

The Nation; Selling the Government Like Soap; It Seems to Work

BYLINE: By JUDITH MILLER

RONALD REAGAN was fond of observing that possibly the biggest lie in the English language was: "Hi, I'm from the Federal Government and I'm here to help you."

If Americans distrusted their Government when Mr. Reagan took office, they do so with a vengeance today, according to a new book edited by three Harvard professors, whose theme was a major topic at the American Political Science Association's annual gathering in Washington earlier this month.

But curiously, some Federal agencies are more popular -- or less unpopular -- than others, say Joseph S. Nye Jr., Philip D. Zelikow and David C. King of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, who also offer an explanation.

The most popular agency, Harris and Roper polls have shown, has long been the United States Postal Service, which has not accepted any taxpayer dollars since 1982 and for the last two years has turned a profit. Second is the military, and third is the Supreme Court.

Although patriotism is fairly constant, that may not be why the military is well liked; rather, the armed services are popular, Mr. Nye argues in the new book, "Why People Don't Trust Government," because, like the post office, they advertise on television. As for the Supreme Court, Mr. Zelikow said in an interview that the courts, and the Supreme Court, are very much on the airwaves in popular television serials.

"Americans may say that they do not trust the media," he said. "But what they see on television seems to seep in and affect their perceptions of government."

E.J. Dionne, a Washington Post columnist and author of several books on government, wondered whether that theory might prompt other government agencies to urge supporters to pay for ads -- or "public service announcements," since they can't use taxpayer money for self-promotion. (The army says its ads promote recruiting, not the army's image.) "I can see the jingle now: 'Be all that you can be, Postal Service's slogan, for the Transportation Department.

Pitching the Arts

Champions of the National Endowment for the Arts, which Congressional conservatives are trying to shut down, have joined CBS, Bravo and others in producing public service announcements about the importance of the arts. But Mr. Dionne said he was skeptical about whether television advertising is so powerful. The most unpopular agencies, he noted, are usually those charged with solving the most unsolvable problems. "It's easier to deliver the mail and even fight a war than it is to end welfare dependency or teen pregnancy," he said."

James Q. Wilson, a political scientist and Mr. Nye's fellow panelist in Washington, said: "People also tend to think better of agencies with which they have direct and satisfying contact. Whereas most Government agencies tell us what not to do, Americans tend to favor those that do something for us -- say, deliver letters."

While the Harvard professors say their theory is yet to be fully tested by polling research, Sandra Harding, a spokeswoman for the Postal Service, credited the \$135 million the agency spent through four private advertising agencies last year with "improving the recognition and sale of our products." Ms. Harding said 72 percent of Americans said in polls that they receive "excellent" service for their dollar from the Postal Service.

Lieut. Col. James Sullivan, the army's chief of marketing and advertising, said that the goal was "not to make a kid decide to enlist based on a TV ad, but to make kid predisposed to listen to what the army has to say about the opportunities and benefits of enlisting."

In the 1990's, the army's ad budget fluctuated between \$76 million and \$35 million. The level of spending, Colonel Sullivan said, made a measurable difference. In an annual poll taken by the Pentagon, called the Youth Attitudinal Tracking Study, the "positive propensity rate" dropped from 19 percent in 1990 to about 12 percent by 1992, after the army's ad budget fell to \$50 million. The ad budget stayed flat until 1994, and was not restored to its previous levels until 1996. In the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1, it will reach \$86 million. Adopting Madison Avenue argot, he said, "We've stopped the decline in positive propensity."

Copyright 1997 News World Communications, Inc.

The Washington Times

December 23, 1997, Tuesday, Final Edition

HEADLINE: Symptoms of eroding faith in government

BYLINE: Benjamin P. Tyree; THE WASHINGTON TIMES

An intriguing sign of the times is that leading public-policy academics associated with a pre-eminent school of public service have come out with a new 340-page book examining the collapse of public confidence in the U.S. government.

"Why People Don't Trust Government," published recently by Harvard University Press and replete with polling and other data, weighs several differing and sometimes complementary explanations. Some seem near mirror images of ideas and reactions espoused by conservative thinkers. They may indicate a growing convergence of thought across the political spectrum about what ails America, and the need for innovative answers.

Social disintegration is one concern, as both a cause and effect of the crisis of confidence in government: And how would this affect coping with a national emergency?

Joseph Nye, dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and an editor of the book, noted that public confidence in government at the federal level has gone into a free fall from 75 percent in 1964 to about 22 percent this year, significantly below the levels of state and local governments. The top reasons pollsters have found are that the government "is inefficient, wastes money and spends money on the wrong things."

But government isn't alone. Public confidence has notably declined in a number of key institutions -including universities, large private businesses, the medical profession and the news media. A similar erosion of respect for institutional authority was noted in many other advanced countries.

And there are major social problems whose root causes may lie largely outside the government. For example, Mr. Nye noted the rise in divorce and decline in the family as individual desires become increasingly paramount: "It means less attention to the children, less attention to the basic unit of the community."

Mr. Nye and associate professor Philip D. Zelikow said, "Many people think government does too much; almost equal numbers think government is not doing enough." They said, "Many Americans feel, with excellent cause, that public safety and the administration of justice have deteriorated sharply in the last generation."

KSG professor Jane Mansbridge said public dissatisfaction may spring from the constant discovery of new social rights, involving transfers of resources to variously defined minorities. "The current debate about rights often ignores or trivializes the cost of rights, assuming that the rights violator is detracting from the general welfare."

She also cited as a source of diminished trust the decline in voluntary civic associations, extolled by 19th century French writer Alexis de Tocqueville as a central feature of American democracy. And she warned that, "Declining trust will erode the citizenry's willingness both to pay taxes and to fight

for the nation's security." Mr. Nye also suggested mistrust could affect even the "voluntary compliance with laws."

Professor Gary Orren said, "The public has not only lost faith in the ability of government to solve problems, but it has actually come to believe that government involvement will just make matters worse." Another essayist suggested that political polarization, with the two main parties dominated by their "extremes," tends to foster public distrust.

In a reverse spin on conservative criticism of bias in the media, Mr. Orren said, "People have less direct experience with the federal government and are therefore more reliant on the news media -and the increasingly negative coverage of government - for their impressions."

Mr. Nye and Mr. Zelikow suggested the military may enjoy an uneviabable positive public image because, like the Postal Service, it advertises. But perhaps these institutions, even if spotted by occasional scandal, are widely seen as more necessary than some others.

For undermining trust, Mr. Orren cited the "ideological migrations" of the 1996 presidential candidates, such as President Clinton having followed up his proposals for a massive health care reform with declarations that the "era of big government is over." Mr. Orren said, "The public couldn't help but wonder what principles, if any, Clinton and Dole were guided by. In stark contrast was the case of Ronald Reagan . . . admired and respected [for] his political integrity. He seemed to have ideological consistency, fidelity to a fixed set of convictions."

Robert Z. Lawrence, KSG professor of international trade investment, suggested that government's failure to meet economic expectations was an inadequate explanation for disenchantment. "The timing and nature of these [polling] responses suggest that events such as the Vietnam War and Watergate, and a perception that the expansion of government actually alienated it from the needs of ordinary citizens, are far more important factors."

And former Harvard President Derek Bok said the state of America has not been solely disappointing: "With respect to the economy, for example, the gross domestic product has almost tripled in real dollars since 1960, and unemployment and inflation have come down to levels only slightly above those of the early 1960s." He also cited wider access to college education, improved opportunities for women and minorities, and enhancement of Social Security and Medicaid and Medicare benefits.

However, professor emeritus Richard Neustadt saw the stunted prospects of America's blue-collar middle class as a source of political instability: "These men are forced to recognize that they cannot keep pace, nor can their sons, without costly college educations." He suggested educational assistance, tax breaks, "or best, some means to share in productivity increases. For otherwise, these people will continue to thrash around, politically, until they do real damage - for example, by surrendering to populist simplicities."

The foundations for a new political order may have yet to be thought out. History professor Ernest R. May suggested the lack of a fresh body of new ideas is a central dilemma: "If we are to obtain manageable understanding of what should be the scope of government in the approaching century, we need to start building a stock of such ideas, not just polishing the surfaces of ideas appropriate for times past."

WHY PEOPLE DON'T TRUST GOVERNMENT

EDITED BY

JOSEPH S. NYE, JR.

PHILIP D. ZELIKOW

DAVID C. KING

Preface

The idea for this book began with the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in April 1995. The shock of the terrorist attack was followed by a troubled and confusing debate about the role of government in the United States. Americans have always had a healthy skepticism about concentrated power, but at the time of the bombing the levels of trust seemed to be at a new low. The founding fathers created checks and balances and divided power between the states and the federal government because they cared about preserving individual liberties. But they also knew that effective government was essential to the new republic's promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

What will effective government mean in the next century? We have been told that the era of big government is over, but no one has yet articulated what will take its place. Clearly change is needed. We are witnessing a widespread loss of confidence in and a dissatisfaction with government as it is currently functioning. While the possible reasons for this situation are many, the simple fact that the world itself is changing rapidly stands as the primary cause. Mid-twentieth-century visions of government must yield to new conceptions consistent with an information-based economy and society.

In an effort to understand the changes needed, the Kennedy School of Government has inaugurated a multiyear research and outreach project that will consider and articulate Visions of Governance for the Twenty-first Century. The project will explore what peo-

ple and communities want from government, from the private sector, and from nonprofit organizations. Participants will consider the areas in which government, both in the United States and abroad, is currently succeeding and failing. Scholars will work with civic leaders and citizens to study the balance between individual liberty and the needs of the community and how societal trends are affecting that balance. The project will address issues such as the relationship between markets and governments, the distribution of public power, the emergence of mediating institutions, and the processes of public decision-making.

Understanding governance is central to the mission of the Kennedy School. Our multidisciplinary faculty is involved in research, teaching, and public outreach, all of which contribute to better public service in democracies. The Kennedy School does not stand for large or small government but for clarity in thinking about the role of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors in managing the common aspects of the lives of citizens—in other words, governance. This book, which focuses on why confidence in government has plummeted, does not provide solutions. It is a first step in our new project and a continuation of our mission to foster better understanding and improved public service in our democracy.

Many have contributed to this volume and this project. We are grateful to members of the Senior Study Group, many of whom participated in our special meeting at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire: Graham Allison, Alan Altshuler, Francis Bator, Robert Blendon, Derek Bok, George Borjas, John Donahue, former congressman Mickey Edwards, David Ellwood, Henry Louis Gates, Mary Ann Glendon, Stanley Hoffmann, Samuel Huntington, Christopher Jencks, Marvin Kalb, Joseph Kalt, Robert Lawrence, Jane Mansbridge, Harvey Mansfield, Theodore Marmor, Ernest May, Thomas McCraw, Mark Moore, Richard Neustadt, Joseph Newhouse, Katherine Newman, Gary Orren, Thomas Patterson, Paul Peterson, Susan Pharr, Roger Porter, Robert Putnam, former governor Barbara Roberts, Michael Sandel, Fred Schauer, former congressman Phil Sharp, Theda Skocpol, Raymond Vernon, Shirley Williams, William Julius Wilson, and Richard Zeckhauser. We are also grateful for the comments and criticisms of numerous colleagues, including Robert Keohane, Pippa Norris, Richard Parker, Daniel Yankelovich, and Jane Wales. Careful readers

will note frequent citations to papers written for the Bretton Woods meeting. Scholars who wish to examine these more closely may do so by referring to our web site, <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/visions>.

We thank the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Parker G. Montgomery, the Daniel and Joanna S. Rose Fund, and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation for their support.

Last but not least, we are grateful to the able staff efforts of Lori Carr Treviño, Cathy Coyle, Robin Worth, Sara Porter, Zach Karabell, Janet Fletcher Hauswirth, and Sarah Peterson.

Joseph S. Nye, Jr.
Philip D. Zelikow
David C. King

Introduction: The Decline of Confidence in Government

Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

Confidence in government has declined. In 1964, three-quarters of the American public said that they trusted the federal government to do the right thing most of the time. Today only a quarter of Americans admit to such trust. The numbers are only slightly better—35 percent—for state government. Some polls show even lower levels. A 1995 poll showed a confidence rate of 15 percent at the federal level, 23 percent at the state level, and 31 percent at the local level. In 1997, the same poll showed a slight improvement to 22, 32, and 38 percent at the federal, state, and local levels, still far behind the numbers three decades ago. The top reasons given for distrusting government are that it is inefficient, wastes money, and spends on the wrong things.¹

Government is not alone. Over the past three decades public confidence has dropped in half for many major institutions: 61 percent to 30 percent for universities; 55 percent to 21 percent for major companies; 73 percent to 29 percent for medicine; and 29 percent to 14 percent for journalism. In a 1996 poll, 30 percent of the public said that they had hardly any confidence in the leaders of the press—about the same as for Congress.² Nor is the United States alone. Canada,

Britain, Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Ireland have also seen some decline of trust in government.³ In Japan, mistrust of politics has been high for several decades, but more recently it has spread to include the bureaucracy as well.⁴

If the decline of confidence affected only government or only the United States, the issue might seem rather straightforward. Perhaps the federal government has outgrown its public support. In 1929, before the Great Depression and World War II, the size of the federal budget relative to the gross national product was under 3 percent; today it is 19 percent. (State and local governments account for another 14 percent.) Public spending at all levels of government increased from 18 percent of GNP in 1947 to 30 percent in 1973, but only slightly thereafter.⁵ Although this is one of the lowest levels among advanced countries, it represents a considerable departure from the American past. Moreover, the composition of what the government does has changed dramatically. In 1954, 70 percent of federal expenditure was for national defense; today it is closer to 17 percent.

For the past decade the overall size of the federal budget relative to the GNP has not increased. And within that total, the areas of growth have been transfer payments—Social Security and health care—that are popular with the public. Another reason to be suspicious of simple explanations such as the idea that government has outgrown its support is the drop in confidence in many other major institutions. Have companies, churches, universities, and medicine also grown too fast, or are there broader causes? The best explanations should tell us something about government, but in a larger context.

Does It Matter?

Whatever the symptoms, we should not overly worry about causes if the consequences do not matter. The "So what?" question comes first. One possibility is that the current symptoms are a sign of health. The United States was founded with a mistrust of government. The American Constitution was deliberately set up in such a way that a King George could never rule over us again. And some might add, "Nor anybody else." In the federalist debates that divided the early republic, there was clearly a difference between the Thomas Jefferson

side :
Unite
felt th
says v
gover
result

Se
but at
polls a
the wo
wheth
say ye
those c
90 per
the cor
in 1968
rotten :
Milicias
less cor
four de

Son
others r
process
we see
example
Compar
larized,
campaign
prevailin
nental li
to the W
child. Pe
became
be the 19
more "nc

None
degree ex
hatred. B

side and the Alexander Hamilton side. Hamilton believed that the United States needed a strong central government, whereas Jefferson felt that the less government the better. A long Jeffersonian tradition says we should not worry too much about the level of confidence in government. If the polls reflect wariness rather than cynicism, the result may be healthy.

Second, if you look not at the way government works day to day but at the underlying constitutional framework, the public opinion polls are still positive. If you ask Americans what is the best place in the world to live, 80 percent say the United States. If you ask them whether they like their democratic system of government, 90 percent say yes. If one looks at the Eurobarometer polls in Europe, even in those countries where there is a decline in confidence in government, 90 percent are "satisfied with a democratic form of government."⁶ At the constitutional regime level, the current situation is not like France in 1968—much less 1789! Most people do not feel that the system is rotten and has to be overthrown. Oklahoma City was an aberration. Militias are not the norm. Something is steady, even though there is less confidence in governmental institutions than there was three or four decades ago.

Some aspects of the current mood are probably cyclical, while others represent discontent with gridlock and bickering in the political process rather than deep disillusion with government. Part of what we see is a cyclical swing in the pendulum of public attitudes. For example, 1900 also saw a prevailing mood of nationwide irritation. Compared with the recent past, party politics has become more polarized, but nasty politics is nothing new. In the 1884 presidential campaign between James G. Blaine and Grover Cleveland, the two prevailing slogans were "Blaine, Blaine, James G. Blaine, the continental liar from the State of Maine" and "Ma, Ma, where's my Pa? Gone to the White House, ha, ha, ha"—referring to Cleveland's illegitimate child. Perhaps the current problem is that expectations of government became too high after World War II.⁷ In that case, the anomaly would be the 1950s, and the solution would be to reduce expectations to a more "normal" historical level. Then the mood may improve.

Nonetheless, there remains a case for concern. Differences of degree exist between loss of confidence, dissatisfaction, cynicism, and hatred. But what is the connection between them? Does low confi-

dence tend to become cumulative? If politicians and the press repeat as conventional wisdom that government cannot do anything right, does that breed cynicism? Business experts talk of "demarketing campaigns" in which consumers are urged not to buy certain products. Since Jimmy Carter's campaign of 1976, presidential candidates have tended to "run against Washington." Now most politicians do. Studies show that over the past three decades the media have tended to report on politics and the government with a much more negative slant.⁸ This might not matter if the only casualty were the vanity of politicians, but over time such devaluation of government and politics could affect the strength of democratic institutions. Social scientists do not fully understand the relationship between satisfaction with day-to-day government and support for democracy as a regime, but one thing is clear: the future of democratic governance matters very much.

Three ways in which institutional confidence and regime stability might be connected are through the willingness of the public to provide such crucial resources as tax dollars, the willingness of bright young people to go into government, and voluntary compliance with laws.⁹ If people believe that government is incompetent and cannot be trusted, they are less likely to provide these resources. Without critical resources, government cannot perform well, and if government cannot perform, people will become more dissatisfied and distrustful of it. Such a cumulative downward spiral could erode support for democracy as a form of governance. Even if government were cut back significantly from its current one-third of our GNP to something like a quarter, that is still a large part of our common life to be poorly administered.

In the next century, the information and biotechnology revolutions and the increasing importance of the global economy will pose new challenges. Some argue that the best thing for government to do is to get out of the way and leave the responses to the private sector. Certainly government needs to adapt to new conceptions consistent with an information-based economy and society in which private and nonprofit actors are likely to play a larger role but a weak and ineffective government performance could be costly. For example, in a global economy, political stability attracts capital; education provides crucial skills; basic research in science and technology enhances competitiveness and living standards; and protection of intellectual

property rights
goods depend
while the econ
sense of ex
proliferation
that will rec

In addition
the decline
The U.S. Co
democracy.
producing
it was desig
liberties. If
using polls
public via
mocracy w
and pulling
Cynicism a
reduce par
signs of th
several are
a continuir
deliberativ

The po
institutions
salt. Surve
targets. Res
that are as
and sampl
skepticism
sky is not f
lies somev
of this bo
that we ha
of democr
does gove
and How
we ask w

property rights becomes more important. Provision of such public goods depends on effective government. In the defense domain, while the end of the cold war seems to have reduced the traditional sense of external threat, the rise of transnational terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are new types of threat that will require effective government responses.

In addition to the costs of ineffective government performance, the decline of trust may have a cost in terms of democratic values. The U.S. Constitution created institutions that encouraged deliberative democracy. The American system was not designed to be efficient in producing action. As James Madison wrote in *The Federalist Papers*, it was designed to encourage extensive debate and the protection of liberties. If the political process becomes merely political consultants using polls and focus groups to learn what politicians should tell the public via thirty-second advertisements, Madison's deliberative democracy will shrink to a "thin" democracy. Except for writing checks and pulling a lever in a voting booth, the citizen's role will wither. Cynicism about the political process and the elected government may reduce participation and the quality of our democracy. Despite some signs of the "thinning of democracy," recent studies indicate that several areas of participation remain strong. The question is whether a continuing decline in confidence would seriously erode Madison's deliberative democracy.¹⁰

The polls showing a loss of confidence in government and other institutions over the past three decades must be taken with a grain of salt. Survey research has its limits. Polls are snapshots of moving targets. Responses vary with the phrasing and context of the questions that are asked. The data are incomplete. And even if the questions and sampling procedures were perfect, a degree of wariness and skepticism about government is healthy for a democracy. But if the sky is not falling, neither is all well with the world. A clear assessment lies somewhere between Chicken Little and Pollyanna. The purpose of this book is not to provide solutions, but to clear the ground so that we have a better understanding of where we are in the evolution of democratic governance. We do this by asking three questions: What does government do? (its "scope"); How is it doing? (its performance); and How is it seen by its citizens? (its perceived performance). Then we ask why things have changed over the past three decades by

examining a series of political, economic, and social-cultural hypotheses about causes.

Scope of Government

The scope of government has not expanded constantly throughout history. On the contrary, the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century removed government from many of the religious and moral aspects of daily life and left those to privileged private life. The U.S. Constitution was a product of Enlightenment thinking. Government was to (1) establish justice, (2) ensure domestic tranquillity, (3) provide for the common defense, (4) promote the general welfare, and (5) secure the blessings of liberty. This is a limited but potentially expansive list that can (and has) been used to justify a broad range of issues. While nineteenth-century government was limited, it played a significant role in education, public works, and the allocation of new lands as well as defense, justice, and order. At the turn of the twentieth century, in response to the rise of large corporations that accompanied the second industrial revolution, government became a counterbalance to private power through antitrust and regulatory roles. Even before the Great Depression, the American political system turned Civil War pensions and laws protecting women and children into an extensive redistribution system.¹¹ The largest expansion of government's scope, however, was in response to the depression, World War II, the cold war, and the accompanying rise of the welfare state.

A possible explanation of the current dissatisfaction with government in the United States is that its scope has expanded too much, that it has intruded into areas best left to private life. At first glance, responses to poll questions only partly support this view. When asked why they distrust the federal government, respondents to polls tend to stress poor performance more than ambitious scope. Eighty-one percent say government is wasteful and inefficient, and 79 percent say it spends too much money on the wrong things, but only half that number say that it is interfering too much in people's lives or that the problems that it is trying to solve cannot be solved by the federal government.¹² If 40 percent feel that government scope is too broad, that is an important fact for politicians to consider, but in a democracy

ial-cultural hypothe-

constantly through-
it in the eighteenth
religious and moral
private life. The U.S.
inking. Government
quillity, (3) provide
ral welfare, and (5)
it potentially expan-
road range of issues.
ed, it played a sig-
e allocation of new
turn of the twentieth
ns that accompanied
ecame a counterbal-
regulatory roles. Even
litical system turned
and children into an
expansion of govern-
epression, World War
ne welfare state.
efaction with govern-
expanded too much,
e life. At first glance,
is view. When asked
ndents to polls tend
s scope. Eighty-one
t, and 79 percent say
s, but only half that
ple's lives or that the
olved by the federal
scope is too broad,
; but in a democracy

one might expect a roughly even split between those who want more and less government. For much of the period of its greatest growth (from the mid-1930s to the mid-1960s), government remained popular, and the areas of most rapid growth in the federal budget—Social Security and Medicare—enjoy broad support. And despite their lack of confidence in government, a majority of Americans believe government should regulate business on matters of environment, product safety, unsafe working conditions, discriminatory hiring, and failed pension funds.¹³

It is also possible that the American public holds inconsistent views about what it wants from government. Majorities want the federal budget balanced, but not at the cost of cutting large programs like Social Security or Medicare. This lack of consensus on what to cut makes it difficult for any party to fulfill what people say they want of government. It is also possible that public concern about the scope of the federal government has less to do with its greater share of GNP (which has not grown significantly in the past two decades) than with its regulatory role in environmental and safety matters, or its role in promoting racial and gender change. Whatever the substantive gains in safety or justice, a sense of intrusiveness accompanies such roles. Federal actions promoting racial integration of schools, for example, created resentments in segments of the public both in South Boston as well as the South.

If one looks at the question of what government *should* do, one can identify at least three different normative models that Americans use. One is the microeconomist's model that can be traced back to Adam Smith. Government plays a limited but crucial role in providing defense, establishing property rights, maintaining justice, and creating public works and institutions that make commerce possible. A second is a more macroeconomic view that has arisen in this century and argues that the government should also dampen business cycles and pay attention to distributional effects of markets. Certainly management of the economy now seems to be part of what the public wants, for electoral studies show that the strongest predictor of presidential elections is the condition of the economy.¹⁴ A third approach, the civic virtue model, holds that government should go beyond economic concerns and become involved in promoting the public and private virtues of the republic.¹⁵ Purely neutral government is impossible,

because citizens want some discussion of what is good. But how far the government should go in determining the content of the good and enforcing it in the private lives of its citizens is a matter of considerable current contention. Ernest May explores these and other issues of scope in Chapter 1.

Performance

People say they are dissatisfied with the performance of government, and in a democracy that is one important measure. But performance is more complicated than it first appears. Performance compared with what? Expectations? The past? Other countries? Other institutions such as businesses or nonprofit organizations? And what are people willing to pay for government efficiency, either in dollars or other values? The founding fathers designed a governmental system that protected liberties at the price of efficiency. A federal system with separated institutions sharing powers is not designed to optimize performance. Do people want this changed? Probably not. Would they if new problems like terrorism produced a "domestic Pearl Harbor"? Perhaps.

Another problem with measuring performance is distinguishing general outcomes from specific outputs of government. People may be properly unhappy with poor social outcomes even though the quality of government outputs does not change. For example, American test scores in science and mathematics compare poorly with those of a number of other nations, but the role of schools may be less important than the role of family values and the general culture in explaining those differences.¹⁶ Or as Theodore Marmor points out, the Canadian, Dutch, British, and American publics all express dissatisfaction with their national health care systems, although the role of government differs. (The U.S. public expresses greater dissatisfaction, and there is less governmental involvement in America than in other countries.)¹⁷ Further complications arise from the unevenness of public knowledge. For example, Americans express more dissatisfaction with foreign aid than almost any other aspect of foreign policy, but they overestimate the amount of foreign aid given by an order of magnitude.¹⁸

good. But how far
nt of the good and
ter of considerable
nd other issues of

rmance of govern-
measure. But per-
Performance com-
r countries? Other
izations? And what
cy, either in dollars
overnmental system
federal system with
signed to optimize
bly not. Would they
estic Pearl Harbor”?

ce is distinguishing
nment. People may
s even though the
or example, Ameri-
re poorly with those
schools may be less
e general culture in
armor points out, the
express dissatisfac-
though the role of
reater dissatisfaction,
merica than in other
unevenness of pub-
more dissatisfaction
foreign policy, but
ven by an order of

In their chapters that follow, Derek Bok and Gary Orren try to sort out real changes in governmental performance from perceived (including misperceived) changes. One important step is to unbundle the cluster of activities that we call “government and politics.” Performance differs by fields and by institutions. For example, over the past few decades, security for the elderly and the quality of air and water have improved in the United States. In a 1995 poll, 44 percent of the public credited the federal government with improving the quality of air, and 23 percent gave it credit for reducing poverty over age 65.¹⁹ And some government institutions rate higher than others. While only 10 percent of the public reported in 1996 that they had a great deal of confidence in Congress, 31 percent had a great deal of confidence in the Supreme Court, and 47 percent in the military.²⁰ The latter case reflects a recovery from a 27 percent level during the Vietnam War, and may reflect not only good performance during the Gulf War but also the relative success of the military in dealing with the drug, race, and education issues that have plagued modern American society. (We discuss this further in the concluding chapter.)

A major puzzle in the relationship between dissatisfaction and government performance is understanding how distant people feel from government. For instance, while polls show a low rating for Congress, they also show a higher rating for the local U.S. representative. Although there is criticism of the school system, people express higher satisfaction with their local school. As noted earlier, there is a somewhat higher level of satisfaction with state and local compared with the federal government.²¹ Values may play a role here. Even if government makes mistakes, there may be greater willingness to tolerate mistakes that are made by “people like us.” On the other hand, in a 1995 poll, only 37 percent responded that their mistrust of the federal government was because the policies did not reflect their own beliefs and values.²²

If mistrust is not closely related to personal values and experience, then explanations may lie in generalized beliefs or moods. Understanding this relationship between distance and perceived performance bears on the issue of devolution. Some observers believe that more devolution to the state and local level will restore confidence in government; others believe that devolution will merely shift the spotlight of criticism to the local level. If the public reaction to government

had a clear, one-to-one relationship with performance, there would be little to explain why attitudes have changed over the past three decades. But the ambiguities in the relationship between real and perceived performance, along with the decline of confidence in other major institutions besides government, suggest that larger causes are also involved.

Economic Causes of Dissatisfaction

In 1965, at the peak of confidence in government, Robert Lane discerned an increase in trust since the 1930s, which he attributed to economic improvement. His prediction that an age of affluence would also be one of trust and a "rapprochement between men and their government" did not prove accurate, however.²³

Robert Lawrence's chapter takes an economic cut at this puzzle. Perhaps the decline in confidence is the result of the economic slowdown. That could explain why it is happening across so many rich countries. The rate of growth during the first two and a half decades after World War II was much higher in all advanced economies than after 1974. Even though Japan's growth was high in the 1980s, it was lower than it was in the 1960s. As for the United States, the annual growth rate was 3.5 percent during the first postwar decades and then about 2.3 percent in the period after 1975, a 50 percent decline in growth rate. Over 20 years, that would be about \$2.5 trillion—enough to mean no government deficit or enough to give government the wherewithal to do some of the things it now cannot afford to do.²⁴

The slowdown of economic growth, we might hypothesize, has led to public dissatisfaction, which in turn has led to a search for political scapegoats. From 1979 to 1995, real hourly wages in the United States rose by about 5.5 percent, or one-third of a percent per year.²⁵ That contrast to the earlier postwar period is a possible reason that people would say something is not as good as it used to be and to blame it on government. A major problem with this hypothesis, however, is that it fits poorly with the timing of when confidence in government began to decline. In the United States (although not in Europe), the greatest drop in confidence occurred from 1964 to 1974,

when growth was fastest and accompanied by a rise in

Another related economic argument says that it is not really at issue is the end of provide almost an infinite lead to a depression of wages, particularly depresses the wage inequality, which in turn

This explanation sounds like a "down" explanation, but only about one-tenth of and the depression of wages much as it occurs in the there are spillover effects and the fact that multinational overseas can also depress to wage such a large drop has been with other rich ours. So while global competition be sufficient to explain

Robert Lawrence argues that trade can explain only changes in technology and technologies that are developed are right, global competition political dimension won't their lives because of local political reality in and of the theme that foreigners be good economics, but

Another hypothesis is on in the economic area of tion, an information revolution are to the end of of steam was to the end

when growth was fastest, and the recession of the early 1980s was accompanied by a rise of confidence in government.

Another related economic explanation is global competition. This argument says that it is not just the economic slowdown that matters but the popular view that the economic slowdown has been caused by global markets and competition. As some people put it, what is really at issue is the enormous rise of the East Asian economies that provide almost an infinite source of low-priced labor that is bound to lead to a depression of wages in the advanced countries. This particularly depresses the wages of the unskilled and leads to increased inequality, which in turn burdens the political system.

This explanation solves the timing problem of the larger "slowdown" explanation, but it faces another difficulty. Trade accounts for only about one-tenth of the American economy. And the slowdown and the depression of wages has occurred in the other 90 percent as much as it occurs in the part that deals with traded goods. Of course, there are spillover effects from wages in traded to nontraded goods, and the fact that multinational corporations can threaten to move jobs overseas can also depress wages. Still, trade may be too small a tail to wag such a large dog. In addition, 70 percent of American trade has been with other rich countries, where wages are just as high as ours. So while global competition has an important effect, it may not be sufficient to explain what's happening in the depression of wages.

Robert Lawrence and other economists think that international trade can explain only a part of what's going on. The real culprit is changes in technology and particularly what he calls skill-biased technologies that are depressing wages.²⁶ But even if the economists are right, global competitiveness and interdependence produce a political dimension worth noting. If people sense a loss of control of their lives because of larger competition in the world, that becomes a political reality in and of itself. So when Pat Buchanan campaigns on the theme that foreigners are causing people's problems, it may not be good economics, but it becomes a political reality.

Another hypothesis is that there is something still deeper going on in the economic area—the third industrial revolution. This revolution, an information revolution, means that computers and communications are to the end of the twentieth century what the introduction of steam was to the end of the eighteenth century or the introduction

of electricity was to the end of the nineteenth century. We are seeing a tremendous wave of technological innovation that takes twenty to forty years to work itself through the system. And in this dimension, according to Joseph Schumpeter, capitalism is a process of "creative destruction."²⁷ It has a positive and a negative effect at the same time. When the Rust Belt factories close, somebody suffers. When plants open in Silicon Valley, somebody else benefits.

This creative destruction is happening in almost all advanced countries. The Americans have responded to it by creating jobs, albeit often at low wages. The Europeans have responded to it by supporting incomes and thereby causing unemployment rates of 10 to 12 percent—and in some countries, a youth unemployment rate of 20 percent.²⁸ The ways in which different societies respond to this economic process can take different forms, but each creates a certain amount of turmoil, either with low wages or high unemployment. In addition, the development of information technology is increasing inequality. The people who win are those who are informationally advantaged, and those who lose are those without the education to cope. Thirty years ago a high school drop-out could go to an auto factory and get a good wage. Today he or she would be out of luck, as such jobs now require a high school diploma and perhaps more technical training so as to operate a numerically controlled machine tool.

In addition to those problems of creating a gap between the informationally advantaged and disadvantaged, creative destruction and restructuring often means downsizing. Firms lay off workers. This can be one way that productivity rises. But many of the people being laid off today are middle-class holders of white-collar jobs—something that was not as prevalent in the past. We are seeing the "democratization of insecurity." This produces a "politics of the anxious middle."²⁹ In the long run the country may profit from this creative destruction, but in the interim people feel insecure and anxious and then blame the government rather than the deeper economic and historical forces. But even here the causation is complicated. If the economy was the primary cause, one would expect to see the greatest decline in trust among the economic losers. Yet as Lawrence points out in his chapter, the decline of confidence in government is virtually the same for both winners and losers. Like the absence of a close

connection between the
mentioned earlier, this
expressed attitudes sug
general, ideological, or

Social and Cultural

Jane Mansbridge's c
about the causes of the
the alleged decline of so
concept, the ability of p
and networks that facil
believe that such skills ar
together in voluntary or
have a positive effect, n
a source of concern. R
voluntary groups such
or the Girl Scouts of Am
in some other groups—
Retired Persons—is risi
memberships, the mem
check in the mail for
Parent-Teacher Associat
learn to work together
participatory groups ren
Alexis de Tocqueville be
that undergirds our dem
challenged, but to the
about contributing to d
exploring.³²

Another aspect of d
sion of cultural change
developed societies hav
institutions, not just gov
respect for authority is
people switch from su
revolts" of the 1960s sa

connection between confidence and personal experience or values mentioned earlier, this lack of connection between economic and expressed attitudes suggests the need for explanations that are more general, ideological, or reflective of the broad public mood.

Social and Cultural Causes of Dissatisfaction

Jane Mansbridge's chapter looks at social and cultural hypotheses about the causes of the decline of confidence in government. One is the alleged decline of social capital. "Social capital" is a commonsense concept, the ability of people to work together. It is the trust, norms, and networks that facilitate coordinated action. Social scientists believe that such skills are developed in part through citizens working together in voluntary organizations.³⁰ While not all such organizations have a positive effect, most probably do, and their decline would be a source of concern. Robert Putnam has focused on the decline in voluntary groups such as the Parent-Teacher Association, the YMCA, or the Girl Scouts of America since the 1960s.³¹ Of course, participation in some other groups—for instance, the American Association of Retired Persons—is rising, but while such new groups have large memberships, the members rarely see one another. People send a check in the mail for dues, and that's about it. Members of the Parent-Teacher Association are more likely to see one another and to learn to work together. The argument here is that the decline in participatory groups removes the kind of intermediary institution that Alexis de Tocqueville believed essential to the structure of civil society that undergirds our democratic government. Putnam's thesis has been challenged, but to the extent that his data hold up, the hypothesis about contributing to decline of confidence in government is worth exploring.³²

Another aspect of decline in social capital is a longer-term dimension of cultural change. As Ronald Inglehart shows in Chapter 9, developed societies have experienced a long-term decline of trust in institutions, not just governments. Inglehart argues that the declining respect for authority is part of modern and postmodern values as people switch from survival to quality-of-life values.³³ The "youth revolts" of the 1960s saw a rapid increase in challenges to authority

and institutions, not only in the United States but in many other developed countries as well.

Western culture has seen a change in the balance between the individual and the community in the favor of greater individualism. This is a long-term secular trend. Divorce, for example, has increased in almost all advanced societies. One aspect of divorce is that some women have been liberated from abusive and unequal marriages. Women used to be trapped economically in unhappy marriages because there was virtually no way out. Men have also benefited from easier divorce. So one thing that divorce represents is a libertarian trend. The other thing divorce represents, however, is the decline of the family. It means less attention to the children, less attention to the basic unit of community. Divorce illustrates two sides of the same coin, as the ratio changes in the libertarian rather than the communitarian direction.

The decline of the family has important implications for both actual and perceived performance of government. Of the tasks for government, public education and preventing youth violence come high on the list of what people care most about. Both rest heavily on the family. Government can run schools, but if parents cannot run families well, government is not going to do very well on schools. Yet government is going to get much of the blame. People are not going to say, "I did a pretty lousy job as a parent, so I will not blame the schools or the government." They are more likely to say that the government is letting us down. Or many are likely to demand that government "do something" about family values even though government may be unable to reverse larger social causes.

Another dimension of this cultural change is our public political philosophy and its current emphasis on rights. Everybody has a right. There used to be a set of basic human rights about which people were in broad agreement. Now people seem to be claiming a right to everything, from a pension to a vacation. We have created a society of entitlements. The net effect is extraordinarily constraining on government. As government is constrained by court interpretations of entitlements, its effectiveness is reduced, and confidence is further diminished. Moreover, as Fred Schauer points out, rights have costs, and some people pay a price for the expansion of the rights of others. Losers are likely to blame this cost on government.³⁴ For example, the expansion of civil rights in the 1960s and 1970s benefited African-

Americans, but it angered the South from the Civil War. Social changes have led to the weakening of our confidence in some of these effects.

Political Causes

David King's and others' theories of political explanation of political explanation in government. None do more of the heavy lifting than the decline of confidence in government. war. Common defense is higher in wartime. opinion together. With differ more about government things fall apart. The of confidence in government wants to date the end of hypothesis does not fit

A second political explanation is the fault of poor leadership. Nixon. As the Orren and the est dips in the curve of confidence in Vietnam and the Vietnam are blamed for both major episodes that reduced confidence of press coverage during Watergate help to explain the duration. Why is confidence in office, confidence in percent to 44 percent in Reagan's second term. deeper explanation. I and Nixon.

A related explanation is corruption and dishonesty.

Americans, but it angered many whites and helped cause the defection of the South from the Democratic to the Republican coalition. Social changes have had large political effects, and these include a weakening of our confidence in government.³⁵ As Mansbridge argues, some of these effects are indirect as well as direct.

Political Causes of Dissatisfaction

David King's and Richard Neustadt's chapters examine a number of political explanations about the causes of the decline of confidence in government. None of the political hypotheses is vacuous, but some do more of the heavy lifting as explanations. One hypothesis is that the decline of confidence in government is due to the end of the cold war. Common defense is a public good, and willingness to sacrifice is higher in wartime. The cold war was the glue that held public opinion together. With the end of the cold war, people have come to differ more about government purposes. The cold war ends, and things fall apart. The trouble with this hypothesis is that the decline of confidence in government starts in the mid-1960s. So unless one wants to date the end of the cold war from the mid- to late 1960s, the hypothesis does not fit very well.

A second political hypothesis is that the decline in confidence is the fault of poor leaders—in particular Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. As the Orren and Blendon, et al. chapters describe, the sharpest dips in the curve of confidence occur after America's involvement in Vietnam and the Watergate incident in 1972. Johnson and Nixon are blamed for both misleading the public and becoming involved in episodes that reduced respect for government. The more hostile tenor of press coverage dates back to these events. Yet while Vietnam and Watergate help to explain the onset of the decline, they do not explain the duration. Why is it still going on? When Ronald Reagan came to office, confidence in government actually made an uptick from 25 percent to 44 percent in the early 1980s. But then it went down again in Reagan's second term and after.³⁶ This type of anomaly requires a deeper explanation. It is not sufficient to blame everything on Johnson and Nixon.

A related explanation for rising mistrust would be the growth of corruption and dishonesty in American politics. Many close observers,

however, doubt that such behavior has increased.³⁷ What *has* increased is media attention to scandal and public belief that politicians have become more corrupt. Certainly we have witnessed enough deceptive and dishonest behavior to fuel this belief, but it is difficult to make the case that increased corruption is the cause.

A fourth political explanation is "the World War II effect." World War II was a success story for government. At the end of World War II, growth was high. The prevalent view was that government works. It had accomplished what we wanted. Then we tried a "war on poverty" and a "war on drugs." The wartime success of government led to too much confidence in government, overexpectations, and misapplication of the war analogy to other issues. What needs explaining is not why confidence is low today but why it was so high after World War II. Maybe the postwar generation was unique because of the effect of the war. There is probably a good deal of truth in this hypothesis, but again it is not sufficient. For example, it does not help to explain why confidence would also decline in Italy or Japan. Something more than just the World War II effect is going on.

Another political hypothesis is that we are seeing a realignment of political parties not only in the United States but in Italy, Japan, and other countries. That process of realignment, when the old coalitions fall apart, produces a loss of confidence not just in the parties but in government more generally. The Roosevelt coalition, which governed in the United States after 1932, gradually eroded, and with it went the faith in liberal big government that held the coalition together. The defection of the South over race and blue-collar Democrats over cultural issues brought Nixon to power in 1968. That defection underpins the current conservative movement. With this realignment of political parties, one would expect a decline of trust in government that went along with a particular view of government. But again, the hypothesis does not explain everything. Why did confidence go up when Reagan came into office and go down again during his later years as president? And maybe what is happening in the United States is not party realignment but *dealignment*—not one party replacing another as much as voters moving toward independent status. Party realignment may be part of an explanation, but again, it does not tell us everything.³⁸

A final political hypothesis attributes the decline in confidence to

the changing role of the trends in news coverage but also in Britain, Sweden and television news has altered, and more focused interpretive role, the press political process.³⁹

Television may have gets its political information. Television has had the political process. political parties directly to do with the dealignment in connecting politicians television and the cost distance between politicians

Second, television has world effect." Television conveyed by what people that messages are often conducted in Levittown were asked, "What is answered, "The rising crime Levittown.⁴⁰ But the more remember somebody: blue light flashing that crime is going down. To get our information about process which is likely

Conclusion

These are some of the study. Many of the hypotheses open. Creative destruction economy. The information causes for hope. The th

the changing role of the media. Thomas Patterson reports three major trends in news coverage since the 1960s not only in the United States but also in Britain, Sweden, and Italy. In all of these countries, press and television news have become more negative, more journalist-centered, and more focused on conflict than substance. In its new interpretive role, the press has become an unaccountable part of the political process.³⁹

Television may have added a special dimension. The public now gets its political information more from television than from newspapers. Television has had at least two major effects. First, it changed the political process. Politicians can appeal over the heads of the political parties directly to the public, and that may have something to do with the dealignment mentioned earlier. Parties are less effective in connecting politicians with the public, and the negative ads on television and the costs of broadcast time create a greater sense of distance between politicians and the public.

Second, television has created what is sometimes called "the mean world effect." Television likes dramatic pictures. Information is conveyed by what people see, not just by what they hear. The result is that messages are often confused by the public. For example, in a poll conducted in Levittown, New York, a middle American suburb, people were asked, "What is the biggest problem in Levittown?" They answered, "The rising crime rate." In fact, crime had been falling in Levittown.⁴⁰ But the mean world effect means that it's a lot easier to remember somebody spread-eagled against a police cruiser with a blue light flashing than to remember a table of statistics about how crime is going down. These arguments suggest that the way we now get our information about politics has had an effect on the political process which is likely to reduce confidence in government.

Conclusion

These are some of the things that we need to understand and to study. Many of the hypotheses suggest pessimism. But the future is open. Creative destruction may work in the polity as well as the economy. The information revolution may bring opportunities or causes for hope. The third industrial revolution may mean the indus-

trial countries are on the verge of a rise in productivity that will end the slow growth. We do not yet know. The information technology revolution may also help government get closer to people, and when people feel a closer connection to government, confidence tends to be higher. It may be possible to have more devolution with information technology. It may also be possible to do more outsourcing and to cut bureaucracy in government. Perhaps the nonprofit sector will provide more intermediary institutions that will work with government, both in helping to provide services and in providing the new ideas that make democracy flourish.⁴¹

The end of the last century saw a sense of unease and discontent much like what we are seeing at the end of this century. The American economy was shifting from one in which 30 percent of the employment was in agriculture to one that was industrial and urban. The era's unease and unhappiness led to a number of creative changes in the U.S. government, including the Sherman and Clayton antitrust acts, the creation of the Food and Drug Administration, and the establishment of the Federal Reserve system. A wave of creativity ran through both political parties. But the first step before searching for remedies is to understand how we arrived where we are. Many people are proposing a wide variety of remedies for the current discontent with government. But some remedies may prove feckless or even counterproductive unless we have a better understanding of causes. That is the task of the chapters that follow.

P A R

*The
Pe
C*

book, *Turf Wars*, explores how congressional committee jurisdictions adapt, or fail, to embrace emerging social problems.

Robert Z. Lawrence is the Albert L. Williams Professor of International Trade Investment at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. A research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research, and a nonresident scholar at the Brookings Institution, his current research on trade policy focuses on America's role in the international market.

Jane Mansbridge is a professor of public policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. She is the author of *Beyond Adversary Democracy* and *Why We Lost the ERA*, and is currently researching the relationship between coercion and deliberation in democracy, and the public understanding of collective action problems.

Ernest R. May is the Charles Warren Professor of History at Harvard. He has been dean of Harvard College, director of the Institute of Politics, and chair of the Department of History. At the Kennedy School, he teaches courses on reasoning from history and he directs a research and teaching program on intelligence and policy.

Richard E. Neustadt is the Douglas Dillon Professor of Government, Emeritus, at Harvard. He was the first director of the Institute of Politics. Having served Presidents Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson in various roles, he is also the author of the classic *Presidential Power*.

Joseph S. Nye, Jr., is the Don K. Price Professor of Public Policy and dean at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. He returned to Harvard in 1995, after serving as assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, and launched the Visions of Governance for the Twenty-first Century Project.

Gary R. Orren is a professor of public policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. A former political advisor, pollster, and opinion analyst, he currently teaches and writes on public opinion, electoral politics, the media, and the rights and duties of democratic citizenship.

Susan J. Pharr
Politics, director
dean of the Fa
comparative stu
industrial democ

Philip Zelikow
F. Kennedy Sch
Governance for t
is the award-wir
Study in Statecra

Copyright 1998 National Journal
Government Executive
January 1998

HEADLINE: WHY GOVERNMENT FELL FROM GRACE

A new book by Harvard scholars suggests that the reasons people don't trust the federal government are deeper than bloated bureaucracy and wasteful spending. In **Why People Don't Trust Government* (Harvard University Press), edited by Joseph Nye, Jr., dean of the Kennedy School of Government, leading scholars explore the 30-year decline in public trust in government that has some politicians demanding smaller government and others calling for better government. "Many people are proposing a wide variety of remedies for the current discontent with government," Nye writes in the book's introduction. "But some remedies may prove feckless or even counterproductive unless we have a better understanding of causes."

The authors argue that four primary trends have contributed to government's fall from grace: changing values; fear of economic change; the expanding gap between political elites and most Americans; and the role of the mass media. Negative political ads on television and a more critical and intrusive press reinforce people's cynicism and distrust, the book argues.

The scholars say the effects of distrust of government are not completely negative. "A certain level of mistrust of government is a long-standing and healthy feature of American life," they write.

Copyright 1997 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Foreign Policy
September 22, 1997

HEADLINE: In government we don't trust; declining confidence of people in their governments
BYLINE: Nye, Joseph S., Jr.

President Bill Clinton has proclaimed that the age of big government is over. He may be right. Certainly American confidence in government has declined. In 1964, three-quarters of the American public said that they trusted the federal government to do the right thing most of the time. In recent years, depending on the polls, only one-quarter to one-third do. The numbers are only slightly better for state and local government.

The United States is not alone. In fact, at a time when the United States and the West are celebrating victory in the Cold War, confidence in many Western governments seems to be declining. In a pair of polls taken in 11 European countries in 1981 and 1990, public confidence in government institutions declined in six (Belgium, France, Italy, Norway, Spain, and Sweden), was mixed in four (Germany, Great Britain, Iceland, and the Netherlands), and rose in Denmark. Polls in Canada show a decline similar to that in the United States. In Japan, polls show a low regard for politicians throughout the postwar period; more recently, there has been a decline in confidence in the bureaucracy as well. In a survey of 43 countries in 1981 and 1990, political scientist Ronald Inglehart found that people in low-income societies accept governmental authority more readily than do citizens of wealthier societies.

We are not experiencing the alleged "crisis of democracy" popularized in the 1970s. If you ask Americans what is the best place in the world to live, 80 percent say the United States. If you ask them whether they like their democratic system of government, 90 percent approve. If one looks at the Eurobarometer polls in Europe, even in those countries where there is a decline in confidence in government, 90 percent are "satisfied with a democratic form of government." At the constitutional regime level, the current situation is not like France in 1968 - much less 1789. Most people do not feel that the system is rotten and has to be overthrown.

Yet there is still cause for considerable concern. While there are differences of degree between loss of confidence, dissatisfaction, cynicism, and hatred, the steady devaluation of government and politics over long periods could affect the strength of democratic institutions. If people believe that government is incompetent and cannot be trusted, they are less likely to provide such crucial contributions as tax dollars and voluntary compliance with laws, and bright young people will not be willing to go into government. Without these resources, government cannot perform well, and if government cannot perform, people will become even more dissatisfied and distrustful. Such a cumulative downward spiral could erode support for democracy as a form of governance.

In the face of the Information Revolution and the globalization of the world economy, some argue that the best thing for governments to do is to get out of the way. Certainly governments must adapt to a world in which private and nonprofit actors are likely to play a larger role, but weak and ineffective government performance in the next century could be costly. In a global economy, for example, political stability attracts capital; education provides crucial skills; basic research in science and technology enhances competitiveness and living standards; and protection of intellectual property rights becomes more important. Each of these public goods depends upon effective government. In the defense domain, while the end of the Cold War has eased public fears of superpower conflict, the rise of transnational threats such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction poses challenges

that only a strong national government can meet.

Of course, the polls showing a loss of confidence in government and other institutions over the past three decades must be taken with a grain of salt. Survey research has its limits. And even if questions, data, and sampling procedures were perfect, a degree of wariness and skepticism about government is healthy for a democracy. But if the sky is not falling, neither is all well. Understanding the causes of the American loss of confidence in government is important not just for the United States, but for a world that looks to the United States as the sole remaining superpower and a harbinger of things to come. A clear assessment lies somewhere between Chicken Little and Pollyanna.

One possible explanation of the current dissatisfaction with government in the United States is that its scope has expanded too much, intruding into areas best left to private life. At first glance, responses to poll questions only partly support this view. When asked why they distrust the federal government, respondents tend to stress poor performance more than ambitious scope. Eighty-one percent say government is wasteful and inefficient, and 79 percent say it spends too much money on the wrong things. Only half that number say that it is interfering too much in people's lives or that the problems that it is trying to solve cannot be solved by the federal government. Of course, some complaints about poor performance may also be criticisms of scope, and if 40 percent feel that the scope of government is too broad, that is an important fact for politicians to consider. Nonetheless, for much of the period of its greatest growth from the mid-1930s to the mid-1960s, government remained popular. Today, the areas of most rapid growth in the federal budget - Social Security and Medicare - enjoy broad support. And despite their lack of confidence in government, a majority of Americans still believe government should regulate business on matters of environment, product safety, unsafe working conditions, discriminatory hiring, and failed pension funds.

Americans say they are dissatisfied with the performance of government, and in a democracy public satisfaction with government performance is an important measure. But performance is more complicated than it first appears. To what should we compare government performance? Expectations? The past? The performance of other countries? That of other institutions such as private businesses or nonprofit organizations? Another problem with measuring performance is distinguishing general outcomes from specific outputs of government. People may be properly unhappy with poor social outcomes even though the quality of government outputs does not change. For example, American test scores in science and mathematics compare poorly with those of students in a number of other nations, but the role of schools may be less important than the role of family values and the general culture in explaining those differences. The unevenness of public knowledge poses further complications: Americans express more dissatisfaction with foreign aid than almost any other aspect of government policy, but they also think that foreign aid accounts for more than 20 percent (rather than the actual 1 percent) of the federal budget.

Governmental performance ratings differ by fields and by institutions. While only 10 percent of the American public reported in 1996 that they had a great deal of confidence in Congress, 31 percent had a great deal of confidence in the Supreme Court, and 47 percent in the military. The latter case represents a recovery from 27 percent during the Vietnam War and reflects the good performance during the Gulf War. It reflects the relative success of the military in dealing with the drug, race, and education issues that have plagued modern American society, but it may also reflect the fact that since the end of conscription, the military (like the post office) has been one of the few parts of government that engages in positive marketing.

A major puzzle in the relationship between public dissatisfaction and government performance is the

distance people say they feel from government. For instance, while polls show a low rating for Congress, they also show a higher rating for local representatives. Although there is criticism of the school system, people express higher satisfaction with their local schools. If mistrust is not closely related to personal values and experience, then explanations may lie in generalized beliefs or moods.

This relationship between distance and perceived performance has some bearing on the issue of devolution. Some observers believe that more devolution to the state and local level will restore confidence in government; others believe that devolution will merely shift the spotlight of criticism to the local level. If the public reaction to government had a clear one-to-one relationship with performance, there would be little to explain about why attitudes have changed over the past three decades. But the ambiguities in the relationship between real and perceived performance and the decline of confidence in other major institutions besides government suggest that larger causes are also involved.

In 1965, at the peak of confidence in government, political scientist Robert Lane discerned an increase in trust since the 1930s, which he attributed to economic improvement. If so, perhaps the decline in confidence is the result of economic slowdown. Growth was higher during the two and one-half decades following World War II in all advanced economies than it was after 1974. Even though Japan's growth was high in the 1980s, it was still lower than it had been in the 1960s. As for the United States, the growth rate in the first three postwar decades was 3.5 percent per year, and then fell to about 2.3 percent in the period after 1975 - a 50 percent decline in growth rate. Over 20 years that decline would represent about \$ 2.5 trillion, enough to wipe out the government deficit or to give government the wherewithal to do some of the things that it now cannot afford to do.

The slowdown of economic growth, one might hypothesize, has led to public dissatisfaction, which in turn has led to a search for political scapegoats. From 1979 to 1995, real hourly wages in the United States rose by about 5.5 percent, or one-third of 1 percent per year. That contrast with wage growth in the earlier postwar period is a reason why people would say something is not as good as it used to be and blame it on government. A major problem with this hypothesis, however, is that it fits poorly with the onset of the decline in confidence. In the United States the greatest drop in confidence occurred between 1964 and 1974, when growth was fastest, and the recession of the early 1980s was actually accompanied by a rise in confidence in government. In Europe, dissatisfaction with government is more closely related to recessions in the early 1970s, early 1980s, and 1990s.

Another related economic explanation is global competition. This argument says it is not just the economic slowdown that matters, but the popular view that the economic slowdown has been caused by global markets and competition. As some people put it, what is really at issue is the enormous rise of the East Asian economies, which provide an almost infinite source of low-priced labor that is bound to lead to a depression of wages in the advanced countries. This competition particularly depresses the wages of the unskilled and leads to increased inequality, which in turn burdens the political system.

The global competition explanation solves the timing problem of the larger "slowdown" explanation, but it faces another difficulty: Trade accounts for only about one-tenth of the American economy. And the slowdown and the depression of wages has occurred in the other 90 percent as much as in the part that deals with traded goods. Of course, there are spillover effects from wages in traded to nontraded goods, and the fact that multinational corporations can threaten to move jobs overseas can depress wages. Still, trade may be too small a tail to wag such a large dog. In addition, 70 percent of American trade has been with other rich countries where wages are just as high as American wages. So while global competition has an effect, it may not be sufficient to explain what is happening in the depression of wages. As

economist Dani Rodrik demonstrated in his Summer 1997 FOREIGN POLICY article, the integration of markets has increased, but the level is still not very high.

Global competitiveness and interdependence, however, do produce a political dimension that is worth noting. If people feel a loss of control over their lives because of larger competition in the world, that becomes a political reality in and of itself. So when xenophobes like Pat Buchanan or Jean-Marie LePen campaign on the theme that foreigners are causing people's problems, their platform may not reflect sound economics, but it becomes a political reality.

There is something still deeper going on in the economic area - the Third Industrial Revolution. This revolution - the Information Revolution - means that computers and communications are to the end of the twentieth century what the introduction of the steam engine was to the end of the eighteenth century or the introduction of electricity to the end of the nineteenth century. We are seeing a tremendous wave of technological innovation that will take 20 to 40 years to work itself through the system. As economist Joseph Schumpeter said, capitalism is a process of "creative destruction": It has a positive and a negative effect at the same time. And while the United States may be leading this Third Industrial Revolution, other countries will be affected as well.

This creative destruction is happening in almost all the industrialized countries. Americans have responded to it by creating jobs, albeit often at low wages. Europeans have responded to it by real wage increases, but with 10 to 12 percent unemployment - and in some countries, 20 percent youth unemployment. The ways in which different societies respond to this economic process can take different forms, but each method creates a certain amount of turmoil, either because of the low wages or because of the high unemployment. In the long run, the country may profit from this creative destruction, but in the interim, people feel great insecurity and anxiety. People then blame the government rather than deeper economic and historical forces.

But even here the causation is complicated. If economics were the primary cause, one would expect to see the greatest decline in trust among the economic losers. Yet the decline in confidence in government is virtually the same for both winners and losers. Like the absence of a close connection between confidence and personal experience or values mentioned above, this lack of a direct connection between economics and expressed attitudes suggests the need for explanations that are more general, ideological, or reflective of the broad public mood.

One prominent sociological hypothesis about the causes behind the decline in confidence in government is the alleged decline of "social capital," a common sense concept that encompasses the ability of people to work together. Social scientists believe that such skills are developed through citizens collaborating in voluntary organizations. While not all such organizations have a positive effect, most probably do, and their decline would be a source of concern. Political scientist Robert Putnam has focused on the decline in voluntary groups such as the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA), the YMCA, and the Girl Scouts since the 1960s. The decline in participatory groups would remove the kind of intermediary institution that Alexis de Tocqueville believed essential to the fabric of the civil society that undergirds our democratic government. This thesis is challenged, however, by some who believe we are seeing a transformation in types of groups rather than an absolute decline of social capital.

Another aspect of cultural change is the long-term decline of trust in authority and all institutions in developed societies. Inglehart argues that the declining respect for authority is part of post-modern values, which people adopt as they switch from preoccupation with survival to greater concern with quality of life. The youth revolts of the 1960s saw a rapid increase in challenges to authority and

institutions, not only in the United States but also in Europe and Japan. If Inglehart is correct, one of the effects of development will be declining confidence in government.

In Western culture, there has probably been a change in the balance between the individual and the community in favor of greater individualism. Divorce, for example, has increased in almost all advanced societies. One aspect of divorce is that some women have been liberated from abusive and unequal marriages. Women used to be trapped economically in unhappy unions because there was virtually no way out. Men have also benefited from easier divorce. But while divorce represents a libertarian trend, it also signifies the decline of the family. It means less attention to children, less attention to the basic unit of community. Divorce illustrates two sides of the same coin, as the ratio changes in the libertarian rather than the communitarian direction.

The decline of the family has important implications for both actual and perceived performance of government. Educating children and preventing youth violence come high on the list of government tasks people care most about. Both rest heavily on the family. Government can run schools, but if parents cannot run families well, government is not going to be successful in the schools. Yet government is going to get much of the blame. People are not going to say, "I did a lousy job as a parent, so I will not blame the schools or the government." They are more likely to say, "The government is letting us down." Or many are likely to demand that government "do something" about family values - even though government may be unable to reverse the larger social causes behind the erosion of those values.

Another dimension of this cultural change is our public political philosophy and its current emphasis on rights. There used to be some basic human rights on which people broadly agreed. Now, in much of the industrialized world, there seems to be a right to everything from a pension to a vacation. We have created a society of entitlements. The net effect is extraordinarily constraining on government. Moreover, rights have costs, and some people pay a price for the expansion of the rights of others. Losers are likely to blame this cost on government. For example, the expansion of civil rights in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s benefited African Americans, but it angered many whites and helped to cause the defection of the South from the Democratic to the Republican coalition. Social changes have had large political consequences, including an erosion of confidence in government. While the United States is a particularly litigious society, the "rights revolution" seems to be affecting other countries as well.

One political hypothesis is that the decline in confidence in government is due to the end of the Cold War. Common defense is a public good and willingness to sacrifice is higher in wartime. A powerful external threat, the Soviet Union was the glue that held public consensus together. The trouble with this hypothesis is that the decline in confidence in the United States started in the mid-1960s. On the other hand, for countries such as Italy and Japan that had one dominant party and significant communist opposition parties, the end of the Cold War did seem to unlock major political change and criticism of government.

Another political hypothesis is that the decline in confidence is the fault of poor leaders - in particular former presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. The sharpest dips in confidence occurred after the American involvement in Vietnam and the 1972 Watergate incident. Johnson and Nixon are blamed both for misleading the public and for becoming involved in episodes that reduced respect for government. The more hostile tenor of press coverage dates back to these events. Yet while Vietnam and Watergate help to explain the onset of the decline of confidence in government, they do not explain the duration. When President Ronald Reagan came to office, public confidence actually made an uptick from 25

percent to 44 percent in the early 1980s. But then it went down again in Reagan's second term and after. This type of anomaly requires an explanation that goes deeper than blaming everything on Johnson and Nixon.

A related explanation for rising mistrust is the growth of corruption and dishonesty in American politics. Media analyst Suzanne Garment and other close observers, however, doubt that such behavior has increased. What has increased is media attention to scandal and the public belief that politicians have become more corrupt. Certainly there has been enough deceptive and dishonest behavior to fuel this belief, but it is difficult to make the case that increased corruption is the sole cause.

A deeper political hypothesis is that we are seeing a realignment of [TABULAR DATA OMITTED] political parties not only in the United States but also in Italy, Japan, and other countries. That process of realignment and dealignment, when the old coalitions fall apart, produces a loss of confidence, not just in the parties, but in government more generally. The Roosevelt coalition that governed in the United States after 1932 gradually eroded, and with it went the faith in liberal big government that held the coalition together. With this realignment of political parties, one would expect a decline in the trust in government that went along with a particular view of government.

A final political hypothesis attributes the decline in confidence to the changing role of the media. Political scientist Thomas Patterson reports that since the 1960s, print and television news have become more negative, more journalist-centered, and more focused on conflict rather than substance, not just in the United States, but also in Britain, Italy, and Sweden. In its new interpretive role, the press has become an unaccountable part of the political process. In particular, television adds a special dimension because it has changed the political process. Politicians can appeal over the heads of the political parties directly to the public and that may have something to do with weakening parties. Parties are less effective in connecting politicians with the public, and the negative ads on TV and the costs of broadcast time create a greater sense of distance between politicians and the public. The combination of negative ads plus negative coverage demarkets government and contributes to a popular cultural view of bad government.

No one hypothesis explains everything, but some carry more weight than others. Many involve broad causes that suggest that the decline of confidence is not likely to be idiosyncratic to the United States. In that sense, the American experience may be prophetic. Many of these hypotheses also suggest pessimism, but the future is open. Creative destruction of the existing order may work in the polity as well as the economy. The Third Industrial Revolution may mean that the industrial countries are on the verge of a rise in productivity that will end the years of slow growth. We do not yet know. The revolution in information technology may also help government get closer to people, and when people feel a closer connection to government, confidence tends to be higher. It may be possible to have more devolution with information technology. It may also be possible to do more outsourcing and cut bureaucracy in government. Perhaps the nonprofit sector will begin to provide intermediary institutions that will work with government, both in helping to administer services and in providing the new ideas that make democracy flourish. At this stage there are more questions than answers, both about the United States and about how much one can generalize from the American experience to other developed countries.

If the era of big government is over, it is far from clear what will take its place. The answer is less likely to be more government than different governance. Major transformations of government accompanied the First and Second Industrial Revolutions. With appropriate lags, we should expect similar changes to accompany the current Information Revolution. The least likely future would be a twenty-first-century public sector that looks like the twentieth-century model. The centuries-long trend of

concentrating power in national capitals may be reversed in the next century. There are already signs of more collective activities taking place in the private and nonprofit sectors, as well as above and below the levels of national capitals.

This scenario of the future is often referred to as the decline of the nation-state, but that terminology can be misleading. It is likely that citizens of developed countries will continue to see the nation-state as the major source of their security, identity, and prosperity well into the next century. However, the roles of other institutions and different levels of government in providing governance of collective activities are likely to change and become more complex. We are less likely to see the end of the nation-state than we are to witness its gradual transformation, and with it, the development of a more complex type of international politics. Governments will continue to matter. They may even regain some of the popular confidence they lost. But they will share more of the processes of governance with market and nonprofit institutions. Central governments will not be home alone.

JOSEPH S. NYE, JR., is dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. This article is drawn from *Why People Don't Trust Government*, Joseph Nye, Philip Zelikow, & David King, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).