionalism, persuasion, personal connection, and partisanship. They find some evidence for performance in wars affecting trust, but "the performance hypothesis has a hard time explaining the GSS high point for post-9/11 military confidence in 2018." The military gets very high marks for being ethical and professional, but it is not clear how this assessment has driven trust ratings over time. Positive depictions of the military in film and on television suggest that persuasion may help to explain confidence in the military, but the evidence is not definitive. Personal connections to the military are strongly related to confidence in the military. Once again, however, the impact on trust in the military over time is not clear. There are generational differences in confidence in the military, but the most substantial gap is between Republicans and Democrats.

In "Trust in Elections," Stewart finds two paradoxes in trust for election administration in 2020. The first is that while the "procedures to ensure the trustworthiness of elections held" and "Americans were *more* confident in the electoral

machinery following the 2020 election than they were in 2016," Americans were also more polarized than ever before. Using data from 2000 to 2019, Stewart finds that a relatively consistent 20 to 40 percent of Democrats were very confident that "votes nationwide were counted properly" (with upticks after Democratic wins and downticks after Republican wins). In contrast, the share of Republicans who were very confident that votes were being counted properly sank from 60 percent in the aftermath of the contentious 2000 election, in which George W. Bush ultimately prevailed, to less than 20 percent in 2018. Moreover, after Biden's victory in the 2020 election, while 60 percent of Democrats were very confident that votes had been counted properly, only 10 percent of Republicans shared this view.

The second paradox is that, regardless of party affiliation, voters are about 20 to 30 percentage points more likely to say that their own vote was counted correctly. These results suggest that different dynamics drive these two measures, "one based upon direct experience, and the other mediated by political elites." We see similar patterns for other institutions in which closeness matters: doctors and nurses who provide medical care are trusted, but not the medical system; local governments are trusted but not the federal government; experience in the military or personal acquaintance with someone in the military increases overall trust in the military.

How and why does partisanship affect trust? It is easy to see why partisanship would be related to trust in government in the American system, in which the American presidency – the most visible symbol of the government – combines the role of head of state with partisan policy-maker, but it is harder to see why it should be associated with trust in nonpolitical institutions. One possible link is through partisan political campaigns to discredit them.

In "From Anti-Government to Anti-Science: Why Conservatives Have Turned Against Science," Oreskes and Conway argue that probusiness conservatives have done just that for science because scientific findings about the negative impact of business practices on the environment and on public health threaten to limit business activity. Oreskes and Conway chart the progression of this effort. First, conservatives made the case that free enterprise was one of the foundations of American government, that economic freedom undergirded political freedom, and that governmental intervention in business undermined economic freedom. Ronald Reagan encapsulated this argument in his inaugural address in 1981, asserting that "Government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem." He later incorporated into press conferences such quips as "I think you all know that I've always felt the nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government, and I'm here to help."[16] Second, as science began to identify externalities from acid rain, tobacco use, chlorofluorocarbons, and greenhouse gases, concerted efforts were made to cast doubt on these findings and on science

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itself. Third, the partisan divide over science was reinforced by the growing partisan divide in religious identity:

> As the Republican Party has become identified with conservative religiosity – in particular, evangelical Protestantism – religious and political skepticism of science have become mutually constitutive and self-reinforcing. Meanwhile, individuals who are comfortable with secularism, and thus secular science, concentrate in the Democratic Party.

For Oreskes and Conway, the distrust in science is a spillover from conservative distrust and dislike of government.

Stewart also sees a concerted effort by Republican elites, especially Donald Trump, to discredit election administration by claiming that malevolent bureaucracies ("the deep state") stole the 2020 election from Trump. In "American Trust in Science & Institutions in the Time of COVID-19," Hatton and his coauthors find a decline in trust in science during the pandemic as many Republican leaders questioned the advice of experts. "With respect to differences in party affiliation, we find that Republicans reported consistent declines in their trust in science during the pandemic, while Democrats and independents remained relatively stable." They find that "trust in local elected officials and local and state health departments has remained more immune from politics than other information sources." Finally, Levi notes that the "ascendant populist parties around the world and Trumpism in the United States have self-consciously 'weaponized distrust' of government and indeed of many authorities, including scientific experts and technocrats."

A different explanation for polarization is that the leaders of these "nonpolitical" institutions may actually be more partisan than in the past. A 2019 survey discussed by Brady and Kent found that respondents attached distinctive partisan and ideological perspectives to the people associated with many "nonpolitical" institutions. Highly religious people, police, bankers, and military generals are seen as typically Republicans, and college professors, journalists, labor union members, public school teachers, and scientists are viewed as Democrats. Only doctors and lawyers are considered to be, on average, neither Republicans nor Democrats. In follow-up work, Kent has found some evidence that at least some of the perceptions may be right. Since 1980, some professions have become more partisan in their political contributions in the same ways found on the surveys.[17] Yet even if there is substance behind these perceptions, we really do not know about how the public has come to these perceptions and why the partisanship of institutional leaders seems to matter so much in the formation of judgments about institutions.

We need a much better understanding of the forces that have precipitated the decline in trust and polarization in confidence. One approach is to look at the separate histories of the various institutions over the past fifty years. These histories have, no doubt, been part of the story. However, the overall erosion of trust

across multiple institutions and the partisan polarization of trust in most institutions suggest that we should look more widely for major social trends that have shaped these outcomes. Three such developments with broad social consequences immediately suggest themselves. One is the increase in economic inequality in America, which has been implicated in the decline of social trust between people, which, in turn, is related to other forms of trust.[18] Another is the massive increase in immigration that has led to much greater diversity in America, a trend that has also been associated with the decline in social trust in local communities, especially when it is combined with substantial residential segregation.[19] And both of these trends have been associated with the pronounced partisan polarization of American politics that has been catalyzed by the rising number of contested partisan primaries, the growth of cable news, and, more recently, the emergence of social media.[20] These trends may have incubated the distrust and misunderstanding that have led us to where we are.

What is the optimal level of trust? It is dangerous to trust institutions when they are not trustworthy, as we have learned from periodic scandals that range from Watergate to the abuse of children by Catholic priests to the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. "The decline in trust in most institutions that public polling has documented since the 1960s," Schudson argues, "was a decline from what was arguably much too unquestioning a level of trust. This is clearly true with the federal government, the media, banking, corporate America, organized labor, and organized religion." Margulies and Blankshain believe that "Both high and low levels of trust in the military can have adverse consequences." High levels of trust in the military may "upend the hierarchical nature of proper democratic civil-military relations" or give some leaders incentives to "use the military as political shield/weapon when beneficial, which only serves to further elevate the military over civilian institutions and thereby further exacerbate the trust gap." Levi puts it trenchantly: "When a policy depends on the most up-to-date science, military intelligence, or other expertise, too much trust of experts can lead to tragic mistakes – à la the war in Iraq or the deadline for the withdrawal from Afghanistan – and too little trust can lead to populations resisting what might save their lives – à la vaccines for COVID." Thus, there are downsides to maximizing trust. Still, there must be a reasonable basic level of trust for our institutions to operate effectively. It seems likely that, at least for some institutions, trust has fallen so low that their operations are impaired. The trick is to achieve an appropriate balance.

Partisan polarization of trust is also a problem if it turns an institution into "just another political institution." Indeed, Schudson ends his essay with the worry that partisan divides will do just that by enfeebling the media, medicine, and other institutions. So, on one hand, it seems startling and counterproductive to see partisan divides with respect to trust in institutions. How can an institution get its work

done when half the population distrusts it? On the other hand, polarization suggests that the institution itself might need to rethink how it does its work.

More generally, rethinking the operation of an institution might be necessary whenever major groups in society distrust it. Nowhere is this clearer than in the deep distrust felt for the police by African Americans, and the persistently large gap between Whites and African Americans in trust in the police. As Meares and also Wu and coauthors point out, perhaps the problem is the wrong model of policing and the wrong standard for legitimating the police. "If the primary reason for public confidence in police was their effectiveness at crime-fighting," Meares explains, "we would expect [given decreases in crime in the past thirty years] confidence to rise during that time rather than to remain flat. Moreover, we would expect that the group who received the most benefits of crime-fighting, Black adults, would register increasing ratings of confidence even accounting for low base rates." The problem, our authors argue, is designing policing only with regulatory and pragmatic legitimacy in mind, while neglecting cultural and normative legitimacy. Effective policing requires attention to justice and fairness. Consequently, polarization of trust is a problem that requires a better understanding of how to legitimate an institution.

What can be done to restore trust? These essays propose several general strategies for ameliorating distrust. Jasanoff suggests that experts and institutions must get beyond trying to justify science, medicine, or policing based upon regulatory authority. They must get better at cultivating civic epistemologies – ways of justifying advice – that "give voice to diverse standpoints, aggregate disparate opinions to produce a measure of objectivity, and find persuasive ways to bridge the gaps between available and ideal states of knowledge." Right now, one critical arena for improvement is criminal justice policy. Meares makes several suggestions for restoring trust in the police: better training in procedural justice; establishment of civilian boards with authority not only to review police actions but also to make policy; and the elimination of the legacy of institutional racism that underlies ill-defined vagrancy and loitering laws.

Levi as well as Oreskes and Conway propose that we need a "progovernment" narrative that convincingly explains how governments can solve problems and improve citizens' lives – a point that is implicit in Stewart's argument. Republican distrust of election administration demonstrates how hard that will be. That our election system, by and large, performs well and is worthy of trust is not sufficient to produce trust in those who see government as the problem and who listen to leaders who harp on that theme. Criticism of government has become a cultural meme that does not require evidence. Getting beyond the neoliberal perspective that minimizes government and enshrines market solutions requires inventing new and more acceptable ways to think about the social welfare state model. It

also requires ensuring that government can actually solve problems by modernizing and improving its performance. That is a formidable agenda.

Meares, Wu and coauthors, and others emphasize the importance of a social justice perspective in public administration to engender trust among marginalized groups. Modern public administration is already pursuing a more inclusive and justice-oriented path, but such efforts are in their infancy. On his first day in office, President Biden signed Executive Order 13985, "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," which, with the Office of Management and Budget's report on assessing equity, marked it as one of the federal government's performance goals.[21]

There are also more specific suggestions. Blendon and Benson make recommendations for the field of public health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it became apparent that the public knew very little about what public health officials do, and the media coverage of their actions did not match that of doctors and nurses in hospitals. As with all governmental activity, there needs to be more visibility for what government does and how it solves problems, but short of creating a hit television show with a public health officer as its protagonist, it is not clear how to do this. Blendon and Benson also suggest that there should be more separation of public health from partisan politics, but this must be done carefully. In many cases during the pandemic, public health officials could invoke sweeping emergency powers without political consultation, a strategy that, based upon Jasanoff's analysis and recent work on failures of governance during the pandemic, may not succeed.[22] Ensuring that those who speak on behalf of science represent both parties might be useful, but it would require the development of new networks linking scientists with public health. Hatton and coauthors add another useful idea: because local governments are more trusted than the states or national government, public health outreach should involve local elected and appointed officials.

Certainly, the internet has exacerbated the problem of trust by creating so many diverse sources of information without mechanisms for assessing their accuracy or dependability. Rainie proposes a series of steps for creating trust in the internet. These include giving people more control of their data, changing "social media algorithms to downplay anger and divisive discourse," finding ways to promote "accuracy, diverse perspectives, and pathways to agreement," embracing more transparency by formal news operations and social media, reviving journalism – especially local papers – and creating new programs for digital and civic literacy. Finding a way to cope with the internet is another major project for our time.

Can we restore trust? The agenda presented in this volume is daunting: develop new civic epistemologies, rethink how institutions (such as police) operate, reframe the role of government, improve the performance of government, and clean up the internet. As Rainie reminds us in his essay, our

times present challenges akin to previous revolutionary moments, such as the invention of the printing press, the French Revolution, or the industrial revolution, when old authorities were overthrown and new paradigms emerged. We must reestablish authority by finding new ways to legitimate institutions. We have a lot of inventing, rethinking, and redoing ahead of us.

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ENDNOTES

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4 Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2016).

5 Karen S. Cook, Russell Hardin, and Margaret Levi argue, in *Cooperation Without Trust?* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005), that large institutions cannot be trusted, or, to be more specific, that trust only makes sense as a "relational" ideal in which the relation is with another person. According to their "encapsulated" notion of trust, trust requires knowing another person well enough to believe that that person has encapsulated one's interests, which Cook, Hardin, and Levi argue is not possible with institutions. In contrast, Lynne Zucker, in "Production of Trust: Institutional Sources of Economic Structure, 1840–1920," *Research in Organizational Behavior* 8 (1986): 53–111, uses "trust" to mean institutional trust as well as personal trust. Susan Shapiro also includes institutions in her understanding of trust and argues that there are trust-like methods of control of institutions–what she calls "impersonal trust." See Susan Shapiro, "The Social Control of Impersonal Trust," *American Journal of Sociology* 93 (3) (1987): 623–658.

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¹⁰ Sheila Jasanoff, "Civic Epistemologies," https://www.sheilajasanoff.org/research/civic -epistemologies/. See also Sheila Jasanoff, *Science and Public Reason* (London and New York : Routledge/Taylor and Francis, 2012); and Sheila Jasanoff, *Designs on Nature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015). The development of "social" epistemologies traces back to Alvin Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1999). Also see Alvin Goldman and Cailin O'Connor, "Social Epistemology," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, February 6, 2001, rev. August 28, 2019, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-social/; and Alessandra Tanesini, "Social Epistemology," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Online, 2017, https://www.rep .routledge.com/articles/thematic/social-epistemology/v-2.

¹¹ The questions in these surveys ask about "confidence" in institutions. Consistent with endnote 9, we treat confidence as a measure of trust in our discussion. These surveys cover most major nonpolitical institutions. Among the few that are missing are the arts, food systems, tech companies, public utilities, philanthropy, nonprofits, and agriculture. By "political" institutions we mean those that make or adjudicate laws and that have elected members (presidency and Congress) or many presidentially nominated and congressionally confirmed members (Supreme Court and executive branch). By "nonpolitical" we mean institutions that are private sector (profit-making such as business or nonprofit such as religion) or government bureaucracies that do not make or adjudicate laws and that strive to be nonpolitical (such as the military, public schools, or the police), even though they might have some elected officials (public school boards) or political appointees (military and police leaders) running them.

¹² These data include confidence in higher education.

¹³ For a full discussion of the issues, see Paul C. Bauer and Markus Freitag, "Measuring Trust," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, ed. Eric Uslaner (New York : Oxford University Press, 2018), 15–36.

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