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Hong Kong Students' Levels of Political Trust Ten Years after the Return to Chinese Sovereignty¹

Hong Kong's return to the People's Republic of China in 1997 marked the beginning of a political transition that, if successful, will result in full democracy by 2020 (Ma 2008). Given that there are different levels of political trust in established and emerging democracies (Catterberg, Moreno 2005) and that regime changes itself exerts an influence on trust, this paper reports on a study that compares levels of political trust between two samples of Hong Kong's young people. The results indicated that more than ten years after Hong Kong's retrocession to China, some institutions were more strongly endorsed in 2009 than in 1999 but others registered a lower level of endorsement. Structurally it seems that 'political trust' is understood by both samples as a multidimensional construct that has a direct impact on the way they see their future citizenship responsibilities. The implications of these results for both political theory and civic education are discussed.

Keywords

Political trust, students, citizenship attitudes

1 Introduction

There is increasing agreement that Hong Kong's political system can best be described as a 'hybrid' (Scott 2004; Case 2008; Ma 2011). *The Economist's* 'Democracy Index 2010' confirmed this categorization by placing Hong Kong in the 'hybrid regime' category and ranking it toward the mid-point of the index (80/167) based on a composite index that took into consideration the electoral system, the functioning of government, political culture, political participation and civil liberties. The index included "full democracies," (ranked 1-26), "flawed democracies" (ranked 27-29) "hybrid regimes" (ranked 80-111) and "authoritarian regimes" (ranked 112-167) (Economist Intelligence Unit 2010). The issue of whether hybrid regimes are "in transition" to democracy has been hotly debated in light of evidence that it is also likely that they can revert to authoritarianism (Levitsky, Way 2002). Morlino (2008, 16) has argued that "the most significant problem in terms of specific cases is to ensure the existence of institutions more or less capable of performing their functions." Levy and Fukuyama (2010) have recently shown the importance of liberal democratic political institutions in limiting the power of the state. They show how such institutions can

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increase the legitimacy of the state and, in some cases, provide the foundations of economic growth. Given the importance of such institutions, this paper is concerned with how they have been perceived by young people in Hong Kong at two points in time – immediately after Hong Kong’s return to China and after ten years under Chinese sovereignty. This focus is especially important in the political context of a Hong Kong since as a ‘hybrid regime’ serious flaws have been identified in its existing democratic processes. A key question, therefore, concerns the ‘democratic utility’ (Jamal, Nooruddin 2010) of political institutions in a hybrid regime the future directions of which are still being negotiated.

2 Political Trust – Theoretical and Measurement Issues

It is important to state at the outset that there have been very few studies dealing with the issue of adolescents’ political trust, with the notable exceptions of Torney-Purta, Barber and Richardson (2004) and Hooghe and Wilkenfeld (2008). These studies used similar data to that which has been used in the current study, but they did not include Hong Kong students in their analyses. More recently, Kennedy, Mok and Wong (2011) used samples of Asian adolescents to examine political trust as a student and school level variable influencing civic understanding. The current study builds on these by exploring in more detail the structure of political trust as a construct and its influence in the particular political context of Hong Kong over time. The remainder of this section will deal with the theoretical and measurement issues associated with political trust with some reference to Hong Kong’s political status.

Warren (1999, 2), writing about the relationship between democracy and trust, pointed out that:

“A society that fosters robust relations of trust is probably also a society that can afford fewer regulations and greater freedoms, deal with more contingencies, tap the energy and ingenuity of its citizens, limit the inefficiencies of rule-based means of coordination, and provide a greater sense of existential security and satisfaction.”

Given the assumed significance of trust, Offe (1999) explored the more basic issue of how trust might be developed in a democratic society. He suggested that under certain conditions vertical trust i.e. trust amongst fellow citizens, can be established through the institutions that serve society. He set very high standards for these institutions relating to truth (“truth telling and promise keeping” and justice (“fairness and solidarity”). The extent to which institutions are characterized by these values is the extent to which they are capable of generating trust among citizens. He commented that:

“Persons who withdraw trust in “everyone else” do so due not to the (impossible) observation that everyone else (or, for that matter, the “political class”) does in fact not deserve to be trusted, but to the perception of failure of the institutions to perform their formative and constraining role according to any or all of these four standards.” (Offe

1999, 75).

This kind of assertion leads naturally to the question of exactly what it is in which members of society should have trust – in themselves, in each other, in society’s government and non-government institutions or all of these? For Offe, the answer was clear – trust should be reserved for individuals and not institutions. This is an important distinction because it gives rise to what is best known as “social trust” as distinct from “political trust.” It is the former that has been the focus of writers such as Putnam (1995) who has developed a significant discourse around the concept of ‘social capital’ and how it provides the basic infrastructure for democratic participation.

Yet the views of the social capital theorists have not been undisputed. Jamal and Nooruddin (2010, 45) have argued that “existing government institutions play an important role in promoting levels of generalized trust because, in democracies and non-democracies alike, political confidence in existing political institutions is linked to higher levels of generalized trust.” According to this argument it is not useful to dichotomize trust since one provides the foundation for the other. A similar view has been supported by Newton (2001), Rothstein and Stolle (2002) and Freitag and Bühlmann (2009) based on their respective secondary analyses of large scale surveys. As Rothstein and Stoll (2002, 28) pointed out “our causal mechanism and developed theoretical insights suggest that parts of generalized trust can be influenced by the institutions in which it is embedded.”

This institutional view of trust is part of a broader debate about the origins or source of trust. Protagonists for a cultural perspective have supported a view that suggests trust is endogenous – almost an inherited characteristic within the social system that is transmitted generationally (Uslaner 2008a). Such a view refers to generalized levels of trust in society. Yet the institutional view of trust, as described in the previous paragraph, sees trusts as exogenous – influenced by factors outside of individuals. Mishler and Rose (2001) showed in relation to post-communist societies that both exogenous and endogenous factors were at work in the development of trust – endogenous factors had indirect effects on trust while exogenous factors exerted a direct effect. Oskarsson (2010) examined a variation on this perspective showing that exogenous factors were more influential for survey respondents who held lower levels of trust. Dinesen (2011), coming from the perspective of migrants in new societies, also supported the interactive effect of generalized and political trust. In this context, Schoon and Cheng (2011) supported a lifelong learning model of political trust rather than a championing of either culturalist or institutional view, a perspective that had been endorsed by Mishler and Rose (2001) a decade earlier. Therefore, while it is possible to distinguish between generalized and political trust it is their interaction that seems more important.

Yet it has also been argued that political trust has its limitations. Jamal and Nooruddin (2010) have argued that the ‘democratic utility’ of trust is effective only in democratic contexts since trust in institutions linked to authoritarian regimes has no spin off for democracy. Jamal (2007) demonstrated in a sample of Arab countries that measures of trust were related to traditional and nondemocratic values while low levels of trust were associated with more liberal values. On the other hand, Li (2010) has

reported how farmers in rural China used ‘freedoms’ provided by central authorities to leverage their claims against local officials. Thus trust in institutions at one level of an authoritarian regime is used to bring about change at another. As Li (2010, 66) pointed out, “if people assert their rules-based claims using the politically accepted language of rights, they may also disguise their claims about rights using the even safer language of rules.” ‘Democratic utility’, therefore, is not an absolute construct – it is determined by both macro political contexts and micro level actions. Yet Jamal’s finding on the importance of ‘distrust’ is also significant. The efficacy of trust depends on its object and at times it may be important to withhold trust where the ends are not democratic. Skepticism towards trust has some support in the literature (Hardin 1999).

In the study to be reported here, the focus will be on political trust or trust in institutions. It is not an entirely new topic in the Hong Kong context. Wong, Hsiao and Wan (2009), for example, have shown that citizens in Hong Kong and Taiwan have different levels of institutional trust. In Taiwan it is overall quite low and in Hong Kong there are relatively high levels of trust in government and the courts but lower levels in the legislature. The explanation is seen as more related to the quality of institutions than to cultural explanations. In a more wide ranging study Wong, Wan and Hsiao (2011) looked across six Asian societies to test the cultural/institutional explanation for levels of political trust. They came down on the side of institutions as the key factor in building political trust in these societies. The current study will extend this regional research by focusing on adolescents rather than adults to investigate how young people in an important area of the region at different points in time have viewed the institutions that govern or influence their lives almost on a daily basis.

Hong Kong’s unique status as an administrative unit of the People’s Republic of China, yet with a colonial heritage that has bequeathed the rule of law, an independent judiciary and an embryonic electoral system, will provide the context for the study. It might be expected that this tension between China’s authoritarian system in which Hong Kong is now embedded and extant political institutions reminiscent of a more fully fledged democracy may have created some ambiguity for Hong Kong’s young people. This study, as well as investigating the nature of the political trust as a construct, will also provide some insight into how Hong Kong’s unique context has influenced adolescent thinking about political trust.

3 The Study

This comparative study drew on cross sectional data from two administrations of the survey used in the IEA Civic Education Study [CivEd] (Torney-Purta et al. 2001). The first administration was part of the Hong Kong component of CivEd and took place in 1999. The second administration occurred in 2009. Details relating to the sample, instrument and analytic techniques are provided below.

Sample. Details concerning CivEd sampling procedures can be found in

Torney-Purta et al. (2001) and Schulz and Sibberns (2004). The 1999 Hong Kong sample consisted of 4497 students with an average age of 15.3 ($SD = 0.8$). The 2009 sample consisted of 602 students with a mean age of 15.35 years ($SD = .79$). Successive random samples of 500 students were chosen from the 1999 group and the full sample was used for the 2009 group.

Data. The CivEd questionnaire contained 12 questions addressing level of trust in political institutions. The items are shown in Table 1. Students were asked: “How much of the time can you trust each of the following institutions”? Answers were provided using four-point scale ‘1=never, 2=only some of the time, 3=most of time, and 4=always.’

Analysis. SPSS 16.0 was used to produce descriptive statistics that were analyzed using ‘*t*’-tests to test for statistical significance and Cohen’s ‘*d*’ to determine effect size. To provide another perspective on the item level analysis, Winsteps (Lincare 2006) was used to conduct a Rating Scale Analysis and determine item difficulty. A Principal Components Analysis of the residuals was also conducted to explore the dimensionality of the items. The dimensionality of the data was also investigated using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The internal reliability (α) of the proposed scales was calculated and the scree plot and eigenvalues were examined to determine the number of factors. Subsequently Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using a second random sample of students. Model fit indices were calculated to test the extent to which the proposed model fitted the data. Multi-Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MGCFA) was then used to test the measurement invariance of the model across the two cohorts of students. This involved testing a series of progressively restricted models to assess the extent to which the models were comparable. A series of multiple regression analyses was conducted to test the relationship between the identified model of Political Trust and three dependent variables. These were ‘Political Knowledge,’ measured by CivEd’s Total Civic Knowledge scale score, and ‘Political Participation,’ measured with two different scales, a two item ‘Informed Voting’ scale and a three item ‘Conventional Political Action’ scale.

4 Results

Descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics for both samples are shown in Table 1.

A number of points can be made from the item analysis in Table 1. The institutions that were endorsed more strongly in 2009 than 1999 with large effect sizes were the “courts” and the “United Nations.” The “police,” “news on television,” “news on radio” and “news in the press” were endorsed more strongly in 2009 but the effect sizes were small. The institutions that were endorsed less strongly in 2009 than 1999 were “district councils” and “political parties” and the effect sizes were large.

Table 1. Mean scores on political trust items for students in 1999 and 2009

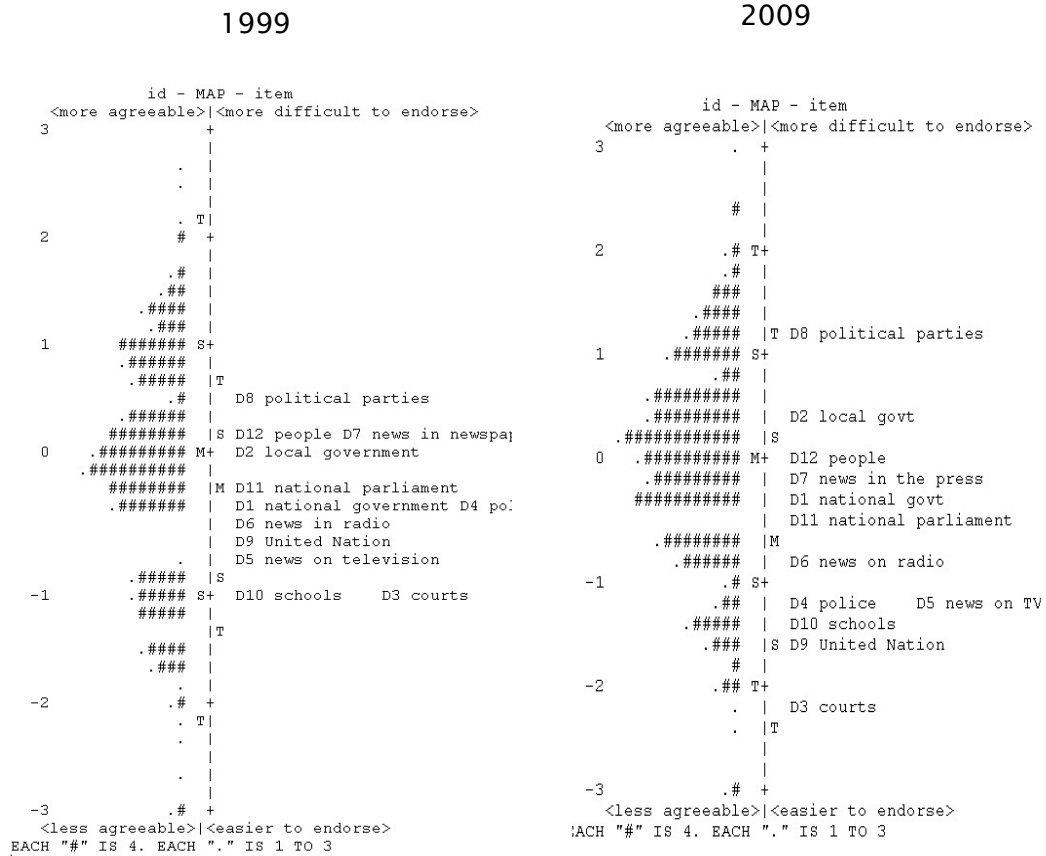
	1999		2009		<i>t</i>		<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
D1 The national government	2.55	0.78	2.57	0.71	-0.52		-0.03
D2 District councils (local government)	2.42	0.74	2.30	0.64	4.02	***	0.17
D3 Courts	2.89	0.82	3.22	0.76	-9.97	***	-0.41
D4 The police	2.66	0.82	2.84	0.77	-5.50	***	-0.22
D5 News on Television	2.70	0.76	2.86	0.71	-5.11	***	-0.21
D6 News on the radio	2.67	0.75	2.70	0.70	-1.10		-0.04
D7 News in the press	2.34	0.69	2.50	0.69	-5.30	***	-0.23
D8 Political parties	2.18	0.72	2.01	0.60	5.89	***	0.24
D9 United Nations	2.67	0.90	3.03	0.83	-9.37	***	-0.40
D10 Schools(Education institutions)	2.85	0.80	2.91	0.72	-1.92		-0.08
D11 National parliament (Congress)	2.54	0.77	2.54	0.75	-0.21		0.00
D12 The people who live in this country	2.38	0.83	2.42	0.66	-1.25		-0.05

Note: *** $p < .001$

As a complement to the item analysis using descriptive statistics, a rating scale analysis (RSA) (Andrich 1978) was also conducted. RSA does not report the raw scores but the transformed raw scores that take into account both

the positive and negative responses to an item (Bond, Fox 2007). This is often referred to as the distribution of item difficulties – an easy item has more positive endorsements and fewer negative endorsements while a difficult item has more negative endorsements and fewer positive endorsements. The RSA enabled a comparison to be made between the item difficulties and their distribution between 1999 and 2009. The results are shown in Figure 1 in the form of a Wright map that provides a graphical display of the interval scale (Wilson 2005) with item difficulties on the right hand side and the distribution of student endorsements on the left hand side.

Figure 1. Item difficulty distributions 1999 and 2009

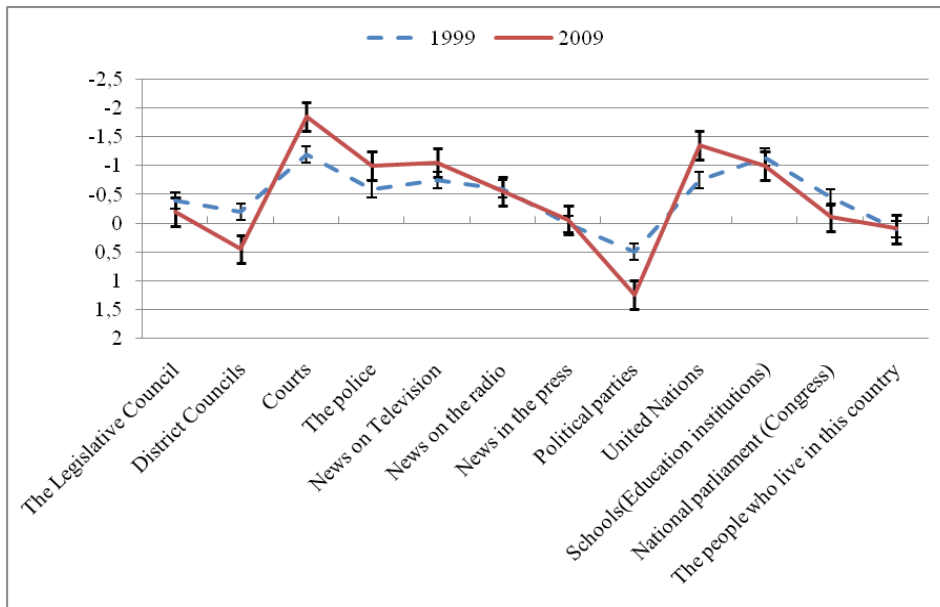


In general, the item difficulty distribution in 2009 was more spread out than item difficulty distribution in 1999 suggesting that some items were more difficult to endorse in 2009 and some were easier. The items - “national government” (1999: -0.63 logits; 2009: -0.28 logits), “district councils” (1999: -0.16 logits; 2009: 0.44 logits), “political parties” (1999: 0.48 logits; 2009: 1.26 logits) and “national parliament” (1999: -0.43 logits; 2009: -0.18 logits) appeared easier to endorse in 1999 than in 2009 suggesting that students in 2009 had higher trust towards these institutions than their peers in 1999. While items “courts” (1999: -1.26 logits; 2009: -1.86 logits),

the “police” (1999: -0.59 logits; 2009: -0.94 logits), “news on TV (1999: -0.83 logits; 2009: -0.98 logits), and the “United Nations” (1999: -0.74 logits; 2009: -1.35 logits) in 2009 appear to be easier to endorse by students in 1999 suggesting that students in 1999 had lower trust towards these institutions than their peers in 2009. These results were consistent with the results obtained from the descriptive analysis.

As in the analysis of raw scores reported earlier, not all differences are necessarily substantial. As Figure 2 shows, there were observable differences (i.e. > 0.5 logits) for “districts councils” and “political parties,” the “courts,” and “United Nations.” These differences were also identified through large effect sizes in the analysis or raw scores.

Figure 2. Item difficulty: 1999 and 2009



It should also be noted that a Principal Component Analysis of residuals of the data for both 1999 and 2009 revealed that item D5, 6, 7 might form another dimension different from the other items. This was indicated by the eigenvalues of over 2.0 (both equal 2.6), accounting for 21.8% and 21.3% respectively of the unexplained variance left from the extracted Rasch dimension in 1999 and 2009. Thus while the scale above has been reported as though it were unidimensional, further analyses will be conducted in the following section to explore further the dimensionality of the scale.

5 Factor Analyses

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA): 1999 data

Item 12 (“the people live in this country”) was deleted from the analysis

because it is not consistent with the other items that focus on specific institutions. It showed a low squared multiple correlation ($R^2=.17$), and low communality (.23). Eleven items with internal reliability (Cronbach's α) of .83 were included in the final analysis. The scree plot suggested a 2- or 3-factor model. Mplus 5.1 (Muthén, Muthén 1998-2007) was used to perform an EFA from 2 factors to 4 factors using a Crawford-Ferguson Varimax rotation method. Goodness of fit indices for 2 to 4 factors are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of factors and goodness fit for EFA

No. of factors	χ^2	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	AIC	BIC
2	540.00	34	.933	.892	.080	.038	48851	49098
3	227.64	25	.973	.941	.059	.025	48557	48856
4	61.64	17	.994	.981	.034	.012	48407	48561

The GFIs suggested 3- and 4- factor models. One factor in the four factor model only had one item loading on it when looking at the specific factor loading on each factor. Based on these preliminary findings, it appeared that the most parsimonious summary of the data could be based on 3 distinct components. The major loadings of the Crawford-Ferguson Varimax rotation are presented in Table 3 with all loadings lower than .3 suppressed.

Table 3. Factor loadings for EFA

Item No.	Institutions	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
D1	The national government	.53		
D2	District councils	.96		
D3	Courts			.59
D4	The police			.52
D5	News on Television		.93	
D6	News on the radio		.83	
D7	News in the press		.43	
D8	Political parties	.37		
D9	United Nations			.48
D10	Schools			.59
D11	National parliament	.36		(.39)

Note: the first three eigenvalues are 3.89, 1.77, and 0.98, the corresponding R^2 are .38, .16, and .09.

'National parliament' double loaded on both Factor 1 and Factor 3, but since conceptually it is related to the other items in Factor 1 it was deleted from

Factor 3. This provided a four item factor with all items conceptually related by their link as government related institutions: the “national government,” district councils” or “political parties,” and “national parliament.” Factor 1 was therefore named *Trust in Government Related Institutions*. The second factor had three items – “news on television,” “news on the radio” and “news in the press.” Factor 2 was named *Trust in Media*. The indicators of this factor were consistent with the international data in CivEd (Schulz, Sibberns 2004) and were also signaled in the Principal Components Analysis of the residuals mentioned earlier. The third factor included “courts” the “police,” “United Nations” and “schools.” These are conceptually different from either *Government Related Institutions* or the *Media* but they were not identified in CivEd as a distinct factor (Schulz, Sibberns, 2004). Hooghe and Wilkenfeld (2008) identified “national or federal government,” “local government,” “courts,” “police,” “political parties,” “national parliament/Congress,” and the “United Nations” as a unidimensional scale they labeled *Political Trust*. Yet in their analysis of European Social Survey data, Allum, Read and Sturgis (2010, 11) noted that “items on trust in legal system, the police, European Parliament and United Nations... were not used in this study, because following some preliminary confirmatory factor analysis, they appeared to measure a separate dimension of political trust.” This view is supported by Rothstein and Stolle (2002, 20) who identified a similar dimension using these items with the explanation that these “institutions that are expected to function with less political bias and in an impartial manner” and in this sense they are not overtly political institutions. In the current study using Hong Kong CivEd data, the distinct latent structure of the items “courts” the “police,” “United Nations” and “schools” reflected the qualities described by Rothstein and Stolle (2002) contrasting with the political orientation of *Government Related Institutions* and the obviously distinctive items in the Media dimension. Thus the third factor was named *Trust in Socio-Legal Institutions*.

6 Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA)

To test the model fit of the EFA that emerged from the 1999 data a CFA was conducted (Model 1) using a second random CivEd sample of 596 students. The model fit indices were $\chi^2 (41) = 137.238$, CFI=.951, TLI=.934; RMSEA=.063, SRMR=.045. Discounting the significant χ^2 , the other fit indices showed a good fit to the data. The corresponding factor loading on each factor and the correlations among factors are shown in Figure 3.

The factor loading of each indicator was high on each factor. The results showed a high correlation between Government Related Institutions and Socio-Legal Institutions and a medium correlation between Socio-Legal Institutions and the Media, but a relative low correlation between Government Related Institutions and Media.

A second CFA (Model II) was conducted using the full 2009 sample (n=602) and the model that was confirmed for the 1999 data. The model fit indices for the 2009 model also showed a moderately acceptable fit to the data (CFI=.923, TLI=.896, RMSEA=.069, SRMR=.052.) The standardized estimated

parameters for the 2009 data are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 3. Confirmatory factor analysis: 1999 data

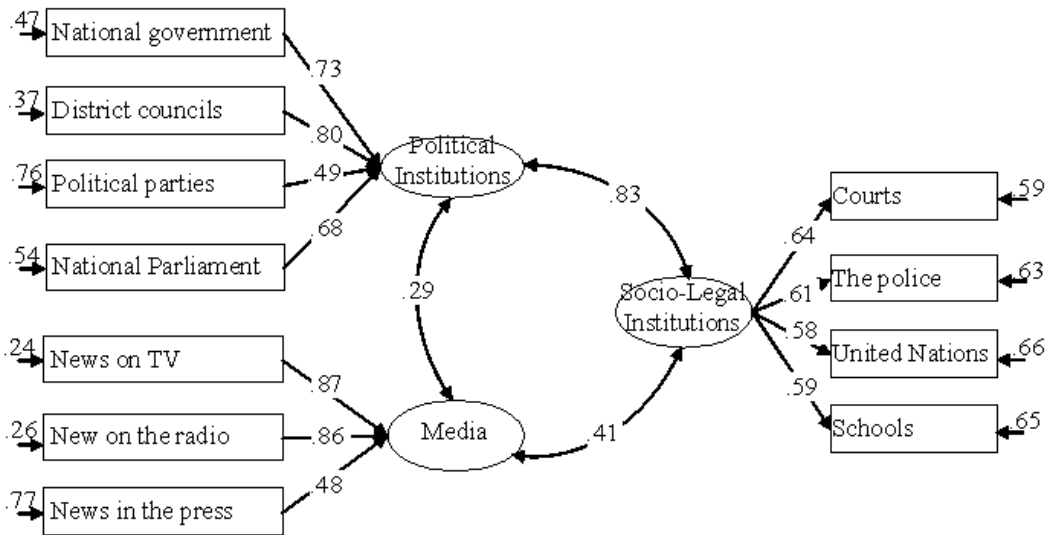
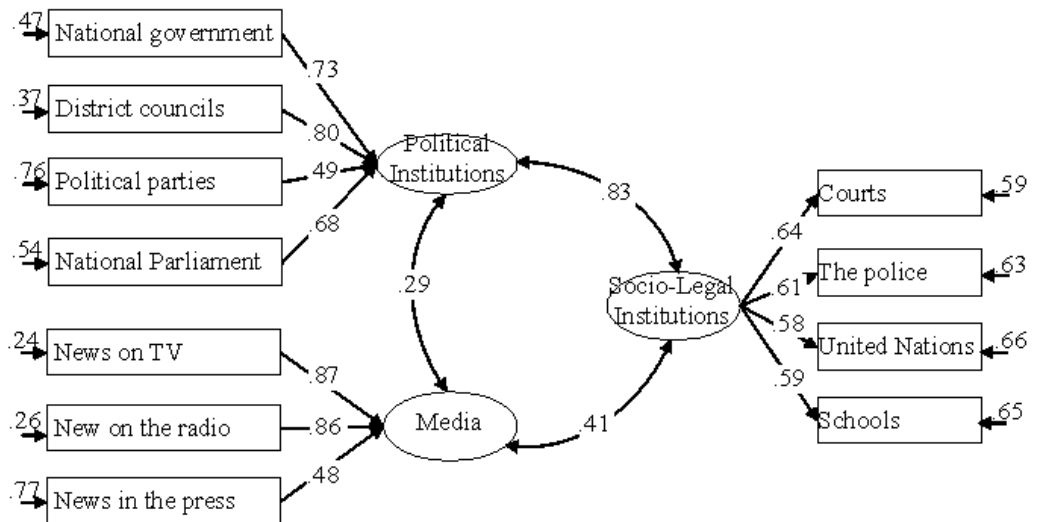


Figure 4. Confirmatory factor analysis: 2009 data



A necessary condition to test for measurement invariance between the two groups (1999 and 2009) is that they are configurally invariant (Horn, McArdle 1992). That is, the factor structure must be the same for each group. Or, put another way, “participants from different groups conceptualize the constructs in the same way” (Milfont, Fischer 2010, 115).

In the goodness of fit indices reported for each of the models above, $\Delta RMSEA = .006$ thus meeting Cheung and Rensvold's (2002) criteria for configural invariance ($\Delta RMSEA < .05$). A Multi-group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MGCFA) was then conducted testing a series of progressively restricted models (Vandenberg, Lance 2000; Vandenberg 2002). The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Multigroup factor analysis: 1999 and 2009

No.	Model	χ^2	df	CFI	ΔCFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
I	Unrestricted Model	297.981	82	.938	/	.917	.066	.049
Weak invariance								
II	Government Related Institutions	323.634	86	.932	-.006	.913	.068	.070
III	Media and Socio-legal equal	310.839	89	.936	-.002	.921	.065	.062
IV	All factor loadings equal	332.422	93	.931	-.005	.919	.066	.079
Strong Invariance								
V	Intercepts of Socio-legal	404.315	93	.910	-.026	.894	.075	.092
VI	Intercept of Media	344.478	92	.927	-.009	.913	.068	.072

The MGCFA process started with an unrestricted model without constraint and parameters equal across two groups (Model I in Table 4). Factor loading invariance, that tests whether “different groups respond to the items in the same way” (Milfont, Fischer 2010), was tested for the three dimensions of the scale (Model IV in Table 4) resulting in $\Delta CFI = -.005$. Based on Meade et al.'s (2008) criteria that requires ΔCFI to be equal to or less than .002, strong factor loading invariance was rejected. Next, partial factor loading invariance was tested (Vandenberg, Lance 2000). Of the three dimensions Government Related Institutions was not invariant ($\Delta CFI = -.006$) (Model II) but Socio-Legal Institutions and Media were invariant ($\Delta CFI = .00$) (Model III). This suggests partial factor loading invariance for the Political Trust Scale. Further examination to test for intercept invariance (“individuals who have the same score on the latent construct would obtain the same score on the observed variable regardless of their group membership” (Milfont, Fischer 2010, 115) of Socio-Legal Institutions and Media led to rejection of invariance based on the respective ΔCFI 's, -.026 and -.009 (Models V and VI) in Table 4.

7 The Relationship of Political Trust to Civic Knowledge and to Citizenship Responsibilities

The relationship between political knowledge and political trust was examined using the 1999 data. Political knowledge was measured by the CivEd Total Civic Knowledge score (Torney-Purta et al. 2001). Political trust was measured by the multidimensional scale identified in this study. The results showed that higher Trust in Government Related Institutions and Trust in Media were associated with lower Civic Knowledge scores (β s = -.31 and -.12, SEs = .046 and .021, p s < .001, respectively). Higher Trust in Socio-Legal Institutions was associated with higher Civic Knowledge scores (β = .49, SE = .050, p < .001).

The relationship between political participation and political trust was also examined. Political participation was defined by two different measures based on Torney-Purta et al. (2004). Informed Voting was measured by two items - "vote in national elections" and "get information about candidates before voting" and Conventional Political Action was measured by three items - "join a political party," "write letters about social/political concerns," and "be a candidate for a local/city office" (this last item was not included in Torney-Purta et al. 2004). Results showed that Trust in Government Related Institutions was associated with a high probability for voting behavior and political action (β s = .19 and .45, SEs = .040 and .043, p s < .001, respectively). Trust in Socio-Legal Institutions was also associated with a higher probability for voting behavior, but negatively associated with political action (β s = .17 and -.18, SEs = .045 and .048, p s < .001). Trust in Media had a negative effect on voting behavior (β = -.04, SE = .020, p < .05) and no significant relationship with political action (β = .01, SE = .021, p = .821).

8 Discussion

This section will first review the results at the item level, followed by a discussion of the multidimensional model identified for both cohorts of students and finally the implications that can be drawn from the multiple regression analyses.

8.1 Changes in Hong Kong Students' Political Trust

The institutions in which there were substantial changes in level of endorsement were the 'courts' and the 'United Nations' suggesting these are the institutions in which young Hong Kong people in 2009 had the most trust. Yet they are quite different institutions and the level of support for them requires different explanations.

- *The Courts*

Torney-Purta et al. (2004) analyzing CivEd data found in the six countries they studied that trust in the courts was an important feature but they added that this was particularly so “in long-standing democracies” (Torney-Purta et al. 2004). Thus students from the United States had higher levels of trust in the courts than students from Bulgaria. Hong Kong students’ level of trust in the courts as measured in 2009 indicates that they responded much more like students in a mature democracy than students in a non-democratic state and they responded more emphatically that their peers in 1999 who also registered positive attitudes towards the courts. This can perhaps be explained by the adoption in Hong Kong of the rule of law, arguably the most significant residue of the British colonial heritage (Tsang 2001). As many scholars have explained (Maravall, Przeworski 2003; Fukuyama 2010) the rule of law itself is capable of different interpretations but they are agreed that commitment to the rule of law is an important adjunct to the development of democracy. Students’ trust in the courts, therefore, can be seen as an important ingredient on Hong Kong’s path to democracy. If young people in Hong Kong continue to see the courts as an institution they can trust, then these institutions can play a very important role in the future to ensure stability. At the same time, there may be other local reasons that have served to increase the level of trust in the courts.

Hong Kong’s independent judicial system and authority remained intact after the return to Chinese sovereignty and a series of improvements were made. The most important among those changes was that court proceedings can now be conducted in either English or Chinese and the laws themselves are available in Chinese. This may have led to the rise in the number of civil cases since access has been made easier (Martin 2007). These changes reflect increased awareness and concern among Hong Kong people about their legal rights and consequently the role of courts in seeking to support these. This may be another reason for increasing levels of political trust among Hong Kong’s young people.

Can it be concluded from these results that Hong Kong’s young people, in valuing the courts, are committed to the rule of law? According to Wen (2001), the answer will depend on how the rule of law is understood. He has argued, based on his review of the famous “right of abode” case in 1999 where the National People’s Consultative Committee was asked by the Hong Kong government for an interpretation of the Basic Law, “that Hong Kong’s legal culture is characterized by strong elements of legal instrumentalism. In other words, in contrast to the common law perspective, law is treated by the common people as a means to an end, and law is valued for its contribution to collective well-being. In such a culture, the public looks for substantive justice, as defined by dominant social values and collective needs, rather than the procedural justice fundamental to the rule of law”. It cannot be expected that the 15 year olds who responded to the survey in 2009 were able to make this fine distinction between legal philosophies but it does highlight the point that there is a ‘legal culture’ in Hong Kong, that young people are aware of it, probably through different socialization agents such as parents and media, and it registers as trust in an institution seen to be of value to the well being of themselves and Hong Kong.

- The United Nations

Torgler (2007), using adult samples, investigated trust in international organizations, particularly the United Nations, and found a positive relationship between levels of trust in the local political system and levels of international trust – citizens satisfied locally will also be satisfied internationally. He also found a relationship between cosmopolitan attitudes and trust in the United Nations. Thus it may be that students in Hong Kong, promoted by the government as “Asia’s world city” are reflecting levels of trust that acknowledge the city’s much vaunted status. Torney-Purta et al. (2004) pointed out that even though students may not have direct experience with such organizations, that they do pick up ideas and understandings from discussions within the family and at school and, we might add, the media.

From a different perspective, Hooghe and Wilkenfeld (2008) have shown that psychometrically, local political institutions and the United Nations form part of a single factor or scale that measures political trust. This suggests that conceptually students can link local and international institutions even though they may not endorse the individual institutions equally strongly. In their study, using both CivEd and European Social Survey data, however, students endorsed local institutions more strongly than the United Nations. In the current study the reverse was true. Apart from the “courts,” the “United Nations” was the most strongly endorsed institution. This remains an important area for future research since Hong Kong students’ trust or confidence in the United Nations needs to be better understood than the research methodology used in this study has allowed. Brewer, Gross, Aday and Willnat (2004), for example, have explored the concept of “international trust” and the extent to which citizens in the United States look outwards to judge the efficacy of national political institutions. They also suggested that citizens with high levels of international trust also have high levels of trust in international organizations such as the United Nations. This area remains to be explored with Hong Kong students.

There were also institutions in which the extent of the change was not as marked as that in the institutions described above. These institutions are discussed below.

- The police

Torney-Purta et al. (2004) found that students displayed moderate levels of trust in the police across the six countries in their secondary analysis of CivEd data with the strength of the endorsement not too different from that given by Hong Kong students. The higher level of trust in “police” expressed by students in 2009 (with small effect size) is probably a better indicator of social rather than political trust as argued by Netjes (2005) and this is supported by the location of the item in the scale ‘socio-legal institutions.’ Comparatively, it seems the social trust in police is higher than trust in political institutions. This makes sense since the police are likely to be much closer to the everyday life of students than distant political institutions. In a sense the police are somewhat like the courts - a community service looking

after immediate needs. Over a ten year period it seems this kind of social trust has increased, even if it is a marginal increase, indicating the confidence young people in Hong Kong continue to have in this important social institution.

- News on television and news in the press

It is important to note that trust in the media has increased over the ten year period, even though the changes are not substantial. Yet based on Husfeldt, Barber and Torney-Purta's (2005) secondary analysis of the Trust in Media scale Hong Kong students' level of trust in the media in 1999 was below the international mean. How can improved levels of trust be explained over the ten year period?

This increase maybe a reflection of Hong Kong's freedom of the press, guaranteed by the Hong Kong Bill of Rights, a freedom that has received constant attention over the ten year period especially in light of the concerns expressed at the time of Hong Kong's return to China (Sciutto 1996). Freedom of the press, therefore, remains an important value in Hong Kong that ranked 34th in the 2010 World Freedom of the Press Rankings (Reporters without Borders 2011). This was just ahead of Asian democracies such as South Korea (42nd) and Taiwan (48th) but well ahead of Singapore (136th), Indonesia (117th) and Thailand (153rd) although behind Japan (11th), New Zealand (9th) and Australia (18th). For students in 2009, it seems the media continue to play a community role that wins their positive support. Since the media can play an important role in mediating attitudes and understandings to the general public ongoing trust in the media appears to be an important element of democratic development.

There were two institutions that were endorsed less positively in 2009 than 1999 suggesting that levels of political trust in these institutions have declined. These were district councils and political parties. The latter were also identified as problematic in Hong Kong by Cheung (2010). Lack of trust in political parties is an international phenomena amongst young people (Schulz et al. 2010) and adult populations as well (Ware 1996). Political parties are always the least strongly endorsed political institutions so that Hong Kong students' attitudes are not unique in this regard. Yet it should be noted that political parties have continued to develop in post-handover Hong Kong although not always with high levels of public support (Chung 2006). But for the students who answered the survey in 1999, parties had only been on the scene since the early 1990s. It seems that a decade of experience with parties since that time has not improved their image among Hong Kong 15 year olds.

District Councils are very local political institutions having replaced Municipal Councils after the handover. They are the political institutions closest to citizens and their members are elected by universal suffrage, but with a provision also for the direct appointment of members by the Chief Executive. Local political parties are also connected closely to District Councils and the fortunes of the party representation are decided by four yearly elections. As DeGloyer (2008) pointed out in relation to the 2007 District Council elections "voters, seeing the District Councils as

neighborhood agents for liaison with government, chose those who demonstrated ... practical abilities rather than those who called for the more abstract goal of added democracy.” This link to political parties, coupled with the pragmatism of the Hong Kong electorate seeking outcomes of personal benefit rather than principle, may well account for declining levels of political trust in District Councils. Again, lack of trust in local institutions is an international phenomena rather than something unique to Hong Kong (Catterberg, Moreno 2005).

8.2 How Best to Understand Political Trust?

Our analysis of the items in Table 1 suggests that political trust for these samples of Hong Kong students is better understood as a multidimensional construct consisting of three interrelated factors. This is in contrast to other analyses using different national samples that have identified political trust as either a unidimensional construct (although without the media items) as suggested by Hooghe and Wilkenfeld (2008) or the two dimensional scale (including the media items) proposed by Schulz and Sibberns (2004). What is more, for Hong Kong students the latent structure of political trust was invariant for the two cohorts of students suggesting that the structure was not simply an artefact of a single sample. At the same time, however, the scale is not fully invariant across the two groups as shown by the MGCFA. This means that direct comparison of scale scores is problematic because students from each group have responded differently to some of the items. Thus more work is needed on the dimensionality of the scale and in particular it needs to be tested with other populations. Perhaps one reason that this has not happened to date is that the media items were not used in the original international analyses of CivEd (Husfeldt et al. 2005). Although the role of media has been explored in the context of political socialization it seems that a focus on its role in building political trust would be an equally important area of future research.

One reason for suggesting this direction is that the regression analyses shown above suggested that the different dimensions of political trust had differential impacts on civic engagement. The predictive potential of these dimensions has important implications for a better understanding of ways to promote civic engagement through the development of political trust. Trust in Government Related Institutions, for example, was positively related to both voting and political action. This is a similar result to that of Torney-Purta et al. (2004) who used CivEd data from six participating countries (not including Hong Kong). Yet for Hong Kong students this trust dimension was a much stronger predictor of political action than voting – the reverse for each of the six country samples reported in Torney-Purta et al. (2004). One explanation for this result may be the absence of universal suffrage in Hong Kong since electoral democracy is limited in important ways. Yet there is a strong protest culture that provides opportunities for full participation and this culture is protected by a Bill of Rights and even the Basic Law (Beatty 2003). Building trust in government related institutions, therefore, may be an important way to support this alternative democratic culture in Hong

Kong.

Trust in Socio-Legal Institutions produced a different result – it positively affected voting but negatively affected political action. This result makes sense if socio-legal institutions are seen as those which primarily play a protective or safeguarding role in society. As Rothstein and Stolle (2002, 11) pointed out, “one should keep in mind that for their personal welfare, citizens are usually much more dependent on the institutions that implement public policies than on the institutions that are supposed to represent their interests or ideology. To be protected by the police and the courts, to get health care and education for one’s children is for many seen as of vital importance.” Confidence in such institutions may mean that young people do not see the need to take political action to secure their purposes, thus the negative relationship between this scale and ‘Conventional Political Action.’ Nevertheless, they would be willing to participate in more conventional forms of participation such as voting. In this sense, trust in socio-legal institutions produces a conservative response to civic participation.

Trust in the Media produced negative associations both with ‘Informed Voting’ and ‘Conventional Political Action.’ Dermody and Hanmer-Lloyd (2003) have argued that the media are caught in a “disengagement vortex” whereby the constant reporting of negative political content creates cynicism and feeds into existing predilections for not trusting politicians and the institutions they represent. Thus trust in a negative and at times cynical media produces the disinclination to participate, perhaps out of a sense of lack of political efficacy in light of such negative contexts. Moy, McCluskey, McCoy and Spratt (2004, 540) also found negative associations between trust in various forms of media and participation. Their tentative explanation was “that people who trust the media (may be) more complacent and allow journalists to participate on their behalf (i.e. engage in participation by proxy).” This suggests that in order to promote civic engagement, there needs to be a healthy distrust in the media or, alternatively, that the media needs to be constructed in such a way that its negative messages are not so pervasive as to provide a rationale for not participating. As Dermody and Hanmer-Lloyd (2003, 18) comment, “in a society where trust is declining and distrust increasing, media, like political parties must begin to reflect on the consequences of their action on public opinion and democracy.”

Finally, the relationship between the different dimensions of trust and civic knowledge also deserves some comment. Trust in Government Related Institutions and Trust in the Media were associated with lower levels of civic knowledge yet Trust in Socio-Legal Institutions was associated with higher levels of civic knowledge. Developing a “trustful” citizenry, therefore will not necessarily lead to a more knowledgeable citizenry, except in the case of building trust in those institutions designed to protect citizens’ interests in an impartial way. This again highlights the importance of understanding the multidimensionality of institutional trust as a construct and supports the view of Uslaner (2008b) that “not all trust is the same,” a view also highlighted by Rothstein and Stolle (2002). Different aspects of trust have different effects whether it is in relation to civic knowledge, voting or political action.

9 Conclusion

This study has shown that 15-year-old students in Hong Kong – those in 1999 as well as in 2009 – understood political trust as a multidimensional construct, as shown by the configural invariance between the two groups; but they did not view that construct in exactly the same way as shown by the partial metric invariance. Differences at the item level gave some idea of how the latent constructs differed across the ten year period. Some of the changes showed more positive attitudes to institutions (for example the ‘courts’ and the ‘United Nations’) and some attitudes were more negative (for example ‘political parties’ and ‘district councils.’) These results suggest that Hong Kong 15 year olds have remained alert to their institutional environment, are able to make nuanced responses to differentiate between institutions and are aware of the role that different institutions play in the local context.

Developing political trust is not a usual goal of civic education yet trust is an important process that can ensure stability and develop confidence in the operations of society. Increasingly links are being drawn between the development of trust and economic growth and development. What role might civic education play? One important role might be in relation to media education since it seems from the results reported here that too much trust in the media is not healthy for democracy. Developing critical skills for media analysis might encourage both productive use of media as well as enhance the potential for civic engagement. These same skills could be applied to analyzing both government and socio-legal institutions – their strengths, their weaknesses and their role in a democratic society. Direct experience could be provided with visits to institutions followed by role play and simulations. It may well be time for civic educators to consider how trust-building (or distrust in case of media) can be included as an explicit part of civic education. The benefits would be far beyond traditional civic knowledge but would extend to civic engagement as well as the potential to contribute to social stability and cohesion.

Over time levels of trust have changed towards some of these institutions with the most positive changes having taken place towards the courts and the United Nations. Smaller positive increases in trust were registered towards the police and certain kinds of media. Lower levels of trust were recorded towards political parties and district councils. The latter should not be seen as unusual but as part of an international trend of disillusion with political institutions. Overall, Hong Kong students’ level of political trust should be regarded as healthy providing a good foundation for the future development of the local political system.

Finally, there is now considerable evidence about the multidimensionality of political trust – not just from this study but in the wider literature (Uslaner 2008b; Rothstein, Stolle 2002). Future large scale assessments of civic and citizenship education need to take this aboard so that appropriate items can be included to allow for a more accurate modeling of the latent structure of the construct. The continuing confounding of ‘government’ and ‘socio-legal’ institutions is a serious barrier to the proper understanding of how different kinds of trust can be developed and the differential impact that these kinds

of trust can have. This would be an important step forward in better understanding adolescent conceptions of political trust, the contexts that influence such trust and its potential as both a citizen attribute and a social reality.

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