

A Panel Study of Media Effects on Political and Social Trust after September 11, 2001

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The authors examine the relationship between media consumption and political trust, social trust, and confidence in governmental institutions in the year following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. This period provides a unique opportunity to explore the effects of media use on trust, given that political and social trust surged in the immediate aftermath only to decline in the months that followed. Using data from a panel survey, the authors find that television news use was associated with higher levels of trust in government and confidence in institutions during the surge that followed the terrorist attacks. Individual-level change in trust and confidence over the year that followed was not, however, attributable to media use or changes in media use. In the case of social trust, the results suggest that television news and newspaper use were not associated with social trust in the immediate aftermath but were associated with individual-level change in social trust over the course of the following year. Specifically, those who watched television news exhibited declines in social trust and those who read newspapers exhibited increased social trust between fall 2001 and late summer 2002. The authors conclude by discussing how coverage in fall 2001 and changes in coverage over the following year may help to explain these results.

Keywords: *media use; political trust; social trust; September 11*

In recent years, scholars and commentators have focused increased attention on the consequences of political trust and social trust. For example, studies have shown that political trust affects compliance with governmental authority (Scholz and Lubell 1998), voting behavior (Hetherington 1998), and policy preferences (Chanley et al. 2000; Hetherington and Globetti 2002). Similarly,

studies have demonstrated that social trust shapes cooperation, volunteering, giving to charity, and policy preferences (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Putnam 2000; Uslaner 2002). Most important, perhaps, political trust helps to provide leaders and institutions with the political capital to take action when a problem emerges (Hetherington 1998), and social trust helps to provide citizens with the social capital to do the same (Putnam 2000).

Given these consequences, it is crucial that we understand what shapes political and social trust. A number of studies, inspired partly by sizable declines in both forms of trust, have argued that the news media may be one (if not the only or the most important) influence on political trust (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Fallows 1997; Nye 1997; Patterson 1994) and social trust (Moy and Scheufele 2000; Putnam 2000).¹ In this study, we try to further our understanding of the relationship between media use and various forms of trust during a period of crisis. Specifically, we revisit the effects of media consumption on social trust, political trust, and confidence in governmental institutions in the year following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The aftermath of these attacks constitutes a striking example of a situation in which political leaders and ordinary citizens had to draw on their stocks of trust to address a range of problems, from assisting victims of the attack to preventing future attacks. Moreover, this period provides an unusual—even unprecedented—opportunity to study the dynamics of media use and trust. Given that political and social trust surged immediately after the attacks, only to decline in the months that followed, we are able to examine not only how media use influenced trust in this period but also whether and how the nature of media effects changed over time and if media use accounts for individual-level changes in trust.

Trust and Confidence in Government and People

In this article, we focus on the effects of media consumption on three important and distinct constructs: political trust, confidence in governmental institutions, and social trust. The first, trust in government (or political trust) is seen as a general orientation toward government, a measure of diffuse support for the political regime (Miller 1974b).² Many scholars argue that trust in the government is essential to the proper functioning of any democratic system (e.g., Gamson 1968; Miller 1974b). We are also interested in more specific forms of political support. Thus, we explore the relationship between media use and confidence in those specific institutions that played crucial roles in the aftermath of September 11, 2001: the presidency, Congress, the military, and the intelligence community. Other work has shown confidence in these institutions is distinct from, though influenced by, general trust in government (Brewer et al. 2003). Both trust in government and confidence in specific institutions may have important consequences for the government's ability to undertake the kind of

actions that President Bush and others argued would be required in the “War on Terror.”

We examine the effect of media consumption on social trust (i.e., trust in other people or interpersonal trust), as well. Social trust is traditionally seen as a view about the trustworthiness of people in general. It “can be viewed as a ‘standing decision’ to give most people—even those whom one does not know from direct experience—the benefit of the doubt” (Rahn and Transue 1998: 545). Social trust is associated with engagement in one’s community as well as participation in politics. Prior work has found a reciprocal relationship between social trust and political trust—suggesting that those who trust others may infer they can trust governmental institutions and actors and vice versa (Brehm and Rahn 1997, Brewer et al. 2003; but see also Uslaner 2002). Nonetheless, social trust is logically quite different from trust in government: One could trust one’s coworkers but not the politicians in Washington, or vice versa.

The Media and Political Trust and Confidence

Trust in government declined substantially among the American public from the 1960s to the 1990s (Craig 1993; Hetherington 1998; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). For example, whereas 76 percent of Americans said they could trust the government in Washington to do what is right just about always or most of the time in 1964, only half that many said so in the 1990s. Confidence in government institutions such as the presidency and Congress suffered similar declines (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995). These trends provoked considerable concern about the potential consequences of declining political trust and confidence, as well as interest in its causes.

Robinson (1976) was one of the first researchers to argue that the news media, particularly television news, shape beliefs about government. His theory of “videomalaise” suggests that the interpretive, negative, and antiinstitutional character of television coverage reinforces political cynicism. According to Robinson, “These anti-institutional themes reach the audience with one essential message: none of our national policies work, none of our institutions respond, none of our political organizations succeed” (p. 429). Although his initial study did not incorporate content analysis, subsequent research showed that a negative, critical, and interpretive style typically permeates media coverage of institutions (Robinson and Appel 1979; Miller et al. 1979; Hart et al. 1990) and elections (Patterson 1994; Robinson and Sheehan 1983; Hallin 1992). These analyses found that coverage tends to be neutral or negative, with negative coverage exceeding positive coverage.

Scholars also noted that increasing negativity in media coverage of politics and campaigns coincided with declining trust. In particular, Patterson (1994) documented growing negativity, increasing use of game framing, and increasing

interpretation in coverage between 1960 and 1992. He furthermore suggested that journalistic values lead to antipolitical and antiinstitution biases in coverage and that the journalistic focus on campaign strategy, personal character, and government failures at the expense of policy debates and government successes has effects extending beyond the campaign context. According to Patterson, such coverage not only fails to provide citizens with the information they need but also reinforces negative, uninformed, and cynical judgments about public officials and institutions. Along similar lines, Fallows (1997: 7) argued that by "choosing to present public life as a contest among scheming political leaders, all of whom the public should view with suspicion, the news media help bring about that very result." The arguments advanced by Patterson and Fallows have been cited by numerous scholars and commentators; moreover, subsequent studies—most notably the experiments conducted by Cappella and Jamieson (1997)—have provided evidence for the claim that the dominant style of political coverage activates political cynicism among news consumers.

Some research, however, suggests that not all media have the same effects on political trust and that the effects of news media use are not always in the direction of eroding political trust. In his original videomalaise paper, for example, Robinson (1976) found greater political cynicism among those who relied on television news than among those who relied on other media. Becker and Whitney (1980) also found differences between television and newspaper users. In their study, dependence on television news led to lower political trust, whereas newspaper use had a positive effect on trust (but see O'Keefe 1980). Similarly, Hetherington (1998) found a negative relationship between television news consumption and political trust and a positive one between newspaper consumption and political trust, although these relationships did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Newton (1999) found higher levels of trust as well as political knowledge and self-reported interest and understanding among readers of broadsheets (quality newspapers). Yet he found no evidence that television news induces political malaise, although television news viewing was associated with political knowledge and interest. Moy and Pfau (2000; see also Pfau et al. 1998) found that print media use generally fostered trust in government and confidence in institutions whereas broadcast news had more mixed results; in a separate study, however, Moy and Scheufele (2000) found no media use effects on political trust.³ Finally, in a study combining content analysis of newspapers with survey data analysis, Miller et al. (1979) found that readers of more critical newspapers exhibited lower trust.

All in all, then, the conventional wisdom seems to be that television use is associated with greater political cynicism, whereas newspaper use is associated with greater trust. Indeed, there is evidence linking media use and political trust. The empirical record, however, suggests that the connections between the two may be conditional and complex. Moreover, research thus far has focused on

these relationships during “politics as usual,” rather than crisis situations, although the substantive role of political trust and confidence in institutions may be particularly relevant during the latter.

One possibility is that in times of crisis, political elites will present a consensus—transmitted to the public through the mass media—in their messages about government and government policy. Past research suggests that when political elites are generally in agreement, the public comes to support government authorities and policy. For example, Brody (1991) argues that international crises lead to increased presidential approval because political figures whom one would normally expect to provide negative comments either rally to the president or remain silent. In the absence of opposition from legitimate sources, news coverage during crises results in an “unusually uncritical mix of news” (p. 64). Thus, such surges in approval result not simply from patriotic rallying around the flag but from supportive messages that reach the public through the media.⁴ Zaller (1992) suggests that a similar dynamic—which he calls a “mainstream effect”—occurs when elites across the political spectrum achieve consensus in support of a particular policy. In response, public opinion becomes more supportive of that policy.

The general process described by Brody (1991) and Zaller (1992) may extend more broadly to political trust and confidence in government institutions. Put another way, coverage lacking in critical perspectives may lead not only to rallies around the president and administration policies but also around the larger political system. If, in the wake of September 11, 2001, the nature of messages of political elites resembled the patterns described by these authors, then this may have had consequences for the relationships between media use, on one hand, and political trust and confidence in institutions, on the other. In this study, we examine these relationships. We then speculate about potential connections between media content and media effects after the terrorist attacks.

The Media and Social Trust

Just as political trust declined from the 1960s to the 1990s, so too did social trust. The proportion of the American public saying that “most people can be trusted” rather than “you can’t be too careful in dealing with people” declined from more than half in 1960 to around a third by 2000 (Putnam 2000; Uslaner 2002). As with the decline in political trust, this trend inspired alarm among many observers, including some who argued that media had contributed to it.

Most famously, perhaps, Putnam (1995) blamed declining social capital (of which social trust and civic engagement are the two key components in his account) in part on television viewing, while also arguing that newspaper reading fosters social capital. He explained the negative link between television consumption and social trust in terms of both time displacement—the idea being

that television takes up time that might otherwise be devoted to social trust-building civic activities—and television content. In making the case that content matters, Putnam drew on cultivation theory (Gerbner and Gross 1976; Gerbner et al. 1980) to argue that watching the “mean world” portrayed on television erodes social trust (but see Uslaner 1998).

Subsequent research, however, suggested a more nuanced understanding of television’s impact on social capital. Norris (1996; see also Shah 1998) found negative effects of total television viewing on various indicators of social capital and positive effects of newspaper use on the same indicators, just as one would expect from Putnam’s (1995) account. At the same time, she also found that individuals who watched public affairs programming and television news actually scored higher than others on a number of social capital indicators (although she did not explicitly examine social trust, focusing instead on civic engagement, efficacy, and interest). As Norris argues, “We might expect that viewers who were devoted to *The Newshour* with Jim Lehrer, C-Span, and *Nightline* might end up as rather well-informed citizens who were well-equipped to become engaged in public life” (p. 475). In subsequent work, Putnam (2000) drew the same distinction between television news viewing and overall television viewing (although he did not directly examine the effects of either total viewing or television news on social trust in this research, either). Here, Putnam suggested that television news in particular can “reinforce a wider sense of community by communicating a common experience to the entire nation,” and in doing so, it may help to bridge differences and nurture solidarity (p. 243). On the other hand, work by Moy and Scheufele (2000) suggested that the positive effects of television news on civic engagement may not extend to social trust. They found that both newspaper reading and entertainment television viewing were positively related to social trust, whereas television news viewing was negatively related to social trust.

In short, some scholars have argued that media use should shape social trust; furthermore, they have suggested that such media effects on social trust may depend in part on media content (Putnam 2000; Shah 1998). In practice, the empirical record on this point is slender because studies to date have focused more on relationships between media use and the other key component of social capital, civic engagement. If prevailing patterns of media content can erode social trust, however, then it may also be possible for different patterns of media content to have the opposite effect. For example, news coverage featuring human interest stories of neighbors helping each other or communities coming together in the aftermath of a crisis such as September 11 might promote social trust. In the following account, we revisit the relationships between media use and social trust; as with political trust and confidence in institutions, we then speculate about potential links between media content and the patterns we observe.

Research Questions

Taken as a whole, the literature to date raises the question of whether news media use can foster political and social trust as well as erode these forms of trust. It also raises the question of whether media effects may vary from one medium to another. In the following account, we take a new look at such effects using data collected during the year following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Specifically, the analyses that follow address three sets of questions. First, what effects, if any, did television news use and newspaper use have on trust in government, confidence in governmental institutions, and social trust during the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks? Was media use associated with increased trust in the fall of 2001, when trust was at its peak and coverage might have included few critical perspectives on the government? Second, to what extent did television news and newspaper use explain individual-level change in trust in government, confidence in governmental institutions, and social trust over the course of the following year? Did the nature of the relationship between media use and trust change over this period? Third, do we find evidence of differences in the effects of television news use and newspaper use, as some previous studies have?

Data and Measures

Our data come from a three-wave national telephone survey of Americans eighteen years and older. Random digit dialing was used to select the sample. The first wave of the survey, in which 1,235 respondents were interviewed, was in the field from October 24 to November 5, 2001. The second wave of the survey was in the field from February 28 to March 26, 2002. Sixty-one percent (758) of the respondents from the first wave were reinterviewed in March, with the bulk of the interviews occurring in the first two weeks. The third wave of the survey was in the field from August 20 to September 13, 2002, with more than 90 percent of the interviews taking place in August. Four hundred and seventeen respondents (34 percent of the initial sample) completed all three interviews. The appendix provides further details about the nature of our sample. Our measures were as follows:

Trust in government. In each wave of the survey, respondents were asked a question that numerous studies, including the American National Election Studies, have used to measure generalized trust in government: "How much of the time can you trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?" Responses were coded so that *just about always* = 1, *most of the time* = .5, and *only some of the time* = 0.⁵

Confidence in government institutions. In each wave of the survey, respondents were asked a series of questions about how much confidence they had in a set of specific government institutions: the presidency, Congress, the military, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Central Intelligence agency (CIA). These questions, which borrowed a format employed in the General Social Surveys and Gallup polls, presented four response options: *a great deal* (coded as 1), *a good deal* (coded as 2/3), *some* (coded as 1/3), and *very little* (coded as 0).

Social trust. In each wave of the survey, respondents were asked two social trust items that have been used in numerous studies, including the General Social Surveys and the American National Election Studies: "Generally speaking would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" and "Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are just looking out for themselves?" Given that responses to these items were highly correlated with one another, we combined them into an index coded so that trusting responses to both items = 1, a trusting response to one item but not the other = .5, and a trusting response to neither item = 0 (the correlation between items in wave 1 was .39; in wave 3 it was .49). Among all respondents, the mean on the social trust index in wave 1 was .68 (standard deviation = .39). Among panel respondents, the mean on the social trust index in wave 1 was .74 (standard deviation = .36), and the mean on the social trust index in wave 3 was .70 (standard deviation = .39). Only respondents who answered both questions were included in the index.

Media use. The first and third waves of the panel survey included a series of questions about media consumption. Specifically, respondents were asked whether they watched or read each of the following *regularly* (coded as 1), *sometimes* (coded as 2/3), *hardly ever* (coded as 1/3), or *never* (coded as 0): national nightly network news, twenty-four-hour cable news channels, and daily newspapers. We created a measure of television news use by averaging across national nightly network news and twenty-four-hour cable news use.⁶ Among all wave 1 respondents, the means for newspaper use and television news use were .70 (standard deviation = .32) and .69 (standard deviation = .26), respectively. Among panel respondents, they were .72 (standard deviation = .31) and .68 (standard deviation = .27) in fall 2001 and .70 (standard deviation = .33) and .62 (standard deviation = .27) in late summer 2002.

Party identification. The first wave of the panel survey included the traditional branching-question measure for party identification, which produced a seven-category scale transformed to range from 0 (*strong Democrat*) to 1 (*strong Republican*). The mean for party identification was .51 (standard deviation = .35) for the full sample and .52 (standard deviation = .35) for the panel.

Patriotism. We created a measure of patriotism from responses to a first-wave item asking respondents, “How patriotic are you? Would you say extremely patriotic, very patriotic, somewhat patriotic, or not especially patriotic?” Responses were coded to range from 0 (*not especially patriotic*) to 1 (*extremely patriotic*), with a mean of .69 and a standard deviation of .26 for both the full sample and the panel. Not surprisingly, nearly 80 percent of respondents reported themselves to be “very” or “extremely” patriotic.

Volunteering. The first wave of the survey included the following question: “During the past two months have you volunteered your time at a charitable organization?” Responses were coded so that yes = 1 and no = 0. Twenty-eight percent of our full sample (and 35 percent of those who responded to all three surveys) had volunteered time at a charitable organization.

Demographic variables. The first wave of the survey included measures for a variety of demographic factors that could have influenced trust in government, confidence in institutions, and social trust: gender (coded 1 if female and 0 if male), whether the respondent self-identified as African American (coded 1 if yes and 0 if no), whether the respondent self-identified as Hispanic (coded likewise), age (measured in years/100), education (measured on a seven-category scale ranging from 0 to 1 where 1 = *highest education*), and income (measured on a similar seven-category scale where 1 = *highest income level*). See the appendix for further details about the demographic composition of the sample.

Surges and Declines

Surveys conducted in the month following September 11, 2001, recorded dramatic surges in trust in government, confidence in government institutions, and social trust. For example, a *Washington Post*/ABC News survey found that the percentage of respondents who trusted the government in Washington to do what is right just about always or most of the time more than doubled in the wake of the attacks, rising from 30 to 64 percent (Hetherington and Nelson 2003). The National Opinion Research Center found that the proportion of Americans expressing a great deal of confidence in the military increased by 27 percentage points, for Congress by 31 points, and for the executive branch of government by 34 points (Smith et al. 2001). Similarly, their indicators of social trust broke or approached previously recorded highs in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001 (Smith et al. 2001). The results of the first wave of our survey paralleled the results of these other surveys, giving us greater confidence in the external validity of our subsequent analyses. Our first wave results also showed increased confidence in the CIA and FBI.⁷

In the year that followed the terrorist attack, however, trust in government, confidence in institutions, and social trust all declined to varying degrees. Table 1 illustrates the trends for our measures among panel respondents. The decline was particularly pronounced for trust in government—a point borne out not only by our results (which indicate a 16-point decline in the percentage saying they can trust the government just about always or most of the time) but also by *Washington Post*/ABC News surveys (Hetherington and Nelson 2003). For the social trust questions, on the other hand, the decline was relatively modest—a finding that is also consistent with the results of other surveys (Rasinski et al. 2002; Etzioni and Mead 2003). As for the specific government institutions, declines in confidence over the course of the survey ranged from a 3-point drop for the FBI to an 11-point decline for the presidency. We use these surges and declines as an opportunity to reexamine the effects of television news use and newspaper reading on trust in government, confidence in government institutions, and social trust during a unique period in American history.

Explaining Trust in Government and Confidence in Government Institutions

Our first analysis examined what shaped trust in government and confidence in government institutions in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks. Our model included not only the first-wave measures of television news and newspaper use but also the demographic measures and measures for two other key variables—party identification and patriotism—that could have shaped each dependent variable. Table 2 presents the results among the full first-wave sample. One finding that stands out is the consistent effect of television news use on trust in government and confidence in government institutions. For each of the dependent variables, this effect was positive and statistically significant at the .05 level or better. To be sure, the impact of watching television news was neither consistent nor overwhelming in its magnitude: It ranged from .07 for confidence in the presidency to .17 for confidence in the CIA, with a mean effect across dependent variables of .11. Our results do indicate, however, that all else being equal, television news consumption was positively associated with trust in government and confidence in government institutions at the peak of the surge.⁸ In contrast, we found no evidence of a relationship between newspaper use and either trust in government or confidence in government institutions during the initial aftermath of September 11, 2001; the coefficient for newspaper use did not attain statistical significance for any of the dependent variables.

The results presented in Table 2 also shed light on some of the other factors that shaped trust in government and confidence in government institutions during the surge. To begin with, Republicans were significantly more likely than Democrats to express trust in government and to express confidence in every

Table 1

Trust in government, confidence in government institutions, and social trust among panel respondents: Percentages expressing trust or confidence

	October- November 2001	March 2002	August- September 2002
How much of the time can you trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?	65	58	50
How much confidence do you have in the military—a great deal, a good deal, some, or very little?	83	83	78
How much confidence do you have in Congress?	36	35	28
How about the presidency?	74	71	63
The FBI or Federal Bureau of Investigation?	43	43	39
The CIA or Central Intelligence Agency?	43	39	36
Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?	68	62	63
Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are just looking out for themselves?	81	77	77

Note: $N = 417$. For the first item, trusting responses include *just about always* and *most of the time*. For the confidence items, trusting responses include *a great deal* and *a good deal*.

institution except one. The magnitude of party identification's effect varied in understandable ways: Its impact was greatest for confidence in the presidency (.19), the institution with the clearest partisan connotations; its impact was weaker for general trust in government and confidence in executive-branch institutions (i.e., the military, the FBI, and the CIA); and it had no discernible impact on confidence in Congress, which had divided party control at the time. Additionally, the coefficient for patriotism was positive, significant, and relatively sizable in every case, suggesting that patriotic sentiments shaped trust in government and confidence in government institutions in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks. In short, television news use was not the only influence on trust in government and confidence in government institutions during this period.⁹

Of course, trust and confidence declined in the year following the terrorist attacks. What shaped *individual-level* change in such trust and confidence? Put another way, among which respondents were the declines most pronounced? To answer this question, we estimated static-score models for each third-wave dependent variable. Each model included a lagged dependent variable (the first-wave value of the dependent variable), the third-wave television news and newspaper use measures, and change in newspaper and broadcast television use, along with party identification, patriotism, and the demographic variables.¹⁰

Table 2
Influences on trust in government and confidence in government institutions in October-November 2001

	Trust in Government	Confidence in Presidency	Confidence in Congress	Confidence in Military	Confidence in FBI	Confidence in CIA
Watches TV news	.08* (.04)	.07* (.03)	.12** (.03)	.09** (.03)	.13** (.04)	.17** (.04)
Reads newspaper	.04 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	.02 (.03)	-.04 (.02)	-.00 (.03)	-.00 (.03)
Party identification	.11** (.03)	.19** (.02)	-.01 (.03)	.07** (.02)	.10** (.03)	.10** (.03)
Patriotism	.28** (.04)	.30** (.03)	.19** (.03)	.33** (.03)	.19** (.04)	.18** (.04)
Female	-.02 (.02)	-.02 (.02)	-.00 (.02)	-.01 (.01)	.01 (.02)	.00 (.02)
Black	.02 (.05)	-.09* (.04)	-.05 (.04)	-.00 (.03)	-.02 (.04)	-.03 (.04)
Hispanic	.03 (.05)	.00 (.04)	-.05 (.04)	-.04 (.04)	-.01 (.05)	-.00 (.05)
Age (in years/100)	-.18** (.06)	-.01 (.05)	-.14** (.05)	-.20** (.05)	-.28** (.06)	-.23** (.06)
Education	-.02 (.04)	-.07* (.03)	.01 (.03)	-.09** (.03)	-.12** (.04)	-.09* (.04)
Income	-.00 (.04)	.04 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)	-.04 (.04)	-.06 (.04)
Constant	.16 (.05)	.38 (.05)	.31 (.05)	.62 (.04)	.47 (.05)	.41 (.05)
Standard error of the estimate	.31	.26	.27	.23	.29	.29
R^2	.09	.19	.05	.17	.09	.08
n	1,026	1,040	1,041	1,038	1,034	1,015

Note: Table entries are ordinary least squares (OLS) regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Results were similar when estimated using ordered probit.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

According to Finkel (1995), static score (or conditional change) models of this sort are generally superior as models of change to simple "unconditional" models of change scores.¹¹ The coefficients we report can also be interpreted as the causal effects of the independent variables on change in trust or confidence, controlling for the respondent's initial level of trust or confidence (see Finkel 1995: 7).

As Table 3 shows, all of the coefficients for television news use and newspaper use fell short of statistical significance. Controlling for prior levels of trust and confidence, we found no significant effects of media use or change in media use on changes in trust or confidence. Put another way, we cannot say that respondents who watched television news or read newspapers regularly were any more or less likely than nonwatchers to exhibit declines in trust in government or confidence in government institutions, controlling for initial levels of trust or confidence; nor can we say that respondents who changed their media use were any more or less likely than those who did not to exhibit such declines.

On the other hand, the extent of change did vary across partisan lines. The positive and statistically significant effects of party identification on trust in government (.09) and confidence in the presidency (.17) indicate that Democrats were more likely than Republicans to exhibit declining trust in government and confidence in the presidency, all else being equal. Not surprisingly, again, the role of partisanship was particularly pronounced in the case of confidence in the presidency. By a similar logic, the positive and statistically significant effects of patriotism on confidence in the military (.10, $p < .10$) and the CIA (.14) indicate that respondents who identified themselves as extremely patriotic were less likely than those who identified themselves as not especially patriotic to exhibit declining confidence in each of these institutions.¹²

We know that in the aggregate the public's confidence in governmental institutions and trust in government changed over this period, yet our analysis suggests that media use had little to do with individual-level changes. How, then, do we explain declining trust and confidence? The results in Table 3 also suggest that the impact of television news on trust and confidence had faded in the year following the terrorist attacks. Contemporaneous television news use was not systematically related to trust and confidence in late summer 2002, as it had been in fall 2001. In another analysis (not shown), we examined the effects of August-September 2002 media use on August-September 2002 trust and confidence, dropping the change in media use and lagged dependent variables (in other words, we ran the same model reported in Table 2 using third-wave television and newspaper use measures to predict third-wave trust and confidence measures). The coefficients for television news use were weaker than they had been in the first wave and only significant in the case of confidence in the CIA (.11, $p < .05$).¹³ Although we cannot say that television news use explained

Table 3
Influences on trust in government and confidence in government institutions in August-September 2002

	Trust in Government	Confidence in Presidency	Confidence in Congress	Confidence in Military	Confidence in FBI	Confidence in CIA
Lagged dependent variable	.44** (.04)	.34** (.05)	.48** (.05)	.46** (.05)	.45** (.05)	.46** (.04)
Watches TV news	.04 (.06)	.01 (.06)	-.00 (.06)	.02 (.05)	.03 (.06)	.05 (.06)
Reads newspaper	-.09 (.05)	-.05 (.05)	.06 (.05)	.06 (.04)	-.01 (.05)	.01 (.05)
Change in TV news watching	-.05 (.07)	-.05 (.07)	-.05 (.07)	.01 (.06)	.01 (.07)	.09 (.07)
Change in newspaper reading	.04 (.06)	.01 (.06)	-.05 (.05)	-.04 (.05)	.00 (.05)	-.04 (.05)
Party identification	.09* (.04)	.17** (.04)	-.04 (.04)	.04 (.04)	.04 (.04)	-.01 (.04)
Patriotism	.05 (.06)	.09 (.06)	.06 (.05)	.10 (.05)	.09 (.05)	.14* (.05)
Female	-.05 (.03)	.01 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	-.08** (.02)	-.04 (.03)	-.04 (.03)
Black	.09 (.08)	.08 (.08)	.05 (.07)	.24** (.07)	.02 (.07)	.18* (.07)
Hispanic	.00 (.09)	-.01 (.08)	-.03 (.08)	.08 (.07)	-.01 (.08)	.01 (.08)
Age (in years/100)	-.20 (.10)	-.03 (.10)	-.05 (.10)	-.23* (.09)	-.15 (.10)	-.27** (.10)
Education	-.05 (.06)	.00 (.06)	-.04 (.05)	-.14** (.05)	-.08 (.05)	-.06 (.05)
Income	.03 (.06)	.03 (.06)	.01 (.05)	.04 (.05)	-.04 (.06)	.08 (.06)
Constant	.21 (.08)	.21 (.09)	.16 (.08)	.43 (.08)	.32 (.08)	.23 (.08)
Standard error of the estimate	.25	.25	.23	.22	.24	.24
R ²	.32	.24	.25	.36	.30	.34
n	355	355	358	359	355	344

Note: Table entries are ordinary least squares (OLS) regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Results were similar when estimated using ordered probit.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

individual-level changes in trust and confidence, taken together, the changes in the effects of television news could partly account for the declines in trust and confidence we see at the aggregate level.

In sum, we found that television news use was one of several factors (along with party identification and patriotism) that shaped trust in government and confidence in government institutions just as they were surging in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001. One year later, our results suggest the positive impact of television news use had eroded. We did not find any evidence, however, that television news use (or, for that matter, newspaper use) explained individual-level change in trust in government and confidence in government institutions; in contrast, party identification and patriotism did shape such change in some cases.

Explaining Social Trust

We followed a similar approach in analyzing what shaped social trust at the peak of its surge and what shaped individual-level change in it. Our basic model for social trust differed from our model for trust in government and confidence in government institutions, however, in that it did not include party identification or patriotism and did include our measure of volunteering. Past research has shown that engagement in one's community is strongly associated with trust in others (Brehm and Rahn 1997).¹⁴ The first column of Table 4 presents the results of our model for social trust in the first wave. As the table illustrates, the coefficients for first-wave television news use and newspaper use did not attain statistical significance. In other words, we found no discernible relationship between either form of media consumption and social trust during the surge in the latter. On the other hand, the coefficient for volunteering was positive and statistically significant, suggesting that volunteerism may have fostered social trust in the initial aftermath of September 11, 2001.

To examine what influenced individual-level change in social trust, we estimated another static score model. This one predicted social trust in wave 3 as a function of social trust in wave 1, television news and newspaper use in wave 3, change in television news and newspaper use, volunteering, and the demographic variables. The results (Table 4, second column) indicate that television news use and newspaper use had significant but opposite effects on change in social trust: The coefficient for the former was negative and significant ($-.18$), whereas the coefficient for the latter was positive and significant ($.13$). In other words, controlling for initial levels of social trust, regular newspaper readers were less likely than nonreaders to exhibit a decline in social trust over this period. In contrast, respondents who regularly watched television news were more likely than nonwatchers to exhibit a decline in social trust. None of the

Table 4
Influences on social trust

	October- November 2001	August- September 2002
Social trust	—	.55** (.05)
Watches TV news	.00 (.05)	-.18* (.08)
Reads newspaper	.06 (.04)	.13* (.07)
Changes in TV news watching	—	.01 (.09)
Changes in newspaper reading	—	-.07 (.08)
Volunteer	.09** (.03)	-.02 (.04)
Female	.00 (.02)	-.05 (.04)
Black	-.08 (.05)	-.11 (.10)
Hispanic	-.06 (.06)	-.02 (.13)
Age (in years/100)	.27** (.07)	.22 (.14)
Education	.30** (.05)	-.08 (.07)
Income	.14** (.05)	.08 (.08)
Constant	.22 (.06)	.25 (.10)
Standard error of the estimate	.37	.32
R^2	.12	.32
n	1,011	342

Note: Table entries are ordinary least squares (OLS) regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Results were similar when estimated using ordered probit.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

other variables in the model were significant predictors of change in social trust, controlling for other factors.

When we examined the aggregate relationship between August-September social trust and August-September media use (i.e., we ran a cross-sectional model predicting third-wave social trust from third-wave media use, volunteerism, and demographics, dropping the first-wave social trust and change in media use measures; analysis not shown), we found that television news use one year after the attacks was associated with lower levels of social trust ($-.21, p < .01$). The coefficient for newspaper use was positive but not significant. Thus, a relationship between television news use and social trust that was not present in fall 2001 emerged one year later. By the following summer, those who watched television news were less socially trusting than those who did not.

In sum, we found that television news and newspaper use did not shape social trust in the aftermath of September 11; instead, social trust was shaped by volunteerism, age, education, and income during this period. One year later, television news use was associated with decreased social trust. Moreover, we found evidence that television news use and newspaper use explained individual-level changes in social trust that occurred in the year following the terrorist attacks.

Discussion

Our results showed that television news use, but not newspaper use, was associated with higher levels of trust in government and confidence in institutions during the surge that followed the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. One year later, neither form of media use shaped trust in government or confidence in institutions. We cannot attribute individual-level changes in trust and confidence over the year that followed to media use or changes in media use, however.

What might explain this pattern of findings? We suspect that the content of media coverage—and changes in that content—may account for our results. There is reason to believe that the nature of coverage following September 11, 2001, should have resembled the coverage Brody (1991) describes as characterizing many rally events. Immediately after September 11, the news appears to have been dominated by progovernment messages rather than by the negativity and game framing described by Patterson (1994) and others. Many journalists appeared to engage in “patriotic journalism” (Kalb 1994): Flag logos appeared on the news; banners with “Attack on America” flashed across the screen; anchors and reporters appeared on air wearing flag pins and ribbons and displaying emotions of horror and outrage at the attacks. Moreover, the bipartisan spirit that dominated politics following the attacks dampened partisan dissent and critical perspectives within news coverage. A content analysis conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates and the Project for Excellence in Journalism showed that the viewpoints reflected in coverage from September, November, and December 2001 were heavily proadministration and pro-U.S. policy. Taking these three months together, 49 percent of stories contained only viewpoints favoring U.S. policy and another 13 percent of stories featured mostly pro-U.S. policy viewpoints, whereas just 8 percent featured mostly or entirely dissenting viewpoints (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2002).¹⁵ As early as December 2001, however, the percentage of stories featuring at least some dissent had increased, heralding the return of more typical coverage.

If negative and interpretive coverage of politics fosters political cynicism as Patterson (1994) and other have argued, and if the public lends support when elites exhibit consensus as Brody (1991) and Zaller (1992) have argued, then coverage in the period immediately after the attacks should have fostered political trust and confidence. In the case of television news use, we find evidence consistent with this account. Furthermore, the relationship between national television news use and trust in government and confidence in government institutions weakened as the content of political coverage reverted to a more typical pattern (as our third-wave results show). On the other hand, we did not find any evidence that media use or change in media use explained individual-level changes in trust in government or confidence in governmental institutions; those who watched more television news or read newspapers more frequently

were no more or less likely to exhibit declining trust than those who did not. It is also important to remember that the effects of television news, although significant across a variety of measures of trust and confidence, were not overwhelming in the aftermath of the attacks. Television news use was only one of several factors (including party and patriotism) that shaped trust in that period. This result is consistent with a portrait of limited, rather than massive, media effects during crisis situations.

Why might we have found different effects for television and newspapers in the fall of 2001? Again, perhaps content is part of the explanation. Television news coverage after September 11, 2001, was apparently more progovernment than newspaper coverage from the same period: 63 percent of television stories in September, November, and December of 2001 were entirely proadministration, compared with only 35 percent of newspaper stories (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2002). Moreover, "patriotic journalism" may be more powerfully displayed in the visual media. This would suggest that television news can have a distinctive and more significant effect on political trust and confidence, which is what we find.

One might think that increased trust in government and confidence in institutions is the obvious automatic reaction in the face of external threats. As we saw following the 2004 train bombings in Madrid, however, it is not the only possible response to a terrorist attack. Thus, it is important to understand what might have driven the surge and decline in political trust and confidence in the United States following September 11. Our results suggest that some of the increased trust may be due to a simple patriotic response (the effect for patriotism is large and significant in fall 2001 and in late summer 2002 for both trust in government and confidence in governmental institutions). But patriotism alone cannot fully account for our results. Surely media coverage reflects the national mood, but it may also contribute to it through practices such as patriotic journalism and its reflection of the progovernment consensus among elites. If the surge in political trust and confidence was simply a reflection of increased solidarity in the face of threat, then we would not expect the differences we find for media use.

In the case of social trust, our results suggest that television news and newspaper use were not associated with social trust in the immediate aftermath of September 11 but were associated with individual-level change in social trust over the course of the following year. Specifically, those who watched television news and those who did not read newspapers exhibited the sharpest declines in social trust between fall 2001 and late summer 2002.

One possible explanation for this pattern of results is that the nature of media coverage in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks attenuated "normal" relationships between media use and social trust. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, news media emphasized human interest stories featuring ordinary citizens working together to solve problems, help others, and deal with their

collective grief. One common theme was the heroism of the rescue workers in New York and Washington; another was the bravery and sacrifice of the passengers of Flight 93; yet another was the efforts of everyday Americans to help the victims of the attack. Yet this emphasis—like the progovernment content of post-September 11 coverage—appeared to fade in the following months. Perhaps this spate of human interest stories—these glowing portrayals of American society in the aftermath of the attacks—helped to foster increased social trust, which manifested in fall 2001 as an attenuation of the negative relationship between television news use and social trust that Moy and Scheufele (2000) previously found. The individual-level changes associated with media use over the following year might, then, reflect a return to the status quo. The contrasting effects for television news use and newspaper use on individual-level change also reinforce the point that different media can have different effects.

We believe our pattern of results suggests that media coverage can foster trust in government, confidence in governmental institutions, and social trust. Of course, media use is not always the only or even the most significant influence on trust. Moreover, it is important to remember that our findings come from an unusual period. We see this as a virtue, given that the dynamics of trust and confidence in the year following the terrorist attacks provide an opportunity to examine how the same individuals respond to changing circumstances. Still, our focus on this period means that the effects of media use on trust and confidence that we found are likely to be different from their effects during politics as usual.

In addition, we should note that our study shares important limitations with many of the previous studies in this area. We infer media effects from survey findings, rather than capturing them through experimental control. Our analyses control for the most likely sources of spurious relationships between media use and trust. Nonetheless, we cannot be certain of the causal direction of these effects. Also, we cannot link our respondents to the specific content they watched; thus, we can only speculate about the reasons behind differences in the effect of media over time and across formats. Nor do we delve into differences in either content or effects within either medium under study (e.g., we do not compare Fox News Channel and CNN). We do, however, see our account as plausible and consistent with the available evidence.

Finally, we draw some attention to the normative implications of our findings. Those who criticize the media for contributing to declines in political and social trust could take hope in our findings that news can seemingly foster trust and confidence (in the case of political trust and confidence in government) or at least neutralize negative effects (in the case of social trust). Just as news media may foster cynicism, so too may they foster faith. In times of crisis, a progovernment consensus of elites that is transmitted to the public by media coverage—and perhaps enhanced by patriotic journalism—may even serve an important purpose in bringing the nation together. Yet one could also argue that the post-

September 11, 2001, news coverage had troubling implications of its own. Indeed, one might raise concerns about whether coverage dominated by progovernment messages and symbols gives citizens the information necessary to engage in critical deliberation about important decisions.

Appendix Sample Characteristics

For the panel survey, the average length of the first interview was around fifteen minutes; the average length of the second and third interviews was around ten minutes. Of the 417 respondents interviewed in all three waves, just more than half were women (53 percent). Twenty-eight percent had a high school education or less, another 29 percent had some education beyond high school but no college degree, 26 percent had earned a college degree, and 17 percent had postgraduate training. Family income broke down as follows: less than \$30,000, 21 percent; between \$30,000 and \$50,000, 22 percent; between \$50,000 and \$75,000, 24 percent, between \$75,000 and \$100,000, 12 percent; and more than \$100,000, 11 percent. Ten percent refused to give their income. Ten percent came of age (i.e., turned eighteen) in the 1990s or later, 17 percent during the 1980s, 24 percent during the 1970s, 27 percent during the 1960s, 14 percent during the 1950s, and 9 percent during the 1940s or before.^a Forty-one percent of respondents described themselves as Democrats or leaning Democratic, 11 percent described themselves as independents, and 47 percent described themselves as Republican or leaning Republican. African-Americans and Hispanics were underrepresented within the sample (less than 5 percent for each). As is often the case with panel data, our respondents also overrepresented the educated and somewhat underrepresented those with lower incomes when compared to census data. According to the 2000 census, 48 percent of the population twenty-five and older have a high school degree or less, 27 percent have some college or an associate degree, 16 percent have a college degree, and 9 percent have an advanced degree; 29 percent make less than \$25,000, 29 percent make between \$25,000 and \$50,000, 19 percent make between \$50,000 and \$75,000, 10 percent make between \$75,000 and \$100,000, and 12 percent make more than \$100,000.

When we compared the panel respondents (the 417 respondents who answered all three interviews) to the initial sample of 1,235 respondents on the demographic and attitudinal measures discussed in this article, the differences between the panel and the full sample from the first wave were insignificant except in the cases of education, age, and social trust; even here the differences were small.^b

Opinion Search, Inc., of Ottawa, Canada, conducted the interviews. We computed response rate using American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) guidelines as follows: response rate = completed interviews/completed interviews + partial interviews + refusals + language problems + unknown eligibility. We estimated the percentage of numbers of unknown eligibility that would have been eligible by using the same proportion as we found to be eligible among those we did reach. The response rate for the first wave of the panel survey was 16 percent, with 34 percent of the original respondents completing both of the subsequent waves of the survey. The cooperation rate for the second wave (completes/completes + refusals) was 78 percent. The cooperation rate for the third wave was 80 percent. Clearly, our response rate necessitates caution in generalizing the results to the American public. On the other hand, the trends in political trust and social trust within our panel are consistent with the trends found in other national surveys at the time. Moreover, in this study we focus not on the absolute

levels of political and social trust but on the relative trends in these forms of trust, as well as on the effects of media use on each.

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- a. Numbers may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
 - b. The panel respondents exhibit higher social trust than the full sample of first-wave respondents. This is not surprising given their willingness to participate in three consecutive surveys with a stranger.

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Notes

1. Of course, media use is not the only possible influence, or even the most important influence, on political and social trust (see Nye et al. [1997], Putnam [2000], and Uslaner [2002] for further discussion). Our goal in this article is not to provide a full accounting of what shapes various forms of trust. Rather, we focus on understanding the nature of the relationship between media use and trust during the aftermath of September 11, 2001.
2. Early research on political trust focused on whether these measures of it reflected a general orientation toward the political regime (Miller 1974a, 1974b) or support for the particular government of the moment (Citrin 1974; Citrin and Green 1986). We do not dismiss the claim that political trust reflects views on the current government, although we think that evaluations of specific institutions should be more dependent on evaluations of the particular actors and the particular actions taken by the current government. Moreover, other work (Brewer et al. 2003) shows that in this period political trust influenced but was not influenced by evaluations of specific institutions.
3. In general, these studies imply that content differences drive differences between television and newspapers. Newspapers are presumed to be less negative than television news (see Moy and Pfau 2000). Drawing on the British case, Newton (1999) argues that it is not the form but the content of the media that matters. Thus, the effect of television news may be different from the effect of other types of television programming and the effect of quality newspapers different from that of tabloids.
4. But see Hetherington and Nelson (2003), who suggest that lack of opposition may in fact be a response to the rally itself. They argue the lack of opposition voices may help to explain the duration, if not the origin, of rallies in presidential approval.
5. The three additional items in the National Election Studies (NES) trust in government battery were included in the survey: "Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?" "Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked?" and "Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?" We report results for these items below, but in the text we focus on the general trust measure. This measure has not only been used the most extensively but is also the most relevant in the context at hand: We are more interested in how the events of September 11 shaped general trust in government than in how they shaped views on whether

the government is run by big interests, whether politicians are crooks, or whether government wastes tax money.

6. In all waves of the survey, respondents reported watching nightly network news more often than cable news channels. Our survey also included a measure of how often respondents watched local news; when we included this as part of the measure of television news use, our results did not substantively change.
7. Comparing our results from the first wave with those from a May 2001 Gallup poll, we found a 10-point increase in the percentage of respondents expressing a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the FBI and a 14-point increase in the percentage expressing a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the CIA.
8. We also estimated these and all other equations reported in this article using ordered probit; doing so did not alter our substantive findings. When we estimated the same regression equation for the other three NES trust-in-government measures, we found that television news had a substantial and significant positive effect on whether respondents felt the government is run for the benefit of all the people but no effect on whether respondents thought those running the government are crooked or waste tax money. Newspaper use was a significant predictor of views on whether those running the government are crooked and waste money; in each case, those who read the paper more regularly were more likely to give trusting responses.
9. At the same time, it is interesting that when we estimated a model for patriotism that included all of the other independent variables in the model describe above, we found a positive and statistically significant coefficient for television news use (we failed to find a similar effect for newspaper use). Thus, television news consumption may have partly fostered the patriotic sentiments that, in turn, fostered trust in government and confidence in government institutions.
10. The change in media use measures were constructed by subtracting the first-wave measure from the third-wave measure. The mean change in newspaper use among panel respondents was $-.02$; for television use it was $-.06$ (change in means for television significant at $p < .01$).
11. The unconditional change score model assumes that prior values of the dependent variable have no influence on current values or change in the dependent variable, a potentially problematic assumption in the case at hand. Durbin-Wu-Hausman tests for endogeneity showed no problem with the ordinary least squares (OLS) estimates including the lagged dependent variable.
12. Using ordered probit, we also found significant effects for patriotism on confidence in the presidency ($p < .10$), the military ($p < .05$), and the CIA ($p < .05$).
13. The weaker effects were not due to the reduced sample size in the panel. We reestimated the equations for trust and confidence in the first wave using only the panel respondents for comparison purposes. Among panel respondents only, the effect of television news use was diminished from wave 1 to wave 3 in each case: Its effect on trust in government went from $.14$ to $.09$; on confidence in the presidency, from $.07$ to $-.00$; on Congress, from $.14$ to $.02$, on the military, from $.08$ to $.05$; on the FBI, from $.11$ to $.02$; and on the CIA, from $.19$ to $.11$. Thus, our results suggest that the impact of contemporaneous television news use on trust in government and confidence in government institutions faded over the course of the year following September 11: Its mean effect across the dependent variables declined from $.11$ in the first wave (and $.12$ among first-wave *panel* respondents) to $.05$ in the third wave. Proportionally, the effect of patriotism did not decline in the same way: Using the same cross-sectional model of third-wave effects, the mean effect of patriotism across dependent variables declined from $.25$ in the first wave (and $.25$ among first-wave *panel* respondents) to $.21$ in the third wave.

14. Brehm and Rahn (1997) found evidence of a reciprocal but asymmetric relationship: Engagement and social trust are positively related to each other, but the effect of trust on engagement is significantly weaker than the effect of engagement on trust.
15. The study (available at <http://www.journalism.org/resources/research/reports/normality/>) looked at 2,496 stories in a selection of newspapers, news magazines, nightly news broadcasts, network morning shows, Sunday and weeknight talk shows, prime time newsmagazines, and cable nightly newscasts in three key periods (September 13-15, November 13-15, and December 13-15). The researchers coded statements and assertions as *entirely pro-U.S. response*, *predominantly so*, *mixed*, *predominantly anti-official U.S. response*, or *entirely anti-official U.S. response*.

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