Trust and Rule

Rightly fearing that unscrupulous rulers would break them up, seize their resources, or submit them to damaging forms of intervention, strong networks of trust such as kinship groups, clandestine religious sects, and trade diasporas have historically insulated themselves from political control by a variety of strategies. Drawing on a vast range of comparisons over time and space, *Trust and Rule* asks and answers how and with what consequences members of trust networks have evaded, compromised with, or even sought connections with political regimes. Since different forms of integration between trust networks produce authoritarian, theocratic, and democratic regimes, the book provides an essential background to the explanation of democratization and de-democratization.

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Trust and Rule

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CAMBRIDGE
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to Harrison White
a hedgehog who became a fox

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Preface

Blame Doug McAdam and Sid Tarrow. It all started in 1995, before an astonished Amsterdam audience. With Ron Aminzade, Doug and Sid plotted and executed a visually vibrant parody of my work: they dressed as sans-culottes and gave a rap performance. For two years before the Amsterdam spectacular, McAdam and Tarrow had been grousing together about the poor connections between studies of social movements and analyses dealing with other sorts of popular politics. They thought, for example, that my own work on revolutions, state transformations, contentious repertoires, and popular mobilization articulated badly with current analyses of social movements.

At the Amsterdam meeting, McAdam, Tarrow, and I made peace by agreeing to work together on new approaches to contentious politics, with the particular hope of coming up with ideas that would span multiple varieties of mobilization and contention. Through Bob Scott's initiative and Harriet Zuckerman's patronage, the Mellon Foundation awarded the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences a capacious three-year Sawyer Seminar grant for workshops, fellowships, and sojourns at the Center. The group eventually included fifteen graduate students, seven faculty members, and a great many more temporary participants.[1]

As Sid, Doug, and I were warming up for a year of intense work together at the Center, we wrote a few programmatic papers. We presented one

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[1] In fact, the program eventually stretched over five years. In addition to Doug and Sid, I am grateful to Ron Aminzade, Jack Goldstone, Elizabeth Perry, and William H. Sewell, Jr., for their indispensable collaboration in the project. For descriptions of the program, see the prefaces to McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) and to Jack A. Goldstone, ed., *States, Parties, and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

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of them to the 1997 meeting of the American Sociological Association as "Democracy, Undemocracy, and Contention." Still happily unpublished and forgotten, that paper pasted together disparate ideas from the three of us concerning the emergence of social movements, their relations to different sorts of regimes (especially democratic and undemocratic regimes), transformations of social movements during democratization, and how to think about contentious politics at large. Reread seven years later, it marks how far we had to go.

One road we had to travel led to clearer ideas concerning how the forms of contentious politics interacted with the character of political regimes. Although we shifted the division of labor constantly, on the whole I took more responsibility in our trio for work on regimes and democratization. It is a measure of my meager influence over Doug and Sid that almost all discussion of regimes disappeared from our major joint production, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). But the book did contain a comparison of democratization in Switzerland and Mexico. That comparison stressed two processes: insulation of public politics from categorical inequality and integration of trust networks into public politics.

As I reviewed what other scholars were saying about trust, two recurrent features of the literature struck me as inadequate, at least for the purpose of explaining democratization and de-democratization. First, almost everyone portrayed trust as an attitude, an individual orientation that had somehow to include popular trust of governments and political leaders if democracy were to solidify. Second, most analysts treated the attitude as ranging from narrow to broad, with narrowness the enemy of democracy. The two features combined in the supposition that democratization depended on formation of a broadly trusting public.

I thought the analysts were on to something, but had not correctly identified the social processes involved. As I saw it:

- trust was a property of interpersonal relations in which people took risks of each other's failure or betrayal
- the same people could simultaneously maintain relations with different others ranging from deep suspicion to confident trust
- the same was likely to be true of relations to fellow citizens, political leaders, or governmental agents
- hence the problem for any explanation of democratization and de-democratization was to specify how relatively trusting relations extended into public politics.

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Preface

Since far outside of democratic regimes a wide variety of risky, long-term collective activities – procreation, cohabitation, provision for children, collaboration in agriculture, long-distance trade, maintenance of ritual solidarities, and more – clearly involved extensive relations of trust, it seemed to me that the mystery concerned how nonpolitical networks of trusting relations politicized themselves, connected with political networks, or gave way to politically connected networks.

Confident that someone somewhere must have dealt with that mystery, I read widely, pestered my friends, and eventually posted a series of queries on my electronic mailing list. The posting generated an energetic, wide-ranging discussion by e-mail.[2] Responses confirmed that many people in my circle found trusting relations important but mystifying, that most considered trust to be an attitude rather than a relation, that a number of partial accounts of its causes and effects were competing for recognition, that no one in the circle had formulated a coherent account of transformations in trust networks or changes in their relations to public politics, but that a wide variety of historical studies bore indirectly on those questions.

As my search proceeded, it became more urgent. I was soon writing the book that became *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650–2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). In that book, an account of trust networks and democratization figured prominently. The account refined, corrected, and expanded my contribution to *Dynamics of Contention*. As the book took shape, however, I realized that both my story concerning exactly how connections between trust networks and public politics change and my evidence concerning those changes remained perilously thin. But I also realized that to expand the account and add new evidence would make an already complex book unwieldy. I reluctantly set aside the task for another day. The day has now come. This book is the result and for you, my readers, to judge how well it meets its challenge.

From very different angles, four scholars who were doing immediately relevant work gave me the immense favor of commenting on some or all of the manuscript as I wrote it. Alena Ledeneva helped me incorporate

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[2] For answers to individual queries and contributions to the online discussion, I thank Ron Aminzade, Sam Bowles, Jeff Broadbent, Juan Cole, Jonathan Fox, Jack Goldstone, Thomas Heilke, Mimi Keck, David Levine, Scott McNall, Jerry Marwell, Peter Murmann, John Padgett, Eleonora Pasotti, Maritsa Poros, Eric Selbin, Jesper Sigurdsson, Marc Steinberg, Louise Tilly, Florencia Torche, Katherine Verdery, Barry Wellman, Harrison White, Richard White, Elise Wirtschafter, Bin Wong, and an electronic correspondent who signed simply Jamal.

ideas and evidence on interpersonal networks and trust in Russia. In her dual roles as expert on trust and general editor of the Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics series, Margaret Levi made me clarify obscurity after obscurity. Reynaldo Ortega took time away from his own inquiry into Spanish and Mexican democratization to scrutinize and correct what I had to say about those two crucial experiences. Viviana Zelizer forcefully drew my attention to parallels between the political processes I was studying and the economic processes she has made her own. Jennifer Carey combed the text with perceptive care. Audiences at the Russell Sage Foundation (where a new roast by Sid Tarrow, disguised as an introduction, mercifully broke down in PowerPoint failure) and the University of Michigan taught me what was and wasn't comprehensible or credible in my arguments.

With permission, I have adapted some material from my "Political Identities in Changing Polities," *Social Research* 70 (2003), 1301–1315; "Trust and Rule," *Theory and Society* 33 (2004), 1–30; and *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650–2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).