

Spring 2017

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Giving up on the Supreme Court: The Role of Political Grievance and Betrayal

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Political Science Departmental Honors Thesis
University of Colorado, Boulder

Defended on March 23rd, 2017

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Abstract

The Miller-Citrin debate, inspired by the widespread distrust of the U.S. government in the early 1970s, has tended to focus on whether trust has implications for alienation from the system or whether people simply distrust incumbents. My theory is that distrust alone is not a measure of alienation because this measure does not distinguish between people who have become alienated and those that are merely superficially distrustful. Using diffuse support for the U.S. Supreme Court as the dependent variable, I have used original data from Mechanical Turk to do a pilot study on the role of political betrayal, political grievance, and governmental trust for diffuse support of the U.S. Supreme Court. I hypothesize that while political grievance and betrayal will significantly predict levels of diffuse support, governmental trust alone will not.

Introduction

The current political landscape within the United States is overridden with individuals who are largely unhappy and even distrustful of government. Not only did the past presidential election expose widespread discontent with both presidential nominees, it revealed that a large portion of the American population are distrustful of Washington, and more specifically, the political elite. President Donald Trump, for example, based his campaign on a conservative platform emphasizing a need to shift political decision-making from what he calls the ‘political elite’ to the general public.

Various scholars have found an interest in understanding the possible causes and implications of cynical attitudes toward the government. Joshua Dyck, for example, found that higher levels of political distrust are shown to contribute to an increase in support for conservative policy due to a pervasive desire to obtain greater control over the federal government (Dyck 2010). Perhaps this was one of the many forces that led to President Trump’s election. However, as the Miller-Citrin debate illustrates, there are divergent theories that attempt to understand what these cynical feelings are reflecting, alienation or a mere dissatisfaction with political figures (Citrin 1974; Miller 1974a; Miller 1974b; Citrin and Green 1986). With this in mind, numerous questions remain unanswered. For instance, is governmental distrust and discontent merely superficial in nature, meaning it does not lead to acute cynical feelings toward the government, or is this distrust representing alienation from the government as a whole? In addition, this further elicits a strong curiosity regarding other possible measures of governmental cynicism and whether this cynicism is affecting the strength and stability of the United States’ democracy.

More specifically, identifying how perceptions of the government influence support for the institutional legitimacy of the United States Supreme Court can likely indicate the stability of democracy. Support for the institutional legitimacy of the U.S. Supreme Court has been relatively high and constant despite the established separation of the U.S. Supreme Court from the voting population (Tanenhaus and Murphy 1981; Gibson 1991; Tyler and Rasinski 1991; Caldeira and Gibson 1992; Gibson and Caldeira 1992; Caldeira, and Baird 1998; Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2003; Gibson, Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2003; Ramirez 2008; Gibson and Caldeira 2011). Most importantly, in most countries, but particularly within the United States, the Supreme Court is the most popular governmental institution (Gibson, Caldeira, and Baird 1998). This phenomenon is observed even when controlling for the policy preferences of individuals (Caldeira and Gibson 1992) and their party identification (Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2003; Tanenhaus and Murphy 1981; Nicholson and Howard, 2003). Identifying possible instances when high levels of diffuse support are threatened provides insight into the relative strength of the United States democracy because opposing an institution that has been highly supported over time, one that upholds the constitutional rights and liberties that are essential to the United States' democracy, arguably indicates a disregard for the rule of law.

Previous Literature

Diffuse Support of the U.S. Supreme Court

Diffuse support is more broadly defined as “opposition to basic structural and functional change” (Caldeira and Gibson 1992, 639). Within the diffuse support literature, a distinction is often made between specific support and diffuse support. David Easton, for example, is

commonly cited as the author that first distinguishes between the two terms. Easton defines specific support as “the satisfactions that members of a system feel they obtain from the perceived outputs and performance of the political authorities” (Easton 1975, 437). Diffuse support, on the other hand, is argued to be “more durable than specific support” (Easton 1975, 444), meaning it is more difficult to change in the short run but has the ability to change over time. This distinction is valuable because it allows for scholars to differentiate between a perception driven by discontent with governmental policies and a more deeply rooted discontent with an institution as a whole.

As for the literature that specifically discusses diffuse support of the U.S. Supreme Court, scholars have come to the consensus that diffuse support of the U.S. Supreme Court is exceedingly high and relatively stable over time (Tanenhaus and Murphy 1981; Gibson 1991; Tyler and Rasinski 1991; Caldeira and Gibson 1992; Gibson and Caldeira 1992; Caldeira, and Baird 1998; Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2003; Gibson, Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2003; Ramirez 2008; Gibson and Caldeira 2011). As a consequence of this finding, there was a growing interest among academics that sought to uncover the possible causal explanations for the consistent and relatively high levels of diffuse support. Caldeira and Gibson, for example, are prominent scholars within the diffuse support discourse and have introduced many causal relationships that explain levels of diffuse support of the U.S. Supreme Court. A few examples include interpersonal trust, race, knowledge of the U.S. Supreme Court, support for democratic norms, commitment to social order, and socialization of favorable perceptions of the Court (Caldeira and Gibson 1992). Caldeira and Gibson are not the only scholars that were interested in understanding diffuse support, however. Beyond the initial proposed concepts that Gibson and Caldeira put forth, procedural fairness, for example, has also been argued to relate to high levels

of diffuse support (Ramirez 2008; Tyler and Murphy 1981; Tyler and Rasinski 1991), although there is some contention over whether procedural fairness causally explains levels of diffuse support or if procedural fairness is yet another measure of diffuse support (Gibson 1991).

As the literature extends beyond a more basic review of explanatory variables, certain scholars have sought to uncover why levels of diffuse support remain high even when there are unfavorable policy outcomes. In a study looking at levels of diffuse support within a racialized lens, Gibson and Caldeira (1992) found that high levels of diffuse support among the black population were largely attributed to the decisions passed by the Warren Court. The decisions under the Warren Court were largely favored by the black population, and thus, increased specific support. Over time, however, this elevated diffuse support (Gibson and Caldeira 1992). This indicates that when favorable policy is handed down by the Court, diffuse support increases; as a consequence, this established level of diffuse support is not easily diminished when unfavorable decisions are handed down.

The notion that favorable court decisions increase diffuse support, while unfavorable decisions do not, is reaffirmed in a comparative study measuring diffuse support of high courts in 18 different countries. This study found that while specific support is not causally related to diffuse support when specific support decreases, it is causally related when specific support increases (Gibson, Caldeira, and Baird 1998). An example of this argument within the context of the United States includes diffuse support levels after *Bush v. Gore*. Although this decision decreased specific support initially, diffuse support was not affected (Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2003; Nicholson and Howard 2003). In addition, knowledge of the Court is especially important to levels of diffuse support over time (Caldeira and Gibson 1992; Gibson, Caldeira,

and Baird 1998). Therefore, the legitimacy of high courts is likely gained through socialization (Gibson, Caldeira, and Baird, 1998).

As a consequence, confidence in the Court does not affect levels of diffuse support (Gibson, Caldeira, and Spence 2003), and while some believe that justices vote based on political ideology, this does not affect the institutional legitimacy of the Court either (Gibson and Caldeira 2011). This consequently reaffirms the notion that individuals largely support the institutional legitimacy of the U.S. Supreme Court over the long term, and when specific support decreases, diffuse support is not diminished. Thus, identifying instances that decrease the durability of diffuse support is significant to our understanding of the stability of our democracy.

Governmental Trust

Beginning in the 1970s, there was a notable shift in governmental trust; more specifically, many scholars recognized that levels of governmental trust declined during this period (Citrin 1974; Miller 1974a; Miller 1974b; Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbring 1979). Despite widespread agreement among academics regarding the decline in governmental trust within the 1970s, when attempting to identify the social phenomenon that caused this decline, the discourse gave a multitude of possible explanations.

The first contribution to the literature, following the notable decline in distrust, emphasized social class and race as explanatory variables. Aberbach and Walker, for example, identified that discrimination against the black population, although there was variation when controlling for social class, led to an increase in governmental distrust (1970). As the literature further developed in the late 1970s, education levels were recognized as important indicators of

governmental distrust (Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbring 1979). In particular, those that were less educated, and read news that included a great amount of criticism of government officials, were more likely to become distrustful of government (Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbring 1979).

While there was no contention over how social class, race, and education explained levels of government cynicism within the 1970s, two prominent explanations emerged that not only sought to explain the decline in the 1970s, but further proved to establish two divergent theories that were used to explain levels of governmental trust in the absence of any temporal factor (Citrin 1974; Miller 1974a; Miller 1974b; Citrin and Green 1986). This contention within the governmental distrust literature is derived from two theories: One theory attributes distrust to the approval or style of the president (Citrin 1974; Citrin and Green 1986), while the other attributes declining levels of governmental trust to discontent with centrist government policies (Miller 1974a; Miller 1974b; Miller and Borrelli 1991). This distinction provides the foundation for the question of whether governmental distrust causes alienation or if it is merely “ritualistic” in nature (Citrin 1974, 68).

As the literature further developed, scholars recognized a growing increase in levels of governmental trust in the early 1980s followed by a sharp decline in the late 1980s early 1990s (Miller and Borrelli 1991; Citrin and Green 1986). The theory that presidential popularity causally explains levels of governmental trust was reaffirmed during this period. Ronald Reagan, for example, had bipartisan support due to how he handled the recession, and this was used as evidence for the increase in trust (Citrin and Green 1986). Citrin and Green were not the only scholars to note this causal relationship, however. A study completed in the 1990s found that higher levels of specific support for the president resulted in an increase in political trust (Hetherington 1998).

Similar to the discourse in the 1970s, presidential popularity was not the only explanation of levels of trust discussed within the literature. While Miller and Borrelli noticed a relationship between trust levels and the popularity of the president, they argued that presidential popularity is not a sufficient indicator of levels of trust. Discontent with domestic and foreign policy, however, was argued to better explain the distrust levels (Miller and Borrelli 1991). Similarly, John Williams (1985) notes that a decline in governmental trust is not related to presidential popularity but rather related to a perception that institutional performance is lacking (Williams 1985).

In addition to the literature that sought to explain substantial changes in political trust, following the initial spark of interest in governmental distrust within the 1970s and then again in the 1980s, certain scholars became interested in political distrust on a comparative level (Miller and Listhaug 1990). These results yield notable differences across the countries studied and provide insight into why distrust levels within the United States are particularly perplexing. In Sweden and the United States, for instance, the political party in office did not causally explain levels of governmental distrust, while in Norway, the political parties were used to express discontent and lack of confidence in government (Miller and Listhaug 1990), thus providing more insight into Miller's (1974a; 1974b) initial claim that political cynicism within the United States can likely lead to alienation because political distrust can be attributed to more than just preferences of political parties.

In terms of describing how individuals react when governmental distrust is high, the more recent literature has varying explanations. (Miller and Listhaug 1990; Peterson and Wrighton 1998; Dyck 2010). While the literature argues that some individuals respond to higher levels of political distrust by electing the opposite political party into office, although this was the case in

Norway not the United States (Miller and Listhaug 1990), other scholars argue that individuals vote for third party candidates (Peterson and Wrighton 1998). Thus, the distrust discourse presents varying ideas of the causes and consequences of governmental distrust; consequently, I seek to resolve some of the scholarly debate revolving around this topic.

Political Alienation

Political alienation, or “a relatively enduring sense of estrangement from the existing political institutions” (Citrin, McClosky, and Sniderman 1975; Citrin 1977), emerged as a topic of interest among scholars in the 1960s and 1970s due to a significant decline in governmental trust (Citrin 1974; Miller 1974a; Miller 1974b; Citrin 1977; Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbring 1979). In the early literature, alienation was often discussed within distinct categories. Examples include alienation that is developed from a state of powerlessness (Marvin 1969), alienation that is derived from a feeling of dissatisfaction with the government (Marvin 1969), alienation that is measured by a perception that one cannot “cope with the political environment” (Finifter 1970, 395), or alienation that results from notable differences between one’s behavior and the norms within a society (Finifter 1970). Due to the controversy over what alienation is specifically measuring, the literature does not paint a consistent picture of the causes and consequences of political alienation.

Despite this inconsistent depiction of alienation, the portion of the literature that describes alienation as a kind of estrangement (Citrin, McClosky, and Sniderman 1975) is particularly compelling because this suggests that political alienation measures a phenomenon greater than a mere perception of discontent, it seeks to quantify a perception of separation from the

government. While some scholars have overlooked this assertion and measured alienation in terms of governmental distrust (Thompson and Horton 1960; Aberbach 1969; Miller 1974a; Miller 1974b; Williams 1985; Miller and Listhaug 1990; Miller and Borrelli 1991;), I argue that governmental distrust alone is not a sufficient indicator of political alienation. There needs to be an indication that individuals have become disconnected from governmental institutions. Thus, the more an individual feels separated or distanced from the government, the more that individual is alienated.

Despite the contention over whether governmental distrust measures alienation, scholars have noted a causal relationship between governmental distrust and alienation (Thompson and Horton 1960; Macke 1979; Williams 1985; Miller and Listhaug 1990; Miller and Borrelli 1991). For example, Macke (1979) notes that a decrease in social discontent, in conjunction with improvements in the economy and a perception that those in government are doing a decent job, leads to a decrease in alienation overall (Macke 1979). Despite my own objections of using governmental distrust as a measurement of alienation, acknowledging the relationship between the two variables is valuable to our understanding of alienation.

As the literature extends beyond an explanation of how alienation is measured, the relationship between political action and political alienation has been widely discussed; however, there is contention over whether or not political alienation leads to an increase in political action, which has often been discussed either in the form of voter turnout (Adams, Dow, and Merrill 2006; Southwell 2008) or political empowerment (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Gilliam and Kaufmann 1998). While some scholars have found that alienation will lead to less participation (Schwartz 1976, Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Gilliam and Kaufmann 1998; Adams, Dow, and Merrill 2006), others have argued that either this relationship does not hold in all cases, (Citrin

1977; Southwell 2008) or that political alienation leads to greater political participation altogether (Aberbach 1969). In addition, political alienation has also been argued to relate to indirect political action in the form of abstaining from voting or voting for a third party candidate (Macke 1979). Although there is clear contention over the relationship between political action and alienation, there seems to be a somewhat stronger consensus among scholars who argue political alienation leads to a decline in political participation (Schwartz 1976, Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Gilliam and Kaufmann 1998; Adams, Dow, and Merrill 2006). This lack of political engagement could likely stem from a feeling of powerlessness, a feeling that becoming politically active is worthless because constituent wants are being ignored by the political elite. If this lack of political engagement continues, it is possible that legislation passed by Congress or decisions handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court will be ignored, thus unraveling the rule of law.

Theory and Hypothesis

As the literature indicates, there appears to be uncertainty regarding measures of governmental cynicism, and ultimately, alienation. This ambiguity is derived from a disagreement about the causes and consequences of governmental cynicism more broadly. More specifically, measuring varying degrees of governmental cynicism has yet to be refined, and identifying the possible ramifications of governmental cynicism necessitates further investigation as well. This study works towards building upon these two issues. More specifically, I seek to uncover how varying measures of government cynicism affect diffuse support for the U.S. Supreme Court.

Two concepts that measure varying degrees of governmental cynicism, and have the potential to causally explain low levels of diffuse support for the U.S. Supreme Court, are

political grievance, defined as the perception that the problems in people's lives are caused by the problems in the political system, and political betrayal, an individual's perception of betrayal by the government. Political betrayal is arguably a measure of alienation, as this concept indicates a feeling of separation from the government due to a possible perception that the government is either deceptive or ignorant of an individual's wants. Both political grievance and political betrayal have the potential to measure a type of governmental cynicism that runs deeper than a mere distrust of government. If individuals reach a point where they feel the U.S. government does not represent their interests, betrayed them, or is the cause of the problems they face, the government and the laws established by it may become obsolete. Due to the fact that the rule of law is essential to a well-functioning democracy, the absence of any adherence to the law threatens the stability of the United States' democracy as a whole. Thus, identifying perceptions people might hold that have the capacity to diminish the rule of law is valuable.

In testing this theory empirically, I plan to see how the independent variables, political grievance and political betrayal, affect diffuse support of the United States Supreme Court. More specifically, I hypothesize that as individuals become more politically aggrieved, support for the institutional legitimacy of the Supreme Court (diffuse support) will decrease, and when individuals perceive betrayal by the U.S. government, diffuse support will decrease as well. Further, I hypothesize that while governmental distrust alone will not causally explain low levels of diffuse support, when individuals are distrustful of government and feel they have been betrayed by the political system, diffuse support will decrease. Thus, I believe that there will be an interactive effect between superficial feelings of distrust and perceptions of political betrayal. In other words, governmental distrust alone has less of an impact on diffuse support of the U.S. Supreme Court than distrust under the condition of high political betrayal.

Method

Survey

I facilitated a survey through Amazon's Mechanical Turk that yielded 1,000 respondents in late November of 2016. The respondents were compensated \$0.50 for their participation in the study. In terms of the demographic of this study, white individuals are more heavily represented. Hispanic Americans and Black/Afro-Caribbean/African American, for example, are underrepresented and not representative of national percentages. The former accounting for roughly 7% of the sample and the latter accounting for roughly 6%. White individuals, however, accounted for about 77% of the sample, while the other racial/ethnic groups accounted for about 10% altogether. This includes American Indian/Alaskan Natives, South/East Asian Americans, Middle Eastern/Arab Americans, and other. As for sex, females are slightly less represented than males, accounting for 45% of the sample. However, the primary purpose of my study is to not distinguish between these groups of people, but rather look at the sample as a whole. That being said, it is still valuable to keep these discrepancies in mind when considering the results of this study.

Regarding the possible biases that could arise from using Amazon's Mechanical Turk specifically, it is important to recognize that respondents have the ability to pick and choose which survey they wish to complete. Although compensation is likely a determining factor in this decision, it is probable that the respondents that completed this survey are more politically interested and aware. In addition, it is also possible that the respondents in my study have more available leisure time. Those who cannot make the time to respond to internet surveys as a result of work schedules, family life, or availability of internet access may not be well represented.

Further, it is quite possible that the immediate shock of the election in 2016 further disillusioned people and is skewing these results; however, the degree of this effect will need to be further studied. These are important considerations to keep in mind when analyzing the results of this survey specifically.

Measures

Diffuse Support

With regard to evaluating diffuse support of the U.S. Supreme Court for the purposes of this study, I used two of Gibson and Caldeira's diffuse support measures¹ (Gibson and Caldeira 2009). The first question addresses whether individuals believe that the U.S. Supreme Court's power should be reduced, while the other addresses whether individuals believe the U.S. Supreme Court should be made less independent. A five-item scale is used to measure respondent's answers. This scale uses agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, and disagree strongly to gauge respondent's perceptions. As Caldeira and Gibson mention, "diffuse support is opposition to basic structural and functional change" (Caldeira and Gibson 1992, 639). These two measures of diffuse support allow a reasonable assessment of whether respondents wish to oppose possible changes to the institution and structure of the United States Supreme Court or not. For the purposes of this study, this is

¹ Gibson and Caldeira's measure reads as follows: "The right of the Supreme Court to decide certain types of controversial issues should be reduced" (Gibson and Caldeira 2009, 145). The measure used within this study simplifies this question by removing the phrase, 'certain types of controversial issues', and replacing it with 'certain issues'. This slight alteration in the wording is not significant, as this question still captures the essence of diffuse support, namely the aspect of reducing the U.S. Supreme Court's power.

captured through an evaluation of respondent's willingness to reduce the Court's power or make the Court less independent. Together, these actions would result in significant changes to both the functionality of the Court, as well as the inherent structure that is set out within the Constitution.

Governmental Trust

In order to measure governmental trust, I am using the ANES Trust in Government item used by Miller and Citrin in their research². It is notable, however, that a couple scholars have raised concerns over the accuracy of this particular measure (Cook and Gonke 2005). Cook and Gonke convey discontent with this measure because it does not differentiate between individuals that are "skeptical" or individuals that are "deeply cynical" (2005, 786). While this is a legitimate concern, my study seeks to separate this distinction by interacting political betrayal with governmental trust in an attempt to uncover when governmental distrust is measuring individuals who are "deeply cynical" (Cook and Gonke 2005). Therefore, the ANES Trust in Government item is sufficient for the purposes of this study.

Political Grievance and Political Betrayal

As for political grievance and political betrayal, I assisted with the development of these measures with Professor Vanessa Baird at the University of Colorado, Boulder and Professor Corey Barwick at Tennessee State University. Political grievance seeks to uncover whether individuals feel the government is to blame for their own problems, a question that has largely

² The ANES Trust in Government item seeks to look at how often people believe they can trust the federal government. This item is worded as follows: "How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right." Respondents were given the option to indicate "just about always," "most of the time," or "only some of the time."

been unstudied within the discourse, while political betrayal measures a form of alienation. Political alienation measures a feeling of estrangement or separation from the government (Citrin, McClosky, and Sniderman 1975), and a perception of betrayal by the United States government is arguably a reflection of estrangement because betrayal runs deeper than distrust and discontent. It reflects a sentiment that the institution sworn to protect its people has turned its back on you. Therefore, this feeling of desertion likely disillusion citizens and creates ideological distance between themselves and the government.

Data and Analysis

Diffuse Support	b	Standard error	t	p
Political Betrayal	-.07	.03	-2.56	.011
Governmental Distrust	-.06	.06	-1.05	.296
Political Grievance	-.15	.03	-5.02	.000
Commitment to Social Order	.17	.03	6.20	.000
Support for Democracy	.30	.03	11.31	.000
Awareness of Court	.18	.04	4.22	.000
Procedural Justice	.10	.03	2.92	.004
Female	-.05	.06	-.79	.428
Income	.03	.02	1.54	.123
Education	.11	.03	4.01	.000
Social Class	-.10	.04	-2.41	.016
Conservatism	.00	.02	.20	.840
Biblical Fundamentalism	-.12	.05	-2.61	.009

Table 1 displays a multiple regression that combines both of the diffuse support questions used within this study to form the dependent variable, diffuse support. Regarding the variables of interest, my findings reveal a negative relationship between diffuse support and political grievance, meaning as individuals begin to associate their problems with the problems in the political system, diffuse support decreases. This relationship has a p-value of .000, indicating a highly significant relationship. As expected, the correlation between political betrayal and diffuse support is significant as well, denoted by a p-value of .011. The negative coefficient associated with this relationship suggests that as people perceive betrayal by the U.S. government, diffuse support of the U.S. Supreme Court decreases. Governmental distrust, however, is not significantly related to diffuse support. The t-value is -1.05, which does not reach the threshold $|t| \geq 2$, and the p-value is far above .05. These findings favor my initial hypotheses, and while governmental distrust is not significantly related to diffuse support on its own, this allows for the possibility of a significant relationship between governmental distrust and diffuse support under the condition of high political betrayal.

In addition to the variables of interest, Table 1 includes a few controls that Caldiera and Gibson (1992) identified. These controls include commitment to social order, support for democratic norms, and awareness of the court. As expected, Gibson and Caldiera's findings were reaffirmed with my results. In more substantive terms, the relationship between support for democracy and diffuse support is positive, meaning that as individuals become less willing to do away with democracy, diffuse support of the U.S. Supreme Court increases. In terms of commitment to social order, as individuals have less commitment to social order and more commitment to allowing individuals to have freedom, diffuse support increases. As for

awareness of the court, as individuals perceive themselves as more aware of the United States Supreme Court, diffuse support increases as well.

In reference to the other controls used within this regression, sex, represented on a scale from male to female, party affiliation, a scale extending from liberal to conservative, and income, represented on a scale extending from lower household incomes to higher household incomes, have shown to have no significant impact on diffuse support. To contrast, a higher education and support for procedural justice significantly relate to high levels of diffuse support, while a higher social class significantly relates to lower levels of diffuse support.

Diffuse Support	b	Standard error	t	p
Political Betrayal	.14	.12	1.20	0.232
Governmental Distrust	.19	.14	1.31	0.191
Betrayal * Distrust	-.07	.04	-1.90	0.057
Political Grievance	-.14	.03	-4.93	0.000
Commitment to Social Order	.17	.03	6.20	0.000
Support for Democracy	.30	.03	11.28	0.000
Awareness of Court	.19	.04	4.35	0.000
Procedural Justice	.10	.03	2.91	0.004
Female	-.05	.06	-0.79	0.431
Income	.03	.02	1.61	0.107
Education	.11	.03	3.99	0.000
Social Class	-.11	.04	-2.52	0.012
Conservatism	.01	.02	0.29	0.775
Biblical Fundamentalism	-.12	.05	-2.62	0.009

As shown in Table 1, the relationship between governmental distrust and diffuse support by itself is insignificant, but when interacting governmental distrust with political betrayal, a concept used to measure political alienation for the purposes of this study, the relationship comes closer to being considered significant. This interaction is displayed in the above table (Table 2) and in Figure 1 below. In substantive terms, the negative relationship between diffuse support of the U.S. Supreme Court and governmental distrust is significant under the condition of high political betrayal, thus confirming my hypothesis. However, it is important to be critical of these results. The p-value is .057, which is slightly above the .05 threshold. Thus, I cannot be confident that governmental distrust is related to diffuse support on a conditional basis, but a p-value that is .007 over a commonly used threshold should not dissuade these results from being discussed. This analysis exposes a relationship that has implications that build on earlier research. Not only do these findings indicate that governmental distrust by itself is an insufficient indicator of diffuse support, it illustrates that alienation has to likely occur for distrust to lead to low levels of diffuse support.

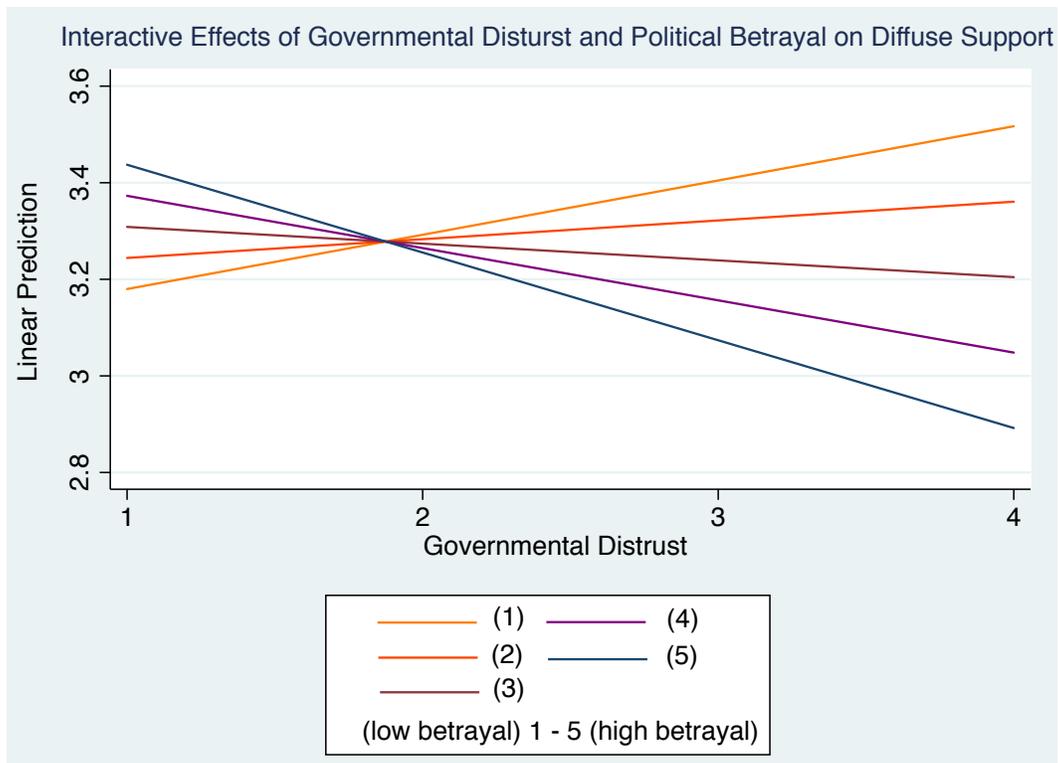


Figure 1: Interaction between Political Betrayal and Governmental Distrust

While the previous analysis indicates that political grievance and political betrayal are significantly related to diffuse support of the United States Supreme Court, it is important to look at the possible causal explanations for aggrieved and betrayed feelings in order to fully grasp why diffuse support is low when people hold these perceptions. Therefore, I am further analyzing political grievance and political betrayal as dependent variables. Table 3 and Table 4 display the results of this analysis, and interestingly, the demographic of people that feel politically aggrieved and politically betrayed is distinct.

Table 3. Predicting Levels of Political Grievance				
Political Grievance	b	Standard error	t	p
Female	-.09	.07	-1.16	0.248
Income	-.13	.02	-5.71	0.000
Education	.10	.03	2.97	0.003
Social Class	.01	.05	0.25	0.803
Conservatism	.01	.03	0.27	0.784
Biblical Fundamentalism	.05	.06	0.97	0.332
Procedural Justice	-.06	.04	-1.52	0.128
Future Economic Prospects	.09	.06	1.67	0.096

Table 3 is a regression using political grievance as the dependent variable in an attempt to uncover the possible demographic of people that are feeling politically aggrieved. While sex, class, conservatism, biblical fundamentalism, procedural justice, and people's future economic prospects (indicating what individuals feel their economic situation will be in 10 years) are not significantly related to political grievance. Income and education are, however, but the direction of the relationship is not the same. As people hold a higher income, they become less politically aggrieved. To contrast, as individuals become more educated, they perceive themselves to be increasingly politically aggrieved.

Political Betrayal	b	Standard error	t	p
Female	.20	.08	2.62	0.009
Income	-.05	.02	-1.91	0.057
Education	-.01	.03	-0.02	0.987
Social Class	-.14	.05	-2.60	0.010
Conservatism	-.03	.03	-0.94	0.350
Biblical Fundamentalism	-.22	.06	-3.73	0.000
Procedural Justice	.06	.04	1.54	0.124
Future Economic Prospects	.04	.06	0.73	0.464

The above figure (Table 4) shows a regression with political betrayal as the dependent variable. In contrast with political grievance, education is not significantly related to feelings of political betrayal, and the relationship between income and political betrayal falls slightly above the significant threshold, which is distinct from the relationship between income and political grievance. However, the relationship between political betrayal and income should not be overlooked merely because the p-value is slightly above the .05 threshold. In addition, unlike the analysis of political grievance, sex, social class, and biblical fundamentalism are significantly related to political betrayal. Therefore, females are more likely to feel politically betrayed than males. As for social class, as individuals perceive themselves to be in a higher social class, they feel less politically betrayed. In terms of biblical fundamentalism, this relationship is negative, meaning as individuals become more religiously fundamental, they perceive less betrayal on the part of the U.S. government.

Governmental Distrust	b	Standard error	t	p
Female	.06	.04	1.74	0.082
Income	-.01	.01	-0.69	0.489
Education	.01	.02	0.44	0.659
Social Class	-.10	.02	-4.01	0.000
Conservatism	.07	.01	4.80	0.000
Biblical Fundamentalism	-.14	.03	-5.06	0.000
Procedural Justice	-.02	.02	-0.93	0.352
Future Economic Prospects	-.00	.03	-0.11	0.913

Following my analysis of the previous independent variables in my study, I became curious as to what indicates feelings of distrust in order to better understand why it is not significantly related to diffuse support by itself. The above table (Table 5) is a regression with governmental distrust as the dependent variable. Social class, party affiliation, and biblical fundamentalism are all significantly related to governmental distrust. Therefore, conservatives tend to be more distrustful of government, as do people that associate themselves with a lower social class, and people who are less religiously fundamental. Interestingly, sex, income, and education are not significantly related.

Implications

The results from the preceding analysis not only uncover a few underlying explanations of low levels of diffuse support, this analysis provides insight that is especially valuable to the study of governmental cynicism. With regard to furthering the diffuse support discourse, this study has provided two novel concepts (political grievance and political betrayal) that have the capacity to causally explain instances when diffuse support of the U.S. Supreme Court is reduced. More specifically, those that associate their own problems with the problems in the

political system, and those that perceive betrayal on the part of the U.S. government, are more likely to have little support for the institutional legitimacy of the U.S. Supreme Court. As for governmental distrust, the relationship between distrust and diffuse support is not significant; however, governmental distrust is related to diffuse support under the condition of high political betrayal. These three concepts represent varying degrees of governmental cynicism, and while there is likely some commonality among them, these perceptions arguably stem from a few distinct demographic factors.

For the purposes of this study, identifying the possible causal explanations of why a specific demographic of people perceive a certain degree of governmental cynicism is outside the scope of this analysis, but is a puzzling finding that necessitates further inquiry. Within this paper, I am most interested in explaining the commonalities between individuals who hold political aggrieved and betrayed feelings, how these are distinct from those that are merely distrustful of government, and ultimately, how this relates to diffuse support of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Income is the one variable that has the capacity to explain levels of both political betrayal and political grievance. Income is significantly related to political grievance, and while the relationship between income and political betrayal does not reach the .05 threshold, it is notably close. Thus, these findings indicate that individuals who are worse off in terms of yearly household income, are more inclined to attribute their own problems to the problems within the political system, and ultimately, they are more likely to feel alienated. This could likely come from a place of desperation. Living paycheck to paycheck, for example, can be stressful, and it is possible that families with lower incomes feel that the government is not doing enough to advocate for them or provide governmental assistance. Therefore, perceptions of grievance and

betrayal from the government can arguably stem from income-related issues. This in turn results in low support for the U.S. Supreme Court as an institution.

Even when controlling for party affiliation, these perceptions, held by lower-income families, are still significant. Thus, the party in power is likely not the cause of these income-related grievances, indicating that the betrayed and aggrieved perceptions people hold are derived from something more than a reaction to the party affiliation of government officials. This does help explain why levels of diffuse support are reduced when individuals feel politically betrayed and aggrieved because alienation and grievance have implications for the institutional legitimacy and structure of government more broadly. In other words, these feelings are removed from a superficial dislike of the party in power and are likely a reflection of the dissatisfaction with the structure of governmental institutions.

To contrast, a couple variables that indicate levels of governmental distrust that are distinct from both political betrayal and political grievance are party affiliation and income. These findings not only assist with the understanding of the distinction between the three concepts, but it aids in our understanding of levels of diffuse support. Governmental distrust is not a suitable indicator of diffuse support levels, while political betrayal and grievance are. Since party affiliation, for example, is significantly correlated with governmental distrust, and then in turn, governmental distrust is not significantly related to diffuse support, it can be argued that this feeling of distrust is superficial in nature, rather than a reflection of alienation. Thus, governmental distrust by itself is a poor indicator of deeply cynical or alienated feelings. Only when interacted with political betrayal did this come closer to predicting levels of diffuse support.

On the other hand, income is not significantly related to governmental distrust, while it is significantly related to political grievance and political betrayal. This may indicate that a basic distrust in government may not be driven by desperation, it is merely a reflection of an individual's party preferences. In reference to the Miller-Citrin debate, it seems my findings are in tension with Miller's understanding of governmental distrust. While distrust can indicate more entrenched cynical feelings when accounting for alienation, as indicated within my analysis, this concept alone is not sufficient for understanding political alienation. Perhaps Citrin was right, and distrust in government is merely "ritualistic" in nature (Citrin 1974, 68).

Discussion and Conclusion

It is important to note, however, that while these results are significant, the United States Supreme Court was the only governmental institution used within this study. While it is possible that I am overstating the implications of my results, the U.S. Supreme Court still remains the most popular institution within the United States (Gibson, Caldeira, and Baird 1998). If individuals have lost all support for the institutional legitimacy of the U.S. Supreme Court, it is possible that these feelings are not isolated and targeted at the Court alone. This could also transfer to other governmental institutions, indicating that perceptions of political grievance and betrayal lead to disapproval of the very structure of government. While this argument is liberally constructed, these findings are significant to our understanding of how politically aggrieved and betrayed feelings can lead to a possible disregard for not only decisions handed down by the Court, but for government altogether. This would unravel the rule of law and threaten the very fabric of our democracy.

These findings shed light on our understanding of diffuse support of the U.S. Supreme Court, yet there are questions that are still unanswered. Further research should look deeper into the causes and consequences of political betrayal and political grievance in order to fully understand why people feel this way, who is more likely to develop these perceptions, and what the possible ramifications of these feelings will be. This would assist in the expansion of the diffuse support literature, the alienation literature, and could very well influence the emerging study of political grievance.

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Appendix

Measures

Variable	Survey Questions	Percent, N=1,000
Diffuse Support	The U.S. Supreme Court ought to be made less independent so that it listens a lot more to what people want.	agree strongly (11%) agree somewhat (28%) neither agree nor disagree (23%) disagree somewhat (17%) disagree strongly (21%)
Diffuse Support	The right of the United States Supreme Court to decide certain issues should be reduced.	agree strongly (9%) agree somewhat (23%) neither agree nor disagree (20%) disagree somewhat (27%) disagree strongly (21%)
Political Betrayal	I feel betrayed by the American political system.	agree strongly (20%) agree somewhat (36%) neither agree nor disagree (18%) disagree somewhat (18%) disagree strongly (8%)
Governmental Distrust	How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?	none of the time (14%) some of the time (69%) most of the time (16%) just about always (1%)
Political Grievance	The problems in my life are caused by the problems in our political system.	agree strongly (5%) agree somewhat (27%) neither agree nor disagree (18%) disagree somewhat (33%) disagree strongly (17%)
Commitment to Social Order	It is better to live in an orderly society than to allow people so much freedom that they become disruptive.	agree strongly (7%) agree somewhat (19%) neither agree nor disagree (19%) disagree somewhat (29%) disagree strongly (26%)
Support for Democracy	Sometimes democracy is so messy, it is better to just do away with some of those rules so that we can just get something done.	agree strongly (8%) agree somewhat (22%) neither agree nor disagree (19%) disagree somewhat (25%) disagree strongly (26%)

Awareness of the Court	How aware are you of the U.S. Supreme Court?	not at all aware (2%) not very aware (19%) somewhat aware (52%) very aware (27%)
Procedural Justice	I believe equality under the law is more important than obtaining a desired outcome.	agree strongly (27%) agree somewhat (40%) neither agree nor disagree (24%) disagree somewhat (8%) disagree strongly (1%)
Female	What is your sex?	male (55%) female (45%)
Income	Which of the following describes your annual household income?	less than \$15,000 (12%) \$15,000-\$29,999 (17%) \$30,000-\$44,999 (21%) \$45,000-\$59,999 (16%) \$60,000-\$74,999 (13%) \$75,000-\$89,999 (8%) \$90,000-\$149,999 (10%) \$150,000 or more (3%)
Education	What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, mark the previous grade or highest degree received.	no schooling completed (0%) nursery school to 8 th grade (1%) 12 th grade (no diploma) (1%) high school graduate (26%) associate degree (17%) bachelor's degree (42%) master's degree (10%) professional degree (1%) doctorate degree (2%)
Social Class	Which social class would you put yourself in?	poor (12%) lower middle class (35%) middle class (41%) upper middle class (10%) wealthy (1%) top 1% (1%)
Conservatism	In terms of party affiliation, I would call myself:	strongly democrat (18%) somewhat democrat (28%) independent (31%) strongly republican (8%) somewhat republican (13%) other (2%)
Biblical Fundamentalism	Here are three statements about the Bible, and I'd like you to tell	The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and

me which is closest to your own view. moral precepts recorded by man. (52%)

The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally. (36%)

The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word. (12%)

Future Economic Prospects	And what about your own economic prospects. In 10 years is your economic position likely to be:	somewhat better than it is today (58%) about the same as it is today (32%) somewhat worse than it is today (10%)
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