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# Article

## ***Trust, Ethnicity, and Political Approval in 21<sup>st</sup> Century South Africa***

**Alecia Anderson and Jonathan Bruce Santo \***

*Trust is a requirement for state legitimacy, however, the relationship between trust and political approval in South Africa is under-investigated, leaving the legitimacy of the South African state questionable. In this study, we use Afrobarometer data from 2004, 2008, and 2012 to investigate citizens' perspectives on trust and political approval. Using structural equation modeling, we analyze the impact of ethnicity on the relationship between trust and political approval in South Africa. The results are clear that ethnic identity continues to influence the relationship between trust and approval of political offices and policies in South Africa.*

Trust has important implications for political attitudes and behaviors. Trust is necessary for the legitimacy of the state, its institutions, and policies (Khan 2016; Sztompka 1999). When citizens trust their governing institutions, they tend to be more satisfied with those

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institutions and support them. This relationship has been observed in studies in Europe and South America (Anderson 2010; Sztompka 1999) but is under-investigated in South Africa. However, South Africa represents an important case to examine because of its recent transition to inclusive democracy and the unique transition of the indigenous ethnic groups from a state of exploitation and powerlessness to a position in which they have nearly full control of government offices and policies (Butler 2004; Hendricks 2003). In addition, researchers have conducted studies globally that show that various structural stratification indicators such as socioeconomic status (Espinoza, Naumann and Benet-Martinez 2017; Kelley 1992; Maeda and Ziegfeld 2015; Nijhawan 1992; Odetola 1992; Turner 1992), age (Breakwell, Fife-Schaw and Devereux 1989; Mattes 2012; Watts 1999), and race or ethnicity (Davis 1998; McLaughlin 2008; Nunnally 2012; Ojie 2006; Valadez 2001) influence political attitudes. With South Africa's ethnic plurality, constituting the "rainbow nation" (Hendricks 2003; Sparks 2003), we anticipate that ethnic identity will hold exceptional importance in the political environment. Therefore, in this study, we investigate these relationships in the context of South Africa by analyzing the following research question: How does ethnicity, among other structural factors, impact the influence of trust on political approval?

We use data from rounds 3, 4, and 5 of the Afrobarometer study conducted in South Africa. Rounds 3, 4, and 5 were conducted nationwide in 2004, 2008 and 2012, respectively. Each round includes 2,400 respondents over the age of 18 in a multistage, stratified, area cluster probability sample to represent a cross-section of all voting age citizens in South Africa. Data from these rounds include several measures of both trust and political attitudes that can be analyzed to provide an understanding of the relationship between trust and ethnicity and political approval in South Africa.

### **POLITICAL LEGITIMACY**

Three macro-level theoretical perspectives lead the discussion on political legitimacy: social contract theory, classical democratic theory, and Weber's theory of power and authority. These perspectives agree that legitimacy is maintained by states that foster citizens' consent by meeting those citizens' expectations (Locke [1690] 2002; Rousseau [1762] 2007; Weber [1947] 2012).

Social contract theorists argue that the social contract is an agreement between citizens and the state (Hobbes [1651] 2008; Locke [1690] 2002; Rousseau [1762] 2007).

Citizenship serves the function of equalizing the people who may otherwise differ in terms of wealth, power, status, or achievement (Ramphela 2001). Citizens expect this equality. Its delivery leads to trust for governing bodies. A government that has earned the trust of its citizens because it has fulfilled its promises and met its citizens' expectations can enjoy legitimacy in its position of authority (Abramowitz 1989a). Thus, political legitimacy and stability ultimately rests on trust.

Classical democratic theorists imply that trust plays a role in the function of democratic governments. They contend that the function of political participation is to ensure that each citizen is able to impact the processes and procedures of the government equally (Locke [1690] 2002; Mill [1859] 2007; Rousseau [1762] 2007). However, we argue that even in cases where the government exercises transparency, no citizen can be certain that this system is functioning properly, distributing power and influence evenly. Instead, individuals who adhere to the democratic system trust that their governing bodies are upholding the democratic arrangements to which they agreed. Therefore, while trust is not examined by classical democratic theorists, we argue that it is clearly assumed.

Although Weber does not discuss authority in terms of trust relationships, we argue that a basic level of trust in the legality of a policy, leader or bureaucratic order is necessary to translate authority into legitimacy. The people determine whether the state meets their expectations. The necessity for trust persists for legal-rational authority, charismatic authority, and even traditional authority. In each case, the citizens determine if the policies and procedures of the state are consistent with the rationale, traditions or sanctity of the established system (Weber [1947] 2012).

## **TRUST**

As the social contract theorists, Weber, and the classical democratic theorists investigate state legitimacy determined by the people; they imply a critical element that must be present for this relationship to function—trust. Trust is “a bet about the future contingent actions of others” (Sztompka 1999: 25) and, in this way, acts as a strategy for handling the freedoms of other human agents and agencies (Dunn 1988; Sztompka 1999). Additionally, we argue that citizens must trust that their governing bodies are operating to allocate rights equally, comply with legal doctrine and incorporate the voices and the power of the people.

A society's political system is embedded in its culture of trust (Abramowitz 1989b; Rousseau [1762] 2007). Trust is the prerequisite for political order: “Without trust

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it cannot stimulate supportive activities in situations of uncertainty or risk” (Luhmann 1979: 103). Democracy is perceived to be the political design most conducive to the emergence of trust (Sztompka 1999). This perception is based on the idea that democracy provides a rich context of accountability, and through its emphasis on constitution, creates the context of pre-commitment (Sztompka 1999). The emphasis on accountability and pre-commitment means that trust in a democratic society is attributable to “the institutionalization of distrust in the architecture of democracy” (Sztompka, 1999: 140). The fundamental premise of democracy is suspicion of all authority, or as the social contract theorists argue, the belief that all power must be legitimized. Only when authority is proven to come from the popular will and when the elected representatives realize the interests of the people will the government achieve legitimacy (Khan 2016; Sztompka 1999; Weber [1947] 2012).

For a democratic government to achieve and maintain legitimacy through trust, it must ensure its citizens against breaches of trust. Therefore, a democracy must meet several conditions, including periodic elections and terms of office, division of power or checks and balances, independent courts, constitutionalism and judicial review, due process, civil rights, law enforcement, open communication and community politics, mass involvement and activism of citizens through voluntary associations, civic organizations and local power (Sztompka 1999). This last point of community politics is the one most heralded by social capital theorists (Anderson 2010; Putnam 2000).

Trust helps determine political support or satisfaction in both specific and diffuse terms. Hetherington (1998) defines political trust as “a basic evaluative orientation toward the government founded on how well the government is operating according to people’s normative expectations” (Hetherington 1998: 791). Hetherington’s definition expresses the relationship between trust and expectations. The government must meet the expectations of the citizens for trust to develop. And, because trust influences political support, consistently low levels of trust ultimately challenge political legitimacy (Hetherington 1998; Khan 2016).

Trust in government is critical for political legitimacy. However, African nations have suffered from multiple occurrences of political instability, violent conflicts, and government corruption that together renders government trust elusive in many cases. Frequently, government trust is evaluated based on performance rather than abstract ideals or values (Askvik 2010; Hutchison and Johnson 2011). However, as Askvik (2010) points

out, trust in post-apartheid South Africa continued to be tied to identity, particularly racial or ethnic identity.

### **THE CASE OF SOUTH AFRICA**

In a society with a unique historical context such as South Africa's, marked by decades of racial and ethnic tensions, any discussion of social capital, citizenship, or political legitimacy must take into account both the breadth of ethnic diversity there and the ways in which those race and ethnic groups have interacted historically. South Africa's citizenry is composed of multiple cultures, including a variety of indigenous groups and large amounts of immigrants from various parts of Africa, Asia and Europe (Thompson 2000).

To begin, it is necessary to determine how South Africa's history has influenced its present state. In 1948, nearly 300 years after Europeans had invaded the southern tip of Africa and claimed it as their own, the Nationalist Party, composed of Afrikaners; descendants of Dutch Boers, won the first of many elections under the banner of "Apartheid" (Plaut and Holden 2012; Butler 2004). Black South Africans (the majority) were excluded from all national elections. Apartheid incorporated a labyrinth of separatist legislation.<sup>1</sup> People were placed in racial categories and interracial interactions were deemed illegal and harshly punished, thwarting the development of mutual associations (Butler 2004). As a result of the Group Areas Act, countless Africans were forced from their homes and communities to "homelands" at least 20 miles outside the cities, creating a racially segregated rural poor and a physical barrier to interracial interaction (Butler 2004; Feinberg 2015).

During the early 1990s, South Africa went through a period of economic stagnation, an influx of the urban Black population and international pressures for democracy. The African National Congress (ANC), along with independent Black trade unions, formed the Federation (later the Congress) of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which held the power to bring the economy to a standstill (Plaut and Holden 2012). The economic turmoil, along with ideological shifts among political and economic elites, led to the development of contacts between exiled ANC leaders and South African business leaders (Butler 2004). The ANC, as the resistance leaders and capable of employing violent measures to achieve its goals, could no longer be ignored. As a result, the National Party was forced to negotiate with the ANC.

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Nelson Mandela, elected South Africa's first democratic president in 1994, was a founder and prominent leader of the ANC Youth League. After 27 years of imprisonment, Mandela emerged as a leading negotiator between the ANC and the National Party (Butler, 2004). His goal of a peaceful transition to a democratic state and a new South Africa in which all South Africans would be considered equal, he preached reconciliation without retaliation. However, by the early 1990s, all whites had benefited materially from apartheid legislation (Butler 2004; Hendricks 2003; Sparks 2003; Thompson 2000). Prior to 1994, whites had acquired more than 90% of the land area (Hendricks 2003). The 2011 Census showed that the average income for black South Africans was R60, 613 compared to the average income for white South Africans at R365, 134 (South Africa Census 2011). This social and economic stratification makes eradication of negative stereotypes difficult (Valadez 2001).

In contrast to the apartheid policies, the new South Africa emerged in 1994 with the goal of a "rainbow nation"; a nation whose multiple cultures could coexist with mutual appreciation, support and consideration in policy creation and resource distribution, as sanctioned by federal laws (Campbell 2016; Hendricks 2003; Sparks 2003). Policies were initially created to grant more autonomy to local governments in an effort to foster citizen participation in domestic development and civic trust (Baiocchi and Checa 2009). However, concern for grassroots participation and resource redistribution gave way to priorities of achieving "world class status" (Baiocchi and Checa 2009). In addition, racial politics continued to dominate national elections (Fields 1996; Louw 2000; McLaughlin 2008; Shubane and Stack 1999; Thompson 2000). In fact, Shubane and Stack (1999) observed South Africa's 1999 national and province-level election results and found that an overwhelming majority of South Africans were continuing to vote based on "racial, ethnic or linguistic terms."<sup>2</sup> Ethnic voting has also been observed in split-ticket voting (McLaughlin 2008). This split is a likely effect of the previous years of racial segregation and antagonism, which could also affect trust building among the various ethnic groups. The lack of integrated networks between ethnic groups results in more bonding than bridging capital.

In spite of these variations in ethnic voting, on the national level, the ANC has dominated elections and policy decisions (Butler 2004; Herbst 2005; Shubane and Stack 1999; Silke 2009). After Mandela's presidency ended in 1999, he was succeeded by Thabo Mbeki. Mbeki implemented a strategy of top-down redistribution to narrow financial gaps

between whites and blacks in the country that was disappointing to many (Herbst 2005). In addition, scholars, political leaders, and media moguls heavily criticized several of his policies, including his response to Zimbabwean President Mugabe's anti-white tactics and his stance on HIV/AIDS treatment (Campbell 2016; Hawker 2002; Herbst 2005). Mbeki became increasingly intolerant of critique and wary of views from alternative parties with which he had once made alliances (Plaut 2012).

More recent political developments indicate that South Africans are growing increasingly dissatisfied with their leadership. The ANC provided consistent pressure for Mbeki to step down in December 2007 after accusations of financial scandals (Southall 2014). He resigned in September 2008, and Kgalema Molanthe was appointed as interim. Zuma, who had been fired from his position as Deputy President by Mbeki in 2005 over accusations of financial corruption, became president-elect of the ANC, but then was put under investigation for accusations of racketeering and corruption (Basson and Du Toit 2017; Plaut 2012; Wines 2005). His charges were declared "unlawful" due to evidence that Mbeki and his followers had tampered with evidence, and charges were dropped in April 2009 (Bearak 2009; Silke 2009; Plaut 2012).

Mbeki's resignation, nearly four months before his legitimate term was set to expire, caused some defected members to split and create a new party named the Congress of the People (Cope) (Campbell 2016; Bearak 2008; Hart 2014; Silke 2009). The recent turmoil may be an indication of growing frustration not only from a sect of members of the ANC party, but also from the masses of ANC supporters in the nation within South Africa's ruling party and could have a significant influence on trust in the nation. Dr. Robert B. Mattes, former Director of Social Science Research at the University of Cape Town, has argued that a growing portion of the population has grown disenchanted with the ANC since the days of Nelson Mandela (Bearak 2008).

Despite a slew of other accusations of economic and social scandals, including a rape charge in 2005, Zuma took office in 2009 (Basson and Du Toit 2017; Campbell 2016). After taking office, Zuma changed the nation's outlook on the HIV/AIDS epidemic, improving policies for drugs that treat AIDS and preventions for pregnant women (Campbell 2016; Dugger 2009). Despite the progress on this issue, however, Zuma failed to improve the failing education system, pervasive unemployment and a widening gap between the rich and the poor.<sup>3</sup> Many questioned both his strategy and his capability to find support to tackle these challenges as his traditionalism compelled him to focus more



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on discussion instead of hard action (Dugger 2010). As Allister Sparks commented on Zuma's approach, "Action dies in the process of eternal, everlasting debate" (Dugger 2010). Public disdain for Zuma was well established only one year after he had taken office (Southall 2014).

In addition to the fractioning that led to Cope, the ANC encountered discontent with its the ANC Youth League. The Youth League's former leader, Julius Malema, once an avid supporter of Zuma's, was expelled from the ANC Youth League in February 2012 because of growing tension between the ANC's political strategy and the Youth League's more communistic, black nationalistic approach (Campbell 2016; Polgreen 2012). In 2011, Malema was found guilty of hate speech for singing an Apartheid-era freedom song that included lyrics regarding the shooting of Boers (Cowell 2011). He also called for the overthrow of the government in Botswana, which got him suspended from the ANC (Basson and Du Toit 2017; Cowell and Eligon 2011). Following expulsion, Malema fired back, accusing Zuma of becoming a dictator (Basson and Du Toit 2017; Polgreen 2012).

This accusation may not be too far off target as it has become increasingly difficult to criticize Zuma or the policies of the ANC openly. As of April 2012, no one had come forward to challenge Zuma for the presidential candidate position for fears of the party's disciplinary committee since the ANC has an aversion to open competition for leadership positions; a tactic that began when the ANC was an anti-Apartheid liberation organization (McKaiser 2012). This tactic is one indicator that the party is failing to become a more democratic party and could have adverse effects on the development of a democratic culture in the nation. In addition, there was growing sentiment among South Africans that corruption had increased between 2007 and 2010, according to Transparency International's 2013 Global Perceptions Index (Campbell 2016).

In April 2017, thousands participated in a protest march, asking for Zuma's resignation (Dixon 2017). In August 2017, the ANC hosted a secret ballot for a vote of "no confidence" due to increasing evidence of corruption in his administration. President Zuma survived the motion, but the number of votes for his removal (177 out of 384) was viewed as a success by Zuma's opposition (Herman 2017). The ongoing tension led to Zuma's resignation in February 2018, staving off the threat of another impending "no confidence" vote (Onishi 2018). Zuma is replaced by Cyril Ramaphosa, who was elected as ANC leader in December 2017, and served as Deputy President until winning the 2019 presidential election (BBC News 2019; Winning and Macharia 2017).<sup>4</sup>

The changes in the political and socioeconomic conditions in South Africa in combination with its history of social movements and Apartheid make it an appropriate case to investigate issues of trust and political legitimacy. The continuing economic issues and suspicions of corruption raise questions related to the perceived legitimacy of the SA government. Given the legacy of white racism and the ethnic divisions within the country created by Apartheid laws, there could be substantial differences in trust among ethnic communities. In addition, the move from the oppressive Apartheid government to an inclusive democracy over 20 years ago is likely to result in trust attitudes that vary between older and younger South Africans. Further, the prevailing economic divide between rich and poor established by Apartheid laws could result in significant differences in trust based on both socioeconomic statuses. In order to investigate these relationships among South Africans, we analyze the impact of trust on political approval using data from the Afrobarometer surveys.

### **HYPOTHESES**

Previous studies suggest that trust affects political legitimacy and democratic stability (Anderson 2010; Rousseau [1762] 2007; Sztompka 1999). Trust increases positive political attitudes and behaviors because any society's political system is embedded in its culture of trust (Abramowitz 1989b) and without trust, the state cannot garner support in time of uncertainty (Anderson 2010; Hetherington 1998; Luhmann 1979). These studies were conducted in various parts of the world, including Europe, North America and South America, and we believe that these relationships hold in South Africa.

Based on the previous literature, we developed the following hypotheses. First, we hypothesize that general trust and government trust will be independently positively related to each of the three dependent variables (approval of government officials, economic and social policies). In addition, we expect that the associations between the variables will vary significantly between ethnic groups. Finally, we expected that ethnicity would moderate the relationships between trust and political approval.

### **DATA AND METHODS**

To test these hypotheses, we use data from rounds 3, 4, and 5 of the Afrobarometer study conducted nationwide in South Africa. These three rounds of data were conducted in 2004, 2008, and 2012, and include 2,400 respondents each. The data were collected in a

multistage, stratified, area cluster probability sample of citizens over the age of 18. The survey was funded by the United States Agency for International Development Regional Center for Southern Africa and USAID South Africa. The data were collected by personal interviews, and there was an 87% response rate.<sup>5</sup> We combined these three rounds of data for our study. The final sample includes a total of 7199 cases.

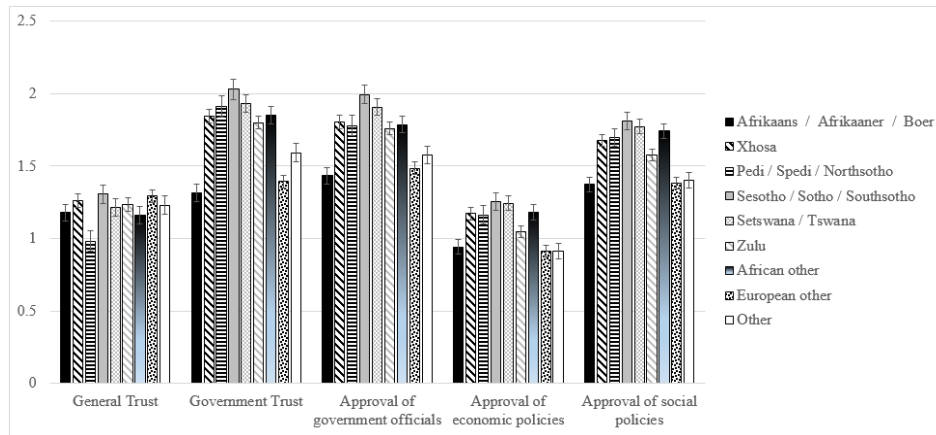
We analyzed the data using structural equation modeling in M-Plus (ver. 7.2, Muthén & Muthén 2017). Structural equation modeling is the statistical technique best suited for this type of analysis because it accounts for shared associations between the dependent variables. Specifically, structural equation modeling allows us to control for the degree to which different forms of approval are related to each other. Moreover, we can also account for the shared relationship between each measure of trust. As a result, we can then examine the associations between the predictors and the dependent variables while controlling for gender, age, education, and employment. Lastly, this type of analytic approach can be split across ethnic groups in order to identify differences in the strengths of the associations (Kline 2015).

The model includes each of the dependent variables: approval of government officials, approval of economic policies, and approval of social policies. Approval of government officials includes measures for the president and National Assembly representatives ( $\alpha = .75$ ). Approval of economic policies includes measures for managing the economy, creating jobs, keeping prices stable, narrowing the income gap, and reducing crime ( $\alpha = .80$ ). Approval of social policies includes improving health care, educational needs, delivering water, ensuring enough to eat, fighting corruption, combating HIV/AIDS, welfare payment, responding to Zimbabwe, and uniting South Africa ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

We included the two independent variables that test the hypotheses: general trust and government trust. General trust includes trust for neighbors, trust for relatives, trust for people in your own ethnic group, trust for people in other ethnic groups, trust for people you know, trust for other South Africans, and trust for foreigners living in South Africa ( $\alpha = .78$ ). Government trust includes trust for the president, trust for the National Assembly, trust for the national electoral commission, and trust for the ANC ( $\alpha = .75$ ). The models also include control variables: gender, age, education, and employment. Finally, we divided the model by ethnic group and analyzed the results for each ethnic group to examine the effect that ethnic identity has on the relationship between trust and political approval.

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics are provided in Table 1 for the continuous variables and Table 2 for the categorical variables. Correlations among the variables using the entire sample are in Table 3. ANCOVAs were used to test for differences in the group means in all of the study



**Figure 1.** Group differences in the study variables using ANCOVA adjusted means controlling for the effects of the covariates (age, gender, education, employment). Error bars reflect the 95% confidence intervals.

variables (general trust, government trust, approval of government officials, economic and social policies), controlling for age, gender, employment and education. Not surprisingly, there were significant differences in general trust ( $F_{(8,6985)} = 8.76, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$ ), government trust ( $F_{(8,6942)} = 69.92, p < .05, \eta^2 = .08$ ), approval of government officials ( $F_{(8,6827)} = 42.23, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$ ), economic ( $F_{(8,6982)} = 29.00, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$ ) and social policies ( $F_{(8,6989)} = 46.69, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$ ). Based on the effects sizes ( $\eta^2$ ), the group differences were relatively modest. Figure 1 contains the adjusted group means. Error bars reflect the 95% confidence intervals, thus any group mean that falls beyond the error bar of another group can be considered significantly different.

The central focus of the current paper though rests on the structural relationships between the different measures of approval and each form of trust across groups. As such, we began hypothesis testing first by creating a model in which the three outcomes (approval of government officials, economic and social policies) regressed on general trust and government trust. Not surprisingly, we found positive correlations between the

dependent variables ( $r = .22-.59$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In addition, government trust is strongly positively associated with approval of government officials ( $\beta = .53$ , S.E. = .01,  $z = 58.66$ ,  $p < .05$ ), economic policies ( $\beta = .38$ , S.E. = .01,  $z = 36.86$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and social policies ( $\beta =$

**Table 1. Descriptives statistics for continuous variables within the entire sample.**

Variable	N	Range	Mean	S.D.
Age	7128	18-97	38.79	15.23
General Trust	7171	0-3	1.22	.77
Government Trust	7128	0-3	1.70	.82
Approval of government officials	7009	1-4	2.70	.76
Approval of economic policies	7168	1-4	2.07	.69
Approval of social policies	7176	1-4	2.58	.68

**Table 2. Descriptives statistics for categorical variables within the entire sample.**

	N	%
Education (N = 7199)		
No formal schooling	267	3.7
Informal schooling (including Koranic schooling)	86	1.2
Some primary schooling	715	9.9
Primary school completed	601	8.3
Some secondary school/ High school	2343	32.5
Secondary school completed/High school	2010	27.9
Post-secondary qualifications	739	10.3
Some university	160	2.2
University completed	198	2.8

**Table 2 (continued).**

	N	%
Post Graduate	71	1.0
Employment (N= 7100)		
No	4196	58.3
Part time	916	12.7
Full time	2068	28.7
Gender (N = 7199)		
Male	3599	50.0
Female	3600	50.0

**Table 3. Zero-order correlation matrix within the entire sample.**

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Gender	-								
2. Age	.01	-							
3. Education	-.04*	-.25*	-						
4. Employment	-.16*	-.04*	.27*	-					
5. General Trust	.00	.09*	.01	.01	-				
6. Government Trust	-.02*	-.02*	-.06*	-.02	.22*	-			
7. Approval of government officials	-.01	-.03*	-.04*	.00	.18*	.54*	-		
8. Approval of economic policies	-.024*	-.04*	.02	.05*	.18*	.40*	.46*	-	

**Table 3 (continued).**

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
9. Approval of social policies	-.01	-.03*	-.02	.00	.12*	.45*	.51*	.66*	-

\*  $p < .05$ 

.44, S.E. = .01,  $z = 44.59$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In addition to the effect of government trust, general trust is also significantly positively predictive of the dependent variables (approval of government officials,  $\beta = .07$ , S.E. = .01,  $z = 6.27$ ,  $p < .05$ ; economic policies,  $\beta = .10$ , S.E. = .01,  $z = 8.68$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and social policies,  $\beta = .03$ , S.E. = .01,  $z = 2.52$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Next, we included the control variables of gender, age, education and employment in the model. Gender is not significantly associated with any of the dependent variables. However, age is a negative predictor of each outcome (approval of government officials,  $\beta = -.03$ , S.E. = .01,  $z = 2.44$ ,  $p < .05$ ; economic policies,  $\beta = -.03$ , S.E. = .01,  $z = 2.39$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and social policies,  $\beta = -.02$ , S.E. = .01,  $z = 2.09$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Education is only significantly negatively tied to approval of government officials ( $\beta = -.02$ , S.E. = .01,  $z = 2.16$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Finally, employment is only positively associated with economic policies ( $\beta = .05$ , S.E. = .01,  $z = 4.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Together, the predictors explain a significant portion of variability in approval of government officials ( $R^2 = 29.6\%$ ), economic policies ( $R^2 = 17.5\%$ ) and social policies ( $R^2 = 20.1\%$ ). The resulting model is a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2_{(8)} = 115.81$ ,  $p < .05$ , CFI = .99, RMSEA = .04, SRMR = .02). Unstandardized model estimates for the full sample are provided in the first column in Table 4.

We then split the model by the nine different ethnic groups (Afrikaner, Xhosa, Pedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Zulu, African Other, European Other, Other). This split allowed us to begin constraining the various components of the model one at a time to identify differences in the associations across groups. We began with the correlations between the dependent variables, the correlations between the control variables, then the effects of the controls on the outcomes, and finally the effects of the predictors on each of the outcomes. If the chi-square test was statistically significant, then we released the constraints for each group until the resulting model was not significantly different from the previous unconstrained model.





**Table 4 (continued).**

	Full sample	Afrikaan/ Afrikaner/ Boer	Xhosa	Pedi/Spedi/ Northsotho	Sesotho/Sotho/ Southsotho	Setswana/ Tswana	Zulu	African other	European other	Other
Gen. Trust correlated with										
Govt. Trust	.14*	.17*	.17*	.17*	<b>.06*</b>	.17*	<b>.09*</b>	<b>.23*</b>	.17*	<b>.11*</b>
Economic Policies correlated with Govt.										
Approval	.13*	.12*	.12*	.12*	.12*	<b>.10*</b>	.12*	.12*	<b>.14*</b>	.12*
Social Policies correlated with										
Govt. Approval	.14*	.13*	.13*	.13*	<b>.11*</b>	<b>.10*</b>	.13*	<b>.15*</b>	.13*	.13*
Economic Policies	.23*	.19*	<b>.22*</b>	<b>.25*</b>	<b>.26*</b>	.19*	<b>.26*</b>	<b>.23*</b>	.19*	<b>.17*</b>

\*  $p < .05$

The resulting final model remained a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2_{(223)} = 224.70, p < .05$ , CFI = 1.00, RMSEA < .01, SRMR = .03). The unstandardized model estimates across the various groups are also provided in Table 4. Meanwhile, in Figure 2, the standardized associations across all of the groups are provided.

The effects of the control variables for each of the ethnic groups vary. For approval of government officials, age is not a significant predictor in any of the groups. Education, however, is only significantly positive in the Zulu group. Meanwhile, employment is a significant positive predictor of approval of government officials in all groups except in the Zulu group, and the effect is slightly stronger among the Xhosa group.

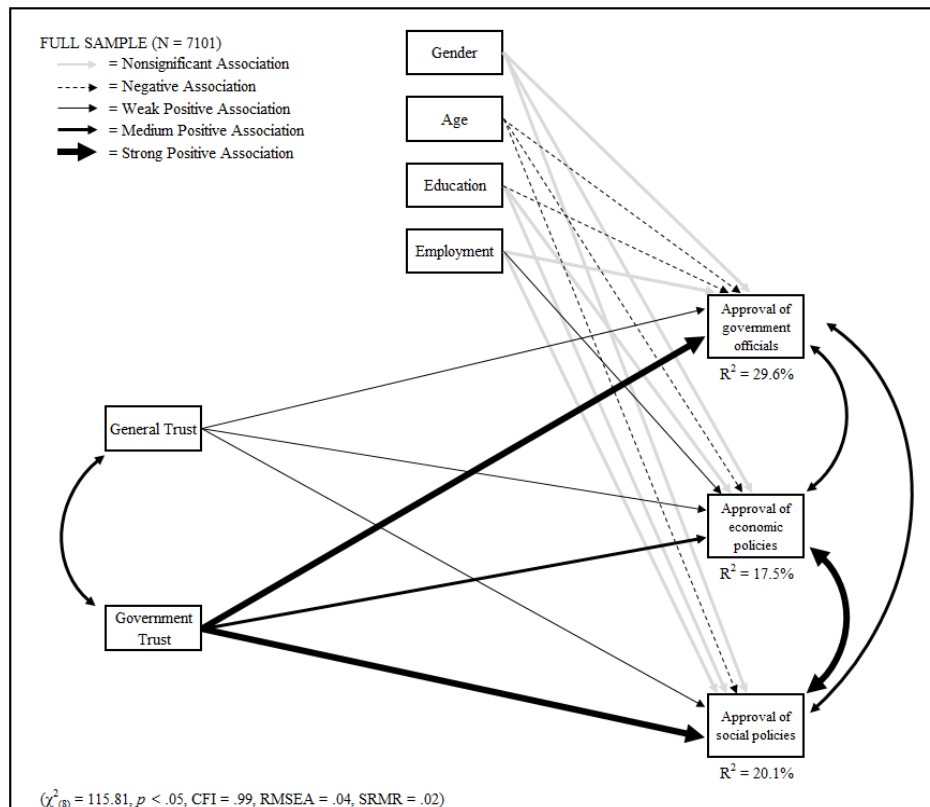


Figure 2. Main effects of general and government trust on approval of government officials, economic and social policies.

For approval of economic policies, the effects of gender, age and employment are consistent across groups. For education, however, the association is positive in most groups but more strongly in the Zulu group and nonsignificant in the Zhusa and European Other

groups. There is a similar result for the positive effect of education on approval of social policies in that it is also stronger in the Zulu group, while negative in the European Other group.

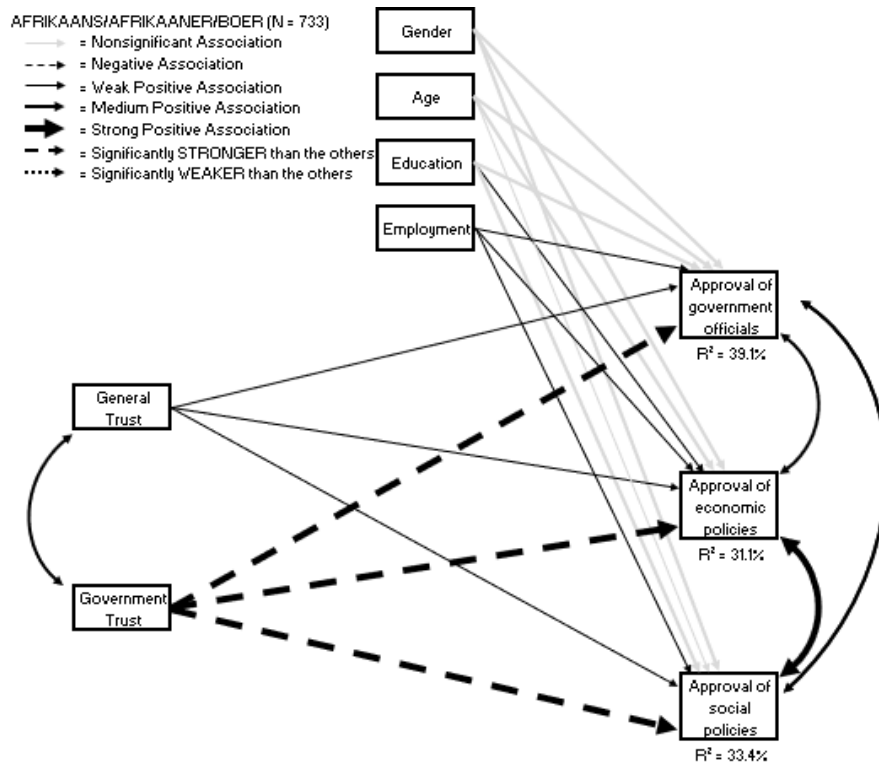
Associations among the independent variables and among the dependent variables also differ by ethnic group. For the positive association between general trust and government trust, the effect is stronger in the African Other group, while being progressively weaker in the Other, Zulu and Sesotho groups. The positive correlation between approval of government officials and economic policies is stronger in the European Other group and weaker in the Setswana group. Meanwhile, the positive correlation between approval of government officials and social policies is stronger in the African Other group and weaker among the Setswana and Sesotho groups. Lastly, although the association between approval of social policies and approval of economic policies is weaker in the Other group; it was stronger among the Xhosa, Pedi, Sesotho, Zulu and African other groups.

More importantly, the main effects of the predictors on approval of government officials, economic and social policies vary among ethnic groups. For approval of government officials, general trust is a positive predictor among most of the groups but more strongly in the European other group and nonsignificant in the Zulu and other groups. Meanwhile for approval of economic policies, general trust is a positive predictor among most of the groups but more strongly in the Pedi and Sesotho groups, while nonsignificant in the other group. Lastly, though general trust is also a positive predictor among most of the groups, the association is stronger in the Pedi group, while it is significantly negative in the Other group.

Finally, we examine the effects of government trust on the outcomes. For approval of government officials, government trust is more strongly positive in the Afrikaner group and weaker in the Pedi group. For approval of economic policies, on the other hand, the association of general trust is weaker in the Xhosa and Zulu groups while stronger in the Afrikaner, Pedi and European other groups. Regarding approval of social policies though, the association is stronger in Afrikaner, Sesotho, and European other groups and weaker in the Xhosa, Pedi and Zulu groups. Final model estimates split by ethnic group can be found in Table 4.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Several outcomes from this study are notable. The most significant is that trust does in fact increase political approval. So, each of the theoretical paradigms that were written for Western nations appear to be applicable in the context of South Africa.



**Figure 3. Effects of general and government trust on approval of government officials, economic and social policies for Afrikaners.**

Secondly, ethnic identity is moderating the relationship between trust and political approval on all measures, although the strongest effect pointed out here is between government trust and political approval. In each case, ethnicity has a positive association with trust as it affects political approval. The results are mixed among the three largest ethnic groups in South Africa: Zulu, the largest ethnic group in South Africa with high population density in the KwaZulu-Natal province; Xhosa, the second largest group residing in the Eastern and Western Cape areas; and Afrikaners, descendants of Dutch Boers who colonized South Africa and instituted the Apartheid system. Afrikaners stand out as having the strongest effect on this relationship while Zulu show the weakest effect

for each of the dependent variables measuring political approval (see Figures 3 and 4). Afrikaners employ trust as a strong determining factor for political approval, while the Zulu may pay closer attention to other factors when determining their support, such as racial, ethnic or linguistic ties (McLaughlin 2008; Shubane and Stack 1999). Unlike the other ethnic groups included in the study, education level was positively correlated with each measure of political approval for the Zulu, suggesting that education matters more for the Zulu than any other ethnic group when determining political approval.

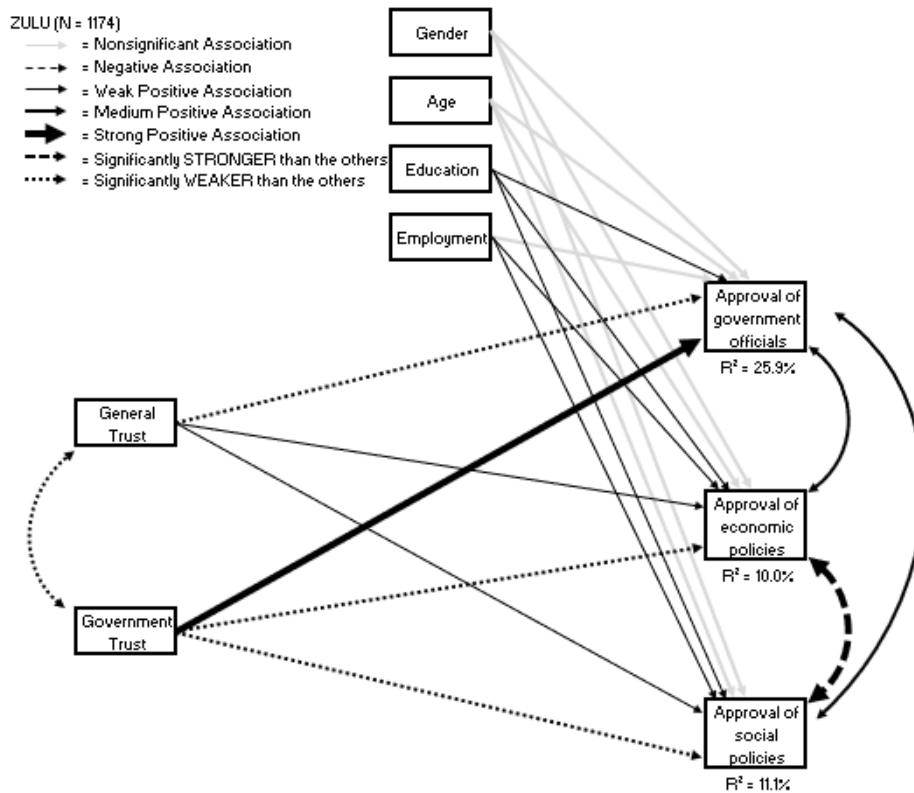


Figure 4. Effects of general and government trust on approval of government officials, economic and social policies for Zulu.

As indicated in Figure 5, the results for members of the Xhosa ethnic group are mixed. For people who identify as Xhosa, there is a strong positive association between government trust and approval of government offices. However, the association between government trust and approval of economic and social policies is weaker than for the other ethnic groups. This suggests that for Xhosa people, trust is a strong determiner for support

of officials, but not so for policies. Perhaps other social or economic factors are more strongly correlated with policy approval than trust for the Xhosa. This correlation makes sense given that the correlation between economic and social policies is stronger for the Xhosa than for any other ethnic group.

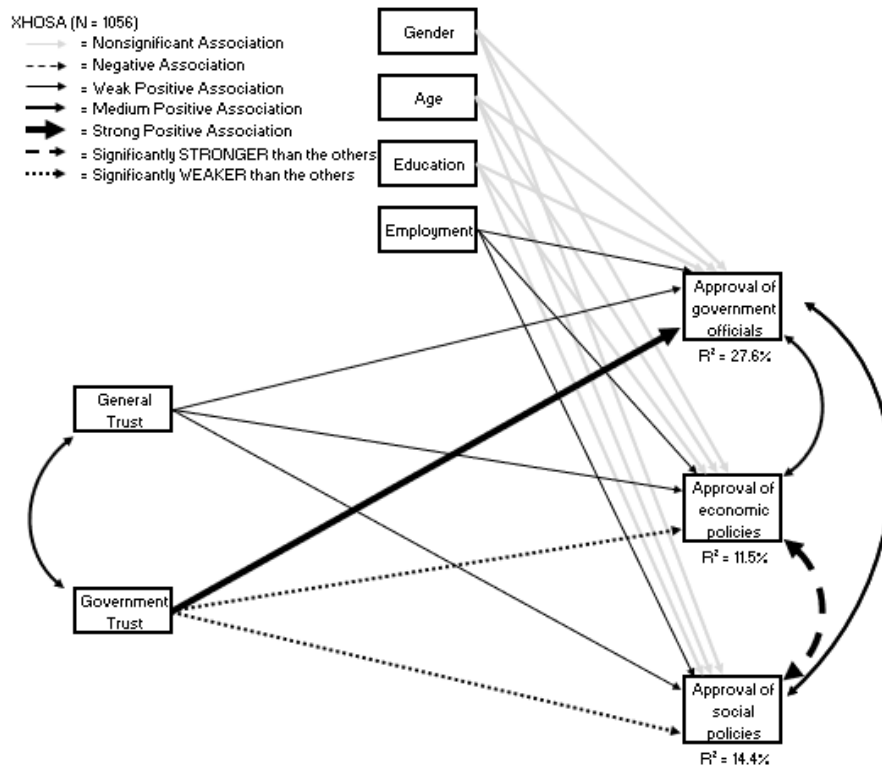


Figure 5. Effects of general and government trust on approval of government officials, economic and social policies for Xhosa.

Together, the results suggest that the relationship between citizens and their government is complex in the ethnic pluralistic nation of South Africa. We can see that trust and ethnicity are the prevailing influences on political attitudes, as suggested by previous studies (Abramowitz 1989b; Anderson 2010; Hetherington 1998; McLaughlin 2008). The three largest ethnic groups: Xhosa, Zulu and Afrikaner, assess political approval in different ways. Still, while ethnicity continues to have a significant effect on political approval, it does not render the relationship between trust and political approval irrelevant. Intuitively, it makes sense that if an individual trusts the government, he or she would approve of the government's positions and policies regardless of personal identity. A similar finding was presented by Hetherington and Husser (2012) who argue that trusting

the government leads to support for more government involvement. In their study of the effects of political trust on political attitudes in post-9/11 U.S., they found that trust did not affect racially directed government programs as it had in the past. Instead, trust affected foreign policy and national defense preferences. But the finding that was most relevant to the one presented in this study is that while political trust had a significant and positive influence on levels of approval for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, race had no significant effect in either statistical model (Hetherington and Husser 2012). The persistence of the relationship between trust and political approval in our study suggests that it is possible that South Africans are moving away from identity politics and evaluating government officials and policies based on performance or other criteria as opposed to the lasting identity-based trust that was found by Askvik (2010).

Still, this study has several limitations caused by the data. We used case-wise deletion and we believe our N of 7101 is large enough to offset any issues that this limitation may cause, but that assumes that the data is missing at random, which is difficult to ascertain. The Afrobarometer data also include what we find to be flawed measures of race and political party affiliation. Race was recorded by the interviewer rather than asked of the respondents, which is problematic, and the question asked of respondents for political party affiliation was posed in terms of closeness to a political party rather than membership or voting history, which was also problematic. Therefore, these potential factors were left out of the analyses.

Also, the data that we used in this study are cross-sectional. Therefore, the results of each round of data are not directly comparable. This also makes it difficult to establish a time-sequence of events, so a case can be made that political approval influences trust. However, we argue that trust influences political approval based on previously established theory and research. Future research should explore how these associations differ over the rounds of the Afrobarometer data.

#### NOTES

1. The Popular Registration Act, the Immorality Act, the Group Areas Act, and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act were among the most notorious (Butler 2004).
2. The ANC's support came mostly from blacks, the Inkatha Freedom Party was supported by mostly Zulu-speaking people, and support for the New National Party was almost exclusively white, Afrikaans-speaking people (Shubane and Stack 1999).

3. According to Statistics South Africa, South Africa's Gini Index as of 2015 was 68.
4. Our data span eight years total from 2004–12. Political events beyond 2012 will not be reflected in the data for this study.
5. This information was obtained from ICPSR website. No additional information regarding response rate is provided by Afrobarometer.

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