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Trust in International Relations

Rationalist, Constructivist, and Psychological Approaches

Edited by
Hiski Haukkala,
Carina van de Wetering,
and Johanna Vuorelma

This is an excellent book, tackling one of the fundamental concepts in International Relations and providing a timely and valuable exploration of the three different approaches to trust through fascinating and empirically rich case studies. It will be valuable for students and professionals alike.

Karolina Pomorska, *Assistant Professor in International Relations at Institute of Political Science, Leiden University, the Netherlands*

This book is a welcome addition to the growing literature on trust in international relations. Using the three main approaches to the study of trust, the collection is particularly valuable for the individual case studies. These range widely and cover an amazing variety of relationships between states and international organizations.

Jan Ruzicka, *Lecturer in Security Studies at the Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, UK*

This book provides a timely intervention into the research on trust and trust-building in international politics. It not only demonstrates the applicability of the concept, but brings together a novel series of case studies that help to enlighten previously unconsidered relationships and broaden our understanding about how scholars can operationalize trust in international politics.

Vincent Keating, *Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and Public Management, University of Southern Denmark*

Trust in International Relations

Trust is a core concept in International Relations (IR), representing a key ingredient in state relations. It was only relatively recently that IR scholars began to probe what trust really is, how it can be studied, and how it affects state relations. In the process three distinct ways of theorising trust in IR have emerged: trust as a rational choice calculation, as a social phenomenon or as a psychological dimension. *Trust in International Relations* explores trust through these different lenses using case studies to analyse the relative strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. The case studies cover relations between:

- United States and India
- ASEAN and Southeast Asian countries
- Finland and Sweden
- USA and Egypt
- The European Union and Russia
- Turkey's relations with the West

This book provides insights with real-world relevance in the fields of crisis and conflict management, and will be of great interest for students and scholars of IR, security studies and development studies who are looking to develop a more sophisticated understanding of how different theories of trust can be used in different situations.

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Tobias Debiel, Claus Leggewie and Dirk Messner are Co-Directors of the Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany. Their research areas are, among others, Global Governance, Climate Change, Peacebuilding and Cultural Diversity of Global Citizenship. The three Co-Directors are, at the same time, based in their home institutions, which participate in the Centre, namely the German Development Institute/Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE, Messner) in Bonn, the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF, Debiel) in Duisburg and the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI, Leggewie) in Essen.

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Note

1 Statements of opinion and fact are my own and do not necessarily represent the official Finnish position.

Introduction

Approaching trust and mistrust in International Relations

Hiski Haukkala, Carina van de Wetering, and Johanna Vuorelma

The contemporary world exhibits signs of a multifaceted and growing erosion of trust. Studies show that citizens' trust in all four key institutions – government, business, NGOs, and media – is in crisis around the world (The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer). Different manifestations of the lack of trust in the established institutions can be witnessed in elections and referendums that continue to produce unexpected results, such as the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom, and the victories of Donald Trump in the United States and Emmanuel Macron in France.

At the same time, trust between states also seems to be receding. The institutional architecture that was built in the West after the Second World War is challenged to such an extent that many argue that we are facing a decline of the liberal West and its key institutions (see for example Walt 2016). From South Africa that is seeking to withdraw from the International Criminal Court to the United States that is foreseeing the end of 'human rights diplomacy' (Piccone 2017), multilateralism is no longer accepted as the only, let alone the most effective or necessarily even the most legitimate way to govern the international system.

But trust is a slippery concept that defies easy, or at least single, definition. To begin with, when it comes to trust in international politics, there are different levels simultaneously at play: trust between leaders, trust within domestic contexts, trust between institutions and state administrations as well as trust in the multilateral governance structure.[1] There are also different ways to conceptualise trust: it can be understood as a rational process, a psychological mechanism, or as a constructivist concept.

Different ways of conceptualising trust have a significant impact on how we understand trust affecting state relations. It is also important to distinguish between various representations of trust in international politics from first-order representations where trust is developed first-hand to second-order representations where images of the counterpart create trusting and distrusting relationships. Sometimes the concept of trust is employed interchangeably with the concepts of faith or belief, which makes it more difficult to develop a nuanced analytical framework for analysing

trust. For instance, Aaron Hoffman argues that the confidence to put your trust into others is a leap of 'essential faith' (Hoffman 2006, 7).

This book contends that trust should be one of the key notions in the study of International Relations (IR) and that it is a concept that creates greater understanding when it comes to analysing international politics. Yet for a long time, the concept did not receive sustained and systematic analytical attention in IR scholarship, partly because its ontological status was largely taken for granted. In the Realist paradigm, for example, trust – or rather the inevitable lack of it between states – has always explained the self-evident logic of the international system and its 'security dilemma'.

Therefore it was only in the 2000s that IR scholars began to probe what trust really is, how it can be studied, and how it functions in state relations. Andrew H. Kydd's *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (2005) and Aaron Hoffman's *Building Trust: Overcoming Suspicion in International Conflict* (2006) were important works in developing a theory of trust in IR. Since Kydd's and Hoffman's books there have been important scholarly interventions that have focused on different aspects of trust in IR, bringing insights from other disciplines and developing a more nuanced understanding of trust in international politics (see for example Booth and Wheeler 2008; Keating and Ruzicka 2014; Rathbun 2007, 2012; Ruzicka and Wheeler 2010).

It seems that today we have arrived at the opposite end of the spectrum with numerous, perhaps even unnecessarily numerous and very sophisticated conceptualisations of trust in IR. Jan Ruzicka and Vincent Keating (2015) have proposed a well-defined distinction between different conceptualisations of trust in IR scholarship. In their review article 'Going global: Trust research and international relations' that was published in the *Journal of Trust Research* special issue 'Trust in International Relations: A Useful Tool?' (2015), they propose a typological division between three ways of theorising trust in IR: treating it as a type of rational choice calculation, as a social phenomenon or as a psychological dimension (Ruzicka and Keating 2015, 12).

The rational choice position conceptualises trust as risk-taking: it predicts whether a self-interested action is also in the other actor's interest and whether they therefore want to reciprocate (ibid., 14, 16). As Russell Hardin (1993, 507) argues: 'Trust involves giving discretion to another to affect one's interests. This move is inherently subject to the risk that the other will abuse the power of discretion.' The prediction and calculation of the other actor's preferences depends on the level of information available and applies to a certain situation only (Michel 2012, 872; Rathbun 2012, 13).

Key to the notion of trust as a social construct is the role of rules and identities (Ruzicka and Keating 2015, 15). The starting point is the expectation that others will 'do what is right' that Aaron Hoffman calls the *fiduciary approach* (Hoffman 2002, 375, 379; Hollis 1998, 10). One is willing to trust which provides an obligation that the other will honour it (Hollis

1998, 11). Approaching trust from a constructivist perspective means that the focus is not only on shared meanings and interpretations concerning trust but also the way in which they are represented in international politics.

The psychological approach emphasises emotions that shape decision-making, either individually or collectively (Mercer 2005, 95–96). Brian Rathbun talks about *generalised trust* that has more to do with psychological characteristics than interests. Some statesmen are generally more inclined to trust and therefore more eager to commit to internationally binding treaties (Rathbun 2012, 2–3). As Rathbun writes, 'Generalised trusters are more optimistic that others will live up to their agreements and that they do not wish them harm' (ibid., 3).

Taking the distinction between rational, constructivist, and psychological approaches as our starting point, we analyse how these three ways manifest themselves in actual case studies concerning state relations and institutional cooperation. In this book our aim is not to ask which approach is the most accurate. On the contrary, we want to move beyond these at times sterile debates and ask what the relative strengths and weaknesses of a given approach are in analysing a particular case study in comparison to alternative explanations.

In other words, the contributors will analyse in depth their case studies in light of their own framework while shortly assessing the merits of other approaches. What we will gain by this is recognition of the suitability of different approaches for particular types of case studies and hopefully growing appreciation of the fact that the diversity inherent in IR is a source of strength and not a weakness to be lamented. In this light, the book will discuss the scope conditions, for instance: in what types of cases should we place trust at the level of the individuals or the collectives? How should we approach agency and structure as the approaches are geared toward a particular understanding of the international system? As a common methodology, all chapters commit to a qualitative method in measuring trust, in particular a textual analysis, in applying a rationalist, psychological, or constructivist approach to the data.

Concretely, we are interested in probing, for example, what a rationalist approach can tell us about the role of trust in the creation of an international organisation such as ASEAN. What is the relative merit of this explanation over others? Concerning the relations between the United States and Egypt, what role does psychology plays in the way in which the Egyptian populace continues to mistrust the United States? Or in what way can the lack of trust within the EU-Russia relationship be defined as a social construction maintained through historical narratives and cultural resources? Could this approach be more suitable than another for this particular case study?

Our primary focus is on trust and mistrust between states and international organisations with case studies analysing relations between

United States and India, the European Union and Russia, the United States and Egypt, Turkey and the European Union, ASEAN and Southeast Asian countries, and Finland and Sweden. Our case selection is theory-driven, which means that the geographical scope is more limited. At the same time, the case selection is representative of contemporary world politics in the sense that we include cases between large and small states, between different inter-regional groupings, and the divide between the West and the rest.

The book is divided into two parts. The first section of the book approaches the question of trust from a constructivist perspective, showing how trust is connected to identity and best understood as a socially and narratively constructed concept. In the first chapter, Ville Sinkkonen analyses the relationship between the United States and Egypt, arguing that we need to examine trust on different levels. Privileging the level of foreign-policy elites and organisations at the expense of the societal setting may engender flawed prescriptions that privilege the maintenance of short-term stability over sustainable long-term peace. In terms of both IR theorising on trust and trust-building policies, a normative claim lies beneath the exposition: IR scholars and foreign-policy leaders should remain privy to the social trappings and the levels of interstate trust.

In the second chapter Johanna Vuorelma examines trust between Turkey and the West, the European Union in particular, arguing that we need to pay more attention to second-order representations that influence our perceptions and beliefs concerning the trustworthiness of different actors in the international system. Approaching the question of trust from a narrative perspective, Vuorelma shows that the current trust literature is inadequate when it comes to methods to tease out images of trust and distrust, which are pivotal in understanding the current deadlock in the relations between Turkey and the European Union.

Finally, Carina van de Wetering examines the relations between the United States and India, showing how, despite a shared democratic identity, distrustful relations endured during the Cold War even when there were no immediate crises in sight. In identifying identities, emotions, and practices, Wetering argues that a poststructuralist approach to trust captures different assumptions concerning the trustworthiness of the counterpart and the insecurity felt. These assumptions are part of a discursive process that is not fixed but always in the process of becoming.

The second part of the book focuses on rational and psychological approaches to trust in IR. In his chapter, Scott Edwards shows how the rational perspective to trust best captures the dynamics in the creation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967. Positioning against the mainstream understanding in the trust literature that challenges the applicability of the rational approach, Edwards argues that while constructivist or psychological perspectives are useful approaches, rational

trust is the most significant tool for analysing the way in which relationships characterised by distrust were transformed into trusting relationships in the case of ASEAN's creation.

Similarly to Edwards, Hiski Haukkala and Sinikukka Saari argue that trust should be viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon that is best examined by combining different approaches. Analysing the relationship between the European Union and Russia, Haukkala and Saari show that despite initial mutual good intentions at the beginning of the 1990s, the mismatch between the level of trust and formally set basis and goals of the partnership led to too high expectations on both sides and the fundamental misreading of each other's intentions. They argue that the case should be explained by combining rationalist, constructivist, and psychological strands of trust theorising.

Finally, Matti Pesu and Tapio Juntunen analyse the relationship between two Nordic states, Finland and Sweden, probing why the progress in the defence and security policy cooperation has been so precautious between these two historically connected Nordic states that otherwise share mature and evolved partnership. Approaching the question through the lenses of social and psychological approaches to trust, Pesu and Juntunen argue that historically rooted suspicions over other's intentions, together with the general feel of uncertainty stemming out of the immediate geopolitical environment, can have decisive effects in generally trustful small state relations where interdependencies between states are high.

The book ends with Tuomas Forsberg's concluding chapter that addresses some general themes that cut across the chapters and help us reflect on what trust research has achieved and could achieve in International Relations. The chapter ends with suggestions on the potential research agenda ahead. It concludes that research on trust has become more prevalent in International Relations and we already have much sharper conceptual and theoretical tools and a broader scope of empirical knowledge than twenty years ago.

Note

1 Extensive research has already been conducted with regard to trust *within* society. For instance, Robert Putnam argues in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000) that trust is generated by connections between people and through active face-to-face contact in voluntary associations, which he conceptualises as social capital. Signalling a corrosion of trust with the declining membership of these organisations, he writes: 'Trustworthiness lubricates social life. Frequent interaction among a diverse set of people tends to produce a norm of generalized reciprocity' (Putnam 2000, 21). Although heavily criticised for his unclear conception of social capital, Robert Putnam's work helped to generate new avenues for research into trust. For instance, Bo Rothstein contends that trust does not derive from below, but it is generated through honest and incorrupt policy-making at the government level (Rothstein 2013).

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