

CSD lecture announcement (02-12-2014):

On December 2 2014, from 12.40-13.40 Sedef Turper and Kees Aarts will present and discuss the paper "Political Trust and Sophistication: Taking Measurement Seriously' in the context of the bi-weekly IoG meeting. Political trust remains a prevalent topic in political science research. A vast amount of empirical research into consequences of political trust has shown that citizens with lower levels of trust in political institutions are less likely to comply with the laws (Marien & Hooghe, 2011), engage less often in institutionalized forms of political participation, and undertake more often system-challenging political behavior (Hooghe & Marien, 2013). Having crucial implications for law-abiding behavior and political participation, political trust is considered an essential indicator of legitimacy in democratic regimes (Levi & Stoker, 2000).

However, a major pitfall of these empirical studies is that they overlook basic measurement considerations of political trust. Firstly, the composite score model that is frequently employed in studies on political trust unrealistically assumes that trust in different political institutions equally weight and load on the latent political trust construct. Secondly, these composite models assume indicators to be free from measurement errors. However, as Dekker (2012) illustrates, incidental measurements of political trust are highly sensitive to context. Measures from different surveys and panel measures that are only one month apart from each other can still vary to a substantive degree.

The neglect of potential measurement problems of political trust raises doubts about the findings of earlier studies. Therefore, in the current study, we revisit the measurement of political trust through robust statistical analysis. We utilize four-wave panel data from the European Social Survey (ESS) in the Netherlands. We pay special attention to differences between political sophistication groups, since debates on the development of political trust have pointed to political sophistication as a key explanation (Bovens & Wille, 2010; Dalton, 2004). We start our analysis by testing measurement invariance of the political trust constructs among sophistication groups in order to establish whether it is meaningful to compare the means of political trust constructs across groups. Then we utilize a multi-group autoregressive simplex model analysis to estimate and compare mean political trust scores for high and low political sophistication groups.