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In Praise of Skepticism: Trust but Verify by **Pippa Norris**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. 305 pp., £24.15, ISBN 9780197530115 (paperback).

The heart of the book stands on the concept of "skeptical trust." It emphasizes that citizens need to form accurate and reliable judgments of public institutions. The theory focuses on keeping aside personal and cultural biases in evaluating the confidence that the public portrays in the performance of the government and its agencies. The central concern of the book is that citizens form biased judgments in portraying their trust in government institutions. This is because either the government provides misinformation to its citizens or negative propaganda set forth by anti-government vested groups, which limits citizens' rational decision-making capacity. *In Praise of Skepticism: Trust but Verify* argues that an accurate response of citizens' trust in government involves various sources of information that people receive in different contexts. In a society where there is a free flow of information with the ability of citizens such as educational literacy to verify the information that they receive, it is expected that people will bestow correct judgment of trustworthiness, in contrast with a society having state censorship and limited critical voice. The book finally states the extent to which citizens are motivated by cultural values and attitudes such as social capital determines the perpetual bias judgments of the citizens, with the higher the societal biases, the lesser the exact evaluation of trust in government.

The book summarizes that an accurate evaluation of the performance of public institutions is more important than finding the trust level of government agencies. Going beyond the two polarizations trust faces—cynic (underestimating the actions of public agencies) and credulous (overestimating the work of government) trust—Pippa Norris argues that the public must be skeptical. She suggests a straightforward understanding for citizens, that is, trust your government but one must verify the works first. The book finds that the claims of the decline of trust in the government across countries proved to be insufficient as there has been evidence of an increase in confidence in public agencies in many countries such as Iran, Turkey, Bangladesh, Tajikistan, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Hong Kong.

The book builds upon the wide literature on political trust by examining performance-based trust. This theory directly focuses on trust in government through the subjective perception of citizens over the rational indicators of competency, integrity, and impartiality (quality of government). Norris convincingly argues that there is no difference in the citizens' subjective evaluation of economic competency indicators to skeptical trust in government in both closed and open societies (p. 166). An open society is an environment where individuals are free to express themselves, engage in constructive dialogue, and make decisions based on well-informed information (p. 6), whereas a closed society is characterized by restrictions on freedom of expression, state control of the media, and the suppression of critical voices (p. 21). In both open and closed societies, irrespective of the flow of information, there is a strong correlation between trust in government and macroeconomic performance. However, the competency factor involving economic indicators is too narrow to explain the drivers of political trust. The book states that in evaluating the trustworthiness of public institutions, reflection on the quality of government involving impartiality and integrity of public agencies is also important. Like the competency indicator, for both impartiality and integrity factors, there is a significant relationship between trust and quality of government (p. 194) for both closed and open societies.

An important mismatch arises when Norris compares the subjective evaluations of citizens with the objective performance indicators of quality of government indicators given by expert

development organizations' evaluations such as the World Bank. The results show that in open societies trust in government is significantly correlated with the objective indicators of the quality of government, whereas in closed societies no significant relationship exists between political trust and impartiality and integrity indicators. One of the plausible explanations for this difference in results given by the author is cultural value preference (p. 195). This might be a realistic argument as one could refer to factors like social capital indicators like associational membership affecting trust given by Robert Putnam. Another explanation may be the role of response bias in the surveys. In closed societies, respondents deliberately provide credulous trust in fear of being harassed by the government if their actual response reflects mistrust.

The book significantly advances our understanding of citizen trust in government. However, future research might want to draw more explicit attention to the role of skeptical trust in developing regions, such as South Asia and Africa, as the book focused more on developed countries such as the US and the UK. These regions reflect some experience of further autocratization or autocratic regimes. While others experience a weakening of democracy along with economic flourishment, the development conundrum in these regions is something of great interest for trust researchers. The book provides in-depth knowledge and literature on trust in political institutions with explicit evidence that if blind and habitual compliance from citizens is reflected in public agencies it may potentially be harmful both for citizens and society if the agents prove to be untrustworthy. For future works on citizen trust in public institutions, Norris' book will be the foundation and natural point of departure.

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