
Preface

The compilation of a handbook on political trust is seemingly a self-evident endeavour for numerous reasons. First, only few would seriously question its scholarly relevance since concerns with political trust have long been permeating political, public and scholarly debates alike. Second, the ongoing theoretical, methodological and empirical advances in political trust research created a need to structure, integrate and contextualize this increasing bulk of analyses. Third, democratic societies around the globe have recently experienced major economic, social and political challenges that are feared to ultimately threaten the sustainability of democratic achievements.

These reasons, and more, explain our eagerness to accept Edward Elgar Publishing's invitation to embark on such a far-ranging project. We strove for an easily accessible but equally profound work of reference for an international readership that integrates the many strands of research in this field and responds to pressing requirements of our time. Despite ongoing concerns with the design and implementation of policies to preserve democratic stability, no encompassing and in-depth handbook revolving around this subject matter had yet been published. Our *Handbook on Political Trust* thus responds to urgent academic and practitioner demands.

Yet, we are aware of the complexity, exigencies and potential pitfalls of this task. While editors of such works of reference commonly aim to provide cohesive, state-of-the-art overviews of their topics and to outline future strands of research, we were additionally confronted with two major caveats. First, an overt and mostly uncritical proclivity of our scholarly discipline and the general public exists to readily equate high levels of political trust with desirable political outcomes. Second, political trust research has for many years been particularly concerned with societies in established democratic regimes and post-communist countries. Partly, these analytical emphases can certainly be attributed to shortcomings in data availability, such as the lack of data on other regions in the world. Notwithstanding significant improvements during the past few years, political trust research still lacks comprehensive regional studies that systematically investigate levels and trends of political trust in Latin America, Africa, the Arab region and the vast, heterogeneous East Asian and Pacific regions. In light of these desiderata, we felt compelled to complement the widely shared narratives on political trust with more nuanced approaches and to fill the existing empirical knowledge gap by venturing into uncharted territories.

Accordingly, the *Handbook on Political Trust* combines the breadth of thematic overviews with original empirical analyses. It not only unites and structures the manifold strands of political trust research but also advances this scholarly realm in its own right. From a more general point of view, the handbook offers conceptual guidance and nuanced approaches to beneficial as well as detrimental implications of political trust in different political settings. It outlines the variety of methodological achievements in this field, takes stock of the multitude of micro- and macro-level studies that aim at revealing the causes, correlates and consequences of political trust, and concludes with a comprehensive account of the levels and trends of political trust worldwide. Moreover, as a corollary

of this handbook's broad scope, several contributions cut across disciplinary boundaries by drawing on theoretical, methodological or empirical insights from adjacent fields of research, such as economics, sociology, (social) psychology and communication sciences.

The realization of such an ambitious publication project stands and falls with the expertise, commitment and cooperation of its authors. In this regard we take special pride in having been able to solicit outstanding international scholarly experts whose contributions guarantee the handbook's high quality. Furthermore, the handbook's final set-up, scope, content and cohesion greatly benefited from intensive discussions held at the authors' workshop that we organized in May 2014 at the Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Stimulating debates in an exceptional environment enriched with many joyful moments turned this workshop into a memorable event and helped to extend and solidify our scholarly networks.

Above all, though, we hope that our combined efforts, reflected in the handbook's final form, become a relevant work of reference for an international readership – both new and old – that captures and stimulates the enthusiasm about political trust research shared by the authors in this project.

Our sincere gratitude, therefore, goes out to our colleagues whose contributions, debates and cooperation turned this editorial challenge into a deeply rewarding experience. Moreover, we are indebted to Lianne de Blok, who tackled her formatting tasks with superb and indispensable dedication. Likewise, we are grateful to Edward Elgar Publishing's professional team for their cooperation and advice throughout the entire publication process. Finally, we extend our thanks to our families – Mirjam, Julian, Merijn and Robin and Akim – whose inspiration, patience and support meant the world to us.

*Tom W.G. van der Meer and Sonja Zmerli
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