

CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS OF STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

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**SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

JULY 2012

Abstract

This thesis analyses citizens' perceptions of standards in public life. It attempts to understand whether perceptions such as these are important substantively for questions of citizen disaffection, and begins the task of analyzing how citizens come to hold the perceptions they do. The thesis presents a systematic investigation into this topic, placing perceived standards in the context of a discussion about citizen disaffection and the perceived legitimacy of political systems. As they are conceived of in this thesis, 'standards in public life' can usefully be thought of as the 'rules of the game' or the 'spirit of public service'. Standards in public life are less a set of formal, prescriptive rules, more an exhortation to the appropriate exercise of public office. Such a focus upon the 'rules of the game' results in the primary concern of this thesis being about the *process* of governing, as opposed to the outcomes governors can produce.

The thesis investigates perceptions of standards in two parts. Part 1 considers broad questions of the conceptualisation, measurement and structure of citizen beliefs about government in general, and perceptions of standards in particular. The findings of Part 1 therefore provide a base upon which future analyses can be built. Part 2 investigates the causes of perceptions of standards, focusing upon three aspects of political 'conditions': partisan co-alignment, the 'scandal' concerning Derek Conway's use of parliamentary expenses to employ his son to do essentially no work, and the MPs' expenses scandal.

The analyses in this thesis are primarily quantitative, and investigate a series of four datasets, which contain data collected in the United Kingdom between 2003 and 2011.

Acknowledgements

As with any thesis, the production of this work would not have been possible without a significant amount of help and support from a wide variety of people and organisations. In particular, I would like to thank Cees van der Eijk, my first supervisor. I began this post having only completed a 10-week module in quantitative methods, and knew little over how to run a regression in SPSS. With Cees' help and support, I now *also* know how to run regressions in R. Along the way, I have also gained an appreciation of the many different and varied approaches to social science investigation and gained an appreciation of the application of a wide variety of methods. It is not an understatement to say that I could not have done this without Cees' help. Moreover, I should also say that I have incredibly enjoyed my supervisions with Cees. His comments on my work may not always have been the fastest to come back, but I am unaware of any supervisor who gives as detailed and thoughtful comments as Cees. Finally, as a recent first-time father, Cees has also been incredibly helpful with a raft of practical advice about bringing up children; from advice on when to worry about a child's temperature to general pointers on how not to lose children in busy city centres (it turns out reins are helpful).

I would also like to thank my second academic supervisor, Lauren McLaren, and my non-academic supervisor, Peter Hawthorne. Both have been incredibly helpful and interested in the project throughout. They have provided me with thoughtful comments on my work, and I think it is substantially better for their involvement.

I must also thank the ESRC and Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL), both of whom provided funding and support for this project. In particular, this project could not have been completed without the help of the CSPL, whose data I analyse here. Being mindful of public beliefs is incredibly important for every political system, and the CSPL should be heartily congratulated for their work in this regard. It is very easy to disregard the public's attitudes, and very hard to consider them properly; the willingness of the CSPL to take on this project reflects extremely positively upon them.

I would also like to thank the R Development Core Team, as well as the numerous authors of libraries used in this thesis, for developing one of the most powerful tools for statistical analysis, and giving it away freely. The same is true of GNU/Linux, which has provided me with a free, flexible, and stable operating system upon which to work. Free (Open Source) Software is incredibly important academically, and the option to investigate the functioning of libraries down to the base code has been useful on more than one occasion.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. In particular, my wife, Ceri, and son, Noah. Ceri has been incredibly supportive during the whole of my PhD, as she was during my BA and MA. I would have struggled to produce anything, let alone a full thesis, without her help and support. Noah too has been supportive; coming home to his smiling face makes working long hours seem much more worthwhile.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"I come in peace," it said, adding after a long moment of further grinding, "take me to your Lizard."

Ford Prefect, of course, had an explanation for this, as he sat with Arthur and watched the nonstop frenetic news reports on television, none of which had anything to say other than to record that the thing had done this amount of damage which was valued at that amount of billions of pounds and had killed this totally other number of people, and then say it again, because the robot was doing nothing more than standing there, swaying very slightly, and emitting short incomprehensible error messages.

"It comes from a very ancient democracy, you see..."

"You mean, it comes from a world of lizards?"

"No," said Ford, who by this time was a little more rational and coherent than he had been, having finally had the coffee forced down him, "nothing so simple. Nothing anything like so straightforward. On its world, the people are people. The leaders are lizards. The people hate the lizards and the lizards rule the people."

"Odd," said Arthur, "I thought you said it was a democracy."

"I did," said Ford. "It is."

"So," said Arthur, hoping he wasn't sounding ridiculously obtuse, "why don't the people get rid of the lizards?"

"It honestly doesn't occur to them," said Ford. "They've all got the vote, so they all pretty much assume that the government they've voted in more or less approximates to the government they want."

"You mean they actually vote for the lizards?"

"Oh yes," said Ford with a shrug, "of course."

"But," said Arthur, going for the big one again, "why?"

"Because if they didn't vote for a lizard," said Ford, "the wrong lizard might get in. Got any gin?"

"What?"

"I said," said Ford, with an increasing air of urgency creeping into his voice, "have you got any gin?"

"I'll look. Tell me about the lizards."

Ford shrugged again. "Some people say that the lizards are the best thing that ever happened to them," he said. "They're completely wrong of course, completely and utterly wrong, but someone's got to say it."

Douglas Adams, *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish* (1984)

This thesis analyses citizens' perceptions of standards in public life. It attempts to understand whether perceptions such as these are important substantively for questions of citizen disaffection, and begins the task of analyzing how citizens come to hold the perceptions they do. The thesis presents a systematic investigation into this topic,

placing perceived standards in the context of a discussion about citizen disaffection and the perceived legitimacy of political systems. As they are conceived of in this thesis, 'standards in public life' can usefully be thought of as the 'rules of the game' or the 'spirit of public service'. Standards in public life are less a set of formal, prescriptive rules, more an exhortation to the appropriate exercise of public office. Such a focus upon the 'rules of the game' results in the primary concern of this thesis being about the *process* of governing, as opposed to the outcomes governors can produce.

All types of political system can be evaluated on at least two criteria: the extent to which the system can produce desired 'outcomes', and the process by which those outcomes are created. 'Outcomes' are evidently important for any political system. Indeed, it may be possible to claim that the primary purpose of any political system is to produce outcomes that are desired by the politically relevant actors (a similar point is noted by Easton, 1965, p.230). Yet procedural issues are also important; it matters how decisions come to be made and how policies are implemented. Hitherto, much academic discussion has focused upon the 'output' question. In particular, there has been a strong focus upon the extent to which the policies espoused by political candidates and parties match the policy preferences of citizens, particularly the median voter, and the consequences of this (see for example Downs, 1957; Stimson, 1999; Powell, 2000; Klingemann et al., 2006; van der Eijk and Franklin, 2009)¹. Even within the less outcome-orientated, more explicitly attitudinal literature, analyses of the role of the political process are often under-considered (see for example, Miller, 1974; Citrin, 1974; Miller and Borrelli, 1991; Hetherington, 1998, p.795; Newton and Norris, 2000; Clarke et al., 2009, pp.296-301). At the same time, relatively little attention has been given to procedural matters (for important exceptions see Tyler, 1994; Gibson and Caldeira, 1995; van den Bos et al., 1998; Tyler, 2000; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2001; Mishler and Rose, 2001; Carman,

¹ Most of the output-oriented literature directly investigates the discrepancy between the median voter's policy preferences and public policy. The 'thermostatic model', elaborated by Wlezien and Soroka, provides a refinement to this model by showing that 'too much of a good thing' can also lead to disaffection (see Wlezien, 1995; Soroka and Wlezien, 2005). However, this refocus does not change the central output-orientated focus of this work, which is not the central focus of this study.

2010; Lascoumes, 2010). Thus, we are left with relatively little information about whether, for example, a dictatorship that (more or less) consistently produced the desired outcome of the median voter would be an acceptable institutional arrangement for citizens. *A priori*, it may be assumed that if citizens are 'rational', and a dictatorship can deliver acceptable outcomes, a dictatorship would be as acceptable as a well performing democracy. Yet, even though citizens often express high levels of dissatisfaction with the functioning of their political systems (Hay, 2007), a large majority of citizens report that they consider democracy to be the *best* form of government (Hay, 2007, p.32; see also Norris, 2011, p.93). Clearly something is missing when analyses focus so heavily upon outcomes. A narrow focus upon outcomes alone thus seems problematic. Analysing perceptions of standards allows us to go some way towards understanding the importance of such procedural matters.

In addressing the 'process' question, this thesis adds to a relatively small literature concerning the impact of political processes, independent of outputs, upon citizens' beliefs. Moreover, the focus of this thesis – perceived standards in public life – represents an under-utilized way of considering procedural questions. To my knowledge there currently exists no work as detailed as this thesis investigating how citizens perceive standards of conduct in public life. This is a shame, insofar as the breadth of concerns bundled within 'perceptions of standards' provides an opportunity to understand aspects of political beliefs that can be missed when investigations focus more narrowly. For example, investigating perceptions of corruption – which, at its broadest, is about conflicts of interest and partiality – does not intrinsically provide an opportunity to consider questions of inadequate levels of transparency in public life. Thus, whilst we may know a fairly significant amount about more specific concepts (such as political corruption), we still do not have an adequate appreciation of more general questions about the process of governing as a whole. This thesis goes some way towards addressing this deficit.

Of course, some of the general themes contained within this thesis – political legitimacy, perceived probity, public perceptions – are quite literally ancient. These broad themes reoccur throughout the ages because of their importance, both to the citizenry at large and to political professionals. Yet, whilst the general themes are ancient, each new generation of citizens exists in a different political climate. This thesis is based upon an empirical analysis of survey data, collected in the United Kingdom between 2003 and 2011. This serves to make the context different to preceding analyses, and allows a sensible discussion of the extent to which previous findings still hold. Yet the findings are not only applicable to the UK, nor only during the specific period under study. Indeed, the UK during this period represents a case of the more general class of democratic regimes. The findings are thus potentially relevant to all other members of the general class of democratic regimes.

This introduction proceeds by first discussing the nature of the political ‘problem’ of hostile citizen perceptions. This is followed by a fuller exploration of the contextual background of citizen political perceptions. The data used within this thesis are then discussed in detail. The structure of the thesis is then presented, with a brief summary of the chapters. Finally, this introduction concludes by presenting working definitions of a small number of important words used within the thesis, but which are not in and of themselves the subjects of this thesis.

1.1 The Political ‘Problem’ of Citizen Disaffection

This chapter began with a quote from Douglas Adams’s book *So Long, and Thanks for all the Fish* (1984). In the quote, Arthur’s inability to grasp the concept of a democracy run as an oligarchy by an entirely different class of organisms is juxtaposed with the audience’s interpretation of the contemporary state as an analogous institution. Yet the

negative representation of the political system in the quote is merely a humorous articulation of a generalised negativity towards those operating within the political system. In this section, I will briefly explore how a general negativity can pose a threat politically. The thesis returns to this theme – in particular in Chapters 2, 4, and the conclusion – where the discussion is also much more narrowly focused upon perceptions of standards.

Negative depictions and representations of the political are pervasive within many contemporary democratic societies. Periodically this antipathy may ‘peak’, insofar as it reaches an unsustainable height only to recede to a more ‘standard’ level. The recent experience of the MPs’ expenses scandal showed an example of a peak. As Michael Kenny (2009b, p.663) notes, at the time politicians were ‘on the receiving end of a tidal backlash of public aggression, the like of which is normally reserved for child murderers, Big Brother contestants and managers of the English football team’. Yet even outside a ‘peak’ in public antipathy, perceptions of ‘politics’ are very rarely positive. As Hay (2007, p.5) rightly notes, even the word ‘political’ carries deeply negative connotations. For the public, it seems, ‘political’ actions amount to little more than facile gestures and dishonesty mounted for personal gain. The case of trust in professionals provides a useful way to consider this hostility over time (for a general discussion see Pharr and Putnam, 2000). Table 1.1 shows the percentages of citizens in Britain expressing trust in politicians, government ministers and doctors. Despite a rough consistency in attitudes over time, which may at least go some way towards assuaging fears that current attitudes represent unprecedented lows², the figures show a deep suspicion of politicians. It is also interesting to note that the suspicion with which citizens hold politicians is not replicated for doctors; the effect is not simply a general hostility towards all authority figures.

² For a discussion on the (short-term) historical consistency of these attitudes, see Norris, 2011.

Table 1.1 – Percentage of British Citizens Expressing Trust in Three Groups of Professionals³

	Politicians generally	Government ministers	Doctors
1983	18	16	82
1993	14	11	84
2000	20	21	87
2005	20	20	97
2009	13	16	92

This problem of citizen hostility is perhaps most keenly felt within representative democracies, where the representatives themselves are a vanishingly small fraction of a percentage point of the population, and thus cannot base their legitimacy upon sheer force of numbers (Rehfeld, 2005, p.5). For the representatives to claim a legitimacy to govern there is a need for the representatives – in some sense – to represent the people. There ought to be some congruence between what the people desire and what is enacted; even though that is not the only criterion by which their legitimacy can or should be judged. This issue has been noted as far back as ancient times, when Cicero noted:

We should, therefore, in our dealings with people show what I may almost call reverence toward all men — not only toward the men who are the best, but toward others as well. For indifference to public opinion implies not merely self-sufficiency, but even total lack of principle. (Cicero, 1913 [44BC], I.99)

³ Research conducted by MORI, questioning c.2000 British adults aged 15+. Retrieved from <http://www.ipso-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?itemId=15&view=wide> (accessed 03/09/10).

More seriously, without 'principle', it is difficult to understand why citizens *should* voluntarily lend support to governments. Importantly, such statements rest upon perceptions to a far greater degree than they rest upon objective actions. Politically, the hostile perceptions noted above thus pose a problem insofar as we desire to see political systems based upon the consent of a people, who see the system itself as (more-or-less) fully legitimate. Such a problem not only speaks to the normative issues surrounding legitimate governance (Warren, 2006), but also has direct empirical implications.

Steven van de Walle (2008, p.215) re-tells a joke about corruption in Belgium in which a foreigner, newly resident in the country, requires a telephone line installed in his apartment. Told by his friends that it is essentially impossible to get a phone line installed if you have no connections to local politicians or the public telephone company, but lacking any connections, he instead decides to follow the 'standard' applications procedures. The man is surprised to be the only customer requesting a telephone line, and to find the staff helpful. He and his friends are even more surprised when the telephone line is installed the following day. To repay the kindness of the staff, and for the prompt installation, the man takes a bottle of wine to the telephone company. Interested, he asked why the service was so prompt, when the reputation of the company was so bad. He was told 'you were the first customer in weeks following the normal procedure, and not having some local politician call us. We really appreciated that, and decided to connect your telephone right away' (cited in van de Walle, 2008, p.216). The joke neatly highlights how perceptions of loose ethics – even if not underpinned by 'reality' – can have important consequences for the efficient operation of public services.

When the expectation of corruption is taken to extremes, corruption itself can become effectively legitimised. Elements of the Indian civil and health services provide a clear

example of the effect of corruption becoming seen as legitimate in this way. Holmberg and Rothstein (2011) tell the story of a new mother being openly asked for a large bribe before hospital staff would give her the baby. Indeed, direct experience with bribery and corruption is so common in India that an effort is being made to catalogue those times where citizens did *not* need to pay bribes to access government services⁴.

Perceptions are thus very important. Indeed, expectations of corruption are harmful to the very concept of democracy (Warren, 2006). Where people feel their representatives are not honourable, what incentive is there to seek their help when an issue arises? More seriously still, if the choice at an election is between two candidates who are both perceived to be equally bad in this respect, what is the point in voting? Citizens have very little reason to prefer a democracy that fails in this regard to several other, less representative, forms of government. To the extent that we view democracy as intrinsically good, these concerns are grave indeed.

Yet, as has been alluded to, these concerns are not 'new', in the sense that they have been discussed for thousands of years. The next section of this chapter seeks to provide a more in-depth discussion of the historical context in which the thesis is placed; whilst suggesting why the topic remains worthy of significant academic interest.

1.2 Contextual Background

Concern about citizens' political perceptions, and the related concern of good and ethical governance, dates back at least as far as the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers. Since then, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke have all made contributions that address

⁴ See http://ipaidabribe.com/sforms/view_reports_didnt_have_to_pay (accessed 24/06/11). Also of interest here is the positive reaction from citizens who were not asked to pay a (small) bribe, and instead given the state-mandated (larger) fine. In this circumstance people are actually worse off than they would be paying a bribe, yet report being pleased with the outcome.

these core issues. In recent years, interest has not diminished. This is particularly so for analyses of political perceptions of government. Simultaneously there has been an increase in studies of political trust (Dalton, 2004, p.21). The interest in political trust was spurred, if not stated, by Miller (1974) and Citrin's (1974) seminal articles about declines in trust in the US between 1964 and 1970. With so much interest, in some cases enduring over a very long period, it may appear that there is little reason to investigate citizen perceptions further. Such a view, however, would disregard both the important developments seen recently in public perceptions generally, and the potentially important differences between perceptions of standards and other public perceptions. These two issues are considered in turn.

One of the more notable changes claimed to have occurred in the past few decades is a decline in positive political perceptions, a decline which is claimed to be occurring across a wide range of democracies (for a review, see Putnam et al., 2000). The fear remains that there may be a point at which positive perceptions fall below a critical level, at which point a polity becomes arbitrarily difficult to govern. Indeed, this may have the potential to result in a level of support so low that the system of governance breaks down entirely (Easton, 1965). To the extent that support is declining in this way, and to the extent that support is approaching these lower bounds, these are serious issues.

Of course, some of the hostility we see is not new, merely better articulated and researched. Consider the words of an army officer commenting on the perceptions of British Army troops in 1944:

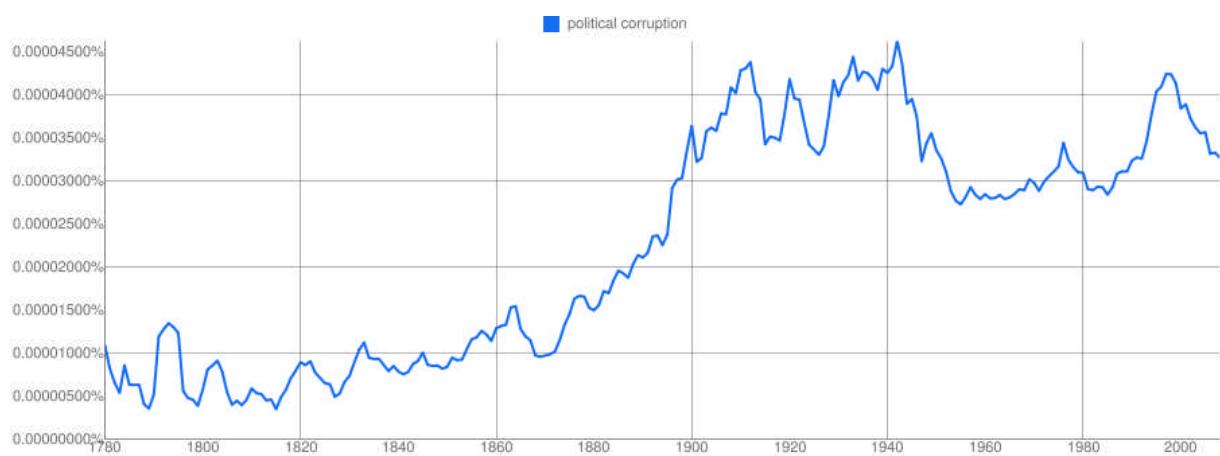
The general line that is always taken is the We and They line. Here is a typical sort of argument: 'What can I do about it all? I may elect a Labour MP, but as soon as he gets into Parliament he does nothing about the things he says he is going to do. They hold all the power and They always will. We can't get it away from them. They have all the money and newspapers and everything. It always has been like that and it always will' (cited in Fielding, 1992)

Similarly, Fielding (1992) notes that among troops, 'many distrusted the world of politics and politicians to such an extent they felt voting would make no difference to their lives'; a line echoing the more serious forms of disenchantment noted above. The experience of soldiers in 1944, after 5 years of war, may not be representative of perceptions system-wide, of course. Nevertheless, these statements do provide a cautionary note against assuming that current attitudes – such as those displayed in Table 1.1 – are historically unique. A similar finding can be seen in Figure 1.1. Figure 1.1 is constructed using Google's corpus of works published in the English language and displays the percentage of all two-word phrases that exactly match the phrase 'political corruption' between the years 1780 and 2008⁵ (for a discussion of the methodology used, see Michel et al., 2011). Here, 'political corruption' is chosen as something of a catch-all 'signature phrase' that is sufficiently common as to allow a consideration of the discussion of the substantive topic ('standards'). To the extent that the use of the phrase 'political corruption' in this capacity has evolved over time, the magnitude of mentions may not necessarily mean the same thing between different time-periods. However, regardless of the difficulties in interpreting specific changes over time, the existence of a sizable number of mentions historically suggests that the importance placed on the substantive topic in published analyses is not new.

Of course, it is also the case that the declines in positive perceptions that have been noted may be less substantively important than they may appear. For example, Norris (2011, pp.23-27) investigates changes between 1997-8 and 2008 across a range of 'satisfaction' indices in a range of European democracies. In general, the changes seen can be classified as either (1) non-significant, or (2) showing increase in positive perceptions.

⁵ Note that this criterion excludes the phrase 'Political corruption' (because of capitalisation), as well as mentions of the concept that do not use the specific linguistic formulation; thus, the phrase 'corrupt politics' would not appear. Undoubtedly, this leads to an underestimation of the number of uses but should provide an essentially consistent count of the relative uses (subject to linguistic changes over time).

Figure 1.1 – Percentage of all Two-word Phrases Matching ‘political corruption’ Within Google’s Corpus of Books in the English Language Between 1780 and 2008



However, the existence of negativity historically does not automatically mean that nothing of note can be said about the current situation. Indeed, two changes over-time would make the general phenomenon of citizen perceptions still worthy of interest: a change in the amount of negativity and a change in the quality of negativity. With regard to the amount of negativity, it may appear that there has been little important change; especially considering the findings of Norris (2011, pp.23-27) that there have been very few significant increases in negativity between 1997-8 and 2008. However, this view is only true on average across a range of European democracies. In particular, Great Britain stands out as a country that has experienced marked declines in positive perceptions in the past few decades. Indeed, between 1997 and 2009 Great Britain saw a 26 percentage point decline in trust in the national government, trust in parliament saw a 30 percentage point decline, and trust in political parties saw a 7 percentage point decline (all declines significant to at least $p<0.01$, Norris, 2011, p.71-76). The magnitude of these changes begins to look 'exceptional' in comparison to other European democracies. If the change in the amount of negativity makes Great Britain an interesting case of change, changes in the quality of these perceptions cements this view.

With regard to the *quality* of negative perceptions, it is readily apparent that much has changed since 1944, and even more since the days of Cicero. Even though some (negative) sentiments expressed may be similar, the quality of the negativity may be plausibly different. One particularly large change seen within the last 65 years is the development of the mass-media from a position of being relatively respectful to those in public life to a far more pervasive and hostile actor (for a recent review, see Popkin, 2006). This has accompanied huge cultural changes in how citizens treat and relate to their elected representatives (see, for example, Inglehart, 1997). This qualitative difference can be seen in the difference in responses to negative political news. The MPs' expenses scandal, which became one of the most important and high profile scandals ever seen in Britain, produced (or exacerbated) openly hostile perceptions. Any remaining pretence of deference was quickly abandoned, replaced by increasingly aggressive public denunciations. In at least one instance, the home of an MP was criminally damaged⁶. More common was persistent hostile verbal and written comments over an extended period, whether posted on the internet, or shouted at public meetings (Kelso, 2009, p.330).

Both the change in the amount of negativity and the quality of the negativity make the general state of contemporary citizen perceptions interesting. Yet this is not the sole reason the present work is necessary at this time. This thesis is about one aspect of perceptions in particular, perceptions of 'standards in public life'. Conceptually, 'standards' may be related to other citizen perceptions – trust, perceived corruption, etc. – but the concept unites a broader range of information than these concepts. Perceptions of 'standards in public life' are about citizens' perceptions of good governance. They are about perceptions of probity, of the 'ethical environment' of government (Doig, 1996, p.36). This thesis is not primarily concerned with actual adherence to 'standards' or ethics; except to the extent that lapses in adherence may influence perceptions. The

⁶See <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23709796-tory-mp-targetted-over-expense-claims.do> (accessed 24/06/11).

subject of perceptions of standards is weighty, and speaks to an important topic. Indeed, as has been noted, citizen perceptions within democracies are inherently important. Yet moreover, because these issues – of standards, ethics, probity, etc. – are concerned with the 'rules of the game' citizen perceptions have the power to alter how the 'game' is played. For citizens to believe it is worthwhile to engage with a political system, for citizens to trust that their concerns will be taken serious and treated fairly, there is a necessity that they can view the functioning of the system as being 'fair'. If we, the public, cannot assume that the system itself is sufficiently ethical, what is the incentive to operate within it? Citizens' actions that follow from an assumption of bad faith can themselves cause problems as severe as poor ethical performance in government. Citizens' perceptions of 'standards in public life' have hitherto not received the depth of interrogation offered here.

The background of this thesis thus shows the importance of the thesis itself. Our ability to understand the changes seen in citizen perceptions and the perceptions which citizens themselves hold is less well served by the academic literature available than it could be. The remainder of this chapter concerns the data used within the thesis and the structure of the thesis itself.

1.3 Data

As this thesis seeks to analyse citizens' political beliefs, and in particular citizens' perceptions of standards in public life, it is necessary to select data that can provide relevant items for analysis and provide data at the citizen-level. Several datasets provide relevant information for this topic, including the British Election Survey, the European Social Survey, the International Social Survey Programme, and the European Values

Study. Each of these allows for some consideration of the topic in question. However, none of these sets of data provides an explicit set of questions dealing with perceptions of standards in public life. Of course, it is always possible to infer how citizens view the general concept 'perceptions of standards in public life' by reference to related beliefs. Yet, research has shown that citizens – in general – have an understanding of the concept 'standards in public life' that tracks our academic conceptual definition (this point is elaborated in Chapter 2; see Joyce and Marshall, 2007). This is a serious advantage for using a direct operationalisation, rather than instrumental variables, when the topic is citizen perceptions.

For this reason, the data used in this thesis come from the Committee on Standards in Public Life's biennial survey, *Public Attitudes towards Conduct in Public Life*, conducted between November 2003 and January 2011. This project aims to provide data for a detailed analysis of citizen beliefs about government, and includes explicit questions on citizens' perceptions of standards in public life. Four surveys have been conducted as part of this project; the dates of the surveys, the sample sizes, and the agency that conducted the surveys are reported in Table 1.2 below. These data form a major series of data collection, taking in several thousand people. People were primarily questioned in dedicated face-to-face interviews, with an emphasis was on producing high quality, considered responses. These data therefore allow the most detailed consideration of perceptions of standards in public life to date. The surveys are discussed in more detail below. Each survey has also been the subject of individual reports that describe in more detail the data collection, response rates, and sampling methodology, along with information on a wide variety of univariate statistics from the data (for Survey 1, see Hayward et al., 2004; for Survey 2, see Ipsos-MORI, 2006; for Survey 3, see Hayward et al., 2008; for Survey 4, see Grasso et al., 2011).

Table 1.2 – Survey Information

Survey	Conducted between	Sample n	Conducted by	Sample frame
1	November 2003 and March 2004	1097	BMRB	Great Britain
2	December 2005 and June 2006	1849	Ipsos-MORI	United Kingdom
3	January 2008 and July 2008	2312	BMRB	United Kingdom
4	29 th December 2010 – 04 th January 2011	1963	TNS-BMRB	United Kingdom

For surveys 1, 2, and 3, the data were collected via dedicated face-to-face interviews using multi-stage cluster samples based on the post-code address file. Survey 4 was conducted as part of an omnibus survey by TNS-BMRB with a similar multi-stage cluster sample design. All surveys carried a similar set of items, centred on the subject of perceptions of standards in public life. Occasionally, new batteries were added and old batteries dropped; this allows an investigation of varying aspects of public perceptions.

Survey 1 sampled from Great Britain, and therefore excluded Northern Ireland. The sample was designed to be essentially representative, subject to random variations and the constraints of the multi-stage cluster design. As has been well noted in the past (see for example, Kavanagh, 1989, p.131), an essentially random sample of Britain or the UK produces very small sample sizes within the devolved regions (Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland). To address this issue, and allow for detailed considerations of political perceptions within the devolved regions, Surveys 2 and 3 oversampled from within the

devolved regions. Survey 2 oversampled within Scotland and Northern Ireland. Survey 3 oversampled within Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Similarly to Survey 1, Survey 4 did not oversample within the devolved regions; although the larger sample size allows for somewhat more detailed considerations.

Not all surveys were conducted by the same survey ‘house’, thus the surveys may differ as a result of the internal procedures of the agencies who conducted them. This may cause some incomparability between the surveys. The differences between Survey 2 in comparison to 1 and 3 may be subtle. Whilst the survey methodology was very similar, differences between BMRB and Ipsos-MORI in terms of procedure, human resources policy, and daily survey completion targets may have an effect. The specific cause and effect of these differences may be incredibly hard to specify, but may cause some incomparability. A more noticeable difference exists between surveys 1, 2, and 3 and Survey 4. Survey 4 was conducted as part of an omnibus, contrasting with the other surveys that were conducted as full surveys in their own right. An omnibus may produce a slightly less politically engaged sample, since political questions may have been only a small part of the total omnibus and may therefore not be a reason to refuse to answer the survey. These differences, however, matter less for analyses of causes and consequences of beliefs, because those analyses must only rest on the assumption that the *relationships* between individual political beliefs do not vary systematically once the method of interview or interviewer is changed, even if reported levels do vary.

These data are particularly helpful for the task of understanding citizen perceptions of standards in public life. Firstly, because the questions have a focus upon standards, they include several items that directly probing citizens’ perceptions of the adherence to standards by those in public life. Secondly, the occasional use of oversampling in the data allows for a greater consideration of the roles of the devolved regions on perceptions of standards. Thirdly, because Surveys 1, 2, and 3 were collected through dedicated face-to-face interviews, the interviewing process stretched out over several

months. To the extent that political realities change during the interviewing process, the affect of those changes can be detected.

These data are used throughout the rest of this thesis.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The general problem of understanding perceptions of standards in public life is tackled in three parts. In the first part, 'standards' are investigated as part of the general structure of citizen attitudes. Chapter 2 elaborates a conceptual structure of citizen attitudes that places perceptions of standards within a theory of the 'empirical legitimacy' of the state. Chapter 3 investigates the (latent) dimensional structure of citizen attitudes, asking whether all perceptions are merely indicating a single underlying perception and whether we can sensibly discuss perceptions of standards as an empirically distinct phenomenon. After discovering that it is possible to consider perceptions of standards as empirically distinct, Chapter 4 questions whether these perceptions are a cause or consequence of other citizen attitudes. Chapter 4 tackles questions such as: are perceptions of standards merely a reflection of citizens' political trust? Do other, more specific performance perceptions primarily drive the more general perceptions of standards in public life? Or are perceptions of standards in themselves a cause of trust and more specific performance perceptions? Chapter 4 finds that it is most helpful to consider perceptions of standards as a cause rather than consequence of these other perceptions.

Part 2 of the thesis then takes forward the analysis of specific causes of perceptions of standards in light of the finding that it is not necessary to consider trust or a more specific performance measure as a cause. This part places an emphasis upon shorter-

term factors as potential causes, rather than longer term, evolutionary changes (such as value shifts). There are two reasons for this. Firstly, an analysis of evolutionary changes could not be achieved with the data available. Secondly, shorter-term influences may put more ‘stress’ on the system (in Easton’s terms), as there is little time for the system to formulate a response or alter their actions. Chapter 5 investigates the impact of partisan co-alignment between governors and citizens. Specifically, this chapter investigates how perceived standards are affected by similarities and dissimilarities in political affiliation between constituents and the local MP, sub-national executive and national executive following an election. Is it the case the people merely assume that standards are higher when ‘their side’ is in charge? Chapter 6 questions whether what is termed ‘negative political events’ are an important cause of perceptions of standards. Chapter 6 focuses upon an analysis of citizens’ changing perceptions in response to the well-publicised breaches of the parliamentary pay and expenses code by Derek Conway MP. After finding in Chapter 6 that the specific case of Derek Conway had a *positive* impact upon perceptions, Chapter 7 probes in a more general fashion the fall-out from the MPs’ expenses scandal proper. As the ‘MPs’ expenses’ event was orders of magnitude more severe, and endured for a significantly longer period, it is hypothesised that it may have a qualitatively different impact to the relatively self-contained event concerning Derek Conway’s use of his parliamentary allowances. Chapter 7 investigates the consequences of local MPs’ proven breaches of the (Additional Costs Allowance) expenses rules.

Part 3 contains the conclusion. This aims to sum up the findings, and offer a general, contextualising, discussion. In particular, the conclusion returns to the distinction, noted at the beginning of this chapter, between what may be called ‘outcome centred’ approaches and ‘process centred’ approaches to the study of citizen perception. Finally, following the findings in the thesis, the conclusion advances a set of policy recommendations.

However, before any analysis can be conducted, it is necessary to provide a discussion of the meaning of several concepts, as they are used in this thesis. This is the final task of this introduction.

1.5 Definitions

As with any work, this thesis discusses concepts that have contested meanings.

Providing a full and rigorous definition of every concept used within this thesis would not only distract from the purpose of this thesis, it would require a work many orders of magnitude longer than at present. Yet such an endeavour is unnecessary for the great variety of contested concepts that are not the substantive focus of this thesis. Whilst it is undoubtedly possible to write an entire thesis on subjects such as defining democracy, this thesis is not about that problem.

The definitions here exist as 'working definitions'; they allow the substantive aims of the thesis to be investigated systematically, without aiming to be the final word on the definitions. Those concepts that are essential to the substantive aim of this thesis are given a much more thorough account in Chapter 2.

1.5.1 Government / The government / A government

Anthony King (2000) thoughtfully highlights an area in which the divide between the UK and the USA of our 'common language' is particularly notable. Within American writing, the phrase 'government' refers – in a general way – to the machinery of governance.

The IRS is 'government', the FBI is 'government', the Department of Defence is 'government'. Of course, this does not mean that the phrase 'the government' is not used in American English, however when it is it refers to the same concept as the general 'government'. This differs significantly from the standard understanding of the word within UK English, where 'the government' refers very specifically to an identifiable set of people in direct political control of a state. In the UK this amounts to around 100 people, almost exclusively MPs and Peers, who work at the Place of Westminster.

Several important implications of this conceptual distinction follow. 'Government' is not temporally bound and is of an undetermined (and probably indeterminable) size. 'The government' exists for a specific period of time, and will eventually be replaced by another government; thus, the Brown government sat from 2007 to 2010, and was replaced by the Cameron government. 'The government' is also a precisely knowable set of people, and all members can be listed in their entirety. 'A government' is, similarly to the phrase 'the government', a specific (though undefined) set of actors in a specific location.

Within this thesis, these (loose) conventions are followed. When the phrase 'government' is used, it refers to the general set of governing institutions and political authorities; when 'a' or 'the' government is used, it refers to the specific set of authorities who are in direct political control of the political system.

1.5.2 Beliefs about government

This thesis investigates how citizens feel about their political authorities and political institutions. This thesis is primarily concerned with perceptions of standards in public life, but also discusses perceptions of the performance of legislators, political trust, as well as other perceptions, attitudes, and orientations. In general, these are termed 'beliefs'

'about government' (pace Kaase and Newton, 1995). They are 'beliefs' in the sense that they exist in the interaction between the 'objective' world, and individual psychological world views (a similar approach to 'beliefs' is found in Tourangeau and Galesic, 2008, p.142). To take an example, political trust may begin – in the earliest stages of life – as a simple world view. Some people are simply trusting, others not. Before any political knowledge is acquired, this simple fact would determine responses to any question concerning political actors. As political knowledge is gained during socialisation this knowledge, and the subjective importance placed upon it, alters the individual level of trust as it relates specifically to politics (a similar point is made in Easton and Hess, 1962). This belief is not only a perception, though much of what drives it is perceptual. The interaction between the perceived reality of the political world and the individual psychological worldview converge to create the 'belief about government', political trust.

1.5.3 Democracy

Many definitions of democracy exist. Each definition focuses upon various factors that are taken as important or crucial elements of democracy (for a review, see Collier and Levitsky, 1997). Moreover, there remains an influential line of thought that rejects the idea that any extant political system has ever been a full democracy, instead it is argued that we should redefine the issue to discuss polyarchies (Dahl, 1971). This thesis deals in particular with a country that is traditionally called a democracy, the UK. It is hoped that the conclusions will be applicable and relevant more widely to the set of countries that we traditionally think of as democracies. Yet this thesis is not about democracy as a concept. It does not aim to be an authoritative investigation into what a democracy actually is, or whether democracy is possible in theory. For this reason, it does not appear necessary or helpful to provide a detailed conceptual discussion of the 'true'

meaning of democracy. Instead, this thesis will use a simple definition, which appears to be in line with the lay definition. In this thesis a democracy is a system in which the people are ultimately sovereign, and have a sovereign right to chose their leaders in (minimally) a reasonably free and fair way. This definition is in line with the 'procedural minimum' school of defining democracy (Collier and Levitsky, 1997, p.434). This tradition follows from the ground-breaking works of Schumpeter (1943), but differs importantly from Schumpeter in the final definition. Whether Schumpeter's definition was ever adequate is a matter for debate (see, for example, Mackie, 2009), however it now lies a significant distance away from what we generally mean when we talk of democracy.

Finally, for the purpose of this thesis, it will be assumed that democracy, political democracy, and electoral democracy are all interchangeable terms, rather than specifically diminished sub-types (on the latter concept, see Collier and Levitsky, 1997). Whenever a more specific term is used in preference to the more general 'democracy', it is in order to highlight a specific element of the functioning of modern democracies; either their political nature, or the importance placed upon elections within modern democratic systems.

1.5.4 Legitimacy

'Legitimacy' is used interchangeably with 'political legitimacy' in this thesis. Whilst the notion of legitimacy can be applied to a massive range of topics, as this thesis specifically deals with political matters, this simplifying note is helpful and is unlikely to cause confusion. The shorter form ('legitimacy') is used primarily to aid readability and clarity within the thesis.

The notion of political legitimacy has a specific meaning academically which is reasonably widely understood. The specific meaning used within this thesis is explored in more detail in Chapter 2, however it remains important at this stage to draw a distinction between the academic and lay use of the term. In the lay use, legitimacy is often used as a binary choice. A political system is either legitimate, and therefore worthy of support, or is illegitimate and is worthy of opposition. In this sense, claims or counter-claims to the legitimacy of a political system in the lay sense are very serious. This is not so for the academic understanding of the term. In the academic usage, legitimacy is a fine-grained continuum. Political systems can be more or less legitimate. That a system is less legitimate is somewhat problematic, but it is not intrinsically an over-riding concern. Indeed, even an exceptionally well-run system that produces the outputs desired by citizens may be less legitimate than another political system.

Part 1

Foundations

The Introduction to this thesis set out, in broad terms, the puzzle to which this thesis was aimed, *viz.* understanding citizens' perceptions of governmental *procedures*, and in particular citizens' perceptions of standards in public life. Yet in order to provide any reliable conclusions it is necessary to investigate a series of substantive problems that have not been explored adequately hitherto. Three problems are especially important for the aims of this thesis:

- (1) A conceptual problem; concerning what the central concepts used within the thesis mean and why these concepts might be important substantively
- (2) A measurement problem; how we can operationalise concepts, and whether valid operationalisations concur with conceptual reasoning
- (3) A structural ('causal') problem; understanding the structural inter-connections between the measures created, including understanding which variables can most usefully be thought of as causes and which as consequences

Without an adequate understanding of these issues, any work now or in the future would be potentially invalid. Conceptual over-stretch, treating different concepts as the same, treating two parts of the same concept as distinct, and the issue of endogeneity remain intractable as long as these three problems have not been laid to rest. Providing an answer to these questions is therefore a pre-requisite of the work done in Part 2, which aims to evaluate potential causes of perceptions of standards. Moreover, providing answers to these hitherto under-considered questions is necessary for the wider academic debate about a range of citizen perceptions.

The first part of this thesis considers these three problems directly.

Chapter 2

Public Perceptions and Political Legitimacy

As noted in Chapter 1, within some contemporary democracies, negative perceptions about 'politics' are seemingly widespread among the citizenry. The aim of this thesis is to evaluate perceptions of standards; yet conceptually, the meaning and importance of standards specifically, and of hostile perceptions to 'politics' more generally has not been explored. If these perceptions are not connected to any deeper underlying beliefs, the importance of them for political systems may be minimal. Citizens may temporarily object to various aspects of a system and yet remain essentially supportive. Yet if these objections are indicative of deeper concerns, displays of negativity may pose a potential challenge to support for the system as a whole. This chapter provides an argument for the latter claim. It is argued that citizens' negative beliefs about government are relevant for considerations of the political legitimacy of democratic political systems.

The legitimacy under discussion here is conceived of as system-wide 'political legitimacy'. That is to say, this chapter focuses upon citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of the political system as a whole. Whilst it is possible to discuss perceived legitimacy of sub-system elements (such as the legitimacy of the electoral system, *tout court*), this is not the objective of this chapter. Where the term 'legitimacy' is used in isolation, it is done only as a short-hand expression for 'the political legitimacy of the political system'.

In viewing citizen beliefs about government as elements of the broader concept of political legitimacy, this chapter moves away from Easton's (1965; 1975) somewhat more common concepts of diffuse and specific support (Hetherington, 1998, p.792). Whilst the concepts of diffuse and specific support can be helpful, especially for focusing

debates upon the areas of support that are of most importance for political systems as a whole, these concepts can also serve to obscure relevant considerations. Firstly, it is almost certainly the case that a range of crucial variables have significant diffuse and specific elements (Hetherington, 1998, p.792). A conception of support that sees important beliefs as either diffuse or specific risks treating those perceptions that can plausibly indicate both as, in some sense, aberrant. Secondly, a distinction between diffuse and specific support risks re-enforcing the notion that some political perceptions have no important impact upon the continuation of a system. Yet we may not wish to completely discount the assumption that even minor negative beliefs, if held over an extended period, or held with sufficient frequency, can become problematic. A similar argument applies (*mutatis mutandis*) to the conceptualisation offered by Norris (2011, p.24), which itself was inspired by Easton's work. Whilst Norris (correctly) notes that 'support' is more appropriately viewed as a continuum, from more diffuse to more specific, her argument still struggles to explain the exact conditions under which seemingly very specific perceptions (e.g. approval of incumbent office holders) can none the less challenge a regime fundamentally (see Norris, 2011, p.30). Systematically downplaying such perceptions may give a misleading view of a system's legitimacy.

This chapter proceeds by investigating the nature of the problem posed by hostile beliefs. The concept of legitimacy as a contextual phenomenon is then discussed. Because legitimacy is contextual, it is not necessary here to consider what the abstract concept may mean under any conceivable system; since this thesis focuses almost exclusively upon democratic systems. This idea is used to substantiate the claim that citizens' empirical concerns are relevant for discussions of the legitimacy of democratic systems. Three potentially relevant beliefs are then evaluated: perceptions of standards in public life, political trust, and perceptions of key political actors. A conceptual discussion of the meaning of these beliefs is offered along with an argument making the case for their relevance to the concept of political legitimacy.

2.1 The Nature of the Problem

A democratic political system's claim to legitimacy wrests primarily on the citizen-centred nature of the system; that citizens get a say in who governs and to what ends. A system that by its very nature is supposed to be citizen-centred, but which generates feelings of hostility within the citizenry, is at the very least functioning problematically. Moreover, where such negative beliefs exist in a sizeable section of the citizenry, we may question the legitimacy of those democracies (for a discussion of the attitudinal components of legitimacy, see Weatherford, 1992, p.159-161). After all, citizens confer legitimacy on governments and political systems. When citizens do not do so, there is a grave problem indeed. As Miller (1974, p.951) noted 'a democratic political system cannot survive for long without the support of a majority of its citizens'. To the extent that we care about democracy as an intrinsic good, we should care about its functioning and survival.

Sufficient support, from the point of view of legitimacy, is not a dichotomy; regimes do not go immediately from enjoying sufficient support to not doing so overnight.

Legitimacy does not evaporate in the blink of an eye. However, important consequences can follow from even relatively minor challenges to the legitimacy of a state. Widespread citizen support confers a variety of benefits that are not enjoyed by those systems that are not supported similarly. Instrumentally, citizens who perceive the political system to be less legitimate may be less inclined to support the decisions taken by the political authorities¹. Indeed, research has empirically shown a variety of (negative) instrumental consequences resulting from a lack of citizen support. Scholz and Lubell (1998) empirically demonstrate a huge effect of political trust upon the propensity to pay tax. Those who have the lowest levels of political trust have a predicted probability of full compliance with tax laws of just 29%, whilst those with the highest level of political trust

¹ I use these terms here in a way congruent with Easton's classic formulation of the objects of support (see Easton, 1965, Chapters 12-13).

have a predicted probability of 99% (Scholz and Lubell, 1998, p.410). Nye (1997, p.4) argues that increasingly negative beliefs will result in fewer capable people being willing to work within the public sector, thus reducing the quality of the public sector. Similarly, increasingly negative beliefs have been linked, both theoretically and empirically, to increased corruption (della Porta, 2000, p.203; Morris and Klesner, 2010). These negative instrumental consequences reduce the capacity of the authorities to govern. This reduced capacity to govern (*ceteris paribus*) reciprocally reduces perceived effectiveness and thus increase citizen hostility. Indeed, the cumulative effect of these issues is a vicious circle; declines in positive beliefs about the political regime (or elements thereof) reduce the system's capacity to govern effectively, which in turn reduces positive beliefs (Gamson, 1968, pp.50-52; Nye, 1997, p.4; Hetherington, 1998, p.791). When declines in positive beliefs become severe, the legitimacy of the system could be undermined.

Of course, it is not necessary for a system to be considered legitimate in order for it to function adequately in terms of political outputs (be they economic outputs or political stability/security). As Easton (1965, p.282) notes, a political system may be accepted simply because it is expedient to do so. Yet intuitively there is something important about a legitimate political system that is missing in a system accepted solely on the basis of expediency. However, what it is that makes a legitimate system different is difficult to assess empirically. After all, in both legitimate and non-legitimate political systems citizens may obey demands from the political authorities². Indeed, as non-legitimate political regimes potentially have greater access to coercive forces than legitimate regimes, they have a potentially greater ability to ensure citizens' obedience

² Passini and Morselli (2010) demonstrated that obedience levels for identical policies do differ by level of democracy (where higher perceived levels of democracy result in large obedience). Whilst the magnitude of the difference was notable between democratic and non-democratic conditions, a significant proportion of the sample provided with a policy from a non-democratic government (20 out of 90) indicated they would obey a contentious policy from a non-democratic authority. Whilst equating democracy and legitimacy may be contentious (cf. Rothstein, 2009), especially because democracy itself may be an essentially contest concept, it will latterly be argued that *ceteris paribus* a democratic regime is more legitimate than a non-democratic regime. This claim is hopefully uncontroversial.

(if not acceptance) of their demands³. Yet to the extent that it is seen as desirable to have a regime that can function adequately and is not dependent on ever-increasing uses of force against the citizenry, we should care about the legitimacy of political regimes.

However, the claim that the legitimacy of a democratic political system is at stake when citizen attitudes become sufficiently hostile rests on an important assumption:

(1) Citizens' (empirical) beliefs⁴ matter for legitimacy

Also, importantly for the *study* of the empirical aspect of legitimacy, is the ancillary claim that:

(2) The specific set of beliefs that are important for legitimacy can be described to some extent

Assumption 1 is by no means universally accepted, nor un-contested. Some, though by no means all, theoretical accounts discount current popular evaluations. However, to the extent that Assumption 1 is true, declines in positive perceptions are incredibly important substantively. Conversely, to the extent that Assumption 1 is untrue, fluctuations in 'support' generally may merely be tantamount to little more than 'boozing' at a sports match (Citrin, 1974).

In order to understand whether Assumption 1 is plausible, and thus to understand the necessity of Assumption 2, it is necessary to consider, conceptually, the nature of citizen support and the legitimacy of a political system.

³ Poe and Tate (1994, p.861-2) demonstrate that both loss of democracy (after transition) and a lack of democracy increase abuses of personal integrity rights and repression. Again using the suggestion that a democratic system is *ceteris paribus* more legitimate than one that is not, this provides information about the use of force in illegitimate systems.

⁴ In this chapter, the phrase 'empirical beliefs' is used to refer to those beliefs about government that have a basis in citizens' empirical observations. Thus, perceptions of standards in public life are 'empirical beliefs', but a belief that a specific type of system is normatively superior is not.

2.2 Legitimacy as a Contextual Phenomenon

Legitimacy is a concept that carries several meanings. Even within the specific realm of political analysis, it can hold several qualitatively different connotations (Pakulski, 1986, p.37). This is a problem conceptually, since the concept risks being 'stretched' (Sartori, 1970). The core of the problem is that legitimacy, as a concept, is contextually defined. Legitimacy simply does not mean the same thing in some cultures as it does in others⁵. For this reason, it is less helpful to consider questions of what political legitimacy means, and more helpful to consider questions of what political legitimacy means in a specific political context, which here is early 21st century Britain. If we desire to understand whether empirical concerns are 'valid' in a discussion of legitimacy, it is necessary to consider the question in a contextually sensitive way. To see the importance of the contextual nature of legitimacy, it is necessary to consider the claims made to support a regime's political legitimacy.

In feudal societies, the government, usually headed by a hereditary monarch, enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy, in the sense that the vast majority of subjects considered the system fully legitimate (on the basic legitimacy of feudal societies, see Lipset, 1959, p.87). If the will of God ought to be obeyed without question, and the monarch was divinely ordained, the legitimacy of the monarch to rule was axiomatic. With the acceptance of these two axioms – the supremacy of God and divine ordination – no other consideration offers substantive grounds for objection, given the superior legitimacy of God. Whilst – with modern eyes – we may have serious objections to systems of governance based solely upon divine right, it would seem strange to claim the system was not legitimate for the people who considered it so. Such observations are not merely historical; the theocratic claim to legitimacy by the leaders of Iran and Saudi Arabia is

⁵ By way of a brief example, consider that Weber's 'pure types of legitimate authority' rest on rational, traditional or charismatic grounds (Weber, 1947, p.328). Modern hesitance to accept that charismatic leadership could be legitimate by virtue of 'devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person' suggests that our cultural understanding of legitimacy has moved some way from Weber's (1947, p.328).

based upon a similar logic (Burnell, 2006, p.548). Somewhat similarly, legitimacy can be sought by reference to an ability to respond to external threats, such as Cuba's use of the threat of American imperialism (Burnell, 2006, p.549). To the extent that the citizens of these countries take such claims seriously, the claim to legitimacy should be taken seriously. However, in each case, perceived legitimacy is generated in a number of citizens via a claim that would not be regarded as appropriate in a western liberal democracy.

This contextual definition ought not to be surprising. Indeed, it only remains surprising that discussions of political legitimacy do not do more to highlight it. After all, legitimacy is a social construction. There exists no lump of 'legitimacy' housed in a laboratory against which we can calibrate the degree of legitimacy of a particular system. Whenever the meaning of words that reference social things becomes contested, or when disagreement exists about what can appropriately fall within the boundaries of a word that references social things, actual usage is the appropriate arbiter (Dan-Cohen, 2001, p.420). Dan-Cohen (2001, p.420) uses the case of disagreements about the height of buildings as an instructive example. Where two people disagree about whether the 'true' height of a building includes or excludes antennae, an analysis of the construction of buildings in general will provide no useful information. The only way to disentangle whether the height of a building should be reported with or without the antenna is to turn to social usage. If those people who record and discuss the height of buildings within the social word always include the antenna, it should be included in discussing the 'true' height of the building (or vice-versa). This logic is directly applicable to discussions about legitimacy.

Moreover, as Dan-Cohen (2001, p.420) persuasively argues, the argument is stronger still when the reference is not based upon an independent reality. Buildings exist independently of the social construction of the world, even if social usage is the final arbiter of the meaning of concepts that apply to them. Society altering its perceptions of

what counts as the height of a building does not change the building's physical properties. This is not so for legitimacy. Thus;

when the bits of social reality to which these terms pertain are formed by the same linguistic community in which the terms themselves originate, no gap... exists between the meaning of the terms we use and the reality they designate... changes in one must correspond to changes in the other (Dan-Cohen, 2001, p.420).

Thus, the meaning of legitimacy is inherently contextual. Importantly, a contextual definition of legitimacy allows for the immediate rejection of some potential conceptions of legitimacy when studying western liberal democracies. A system is not therefore legitimate if the claim to legitimacy is based solely upon divine right; even though this is a perfectly valid claim historically. A system is almost certainly not legitimate if its claim is based primarily upon a (real or imagined) external threat. This also provides some assistance in narrowing down the range of potential definitions.

2.3 A Contextual Definition of Legitimacy in Democratic Societies

As argued in Section 2.2, any definition of legitimacy – and any understanding of what 'counts' as legitimacy – must be contextually based. Whilst this does allow for the rejection of many possible legitimacy claims on face validity grounds, a robust interpretation of what legitimacy means remains problematic. However, democracy is a very powerful concept for conferring legitimacy in democratic political systems. Moreover, systems that are in part defined by their democratic nature appear to base at least part of their legitimacy upon democracy⁶ (Buchanan, 2002). The nature of democracy offers a plausible way to understand the legitimacy of democratic systems,

⁶ As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, it is not my intention here to provide an in depth discussion about the nature of 'democracy' or whether a true democracy is even theoretically plausible (*pace* Dahl, 1979). Instead, I intend only to focus on 'democracy' as a system that places ultimate sovereign power with citizens.

perhaps through a belief that democracies are almost intrinsically legitimate. Indeed, it is probably uncontroversial to assert that *ceteris paribus* a more democratic system is always more legitimate than a less democratic system. This assertion carries face validity within democratic societies, where there is an extremely strong norm of democratic processes. Decisions that are not supported (or acquiesced to) by the majority of citizens are normatively bad precisely because they violate these democratic norms. Thus, we may even go as far as to suggest that within democratic societies, legitimacy is a *function* of democracy.

Yet the use of democracy as a concept does not solve the problem of understanding legitimacy, because the pertinent elements of democracy can still be contested. Thus, it is possible that democracy in and of itself establishes legitimacy (in a normative sense), or it is possible that by responding to citizens' concerns, democracy establishes legitimacy (in an empirical sense). It is helpful to think of these different approaches as occupying different positions on an 'empirical – normative' conceptual dimension of legitimacy. Definitions can be understood as requiring more or less of an empirical component, and more or less of a normative component (see also Ansell, 2001). Such a distinction is useful to the extent that we wish to understand whether negative citizen perceptions can challenge legitimacy, since they less obviously do in normative theories.

A classic Hobbesian view would see a state as legitimate if it could have arisen by freely made covenants from the state of nature (Hobbes, 1651, ch.17). This view of legitimacy has very little to do with satisfaction with how the regime is performing. Indeed, because of the nature of the Hobbesian contract with the sovereign – where the sovereign never relinquishes their absolute rights from the state of nature – it is almost nonsensical to suggest that the legitimacy of the state is based upon popular satisfaction (Hobbes, 1651, ch.18). The legitimacy of the state is completely independent of any measure of popular satisfaction. Of course, even within the extreme Hobbesian account it is not completely true to say that *all* perceptual elements of legitimacy are void. Indeed, a

citizen's obligations to the sovereign are contingent upon a reasonable belief that the sovereign is actually protecting the citizen's life better than that citizen could have done in the state of nature (Hobbes, 1651, ch.14). Thus, this caveat to Hobbes's theory of obligation allows for the introduction of an important (if limited) empirical component of legitimacy, although it remains a component that only applies *in extremis*.

Hobbes was not a proponent of democracy (though his work has been influential within democratic theory), though conceptually similar arguments hold for democracy. Indeed, it is possible to conceive of the concept of democracy itself fulfilling a similar function to Hobbes's sovereign. The grounds upon which a democracy may be considered legitimate (in a normative sense) rest on a similar alienation of initial all-encompassing rights to those seen in the state of nature. The equality between subjects provided in the Hobbesian account by the sovereign is provided by a democratic political structure. Thus, within a democracy:

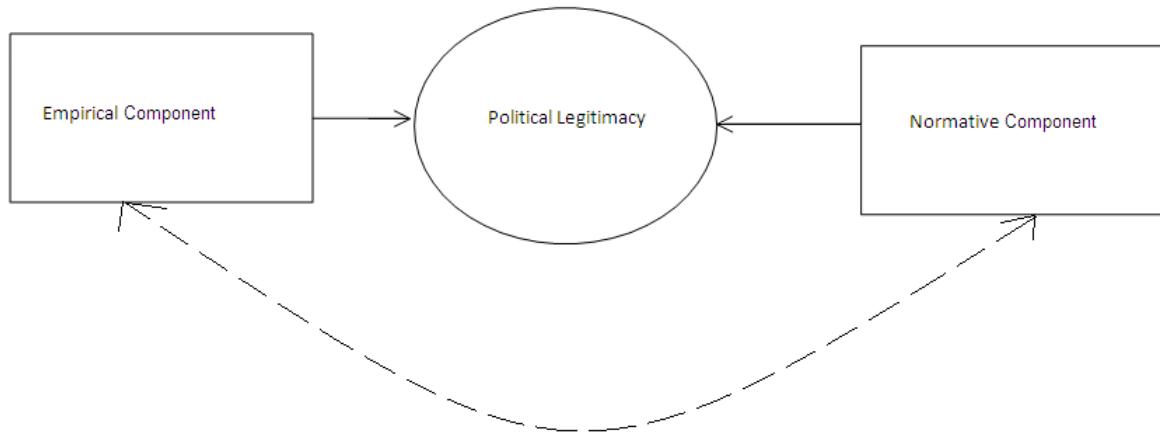
the inequality that political power inevitably involves is justifiable if every citizen has "an equal say" in determining who will wield the power and how it will be wielded, at least so far as the content of the most basic laws is concerned.
(Buchanan, 2002, p.710)

Again similarly to Hobbes's account, there remains little room for sizeable empirical concerns. Whether citizens are having 'an equal say' is the only empirical concern. If it can be shown that citizens have an equal say 'in determining who will wield the power and how it will be wielded', the system is justified, and thus legitimate (Buchanan, 2002, p.710). On such a view, it is not enough for citizens to show they are genuinely dissatisfied with the outcomes or procedures of a regime to challenge that regime's legitimacy. So long as the 'equal say' criterion is met, the system is legitimate. Theoretically, this could even discount perceptions of corruption, as corruption need not necessarily interfere with having an equal say (vote) in who wields power and how.

Thus, it is possible to conceive of a view of legitimacy that is primarily normative (see also Weatherford, 1992, p.150). However, since such a view of legitimacy passes over

citizens' own political experiences and views it arguably moves the question of political legitimacy somewhat away from what, in the lay sense, would be considered a 'democratic' foundation. If the ultimate arbiters of politics are the citizenry, this seems problematic. As a result, it is helpful to conceive explicitly of political legitimacy as being a function of two separate, but related, components, a normative component and an empirical component (Ansell, 2001, p.8704). A hypothesised structure of political legitimacy following this conception is shown in Figure 2.1. In this figure, the two elements of legitimacy, as discussed here, are connected directly to political legitimacy. The curved, dotted, line between the empirical and normative components represents the potential connections between these components. As this Chapter is not concerned with the normative component, the interconnections between the empirical and normative components will not be discussed.

Figure 2.1- The Structure of Political Legitimacy



If this structure is accepted, the necessity of including citizen perceptions as an important – or crucial – element of political legitimacy is apparent. Thus, to the extent

that we accept this view, Assumption 1, noted at the beginning of this chapter (that the empirical beliefs of citizens matter for legitimacy), can be accepted.

However, even if (empirical) beliefs are important, empirical accounts of legitimacy can suffer from objections concerning the situations under empirical measures may not be genuine indicators of a belief in legitimacy. Almost any account of legitimacy would wish to discount citizen ‘support’ (*qua* empirical actions/reported beliefs) which has been acquired through official coercion, as would many where this ‘support’ was acquired through deceit (Rehfeld, 2005, p.15). This is in part why ‘empirical legitimacy’ formulations usually retain a normative component, specifying that the support must be ‘genuine’ in some sense. Indeed, this is the reason the ‘normative component’ in Figure 2.1 is necessary. Thus, vote shares approaching 100% for the current incumbents are treated as suspicious and putative evidence of illegitimacy (see Gilley, 2009, pp.7-8)⁷. These criteria tend not to be theoretically well specified, and aim merely to exclude those cases where the empirically observed approval is not seen as ‘real’. Yet despite the weightiness of this objection, this chapter will not discuss it in detail. In regimes that approximate polyarchies this consideration is much less important, since it can be assumed that the systematic and malicious enforcement of the ‘correct’ public opinion does not occur (for a discussion of the requirements to be considered a polyarchy, see Dahl, 1971). As this thesis is primarily concerned with the UK, and as the definition of legitimacy offered is contextual to liberal democracies, this (important) consideration will be assumed to be met.

It now remains necessary to investigate the ancillary claim from the beginning of this chapter, that the important aspects of the empirical component of legitimacy can be described in a way that is helpful for analysis.

⁷ It should be noted, of course, that the desire to create the pretence of citizen support by regimes which already hold sufficient power as to be able to manufacture such results goes some way towards showing the political allure of an empirically-based legitimacy.

2.4 The Empirical Aspect of Legitimacy

If we accept the claim that, at least within democracies, citizens' beliefs matter for legitimacy it still remains necessary to attempt to specify what specific beliefs matter. Some beliefs can be rejected immediately; it should not matter for legitimacy in a democracy how charismatic a leader is. Yet other potentially relevant empirical beliefs require much more discussion. The objective here is to focus on three putatively important beliefs: perceptions of standards in public life, political trust, and perceptions of the performance of key political actors. This, of course, does not exhaust the set of potentially relevant beliefs from the point of view of legitimacy. Indeed, the set of potentially relevant beliefs is ostensibly infinitely large. However, these three beliefs about government define a set of beliefs that appear – either conceptually or empirically – to be especially important. The conceptual meaning of these terms, and reasons for considering these to be especially important from the point of view of legitimacy, will be discussed for each variable individually in the following three sub-sections.

2.4.1 Perceptions of standards in public life

'Standards in public life' may be considered, following Doig (1996, p.36), as relating to the 'ethical environment' of governing. Thus, as briefly noted in the introduction, standards in public life concern the procedural element of governing rather than specific outputs. Such a definition provides a useful starting point, but does not provide a sufficiently detailed conceptual definition for considering the substantive topic systematically. The aim of this section is to discuss the meaning of standards, and citizens' perceptions of standards, conceptually in more detail. I begin with an analogy.

Cricket matches are played according to 'The Laws' of cricket. These are 'the rules', specifying in detail the course of play, the number of players on a team, under what circumstances specific plays can be made, when a player is out, etc. However, within the game, there exists what might be thought of as a more important 'rule' – the Spirit of the Game. Whilst general advice is provided on the Spirit of the Game, it remains essentially un-codified; instead it is based upon a common understanding of the guiding norms of the game (Bradshaw, 2010, pp.1-2). To the extent there is a dispute, the Spirit of the Game supersedes all other rules. The Spirit of the Game specifies, in broad terms, that players should: play fairly, respect other players and officials, respect the game and its values, should not be abusive, and should not be involved in any form of gamesmanship; even if not against the Laws (Bradshaw, 2010, p.4). The importance of the Spirit of the Game is shown in the pre-able to the laws; 'Any action which is seen to abuse this spirit causes injury to the game itself' (Bradshaw, 2010, p.4). Violations of the Spirit are not simply about breaking the rules; they are a fundamental attack on the game itself.

'Standards in public life' is an extremely similar concept to the Spirit of the Game. 'Standards' are not laws. They are described in broad terms, but primarily rely on a system of norms and values to substantiate the interpretation and application of the standards. 'Standards' set out the themes that ought to guide the practice of those within public life; thus, an official who violates 'standards' may not have broken any codified law. Indeed, legal statutes have a remarkably uneven applicability for public servants. Parliamentary privilege theoretically prevents the courts from investigating parliamentary proceedings (Oliver, 1997, p.543)⁸. However, violations of 'standards' are more important than considerations of whether a single official broke the rules. Violations of standards cause injury to public life itself. The notion of an injury to public life highlights the importance of standards. Moreover, this notion of an injury to public

⁸ This, of course, is truer in theory than practice. Several MPs have indeed been convicted of crimes relating to their actions under the former expenses regime. The courts explicitly denied that parliamentary privilege could operate under these conditions. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12819553>.

life highlights the importance of 'standards' for conceptions of legitimacy. If public life is injured by poor adherence to standards, the legitimacy to govern of those who are injuring public life is brought into doubt. In order to understand the norms and values that are relevant for standards, and thus to understand how 'standards' relate to empirical considerations of political legitimacy, it is necessary to 'unpack' the concept.

In the UK, 'standards of conduct' for those within public life were formally defined as part of the Nolan report⁹. The formal definition still has a heavy emphasis upon norms, as evidenced by the lack of in-depth explanations within the definition. The definition centred on the so-called *Seven Principles of Public Life*:

Selflessness: Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends

Integrity: Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties

Objectivity: In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards or benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit

Accountability: Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office

Openness: Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands

Honesty: Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest

Leadership: Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example

(Nolan, 1995, p.14)

⁹ This is not to suggest that this is a 'closed' definition. Thus, there are undoubtedly other aspects of 'conduct in public life' that could be important to 'standards' in different contexts. However, this fact does not diminish the usefulness of discussing these principles as set out here.

The *First Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life* placed a requirement that 'all public bodies should draw up Codes of Conduct incorporating these principles' (Nolan, 1995, p.3). However, the *Committee on Standards* was not prescriptive in how this implementation ought to be achieved. In this sense, the specific interpretation of the standards is both contextual and norm-based. Following Dan-Cohen's (2001) argument about the linguistic contextualisation of social words, it is possible to understand the elements of 'standards' on face. Moreover, qualitative research conducted by the *Committee on Standards in Public Life* during 2005 and 2006 found many similarities between the official definition and citizen perceptions (Joyce and Marshall, 2007). The research focused on both the perceptions of public officials and lay perceptions. Helpfully, whilst some differences were noted between the definition of 'standards' from the *Committee on Standards*, and the understandings of public officials and ordinary citizens, these distinctions were often minor (see Joyce and Marshall, 2007, viii). In general, the public supported a refinement of the definitions to place an emphasis on truth telling in the honesty principle, and to amalgamate sections from other principles into an 'impartiality' principle (Joyce and Marshall, 2007, viii). The distinctions – whilst interesting – are not sufficient to transition away from using the formalised definition provided by the *Seven Principles*; thus, this will be the basis of the definition of standards in this thesis. Though the definition is not identical to that used by citizens, by virtue of being formalised, it provides a useful guide for research.

This definition also allows for a fuller understanding of why the concept of standards matters for an empirical understanding of legitimacy, and why it is the case that failure to adhere to standards can injure the whole of public life in the eyes of citizens. Standards are the 'spirit' of ethical and responsible governing. Without adherence to standards, there is no reason for citizens to approach public life expecting fair treatment, and no reason to assume that those people who work within public life are trustworthy (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008; see also Weatherford, 1992, p.155). When citizens in a democratic political system can no longer sensibly assume that political authorities or

political institutions are acting in good faith, the system itself is putatively illegitimate (see Tyler, 1994).

'Standards' apply to those working within public life. Very broadly, public life may be thought of as the realm of those who operate in the public interest, or primarily with public funds. In 1994, John Major, the then Prime Minister, defined public life in the UK thusly:

[P]ublic life should include Ministers, civil servants and advisers, Members of Parliament and United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament, members and senior officers of all non-departmental public bodies and of national health service bodies, non-ministerial office holders, members and other senior officers of other bodies discharging publicly funded functions and elected members and senior officers of local authorities. That is a wide-ranging list, and it is intended to be so. (cited in Hansard, 25th October 1994, column 758)

This definition closely tracks the somewhat broader conceptual definition given by Easton (1975, p.438) in relation to the political authorities, which included 'all public officials from chief executives, legislators, judges and administrators down to local city clerks and policemen'. In this thesis, to allow a broad range of concerns, Easton's conceptual definition will be used to define the boundaries of public life.

In the UK, following the enactment of the Bribery Act 2010, legal definitions of corruption have now been subsumed under the law on Bribery (Raphael, 2010). However, even before the Bribery Act replaced the Corruption Acts 1889 – 1916, corruption focused primarily upon providing inducements to act or not act in a beneficial way (Doig, 1996, p.36). In its academic sense, political corruption is a much broader concept. It is the antithesis of good, ethical government. It involves improper preference and partiality (Philp, 1997, p.458). It violates accepted norms of public behaviour (Heywood, 1997, p.423). Helpfully for considering legitimacy, it is far reaching, in the sense that even actions that are legal can be considered potentially corrupt (Heywood, 1997, pp.423-4). Yet even in the broader academic sense, corruption is still about conflicts of interests, preference and partiality. Lack of leadership, lack of accountability,

and lack of transparency may all fall outside of even a wide (academic) definition of political corruption (Philp, 1997, p.453). The extent that these things could be included within the definition of political corruption would be driven by how they were used to aid in the pursuit of undue partiality. As a narrow concept, this almost certainly leaves out much of what we would wish to analyse when thinking about the empirical aspect of political legitimacy.

Similarly, this conception of 'standards' is broader than Rothstein's notion of 'Quality of Government' (see Rothstein and Teorell, 2008). Rothstein and Teorell (2008) conceptually define 'Quality of Government' as impartiality, which is in turn defined as:

When implementing laws and policies, government officials shall not take into consideration anything about the citizen/case that is not beforehand stipulated in the policy or the law (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008)

This offers an interesting way to think about the ethical quality of government, but like 'corruption' is much more restrictive, in a way that appears to disregard some important considerations. Indeed, impartiality, so defined, does not actually guarantee high 'standards', or ethical decision-making; since this formulation of impartiality is contingent on the ethics of the relevant law or policy. Moreover, as this conception of impartiality focuses narrowly on legal impartiality, it disregards the crucial norms that, whilst not codified into law, form an integral part of citizens' expectations and experiences.

2.4.2 Political trust

Standards, as discussed here, are important to the legitimacy of a democracy because they underwrite the (essential) assumption of good faith that citizens need to be able to make about political intuitions. Adherence to standards is, therefore, a way that political authorities show that they are trustworthy. Yet even if the authorities are *trustworthy*, it

can still be questioned if it is *trusted*. Trustworthiness – however defined – is not a sufficient condition for trust. Yet whether a country's political authorities or political institutions are trusted is extremely important. If citizens in a democracy are not willing to trust political actors, the functioning of the system is impaired (Hetherington, 1998, p.791). However, an argument that political trust is relevant for a discussion of political legitimacy appears to face at least two important problems. Firstly, it is possible to question whether it is *possible* – even in theory – to trust the political authorities¹⁰. Secondly, even if it is possible, it can be questioned if it is *necessary* to trust the political authorities, from the point of view of legitimacy. These potential objections are serious from the perspective of including a conception of trust as an empirical evaluation of legitimacy. If it is not possible or not necessary to trust those in public life, it cannot be a valid requirement of a state's legitimacy. These issues will be dealt with in turn.

It is common to see authors discuss political trust as a conceptually unproblematic phenomenon, at least insofar as to whether it is possible for political trust to exist (see for example Hetherington, 1998; Newton, 1999; Levi and Stoker, 2000; Dalton, 2004; Marien and Hooge, 2011). Indeed, Dalton (2004, p.24) considers trust in 'politicians in general' as a crucial affective orientation towards the authorities. Yet it is possible to begin an investigation at a more fundamental level and question if it is even possible to trust political authorities (Hardin, 1999, p.22-24). Hardin (1999, p.23) notes that 'unless we mean something very different when we speak of trusting government than when we speak of trusting a person, however, citizens typically cannot trust government'. Despite this, citizens do frequently discuss trust (or, more commonly, *distrust*) in political authorities. A disconnection appears to exist here. This disconnect raises issues about what it means to 'trust' anyone.

¹⁰ This argument holds regardless of who the specific constituents of the class 'political authorities' are taken to be. The nature of the class of professionals who can legitimately be called the political authorities will be investigated in more depth in Chapter 3.

Generally speaking, trust perceptions take the form 'A trusts B in order to X' (Hardin, 1999, p.28). In this situation, the act of 'trusting' makes A vulnerable to B (Levi and Stoker, 2000, p.476). If B does not conduct action X for whatever reason, A's interests have been damaged¹¹. Here, trust is a leap of faith by A. There may be anticipation – and perhaps even shared interests – but without a means to compel B to do X, trust rests on faith. Yet what underwrites this faith? When we say we trust our friends, this faith is drawn from a deep personal knowledge of person B; a shared past and deeply ingrained norms (a similar point is made by Hardin, 2000, p.34). As Hardin (1999; 2000) rightly notes, a similar faith is simply unjustified on these grounds for political authorities in modern societies. It is uncommon for citizens to know personally even a single member of the political authorities (Hardin, 2000, p.34). Hardin's solution to this issue is the re-focus of trust upon a notion of 'encapsulated interest' (1999, p.26). Here 'to say that I trust you means that I have reason to expect you to act, for your own reasons, as my agent' (Hardin, 1999, p.26). Under this definition, it is possible to trust people in the government, but only in a way that seems alien to the basic concept of trust as expressed between persons. Yet to reject the notion that citizens can trust the political authorities of a country in the ordinary way simply because the way trust is constructed is not identical seems like an over-reaction. For one thing, it would reject the notion that someone may simply trust the political authorities for no reason. This still meets the standard claim that A trusts B in order to X. A has trust in B in exactly the same way they might trust their friends; merely without the deep personal connection associated with friendship. It may be that this form of trust more often leads to disappointment; but it still bears a strong resemblance to trust in one's friends.

More importantly for discussions of whether it is possible to trust political authorities is the frequent use of this concept, and indeed this exact term, by citizens. In a mass of

¹¹ This, of course, need not be true. A may trust B in order to conduct an action which harms the interests of A; in the way a criminal (A) may trust that the police (B) would investigate their crimes (X). Here, the police (B) by conducting an investigation (X), and fulfilling the expectation placed upon them, will damage the interests of the criminal (A).

attitudinal research, including the surveys used within this study, citizens are questioned about their trust in various authorities. There is no evidence that citizens are unable to interpret such claims. Indeed, given the non-negligible numbers of citizens who say they trust those within public life, it suggests citizens do not share the more philosophical concerns about 'trust' in authorities. Again following Dan-Cohen's (2001) argument about social concepts and social usage of terms, not only the case that we *can* say that it is possible to trust political authorities, but that (given social usage) we *must* say that.

Hitherto, trust has been defined in a very simple relational way, without considering in detail more intricate and complicated definitions. Yet we may question whether it is necessary or helpful to attempt to specify a more exact formal definition over and above the discussion of the simple relational concept discussed above. I do not believe this would be useful, since any greater formalisation will inevitably move further away from the general (and non-formalised) concept that citizens understand to be 'trust'.

If political authorities *can* be trusted, there remains an open question as to whether it is *necessary* to trust them, from the point of view of legitimacy. If political trust is merely a manifestation of specific support, in Easton's (1965) terms, it has little bearing upon the legitimacy of a state. This is a view that has found some support among commentators (in particular Citrin, 1974; Citrin and Green, 1986). In this sense, 'trust in government is closely tied to approval of the incumbent president' (Citrin and Green, 1986, p.444). If this argument held more widely, political trust would be little more than a belief about current incumbents. Easton (1965) actually has very little to say on the subject of trust, and whether it is appropriately thought of as a diffuse or specific belief, and thus whether it primarily concerns incumbents or the political system more generally.

However, it remains common to treat political trust as a *de facto* requirement of good governance (see, for example, della Porta, 2000; for a review, see Hetherington, 1998). Moreover, it is not uncommon for a basic level of trust to be seen as necessary for the maintenance of a stable governmental system (see, for example, Miller, 1974;

Lagenspetz, 1992; Inglehart, 1999). Indeed, empirical research has shown that those who have higher levels of political trust are vastly more likely to pay taxes they owe and to obey the law (Scholz and Lubell, 1998; Marien and Hooge, 2011).

If political trust is indeed very important for good and stable governance, the inclusion of political trust within the boundaries of legitimacy appears expedient. However, a stronger case can be made that political trust is necessary for understanding the empirical aspect of legitimacy. Lagenspetz (1992) argues that trust, in the political or societal sense, is a reflection of a deep 'rootedness' in a society. For Lagenspetz (1992, pp.15-16) it is the trust that is placed in political authorities and political institutions that fundamentally determines the legitimacy of the authority structure as a whole. Only genuinely accepting political structures, expressed through the trust placed within them, is true legitimacy established. An overriding importance placed on trust may make sense theoretically, however empirically political trust remains one empirical element of a citizens' perception of legitimacy (Weatherford, 1992, p.154). Whilst the suggestion that trust is the *only* relevant driver of legitimacy may be more than we would wish to accept, given other factors noted, the intimate connection between trust and legitimacy remains apparent.

2.4.3 Perceptions of performance of key political actors

Thus far, the discussions of the empirical aspects of legitimacy have focused on the trustworthiness of those in public life and the trust placed in them. However, whilst these are undoubtedly crucial elements for understanding the empirical legitimacy of a state, they do not account for the whole range of citizen beliefs. Indeed, there remains a question about perceptions of political performance. That is not to say that the other attitudes considered do not impinge upon perceptions of performance. Perceptions of the adherence to standards in public life are, in their own right, performance perceptions.

Indeed, standards may be thought of as the ‘process’ performance of public officials. Yet standards, as discussed here, are a measure that relates to those across the range of public life. Thus, considerations of ‘standards’ inevitably involve very general and broad considerations. However, within any political system some groups are more high profile than others are. For a system to be *seen* to be effective, it may be important for the most high profile actors within the system to be seen as performing well.

Easton (1965) discusses the concept of ‘stress’ that ultimately can undermine a political system. For Easton (1965, ch.15), ‘output failure’, *qua* confounded performance expectations, represents a key source of stress. Yet citizens’ expectations can only be confounded when they gain new information. Whilst this is obvious, the implications are important. Every aspect of a political system maintains some public profile, but the magnitude of these profiles varies dramatically (Van der Walle and Bouckaert, 2003).

Those aspects of a political system that have a very low public profile are therefore much less likely to produce ‘stress’ by confounding expectations, merely because citizens would be less likely to hear about any specific instance of output failure¹². This is not the case for some institutions, which receive orders of magnitude more coverage.

Within most democratic political systems, the institutions that receive the most coverage and generate the most focused attention are the executive and the legislature. The focus given may in part be a reflection of the primary law-making ability of these institutions within most political systems, or the usually explicitly political nature of the actors within these institutions. These actors within these institutions therefore have a very high profile, purely because so much attention is focused upon them. This will be even more so within systems modelled on the British Parliamentary system, where the executive are members of the parliament. Thus, the flow of information that is necessary for

¹² Of course, personal experience is another important source of new information. However, for those aspects of the political system with a very low profile, citizens may misattribute the source of the confounded expectation; either to another element of the political system, or to other (non-political) factors. Thus, the same argument about the importance of public profile putatively holds for new information gained by personal information.

expectations to be confounded exists to a much larger degree here than elsewhere in the political system.

If citizens have more information and more *detailed* information about a coherent group of actors within a political system, it makes sense to consider these actors 'key' from the point of view of (empirical) citizen beliefs. Yet the fact that these actors are highly visible does not guarantee that perceptions of them will be especially relevant for considerations of the legitimacy of a system. Indeed, because a perception of a *system's* legitimacy is a system-wide perception it could be the case that the relatively small group of actors within the political system has essentially no impact upon these general, system-wide, legitimacy perceptions. However, there remains a reason to think that – even though small numerically – perceptions of the key political actors within a system would have an important effect on perceptions of legitimacy. Partly, this again is a function of citizens having more information about these actors than others within the political system. Yet partly this may be related to the law-making and agenda-setting ability of these actors.

Gamson (1968, pp.50-52) noted that system support – and so, following the argument here, legitimacy – could be maintained so long as politically engaged citizens saw themselves as 'winning' in a suitable number of important political confrontations. The specific type of 'winning' that is most important is a matter for debate. However, it is undoubtedly the case that 'winning' in a legislative sense is an extremely important element. We may therefore, *pace* Gamson (1968), take it that those with legislative competencies will be very important for legitimacy considerations, relative to other political actors (a conclusion in agreement with Van der Walle and Bouckaert's 'dominant impact' model of perceptions; see 2002, p.899). The set of actions that key political actors can undertake that have a bearing on perceived (empirical) legitimacy are varied and contextual. When decisions are taken that a citizen supports, inadequacies in the decision making process is unlikely to have any impact upon perceived legitimacy (see

Gibson and Caldeira, 2003). When the decision is not supported, these considerations will be far more important. Despite this, it is perhaps possible to say that perceptions of the *procedural performance* of key political actors is of special importance here; since deviations from this always provide the potential for unjust harms, even to citizens who are presently benefiting from them. This is a similar argument to that made concerning perceptions of standards, however it gains a new impetus when applied to the most high-profile actors within the political system.

2.5 Conclusion

Ultimately, then, it is possible to see a range of citizen beliefs (perceived standards, trust, and perceived performance of key political actors) as being importantly connected to the empirical aspect of the concept of legitimacy. This connection makes clear the importance of the beliefs that have been discussed. These are not unimportant perceptions; they are not merely tantamount to booing at a sports game (cf. Citrin, 1974). That citizens may hold these perceptions negatively is a serious concern.

Helpfully, the set of beliefs here cover a wide range of relationships between citizens and the political system. In particular, they provide a way to consider both the procedural and ‘output’ aspects of governance. Of the beliefs considered here, perceptions of standards are the most explicitly ‘procedural’, in the sense that they refer to the underlying ‘rules’ that govern the political process. Yet both other beliefs considered – perceptions of performance of key political actors and political trust – have non-trivial procedural elements. This is especially so for perceptions of performance of key political actors, since, as was argued in this chapter, poor performance on procedural issues is continually a threat to citizens, even if they are presently receiving the outputs they desire. Yet, despite sharing important procedural elements, this concept differs importantly from perceptions of standards. ‘Perceptions of standards’ applies far more

broadly than only to the key political actors; although it is presently unknown whether one perception dominates the other in causal terms. Moreover, despite the importance of procedural issues here, key political actors also perform in a variety of non-procedural ways. These non-procedural elements are not only actions such as delivering desired policy outcomes, but also for notions such as competence. Similarly, political trust also has important procedural elements, insofar as we may expect trust to be importantly conditioned by the adherence of the trusted to appropriate procedures. Yet trust is also much more than a procedural matter. Political trust calculations can be based upon the whole range of experiences of the governing environment; including all procedural matters and all outcome evaluations. Indeed, when trust is considered in order to 'X', it matters whether the trusted person has a history of doing 'X' or not.

As this chapter has attempted to show, concerns about perceived legitimacy provide an impetus to understand these beliefs to a greater extent than we presently do. However, in order to understand the empirical relationships between these beliefs, it is necessary to measure them. This is the task of the next chapter, investigating whether it makes sense to consider these beliefs as single dimensions and attempting to specify measurements of these beliefs. After measures are constructed, the structure of the relationships between the variables can be modelled, allowing for a direct consideration of which belief is structurally prior.

Chapter 3

Latent Variables: Measures and Implications

Chapter 2 provided a conceptual discussion of citizen beliefs about government, and how these beliefs could be considered to provide information about the (empirical) political legitimacy of a state. As these beliefs are conceptually wedded to the same over-arching concept – political legitimacy – it is necessary to question how these ‘lower-level’ beliefs are related to each other (see also Sartori, 1970, p.1044). Indeed, precisely because these beliefs can all be connected to a broader, deeper, attitude, it is possible to question whether seemingly disparate ‘beliefs’ are actually empirically distinct. The fact that these beliefs can be separated conceptually does not ensure that citizens draw such distinctions. Suppose citizens have a relatively uncomplicated political outlook, in which they assess whether they consider the state politically legitimate, and use that assessment as a heuristic to guide all lower-level beliefs (on the use of heuristics in politics, see Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). In this case, the lower-level beliefs are not empirically distinct, because each is a manifestation of a singular perception of a state’s legitimacy. If these beliefs were not empirically distinct, but we assumed they were, empirical analyses could be misleading. Of course, conversely, if these beliefs were empirically distinct, but we assumed they were not, the results could also be unhelpful. There is thus a pressing need to explain the relationships between these beliefs; answering the question of whether all the extant measures are distinct.

The relationships between citizens’ beliefs have other important implications. Substantively, the way citizens’ beliefs are connected reveals important information about the beliefs themselves. Knowing what is and is not connected aids with understanding the beliefs because it reveals information about how these beliefs are

actually seen and considered in practice. This also matters methodologically. The measurement instrument used in any analysis of citizen beliefs ought to reflect how citizens conceive of the beliefs in question. If various beliefs are deeply connected, such that they form a consistent attitude, then a potentially useful and construct-valid measurement instrument can be created (Rasinski, 2008, p.364).

This chapter addresses the structural interconnectedness of the beliefs considered in the thesis empirically, by applying an ordinal item response theory (IRT) model to individual-level data. This analysis allows latent attitudinal dimensions to be detected and differentiated. This analysis is conducted upon three batteries of items relating to the main substantive areas of interest for the thesis (discussed conceptually in Chapter 2): standards in public life, trust in the authorities, and perceptions of the performance of MPs (who we can take as the 'key' political actors in the UK system). The main finding is that several qualitatively distinct, though correlated, dimensions should be distinguished.

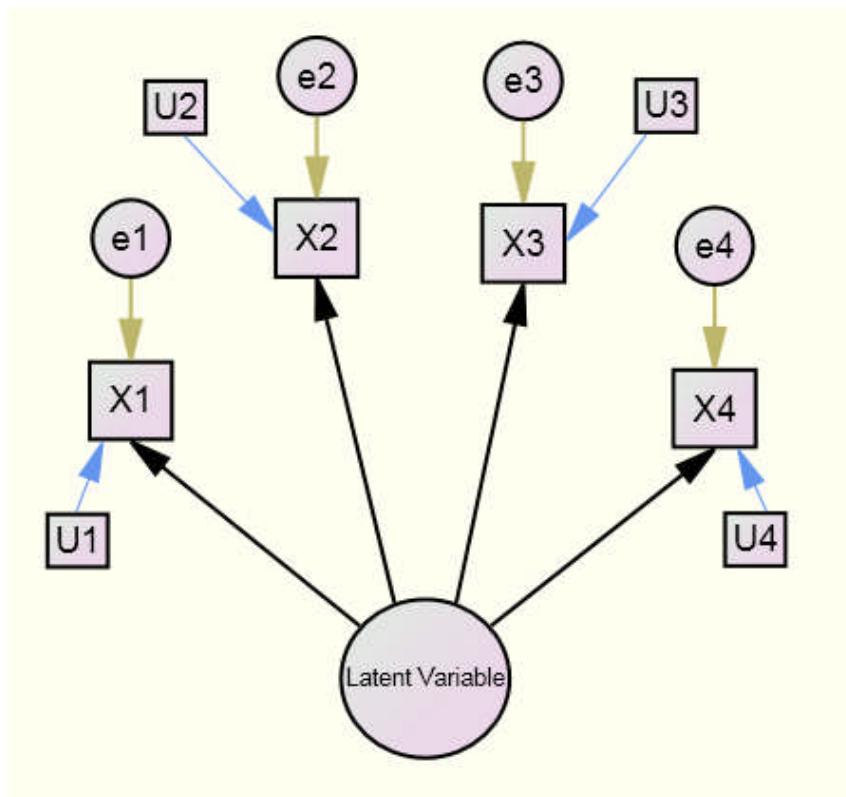
3.1 The Concept of Dimensionality

For any group of items (questions, tests, abilities, etc.) it can be questioned whether they are all indicators of a single concept. This consideration can go beyond merely probing whether, conceptually, items can be thought of as operationalisations of some abstract phenomena (in Sartori's sense, see 1970, p.1044). Indeed, we may question whether the items are all indicators of a single latent variable, whether they belong on a single latent dimension¹. Conceptually, when a set of items form a latent dimension, responses to these items can be thought of – conceptually – as being *caused* by the

¹ Strictly speaking, this is true only for those methods which seek to identify latent *dimensions*. A latent class analysis creates nominal-level latent variables, which cannot be placed on this sort of 'dimension'. Because this chapter does not consider latent class analysis at all, this nuance will be dropped in favour of enhancing readability.

latent variable itself (Edwards and Bagozzi, 2000; Borsboom et al., 2003)². Figure 3.1 represents this graphically.

Figure 3.1 – Graphical representation of a latent variable model.



Arrows indicate causal directionality. X_1, \dots, X_4 represent observed variables (items), e_1, \dots, e_4 represent per-item error, U_1, \dots, U_4 represents per-item unique components.

The latent variable is 'latent' in the sense that it is not directly observed. Instead, the existence of a latent variable, and knowledge of individuals' positions on it can be inferred from a set of observed items. Importantly, as can be seen in Figure 3.1, there is no structural connection between the observed items (X_1, \dots, X_4), indicating an absence

² Here, the idea of a latent variable is following the reflective model (where items reflect latent concepts), rather than the formative model (where concepts are formed as composite measures from items) (Edwards and Bagozzi, 2000, p.155). In the formative case, this causal model does not hold. Formative models do not delineate latent variables; instead, they simply create measures.

of causal connections. Whilst the observed items empirically co-vary, this relationship is solely a result of their common cause. If the latent variable could be controlled for, there would be no relationship between the observed items (see Lazarsfeld and Henry, 1968, p.22; Borsboom et al., 2003, p.203). This is known as the assumption of local independence.

In Figure 3.1 it can be seen that individual observed responses to items are some function of the latent variable, error, and per-item unique component. The 'unique' component represents possible systematic variation causing each item to be – in some sense – different from the other items. The unique component can be related to any aspect of how the item is perceived. For example, if a specific scandal relating to government ministers was prominent in the media, this would be incorporated in the unique component for items tapping perceptions of government ministers. As this unique component would probably not affect perceptions of other public officials³, the unique component is connected only to a single item. Whilst the causes of the unique components of items may be substantively interesting, their existence does not undermine the interpretation of a latent dimension. There are two principle reasons for this. Firstly, a unique component does not alter the causal relationship between the latent dimension and the observed responses. Thus, it still makes sense to investigate latent dimensions as phenomena in their own right. Secondly, the unique component can only explain that portion of the variance of the observed responses that is accounted for neither by the latent dimension, nor by the random error. Wherever the latent dimension accounts for a satisfactorily large portion of the variance⁴, the unique component will inherently be small, regardless of the size of the error component.

³ That is if we assume a hypothetical scandal that narrowly applies *only* to government ministers. If a hypothetical scandal applied more widely, this would be included in the unique components of the other relevant items too. Because there is no need to specify nor calculate the unique component, the specific causes of it are irrelevant.

⁴ 'Satisfactorily large' would be defined depending upon the method used. However, wherever the size of the component driven by the latent dimension is large enough for the method to consider it a useful latent dimension, the size of the component can be taken to be 'satisfactorily large'.

A latent dimension provides information not only about which specific items express the same underlying concept, it also provides measures that can be used for subsequent analyses (this point is discussed in more detail Section 3.2). A single latent dimension allows for the placement of respondents on a single (unidimensional) continuum which can be used to distinguish those people who have 'less' of a property, or those who have 'more'. These positions can be reflected in scores that can be used as measures of the individual's position on the latent dimension (Molenaar and Sijtsma, 2000, p.62).

3.2 The Nature of the Problem

Questions about dimensionality are extremely important for empirical analyses. This is particularly so methodologically. If we did not know the dimensionality of the specific items we were analysing, it is possible to analyse two aspects of the same dimension as if they expressed something distinct. As Hooghe (2011) demonstrated, this is not only a theoretical problem, extant research findings can be invalidated by such problems. Thus, in order to construct models that are helpful analytically, there is a need to ensure that there are empirical as well as conceptual justifications for the distinction.

Given the seriousness of this issue, it is surprising that so little attention is given to the empirical dimensionality of concepts⁵. Moreover, where attention has been paid, the method used has often been sufficiently inappropriate to pose a serious challenge to the substantive conclusions. Most commonly within political analyses, the task of assessing the dimensionality of citizen attitudes is achieved with a factor analytic technique (see, for example, Muller, 1972, p.943; Kaase, 1999, pp.10-12; Cook and Gronke, 2005, p.792; McLaren, 2011). However, because of distributional assumptions, factor analysis

⁵ For important exceptions, see for example Mokken, 1971; Muller, 1972; Marsh, 1977; Kaase, 1999; Cook and Gronke, 2005.

is not formally appropriate when the variables to be analysed have different means and standard deviations (van Schuur, 2003, p. p.141). Yet differences in means and standard deviations, reflecting differences in average perceptions and intensity of feelings, are the expectation in political analyses. The well-noted difference in levels of trust in a respondent's local politician and the government of the day (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995, pp.44-5) is a particularly clear example. Even here, where the frame of reference is almost identical, large and important differences between the distributions are expected. Moreover, the problems with factor analytic approaches are more serious when the items to be analysed are ordinal. Again, this is the expectation within mass survey data. The reliance within current research upon factor analytic techniques in situations where they are not formally appropriate reduces the statistical conclusion validity of the research (on the concept of statistical conclusion validity, see Cook and Campbell, 1979, pp.39-45). This is manifest in two main ways, both of which pose serious problems: over-dimensionalisation and inappropriate scoring of cases.

These are considered in more detail in turn.

Firstly, the over-dimensionalisation of factor analytic strategies results in analyses that, on average, suggest the existence of more underlying dimensions than is necessary (van Schuur, 2003, p.141). The frequency of over-dimensionalisation is significantly affected by several factors, in particular: the distribution of the underlying attitude, the number of items in the analysis, and the dispersal of the items⁶. Normal and skewed-normal distributions of the underlying latent trait lead to a larger risk of over-dimensionalisation when compared to bi-modal or uniform distributions; larger numbers of items in the analysis increase the risk of over-dimensionalisation; and more heavily dispersed items (measured by the inter-quartile range of interpolated medians) increases the risk of over-dimensionalisation. A factor-analysis of ten items that are derived from a normally distributed uni-dimensional latent continuum will over-dimensionalise with $p > 0.5$. Yet ten-item batteries are not uncommon within the social sciences, and the underlying

⁶ The arguments here are drawn from van der Eijk and Rose, 2011

dimension would usually be assumed to be normal. This propensity to over-dimensionalise increases, *ceteris paribus*, the risk of inappropriately analysing two aspects of the same concept as if they were distinct. Moreover, as this propensity to over-dimensionalise is not related to substantive concerns, it reduces replicability between studies. This raises serious concerns with much of the extant literature dealing with the dimensionality of attitudes.

Secondly, latent variable models allow an attitudinal dimension to be operationalised as a single variable; as such, they can be used to generate individual 'scores' which represent an individual's position on the latent variable. These scores can be generated in various ways. Factor scores are derived by multiplying a case's standardised score on each related variable by the factor loading for that item, and summing across the range of items (Garson, 2011). Yet, where the assigned items are ordinal, factor scores are an inappropriate representation of individuals' positions on the latent variable. The factor scores tend to be either too high (at the high end of the distribution), or too low (at the low end of the distribution) (Dumenci and Achenbach, 2008). Moreover, as the factor scores themselves are derived with reference to the putative number of dimensions, the first issue noted is also an important source of error.

The problem of an inadequate understanding of dimensionality is, then, of substantial practical importance, since it affects the usefulness of our measures and the validity of our (causal) conclusions. However, the problem is also of direct theoretic importance.

Where two items strongly relate to the same latent dimension, the required explanations for analyses will be based at the more general concept-level⁷; yet where items do not form part of the same latent dimension separate theoretic explanations are required for each item. For example, citizens may trust MPs in a qualitatively different way to public

⁷ That is not to say that there would never be a reason to consider individual items in isolation, even if they measure the same underlying variable. For example, an analysis that sought to consider why local politicians were seen more favourably than national politicians, even if they are not dimensionally distinct, would obviously need to consider the individual items. However, such an analysis can only consider the portion of the variance in the items that is not caused by the shared underlying concept or by error.

officials. MPs are political, and citizens' trust in them may be importantly connected to the electoral process (Anderson and LoTempio, 2001), whereas trust in the civil servants may be based much more heavily on their putative impartiality or political neutrality⁸ or on their 'ethics of care' (Stensöta, 2010, p.300). If citizens do indeed draw these distinctions, a theoretical explanation of trust in MPs ought to be distinct from an explanation of trust in civil servants. However, if citizens do not draw distinctions between MPs and civil servants, the factors affecting public perceptions of those groups will not be theoretically distinct (Lazarsfeld and Henry, 1968, p.21). It would thus be much less important to consider the theoretic distinctions between the issues. Each would share significant common antecedent causes. Here again, the problem of over-dimensionalisation can pose a serious challenge to our understanding of citizen perceptions.

In order to understand the dimensionality of citizen attitudes, it is thus necessary to select a method of analysis that does not suffer from the same limitations as factor analysis and to analyse citizen responses to questions probing putatively related issues. Surprisingly little information is available to guide our substantive understanding of the concepts of interest which does not suffer from the issues noted.

3.3 Substantive Background

In principle, the structure of citizen beliefs about public life could take many different forms. Specifically, it is possible to distinguish approaches according to the number of latent dimensions they suggest. At one extreme, an approach could hypothesise a single

⁸ Indeed, impartiality and neutrality may even be a formal requirement for civil servants. For example, "professional, impartial, and politically neutral civil service systems" were a formal requirement of EU membership for Central and Eastern European EU candidate countries (Mayer-Sahling, 2011, p.234).

latent dimension, which causes all relevant political perceptions. At the other extreme, it is possible that the very idea of underlying dimensions could be rejected in favour of a complex and multi-causal schema where each item is seen as representing a unique and separate concept. In between are those approaches that allow space for responses to groups of items to be caused by latent dimensions that specify a number of dimensions greater than one but less than the total number of items in the analysis. By far the most common of these approaches among those who conduct explicit dimensional analyses is the latter. However, there remains at least a superficial plausibility to all three. The three positions will be considered in order. The aim is not to attempt to specify a firm hypothesis, which would be extremely difficult given the problems with much of the previous research noted in Section 3.2. Instead, the objective is to provide a substantive background by which analytic results can be interpreted.

3.3.1 One dimension

The view that a single underlying dimension may drive a large range of important political perceptions is rare within political analyses. However, conceptually, it makes sense to think of overarching perceptions that drive perceptions. This may be a legitimacy perception; indeed, in Chapter 2 it was argued that at least three important political beliefs could be connected to the general concept of legitimacy. However, if it were the case that each of these views did not represent an individual belief for citizens, and was instead a manifestation of a general perception of the legitimacy of the regime, say, a single dimension would be expected. Similar claims can be made for the concept of 'support'. Whilst 'support' is often broken down into diffuse and specific support (following Easton, 1965), it is possible to maintain a view that a large range of expressed political perceptions are merely a manifestation of the more general latent

dimension, 'support'⁹. Easton himself discusses the concept support as a putative single dimension that would be indicated through a variety of manifest items, including: belonging to organisations or performing obligations, whilst the negative pole would be seen through manifestations of hostility including breaches of the law, revolutions, or expressing a preference for other systems of governance (Easton, 1965, p.163). In this sense, it is plausible to think that citizens may have a level of support (whose own causes are exogenous) which causes very wide range of more specific political attitudes and orientations.

The use of 'perceived legitimacy' and 'support' in this context share many important features, even if they are not the same concepts. Yet a more important distinction to make is with those theories that espouse a psychological dimension as the key underlying concept. One of the more prominent candidates from within this literature is affect.

Affect, in the psychological sense, can be thought of as emotion or mood (Glaser and Salovey, 1998, p.157). In highlighting the emotional aspect of citizen perceptions, the explanation focuses on a view that (more or less¹⁰) citizens can, as a function of their core personality type, be likely to be satisfied or dissatisfied in general (see Newton and Norris, 2000, p.59). Indeed, this view is taken implicitly when people make familiar statements such as 'you're too trusting'. Empirically, Ottati and Isbell (1996) demonstrate that an individual's mood can significantly affect political evaluations. Whilst in the case of Ottati and Isbell (1996) the mood-state was artificially created, it is plausible to think that individuals have an essentially consistent world-view in an affect sense which is the most prominent cause of individual perceptions (see Newton and

⁹ Note that whilst Easton (1965, p.164) discusses 'additional dimensions' necessary for understanding support, these are not properly dimensions in the sense we use the word here.

¹⁰ Whilst it is not the substantive objective of this thesis to evaluate the unique component or error component of items that form a latent dimension, they remain important (even if small in sufficiently strong dimensions). Thus, even if a single dimension is driving most of the variation in responses, there is no need (nor expectation) for the relationship to be empirically deterministic.

Norris, 2000, p.59; see also Brehm and Rahn, 1997, p.1019). This would be the case if, say, some people are simply ‘trusting’, and thus respond in a trusting way to survey questions, whilst others are not trusting, and answer in a distrustful way. Here, the underlying cause is the respondent’s psychological state, rather than a particularistic evaluation of individual survey items.

Contrasting with a view of a single underlying latent variable is the view of more complex underlying structures. As noted above, these can be in two forms. The first, discussed immediately below, postulates essentially no latent variables. The second, discussed at the end of this section, postulates a number of latent continua, but many fewer than the total number of items that can be used to measure political concepts.

3.3.2 – A complex schema: no latent dimensions

It is possible to draw such fine distinctions between items that the notion of underlying dimensions that unite disparate perceptions can be rejected. This would be the position taken by theories that focus on the complexity of human interactions and favour that complexity to the exclusion of parsimony considerations (for example postmodern ethnographers or constructivists, see Hay, 2002, p.36). This is tantamount to either setting the acceptance criterion for inclusion as part of a dimension to unity (or near unity), or taking the unique component as a critically important component of each item irrespective of how small it is.

The view that all manifest items should be considered independently can make theoretical sense. Consider the case of trust in various professionals. Above it was discussed that citizens may make (qualitatively) important distinctions between their trust in MPs and their trust in public officials. Yet this two-dimensional account does not account for all distinctions citizens could make. For example, it is possible to sub-divide

the general category of ‘public officials’ into increasingly specific categories; perhaps based upon varying levels of neutrality, seniority, or even personal administrative style (see de Graaf, 2011). If citizens do indeed draw heavily on these types of distinction, it would be expected that the items to be analysed would not reflect a consistent latent dimension.

It is also possible that many of items focusing upon citizens’ political views will not form a consistent scale by virtue of lacking a common scale component. Thus, the matter is one of empirical distinctions rather than theoretical. As this is an empirical claim, it will be tested here. To the extent that items do form a scale, this claim can be rejected.

3.3.3 Small-n dimensions

The suggestion of a relatively small number of latent continua that variously cause a wide variety of specific citizen beliefs is a plausible account, and common within the literature. In this sense ‘support’ is not a single, distinct, thing. Instead, an amalgamated concept of support is constructed, in a ‘formative’ (i.e. non-causal) sense, from qualitatively distinct latent continua (Edwards and Bagozzi, 2000, p.155). The question that immediately emerges is what these latent continua are. Extant research is somewhat lacking in this area, and – as noted in Section 3.2 – the available research may draw out substantively unimportant distinctions. However, whilst this means that much of the extant research in this area is methodologically problematic, it can still provide a guide as to the potential distinctions made by citizens. Moreover, theoretic research remains untouched by empirical methodological problems.

The extant empirical research on the dimensionality of citizen perceptions of governance has highlighted a number of potential dimensions that relate to citizens’ substantive perceptions. The specific item ‘constituents’ of the dimensions can be difficult to track

between empirical research efforts, because different datasets probe different aspects of the general problem, and so the dimensions have different constituents in different studies. However, previous empirical research has found a 'confidence in government' dimension (Brehm and Rahn, 1997; see also Cook and Gronke, 2005). Similarly, within the American context, a 'confidence in the three branches' (i.e. Congress, the Supreme Court and the executive) has been noted (Brehm and Rahn, 1997; see also Cook and Gronke, 2005). Elsewhere, similar continua have been titled 'performance of the regime' (Klingemann, 1999, p.38), 'confidence in the state' (Edlund, 1999, p.352), support for 'political institutions' (Dalton, 2004, p.24; see also Kaase, 1999), and perceptions of 'partisan institutions' (Rothstein and Stolle, 2008).

The more evaluative 'confidence in political institutions' dimensions can be distinguished from the somewhat more affective 'political trust' dimension (Dalton, 2004, p.24). This latter dimension focuses upon 'trust in politicians' or 'trust in institutions' (Dalton, 2004, p.24), and is dimensionally distinct from inter-personal trust. Empirically, Muller (1972, p.943) provides an analysis that shows citizens' perceptions of trust in local and national government, the police, and the courts all form one attitudinal dimension. Somewhat similarly, Hooghe (2011) argues – based on a factor analysis of 'political trust' items in the British Election Survey – that a dimension of political trust can be distinguished.

Explicit tests of the hypothesis that confidence (in the sense discussed immediately above) and political trust are the same dimension, distinguished only by naming, are very rare. However, structural equation models that hypothesise structurally separate latent dimensions indirectly test this claim. To the extent that a structural model is well fitting, the hypothesis that political trust and 'confidence' are indeed separate gains support. Mishler and Rose's analysis of regime support provided an adequately fitting model with structural differences hypothesised between 'trust' and 'performance' (2005, p.1063). Unfortunately, this does not explicitly test the hypothesis that the data are better explained by a multiple-dimensional solution rather than a one-dimensional

solution; instead, it merely shows that a greater-than one-dimensional solution can appear adequate.

Another distinction could be drawn to highlight a ‘perception of public ethics’ dimension. Allen and Birch (2011, fn. 29) show that four public perceptions of ethical behaviours by MPs form a single dimension. This highlights that citizens likely have some conception of the state of public ethics within a country, but that these perceptions are not fine-grained. Instead, seemingly disparate perceptions are based upon a single underlying perception. In the case of Allen and Birch (2011, p.72) this perception was noted drawing together perceptions of elected politicians: misusing expenses, not providing straight answers, making promises that cannot be kept, and accepting bribes.

We can therefore plausibly think of a small number of dimensions that structure citizens’ beliefs about government. Undoubtedly there are more dimensions than the few discussed here. Yet the central feature of this discussion is the existence of far fewer dimensions than items. In each case, disparate items unite as part of an underlying perception that accounts for responses to more detailed questions. However, two problems prevent this view from being accepted without further evidence. Firstly, it is uncommon for researchers to test a pool of items that is sufficiently broad to test the hypothesis of there being essentially a single underlying dimension of the order of ‘political support’. Secondly, almost without exception the extant literature uses factor analytic strategies, which are known to over-dimensionalise ordinal survey items. Thus, the problem remains – to some extent – open.

3.4 Methods for Assessing Dimensionality

Thus far, it has been argued that it is extremely important to pay attention to the underlying dimensionality of items, and that the common factor analytic approach is

inadequate for this purpose. It is thus necessary to analyse the data in a way that can uncover the attitudinal dimensionality of responses, yet does not suffer from the noted difficulties of factor analysis. This is especially important when, as here, ordinal data is analysed. Whilst several methods are available (see Dumenci and Achenbach, 2008, pp.55-56), IRT methods are well suited to this context (Niémoller and van Schuur, 1983; van Schuur, 2003). The two most common IRT methods are Rasch scaling and Mokken scaling. Rasch scaling is in some ways superior, most notably its ability to position respondents on an interval-level scale, whilst Mokken scaling produces an ordinal scale. Yet because Rasch scaling makes far stronger assumptions, Mokken scaling is to be preferred here (van Schuur, 2003, p. 143; on Mokken scaling generally, see Mokken, 1971).

Mokken scaling is a non-parametric extension to Guttman scaling which allows stochastic errors within responses (Niémoller and van Schuur, 1983, p.121). Mokken scale analysis allows for the quantification of the degree to which the observed response patterns deviate from a perfect scale (Mokken, 1971, p.148). This quantification is expressed as Loevinger's H coefficient; with the H_i coefficient defined as the scalability for item i compared to the scale as a whole, and the H_{ij} coefficient defined as the bivariate scalability of items i and j (see Mokken, 1971, p.148-151; Niémoller and van Schuur, 1983, p.131). The H_{ij} is calculated in a similar fashion to calculations of the χ^2 test for independence, where observed and expected frequencies are compared under the assumption of perfect scalability. An 'error' is counted as a respondent who answers positively to a 'more difficult'¹¹ question and negatively to an 'easier' question. The 'error' rate is analysed against the expected frequency under the assumption of independence, and quantified to reflect the infrequency of errors, such that a H_{ij} of 1 indicates no errors, and a H_{ij} of 0 indicates the expected number of errors under independence. The H_i and H coefficients are derived similarly but instead focus upon the scalability of one item against the rest of the scale and the scale as a whole,

¹¹ Item difficulties are represented by the mean response to the item.

respectively. A generally accepted (yet ultimately arbitrary) lower bound of the scalability coefficients is 0.3, below this it is assumed that the items do not scale together (Mokken, 1971, p.185; van Schuur, 2003, p.149).

The scale procedure initially selects the two items that have the highest pair-wise scalability (H_{ij}). To this pair, items are added so long as the individual item meets the criterion $H_i \geq 0.3$. No weight is given to the impact of adding another item upon the H_i coefficients of items within the scale; thus, after an item has been added, its H_i coefficient can fall below 0.3. Items are clustered together to form a scale until no more items can be added which meet the criteria $H_i \geq 0.3$; remaining items can then be clustered into a new scale. Thus, Mokken scaling creates unidimensional scales, which explicitly allows the testing of whether a one-dimensional solution is sufficient to describe the empirical data. Because these latent attitudinal dimensions reveal which items measure the same concept, knowing the contents of a scale allows substantive interpretations of the unifying characteristics. For example, a scale that contains an item directly probing perceptions of standards will help to elucidate which items are considered part of that general concept. Whilst this does not define the boundaries in a hard sense, and should not over-ride the theoretical goals of research, the information is useful methodologically and substantively.

The final scale represents a cluster of items that are (stochastically) hierarchically ordered and are not qualitatively distinct. That the scales are (stochastically) hierarchical means that those people who respond positively to a more difficult item will also respond (subject to error) positively to all easier items. Thus, the scale analysis provides a large amount of detail about the relative difficulty of various items.

Any scales produced can be evaluated for the extent to which they adhere to the 'double monotonicity' model¹², and for their reliability. Within Mokken scaling, reliability is

¹² Double monotonicity encapsulates the assumptions of (single) monotonicity and non-intersection of the item response trace-lines. The assumption of (single) monotonicity specifies that the probability of answering a

measured using rho (ρ), a coefficient somewhat analogous to Cronbach's alpha that estimates the test-retest reliability of the items within a scale (Niémoller and van Schuur, 1983, p.137-9; van Schuur, 2003, p.152). A scale is assumed to be reliable if $\rho > 0.7$ (Niémoller and van Schuur, 1983, p.139).

3.5 Data

In this analysis, data are taken from Survey 1, the 2003-4 *Public Attitudes* survey. Because this survey did not oversample in any region of Britain, it provides an approximation of a random sample of Great Britain¹³. This allows an analysis that is easier to generalise in the absence of weighting, a procedure that is not supported within the available software for scale analysis.

Three batteries of survey items are selected for analysis. A full list items and codings are reported in Appendix A. The first battery of 17 items probes the extent to which respondents trust various professionals to tell the truth¹⁴. The second comprises 10 items that question how many or how few MPs act in the way described¹⁵. Of the 10 items in the second battery, two represent 'negative' behaviours ('taking bribes' and

question in the more 'positive' way should not decline for increasing values of the latent variable. The assumption of non-intersection of the item response trace-lines specifies that the ordering of the item 'difficulty' should be (stochastically) consistent across different individuals (Niémoller and van Schuur, 1983, p.128). A full discussion of these assumptions is provided in Niémoller and van Schuur (1983).

¹³ Note that the sample design used a multi-stage cluster approach. Whilst this moves the sampling method away from the logic of a simple random sample, the final sample does not necessarily oversample any groups.

¹⁴ It may be noted that conceptually 'trust' and 'trust to tell the truth' are not always the same thing. Indeed, one may trust someone to tell the truth without 'trusting' them; for example, when criminals confess they are trusted to tell the truth, but we would hesitate to say we 'trust' them. To test whether citizens actually draw such distinctions within this survey battery, a survey was conducted by YouGov between 15th and 16th July 2011 ($n=2012$) asking random split halves of the sample either whether they 'trust' the professionals listed, or whether they 'trust them to tell the truth'. The results did not differ systematically between each question formulation; strongly suggesting an equivalency between 'trust to tell the truth' and 'trust'. Thus, the 'trust to tell the truth' batteries will be taken as probing 'trust' generally.

¹⁵ To allow for explicit testing of whether all variables share a single attitudinal cause, here all variables are coded such that perceptions that are more positive gain a higher score.

'using their powers for their own personal gain'), thus these two items are reverse-coded to focus upon positive behaviours ('they do *not* take bribes', 'they do *not* use their power for their own personal gain'). Finally, a third battery probes perceptions of the adherence to standards in public life and perceptions of the ability of regulators to ensure adherence.

As Mokken scale analysis can be performed upon polytomous ordinal data of various numbers of categories, 'don't know' responses could be inserted as middle categories to questions which do not have a pre-defined middle option (following Bishop et al., 1978, p.84). As this allows for slightly more information to be considered in this analysis, this convention will be followed. This, of course, only makes sense for those variables that lack a pre-defined middle category. Where variables include a pre-defined middle category, 'don't know' responses will be treated as missing. Because Mokken scaling cannot analyse cases with missing data, this will result in some loss of cases for analysis for scales that contain items where 'don't know' responses are treated as missing.

3.6 Empirical Results

As was noted in Section 3.3, it is possible, in principle, to conceive of a single latent dimension, a small number of latent dimensions, or a very large number of latent dimensions accounting for responses to political survey items. This section begins by explicitly testing whether it is possible, empirically, to distinguish common scale components within the three batteries of items selected for analysis. If it is not possible to form a consistent scale from these batteries, the hypothesis that common scale components exist can be rejected. The results of a Mokken scale analysis that explicitly tests whether the items can form coherent clusters are shown in Table 3.1 below¹⁶. This

¹⁶ Table 3.1 shows the results of a Mokken scale 'search' procedure performed on each item battery separately.

table shows the ‘loadings’ (H_i values) of each item on the first scales found for each battery analysed¹⁷. Greyed-out coefficients show the H_i coefficients of items that were not included in the scale because they did not exceed the standard lower-bound of 0.3. These are the coefficients that *would* have been seen, had each item been included. The mean indicates the mean response per item, and thus provides information about the difficulty of that item relative to other items within the same question battery.

Table 3.1 shows that, empirically, it is possible to distinguish sets of scalable items within the batteries considered¹⁸. We can explicitly reject the notion that citizens view each of the items within the batteries analysed in a qualitatively different way. There is a common scale component that underpins at least some of the items in each of these item batteries. Moreover, we can also explicitly reject the notion that citizens view all the items in the same way. Some items did not scale. This is especially noticeable in Scale 1, where – in particular – journalists were rejected for inclusion. On no reasonable scalability criteria could journalists be considered part of the first scale. Thus, we are able to make the claim that citizen trust in journalists is distinct from citizen trust in, say, MPs and government ministers. Each of these scales can be taken to meet the assumption of double monotonicity¹⁹, and each is reliable ($\rho>0.7$).

¹⁷ In addition to the reported scales, an additional three-item scale was found focusing on trust in the media (TV news journalists, broadsheet journalists, and tabloid journalists). Whilst this scale is fairly strong ($H=0.47$), because it only contains three items it has a poor reliability ($\rho=0.56$). For this reason, the scale is not shown here. No other items were connected to this scale in a substantively or statistically meaningful way.

¹⁸ Despite the fact that the results provide a clear empirical account of this claim, such an argument cannot reject theoretical claims for distinctions between items. However, to the extent that theoretical claims disregard empirical results, we have reason to treat the theoretical claims with suspicion.

¹⁹ None of the scales show statistically significant violations of the assumption of monotone homogeneity. The assumption of non-intersection of item response trace-lines is more complex to evaluate. However, for all scales, evaluating this assumption via ‘restscore’ groups leads to no violations sufficiently large to be considered a ‘reason for concern’ in substantive terms (following Molenaar and Sijtsma, 2000, p.49).

Table 3.1 – Results of a Mokken Scale Analysis of Three Batteries of Items

Scale range	Item	Mean	Scale 1	Scale 2	Scale 3
1 - 3	Trust, Tabloid journalists	1.17	0.11		
	Trust, estate agents	1.43	0.15		
	Trust, government ministers	1.54	0.50		
	Trust, people who run large companies	1.55	0.28		
	Trust, MPs in general	1.62	0.46		
	Trust, senior managers in local councils	1.79	0.39		
	Trust, broadsheet journalists	1.82	0.14		
	Trust, top civil servants	1.82	0.38		
	Trust, local councillors	1.87	0.34		
	Trust, senior managers in the NHS	1.94	0.33		
	Trust, TV news journalists	2.03	0.19		
	Trust, your local MP	2.03	0.36		
	Trust, senior police officers	2.39	0.39		
	Trust, local police officers	2.60	0.35		
	Trust, judges	2.64	0.36		
	Trust, head teachers in schools	2.71	0.30		
	Trust, family doctors	2.84	0.25		
1 - 5	MPs own up when they make mistakes	2.29	0.43		
	MPs tell the truth	2.87	0.50		
	MPs are competent	2.79	0.47		
	MPs explain the reasons for their actions and decisions	2.89	0.40		
	MPs make sure public money is used wisely	2.93	0.47		
	MPs are in touch with what the general public considers important	2.98	0.47		
	MPs set a good example in their private lives	3.14	0.41		
	MPs do not use their power for their personal gain	3.16	0.25		
	MPs are dedicated to doing a good job	3.30	0.53		
	MPs do not take bribes	3.82	0.25		
1 - 5	Confidence that the authorities will punish those caught doing wrong	2.76	0.37		
	Confidence in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life	2.81	0.38		
	How standards compares to a few years ago	2.95	0.41		
	Confidence in the authorities to improve standards	3.09	0.47		
	How standards compare to elsewhere in Europe	3.27	0.25		
	Overall rating of standards	3.35	0.43		
	Confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life	3.84	0.17		
Overall scale coefficient (H)		0.38	0.46	0.41	
<i>n</i>		1097	1025	1051	

Result of a ‘search’ procedure on three batteries of items. Scales are formed independently. The items restricted to form a scale only with items in the same column.

The results in Table 3.1 show both that it is possible to distinguish items that share a common cause within the item batteries, and allows us to reject the notion that

responses to all items are caused by a single underlying concept. However, this analysis cannot provide evidence for empirical distinctions between the scales; since by necessity they are separated. In order to analyse whether all items are caused by a single underlying concept, it is necessary to also allow clustering between batteries. To the extent that the scales analysed thus far ought to be thought of as distinct, the items analysed should 'cluster' into roughly similar sets. Of course, because the scales are likely to be correlated²⁰, some 'overlap' is likely without necessarily undermining the usefulness of considering the scales as distinct. This 'overlap' is likely to be expressed as some 'cross-scale' clustering, perhaps with some items with H_i coefficients above 0.3. Such 'overlap' *would* be problematic to viewing the scales as distinct only if two or more scales from Table 3.1 form together with reasonably strong H_i coefficients. The definition of 'reasonably strong' here is a substantive concern, and is considered in light of both the original scale's H_i coefficients, and in light of the standard cut-off, $H_i \geq 0.3$.

The results of this analysis are shown in Table 3.2.

²⁰ Note, however, that it is not the aim of this chapter to attempt to specify the degree of correlation between the latent variables.

Table 3.2 – Results of a Mokken Scale Analysis of All Items Simultaneously

Scale range	Item	Mean	Scale 1	Scale 2
1 – 3	Trust, government ministers	1.54	0.43	
1 – 3	Trust, MPs in general	1.62	0.41	
1 – 3	Trust, senior managers in local councils	1.79	0.34	
1 – 3	Trust, top civil servants	1.82	0.30	
1 – 3	Trust, local councillors	1.87	0.33	
1 – 3	Trust, your local MP	2.03	0.33	
1 – 5	MPs own up when they make mistakes	2.29	0.34	
1 – 3	Trust, senior police officers	2.39	0.28	
1 – 3	Trust, local police officers	2.60	0.27	
1 – 3	Trust, judges	2.64	0.28	
1 – 3	Trust, head teachers in schools	2.71	0.27	
1 – 5	MPs tell the truth	2.88	0.42	
1 – 5	MPs explain the reasons for their actions and decisions	2.88	0.31	
1 – 5	MPs make sure public money is used wisely	2.92	0.38	
1 – 5	MPs are in touch with what the general public considers important	2.98	0.34	
1 – 5	Confidence in the authorities to improve standards	3.09	0.35	
1 – 5	MPs are competent	3.21	0.33	
1 – 5	MPs are dedicated to doing a good job	3.30	0.40	
1 – 5	Overall rating of standards	3.35	0.33	
1 – 5	Confidence that the authorities will punish those caught doing wrong	2.76		0.33
1 – 5	Confidence in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life	2.81		0.32
1 – 5	How standards compares to a few years ago	2.95		0.35
1 – 5	How standards compare to elsewhere in Europe	3.27		0.30
Overall scale coefficient (H)		0.34	0.32	
<i>n</i>		1025	1025	

Result of a 'search' procedure on all items simultaneously. Only items selected by the procedure to be clustered into the two scales shown here are included in the table. Scales focusing upon journalists and those with only two items included are not shown here.

As can be seen, the items cluster somewhat differently in this analysis once 'cross-scale' clustering is allowed. The most significant difference is the formation of a single scale featuring both the trust items and items relating to how MPs act. However, whilst the procedure used here *can* cluster these items together, this does not ensure that the larger scale is more appropriate, or even substantively meaningful. Unfortunately, the scaling method used here does not offer a statistical test for comparing the usefulness of the scales directly. It is thus necessary to base the choice upon substantive concerns, and the comparative usefulness of the scales. The scale construction process, the

process by which items are individually selected for inclusion, is relevant in this regard. The procedure forms the 'trust' scale essentially completely²¹ and only then adds items relating to MPs. This demonstrates the strong interconnectedness between the 'trust' items; something they share to a much lesser extent with the items relating to how MPs act. This pattern appears in line with the suggestion made earlier that the expected correlation between the scales may result in some 'linkages' between them, without necessarily indicating that they are most helpfully viewed as one dimension. Of course, this in itself may not be a sufficient reason to prefer one formulation to another.

However, coupled with the inclusion pattern that begins by building the first scale is the finding that the H_i coefficients for several of the items in the 'linked' scale fall below 0.3, after inclusion in the scale. The scale construction procedure, which adds one item at a time, shows that this substantively important decline in H_i coefficients of the 'trust' items occurs after the inclusion of the 'how MPs act' items. This, again, is congruent with a view that the scales are correlated but distinct. A very similar finding applies to the inclusion of two 'standards' variables in the first scale ('overall rating of standards' and 'confidence in the authorities to improve standards'). Whilst the H_i coefficients for these items remain above 0.30, they fit into the 'amalgamated' scale far worse than they do into the more theoretically coherent Scale 3 in Table 3.1. Finally, it is important to note that only one coefficient in Table 3.2 is higher than in the scales in Table 3.1 ('how standards compare to elsewhere in Europe'); all other coefficients are smaller, often much smaller.

This analysis demonstrates the utility of viewing the scales as distinct. As expected, some empirical linkages between the scales can be detected. However, this linkage does not challenge the claim that it is most helpful to view these data arising from three distinct latent attitudes.

²¹ The scale is formed in its entirety, with the exception of the item relating to senior managers in the NHS, which is not included.

3.7 Substantive Interpretation of Scale Results

The empirical results in Table 3.1 highlight subsets of items that can sensibly be viewed as sharing a singular attitudinal cause. As was shown further in Section 3.6, this finding is helpful even in light of the analysis in Table 3.2, allowing scales to be formed from all items simultaneously. This finding allows a substantive interpretation of the scales, which here will focus upon the distinctions drawn in Table 3.1.

In general, it is noteworthy that sets of items relate to distinct latent variables. This allows a rejection of the hypothesis that a single attitude or belief is an important driver of *all* manifest items. The scale results also suggest that the correct unit of analysis for questions concerning the abstract concepts covered by the scales is at the concept level, and not at the item level. Indeed, because the items are not viewed in a qualitatively different way, there is no pressing need in quantitative analyses to separate out the causes of individual item perceptions. This is because citizens' responses to individual items are just manifestations of a deeper and more general belief.

A substantive evaluation of each scale in turn is presented below in Sections 3.7.1, 3.7.2, and 3.7.3.

3.7.1 Scale 1: Political trust

Scale 1 in Table 3.1 highlights perceived trust in various professionals. The list of professionals is somewhat diverse, although all the professionals within the list have a formal connection to the state, and an 'authority' role. Moreover, as the scale contained some professionals that are un-problematically political (in particular government ministers), the stronger claim can be made that this scale identifies a subset of analysed

professionals that citizens see as political authorities²². Thus, the scale demarcates those authorities who are relevant, and those who are not relevant, for considerations of citizens' political trust. The inclusive nature of the final scale allows us to reject hypotheses that suggest important distinctions in citizen perceptions based on degrees of impartiality or levels of partisan political involvement. It is not the case that citizens have qualitatively distinct perceptions of 'trust in the government' and 'trust in the civil service'. This is especially important because numerous studies focus upon perceptions of the legislature, politicians, or of the government, often to the exclusion of broader considerations (see for example, Hetherington, 1998, p.806; Dalton, 2002, pp.242-3; Newton, 2006, p.849). Indeed, even the broader conception of 'government', often used within the American literature (King, 2000, p.76), falls short of the elaborated list of political authorities.

The results are interesting for not only showing which authorities are relevant for considerations of 'political trust', but also for highlighting what is excluded. Citizens' trust in journalists was not caused by the same (latent) attitude. This demonstrates that, at least for citizens in Great Britain in 2003-4, journalists are not relevant for considerations of political trust. This is especially interesting because journalists, and in particular newspaper journalists, do act politically (see, for example Blumler and Coleman, 2010); it thus could have been the case that journalists were seen as 'political' actors. A plausible interpretation of this finding is that citizen perceptions of the boundaries of the political authorities are based heavily upon the boundaries of state's formal role. Thus, journalists do not form a part of the political authorities because – to a large degree – journalists are private commercial actors. Similarly, estate agents are excluded from the scale, reflecting their private status. More broadly, this suggests that

²² This finding also provides empirical support for Easton's (1975, p.438) definition of the 'political authorities', which included 'all public officials from chief executives, legislators, judges and administrators down to local city clerks and policemen'. As this is the definition of the boundaries of public life used within this thesis, this finding also provides an empirical justification for the boundaries of public life used within this thesis.

in different contexts, where the state's formal role may be radically different, the professionals who are seen as 'political authorities' will be different.

However, this interpretation is complicated by some seemingly incongruent findings.

Indeed, family doctors did not appear to form part of the scale, despite the overwhelming majority of family doctors in Great Britain being employed by the NHS.

This may be a result of the special position of family doctors as care providers (see also Stensöta, 2010). It is possible that the question was interpreted as relating to the extent to which the respondent could trust their family doctor's health advice. Further, trust in TV journalists was found to be unrelated to trust in the political authorities, despite the existence of the BBC. This could be either a result of the functional independence of the BBC from the rest of political system, or a result of the effect of TV journalists who are inherently not connected to the state (e.g. *Sky News* journalists). These findings suggest that investigating in more depth how people actually conceptualise these groups of professionals would be a worthwhile endeavour. Yet the finding that journalists do not form part of the scale is still analytically interesting. Kaase (1999, p.10) argues that journalists are relevant for political trust when considering West European democracies. If this finding cannot be replicated within Britain even for TV journalists, where the BBC exists as a state funded corporation with one of the highest profile news organisations within the country, doubts can be raised about the finding more generally. Indeed, the magnitude of the rejection is striking. On no reasonable scaling criteria could journalists be included.

Despite the disagreement with Kaase over the inclusion of journalists, one notable feature of the elaborated list of political authorities is the consistency with some classic theories. Indeed, Easton's (1975, p.438) claim that the authorities include 'all public officials from chief executives, legislators, judges and administrators down to local city clerks and policemen' maps almost perfectly onto the empirical findings.

As the perceptions formed a consistent scale, responses to the noted set of authorities – government ministers, the local MP, MPs in general, senior managers in local councils, top civil servants, local councillors, senior managers in the NHS, senior police officers, local police officers, and judges – will form, in this thesis, the basis of a latent variable operationalising political trust. This operationalisation takes the form of an additive index of respondents' expressed trust in these professionals, with each measured on a 'trust'/'don't know'/'do not trust' scale. Thus, the variable has a range of 20.

3.7.2 Scale 2: Perceptions of the performance of MPs

Scale 2 in Table 3.1 highlights citizens' perceptions of the behaviour of MPs. To this extent, it provides information about how satisfied or dissatisfied citizens are with the performance of MPs specifically. The items evaluated here do not focus specifically upon the 'policy outputs' created by MPs. Here performance is taken primarily in process and ethical terms. As was discussed in Chapter 2, an emphasis upon process can be helpful, since this remains a particularly important consideration substantively.

Importantly, the items within this scale are not merely a reflection of trust. Trust and satisfaction, as measured here, are not two parts of the same whole, even if the two are 'linked'. This is an important finding. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find political analysts take items such as 'officials care what people think' or 'there are few dishonest people in government' as fundamental elements of trust (see for example Dalton, 2002, p.240; see also Marsh, 1977, pp.262-3). The explanation offered here (*viz.* that there is a distinct perception of MPs) appears to give a more parsimonious account that attributes genuine substantive meaning to the items relating to MPs. MPs are not only close to citizens in representational terms, they are the only group within the national political system who are directly accountable to voters. Thus, it should be unsurprising that perceptions of MPs are not merely the same underlying perception as the more general

'trust' perception. Of course, three 'trust' items also relate to MPs or government ministers (who are usually MPs), and these are empirically linked to the scale. This is not unsurprising, given that the items all refer to the same group of actors. Yet this scale is fundamentally distinct from the more general trust scale. Indeed, even the 'trust' items specifically relating to MPs scale less well with this 'MPs scale' than they do with the other trust items.

Moreover, trust and perceptions of the performance of MPs are different in practice. If a citizen believes that MPs will be in touch with what the public regard as important solely because they have faith that the democratic system will punish those who are not, they do not in fact need to trust the MPs at all. Regulation – and the discipline exercised by the electoral process – may take the place of trust (see also Warren, 2006). Geraint Parry makes the point more eloquently:

If we were to follow this view of politics, we should not ask about a politician whether we would buy a second-hand car from him but whether we would be adequately protected by a Sale of Goods Act if he sold us a bad one (1976, p.142)

It is also of note that the scale unites a set of items that may be thought of, conceptually, as being distinct. There is no reason why someone would have to consider MPs to set a good example in their private lives if they thought they were competent. Indeed, it is surely possible for highly competent and effective public servants to set a bad example in their private lives. Indeed, involvement in a sex scandal does not inherently make a politician less competent. Again, the findings show the propensity of citizens to generalise latent attitudinal perceptions and apply the underlying perception essentially consistently across a range of seemingly disparate items.

Because of the scalability of the items, it is possible to create a scale variable that estimates the underlying position on the latent attitudinal trait. However, within the survey, other useful information is available to provide greater context for decisions about these perceptions. In particular, respondents were asked how important each action by MPs was. Importance was assessed in two ways. Firstly, this was asked as a

ranking of importance from 'not at all important' to 'extremely important'. Secondly, respondents were asked, in an ipsative fashion, which three of the behaviours were the most important²³. This provides the opportunity to 'weight' the contribution of the separate item to the composite scale score by the subjective importance ascribed to it. As this 'weighting' is impossible with the aggregate scale variable, this variable will instead be operationalised in a formative way (a variable formed as composite measure from items) (Edwards and Bagozzi, 2000, p.155)²⁴. As the importance rankings contain an ipsative element, it is important to include all items which could have been ranked as one of the three most important. Thus, the items relating to 'using powers for personal gain' or 'taking bribes' will be included in the measure, despite not meeting the standard $H_i \geq 0.3$ criterion. Because this variable is 'formative' it is not problematic to include these items. An aggregate index is formed out of the weighted variables.

In subsequent analyses, items are coded to range from 0 to 4, indicating whether respondents think that 'all' (0), 'most' (1), 'about half' (2), 'a few' (3), or 'no' (4) MPs do of the actions shown in Table 3.1; importantly, here, this variable is *negatively coded*²⁵. Thus, these items indicate whether respondents think MPs 'take bribes' or 'are not competent'. If a respondent considers the individual action to be 'very' or 'extremely' important, and rates that action as one of the three most important of the ten considered, their score on that item is multiplied by 3. If a respondent considers the individual action to be 'very' or 'extremely' important, but *not* one of the three most important of the ten considered, their score is multiplied by 2 for that item. If neither of these conditions applies, the raw score of the item is taken. Scores on all ten (weighted) actions are then summed, and divided by the number of items (10). This process

²³ Each of these questions are also described in Appendix A.

²⁴ As the variable is constructed in a 'formative' way it moves somewhat away from the standard logic of latent variables, insofar as it is not the case that scores are *caused* by the underlying trait (in a strong sense).

²⁵ Note that this coding differs from that used in the scale analysis in this chapter. The 'positively facing' coding used in this chapter was necessary to prevent the arbitrary rejection of the possibility of cross-scale clustering purely on coding grounds. Here, the negative coding is used to allow greater discrimination between individuals who hold increasingly poor perceptions of MPs. As many citizens hold MPs in quite low regard, discrimination at this end of the scale is more important than at the very positive end.

therefore produces a variable tapping dissatisfaction with the process performance of MPs. The variable thus has a range of 9.2; although because of its multiplicative nature, has many potential individual values.

3.7.3 Scale 3: Perceptions of standards in public life

Scale 3 in Table 3.1 focuses upon citizens' perceptions of the extent to which standards in public life are adhered. Similarly to the previous attitudes discussed, this attitude unites a set of disparate perceptions into a single coherent (latent) attitude. It may have been assumed that disparate beliefs of the 'process' performance of government would not form part of the same latent continuum; given that for something to do so the underlying process that generates the beliefs has to be the same for all related perceptions. The beliefs could have been too disparate. Indeed, it is surely possible to believe both that standards in general are improving, but are still unacceptably low. Yet such a nuanced view can again be rejected.

Substantively, the scale concerns how well the political system is seen to be performing in terms of 'standards in public life'. As 'standards' refers to the 'ethical environment' of governance, this scale provides information about perceptions of adherence to regulations, adherence to moral norms outside of regulation, honesty, and integrity (Doig, 1996, p.36). In this sense, the measure is one of perceptions of the general process performance of the political system. The importance of these perceptions should not be understated. Deviations from expected processes could potentially undermine the very feelings of fairness and justice across the political system (Almond and Verba, 1965, p.72; deLeon, 1993, p.34; see also Rothstein and Teorell, 2008).

A consistent finding has been the rejection of variables relating to the 'media' from the scales. Thus, even though the item 'confidence in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life' substantively formed a part of the scale ($H_i=0.38$), 'confidence in

the media to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life' did not ($H_i=0.17$). At first, this may not seem surprising. All items explicitly concerning regulation that form part of the scale focus upon the actions of the authorities. The media, as has been noted in Section 3.7.1, are not primarily 'authorities'. Yet the media do have a substantial role in uncovering wrongdoing by those in public life (see for example the revelations concerning MPs' expenses, Kenny, 2009a; Kelso, 2009). In this sense, they are as much a part of the regulatory environment as 'the authorities'. It thus could have been the case that the media were perceived in this way. Yet on no reasonable criteria could the item be included. This highlights the difference in *quality* of the perception.

It is also of note that the item comparing standards in Britain to standards elsewhere in Europe did not scale, although the magnitude of the rejection was somewhat less than for the 'media' item. This may also seem surprising, given that the scale incorporated other some seemingly disparate perceptions. It is not possible here to evaluate why this item was rejected, however it may be related to a 'home-team effect' which drove artificially positive perceptions of Britain relative to other perceptions, among some people. Theoretically, this could reduce scalability.

A consistent and sufficiently strong scale could be created among five items (confidence in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing, confidence in the authorities to punish wrongdoing, confidence in the authorities to improve standards, how standards compare to a few years ago, and an overall rating of standards). This scale will form the basis of a variable operationalising general process performance of those in public life. This variable is formed as an additive index of responses to the five manifest items. As each manifest item is coded on a 1 – 5 scale, the variable has a range of 20.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter focused on understanding the latent structure of citizens' beliefs about government. By highlighting sets of items than can all be viewed to have the same 'attitudinal' cause, it has also allowed us to understand – to a far greater degree – how citizens themselves understand the beliefs under study in this thesis. Thus, we can now enumerate a list of authority figures that appear relevant for citizens' conceptions of political trust. Similarly, sets of (disparate) items relating to perceptions of the process performance of MPs, on the one hand, and perceptions of standards in public life, on the other, can be brought together under two theoretically sensible latent variables.

Moreover, it has been seen that citizens can plausibly be thought of as having a perception of the (process) performance of MPs that is importantly different from their perceptions of standards in public life, a general process performance measure.

Moreover, both of these are distinct from political trust. It is therefore *not* the case that all items concerning political processes are viewed in a qualitatively identical way.

The latent dimensions discovered allow the construction of three variables tapping key aspects of citizens' beliefs about government: perceptions of standards in public life, perceptions of the process performance of MPs, and political trust. These findings are repeated for the 'standards' items in all subsequent datasets (reported in Appendix B.1), and thus allow the construction of variables for analysis in subsequent chapters²⁶. Yet, while these variables are qualitatively distinct, we may question their structural ('causal') interconnections. Thus, we may question the extent to which a citizens' position on one latent variable causes their position on another. Structural ('causal') connections do not

²⁶ As 'perceptions of the process performance of MPs' and political trust are not used in substantive analyses of non-2004 data, these structures are not probed. Note that all but one of the items analysed here were asked using a consistent question and set of response categories across the years. A single item's question was changed slightly after Survey 1; 'confidence in the authorities to improve standards' became 'confidence in the authorities to uphold standards'. As the change is minor, does not affect the response options, produced values with very similar means, and did not alter the observed latent structure, it will be assumed the two questions are equivalent.

challenge the interpretation of the latent variables as distinct; instead, they provide information about the causes of the 'scale component'.

Unravelling the structural connections between these latent variables is the task of Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Process Performance and Political Trust: Structural Models

In the preceding chapters, it has been found that we can sensibly distinguish sets of items, which individually relate to different underlying beliefs. These have been called: 'perceptions of standards in public life', 'perceptions of the process performance of MPs', and 'political trust'. Because these sets of items relate consistently to distinct beliefs, these three beliefs can sensibly be operationalised as three variables. However, the structural ('causal') connections between these variables are not presently known. Thus, for example, it is not known whether it is more helpful to view perceived standards as a cause or consequence of political trust. It may be that citizens decide whether they trust those operating within public life, and condition their perceptions of standards based upon that trust decision. Conversely, it may be the case that perceptions of standards are more helpfully viewed as causally prior. Similarly, it is also unknown whether perception of standards can most helpfully be viewed as a cause or consequence of perceptions of the process performance of MPs. As was noted in Chapter 2, MPs in the UK system enjoy a degree of visibility that is not afforded to many others working within public life. It thus may be the case that perceptions of the process performance of MPs causes more general standards perceptions. Conversely, it may be the case that the more general standards perceptions cause the more specific perceptions of MPs. In this chapter, rivalling plausible models are created and evaluated to test these propositions. This process allows for the determination of which rivalling model provides the best fit.

The importance of such an analysis for this thesis specifically is apparent. Without knowing the structural ('causal') relationships between the main beliefs of interest, decisions about which variable(s) should be considered dependent and which independent cannot be empirically grounded. Moreover, our understanding of the relationships between these variables has a direct impact upon how we react to changes in these variables over time. Our – rarely tested – assumptions about causal directionalities provide the background to our interpretations. Yet the importance of the findings here stretches beyond only the importance their importance for this thesis.

Within the wider academic literature concerning citizen beliefs about government, the covariance between political trust and perceptions of performance (of any kind) is well established. However, very little work has been conducted evaluating the structural connections between trust and performance. As both the variable concerning perceptions of the process performance of MPs and the variable concerning perceptions of standards tap an element of political performance, this chapter is also able to add to the wider debate about the relationships between performance and trust. Indeed, as has been noted in previous chapters (and in particular Chapter 3), *both* the 'perceived standards' variable and 'perceived process performance of MPs' variable contain important information about the political system's and MPs', respective, process performance. That is to say, both variables contain important information about perceptions of the extent to which the procedural elements of governance (as opposed to the 'outputs' produced by the political system) are adhered to. Thus, this chapter allows for a more in-depth discussion of the interconnections between perceptions of the actual ethical practices by those in government and political trust. In keeping with the wider academic literature, here the process performance/political trust distinction is of primary concern; however the analysis also allows comment on whether process perceptions that are more specific cause more general perceptions, or vice-versa.

It is important to note that because of the methods used in this chapter, the specific causal structures cannot be tested directly. However, the theorised causal structures

each give rise to different empirical relationships within the data, which are directly testable. Thus, if the available data strongly rejects an empirical model, we have reason to be suspicious of the underlying theoretical model and the theorised directionality of causation. Failure to reject a model does not guarantee that this is the only possible causal structure. Instead, an empirical model that cannot be rejected provides evidence for the utility of that theoretical causal model. This is also not to claim that the beliefs analysed here will have only one cause, or even that all the potential causes can be elaborated. However, the inability to specify a maximal model does not pose a problem for evaluating the relative merits of the models. Finally, this chapter does not attempt to specify the totality of the causes of the main beliefs of interest. This does not imply that these beliefs are created or destroyed *ex nihilo*, merely that specifying all possible causes lies outside of the scope of this chapter.

This research begins by evaluating the substantive issues at play in a more general fashion, considering the putative connections between political process performance and political trust, before elaborating two conceptually different and competing views of the directions of causation: a 'performance view' and a 'trust view'. Structural equation models are then built to evaluate the competing views of directionality. The models tested strongly suggest that process performance perceptions are antecedent factors for citizens' political trust. The implications of the results are then discussed.

4.1 The Nature of the Problem

A plethora of research has established that political trust and perceptions of all kinds of performance of political objects co-vary (see, for example, Pharr, 2000; Citrin and Luks, 2001; Hay, 2007). Yet because an analysis of co-variation of variables provides scant evidence of causality (Pearl, 2009, p.103-4), any claim arising from this co-variation that

political performance impacts upon political trust is based more upon theoretical reasoning than upon empirical analysis. Yet the causal direction is of fundamental importance to analyses of perceptions of political performance, whether in terms of process performance or 'outcome' performance, and political trust. If political trust is caused by political performance evaluations then a decline in political trust is suggestive of an increase in citizen dissatisfaction with how the political system is operating. This causal directionality would do much to underpin the more pessimistic claims about the implications of hostile citizen orientations to government (see, for example, Nye, 1997, p.4, who argues that hostile perceptions could undermine the strength of democratic institutions; see also Chapter 2 of this thesis).

Conversely, if political trust causes perceptions of political performance then a decline in political trust, and a consequential decline in some performance evaluations, may well signal little more than a return to scepticism about political actors after a period of unusually high trust (Nye, 1997, p.3)¹. Reported perceptions of low performance are interpretable either as an expectation of low performance, caused by lower levels of political trust, or as scepticism about how well any political object can perform. This latter hypothesis leaves ample room for an interpretation of declining trust as a normatively virtuous phenomenon. Indeed, a 'Jeffersonian' tradition of perceptions of government sees general scepticism of government as the healthiest and most appropriate outlook (Nye, 1997, p.3; Orren, 1997, p.78). This need not necessarily be problematic for citizens' interactions with government, even where it concerns process performance evaluations. Of course, the view of a decline in political trust as normatively virtuous is not the only possible interpretation, even if political trust causes perceptions of performance. Indeed, Hetherington (1998, p.791) suggests that even if political trust

¹ This, of course, rests on the claim that positive citizen perceptions of 'politics' are falling. Whilst there is some evidence that this is the case – notably from the USA (see Hay, 2007: 28), and the UK (see Norris, 2011, p.74) – the conclusion does not hold in all democratic countries (Norris, 2011, p.74). However, following Hay (2007, p.36), it may be the case that there has been an important decline in other countries, just one that occurred before the advent of serious political polling.

is the cause, low trust can undermine a government's ability to solve problems. However, evidence suggesting that current declines in political trust actually indicates *scepticism* rather than a deeper *cynicism* (Cook and Gronke, 2005) adds at least superficial plausibility to the 'Jeffersonian' interpretation.

Importantly, these differing interpretations of existing empirical evidence allow differing interpretations of the impact of attitudinal changes on perceptions of democratic legitimacy and support for democracy. Hitherto in the thesis, it has been argued that declines in perceived process performance can undermine the (empirical) legitimacy of a regime. Yet, strictly speaking, this view holds only if the causal directionality runs from perceived process performance to political trust. If such a causal directionality was operating, failure of public officials to adhere to expected political processes *in actuality* (thus, failure to perform adequately procedurally), creates 'stress' in the political system as a whole (Easton, 1965, p.220-1). As has been argued, the most serious potential consequence of this stress is an undermining of perceived (empirical) legitimacy. Yet if the 'Jeffersonian' interpretation of a decline in trust, and a consequential decline in perceptions of performance of any kind, is correct then the legitimacy of the system may not be undermined. Indeed, in many formulations of the 'Jeffersonian' interpretation, scepticism of government, and thus low performance perceptions, can co-exist with very high degrees of perceived legitimacy of democratic systems (Nye, 1997, p.3; Inglehart, 1999).

Unravelling whether political trust causes performance perceptions of any kind, or vice-versa, also has important implications for how future research on political trust should be conducted. Were political performance evaluations primarily driven by political trust with little if any reciprocal causality, explanations of perceptions of process performance would be of lesser importance. Yet if perceptions of political performance drive political trust, explaining perceptions of political performance becomes one of the most important elements in understanding citizens' affective orientations towards political authorities (on

political orientations, see Almond and Verba, 1965, p.14 ; Dalton, 2004, p.23). In each case a different imperative for research is suggested. It is beyond the scope of any individual work to provide the final word on causal directionality; however, it is possible here to provide empirical evidence for or against the theoretical models of causality.

There is thus significant room for both differing interpretations of the causal directionality and differing normative interpretations of the same empirical co-variation.

4.2 Substantive Background

The existing literature dealing with citizens' attitudes towards government has often conceived of political trust as a dependent variable (see, for example, Miller, 1974; Alesina and Wacziarg, 2000; Newton and Norris, 2000; Espinal et al., 2006). This formulation pre-supposes a causal structure, even if explicit causal analyses in this area are rare (for important exceptions, see Williams, 1985; Van der Walle and Bouckaert, 2003; Mishler and Rose, 2005; van der Eijk et al., 2007). When political trust is seen as the 'output' of the political system, the analytic objective is to explain the causes of political trust by examining putative antecedents. Yet because of the rarity of explicit causal analyses, there is little certainty that this analytic focus is sensible. Moreover, as it is possible to see regression models as putative causal models (Fox, 2008, p.110-3), the conclusions may imply an unhelpful model of causality. Indeed, whilst simple linear regressions can provide important justifications for accepting an association between variables, they provide little direct evidence for assessing causality (Pearl, 2009, p.103-4).

In the specific case of political trust, important associations have been shown to exist between perceptions of official process performance and political trust (see for example

Pharr, 2000, p.199). Yet there remains no *a priori* reason to assume that the causal directionality *should* run from these perceptions to trust. Indeed, some theoretical (Van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003, p.902) and empirical (Hetherington, 1998) literature has provided suggestions that the causal directionality might run from political trust to perceptions of the process performance of government. Thus the putative causal directionality of political perceptions to political trust, and indeed the studies which depend upon this directionality, is potentially problematic.

Before performing the statistical analyses, I provide a more detailed theoretical exposition of the two putative models of causality.

4.2.1 The performance view

In the most common formulation, political trust is seen as some function of perceived conditions; with the assumption being made that political trust is a consequence of these conditions. Which specific conditions are relevant has been the topic of debate (Van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003). Important predictors that have been suggested include: approval of authorities (Citrin and Luks, 2001, p.21); perceived corruption and morality of authorities (Pharr, 2000; Citrin and Luks, 2001, p.21; Mishler and Rose, 2005, p.1063); economic factors (Alesina and Wacziarg, 2000; Mishler and Rose, 2005, p.1063); and social and cultural factors (Inglehart, 1997; Mansbridge, 1997). It would be wrong to suggest that these factors are in any sense incompatible. Indeed, it is possible to subsume most – or perhaps all – of these ‘determinants’ of political trust under a ‘performance view’ of politics, where ‘bad performance of government actors and agencies would create negative attitudes towards government in general’ (Van der Walle and Bouckaert, 2003, p.893; see also Easton, 1965). Social and cultural factors may least obviously be connected to performance; yet to the extent that these factors

alter the *demands* placed upon a political system, they also influence performance perceptions (Bok, 1997, p.86; see also Hay, 2007, p.55).

Several plausible determinants of political trust under the performance view can thus be specified, yet it is still important to consider the comparative importance of different perceptions of performance. Indeed, a 'performance view' of politics is compatible with both a single aspect of performance having an over-riding impact upon political trust, and political trust being constructed from a summation of different performance indicators which (stochastically) are of equal importance (a similar point is noted by Van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003). Notwithstanding that the focus of this thesis is upon perceptions of process, it is important to consider in more detail which aspects of performance ought to be considered most important from the point of view of political trust.

Two of the main putatively important perceptions of performance for analyses of political trust are perceptions of process performance of public officials and perceptions of the economy (for example, Mishler and Rose, 2005). That the process performance of public officials has important implications for political trust may seem uncontroversial, given what has hitherto been noted in this thesis. The act of giving trust necessitates the acceptance of a situation in which you hope another actor would act in your interests, without a means of compelling that actor to do so (Levi and Stoker, 2000, p.476). If we accept a definition of trust that places the emphasis upon a hope that another will further your interests without a means of compelling the other, it may not be advisable to trust political authorities who have previously violated ethical processes (see also Phelan, 2006). Moreover, if political trust in the authorities is tapping a deeper, more 'affective' orientation (as suggested by Dalton, 2004, p.24), the observed relationship between trust and process performance is even less surprising. Deviations from expected processes will not only impinge upon present evaluations but may serve to undermine

the very feelings of fairness and justice within the system as a whole (Almond and Verba, 1965, 72; deLeon, 1993, 34; see also Rothstein and Teorell, 2008).

Yet given that trust is a leap of faith, the putative importance of economic performance may seem surprising for several reasons. Firstly, the economy can be subject to global-level fluctuations that no single government could realistically control. In this situation, the connection between apparent economic performance and the political authorities acting in citizens' interests is somewhat weakened; and thus the usefulness of economy as a political performance measure is potentially weakened. Whilst the authorities may be expected to mitigate the global situation to some extent, poor economic performance at the state level does not wholly or even mainly reflect poor performance by the political authorities. As such, it may be the case that the political authorities are no less worthy of trust, so defined, even if the economy is not performing well². Secondly, economic indicators and economic perceptions relate to the efficiency of a system, independent of other concerns. Thus, to the extent that violating accepted governing processes is economically efficient (for discussion of the efficiency of this see Nye, 1967, p.424; deLeon, 1993, p.31-4), the importance of economic variables may be at odds with the importance of political processes³. This may go some way towards explaining why the economy is often regarded as a less important predictor of political trust (see, for example, McAllister, 1999; Putnam et al., 2000, p.24; Chanley et al., 2001, p.72-3). Indeed, it should be expected that economic perceptions would be less important than

² It has been hypothesised that falling revenues, brought by economic problems, could increase the probability of governments violating the formal ethical processes and thus lead to a decline in trust (Phelan, 2006, p.42). This explanation of the relationship between the economy and trust seems less convincing in the case of established democracies, where wholesale violation of property rights is highly unlikely.

³ That is not to suggest that efficiency is entirely outside of trust. Indeed, the decision by A to trust B to carry out action X must include, to some extent, a reasonable belief that B can actually carry out action X. However, to the extent to which this violates probity (*qua* accepted ethical processes), we expect some reduction in citizen perceptions of process performance. It remains a somewhat open question whether it makes sense to think of trusting someone (in the general sense) who is efficient but violates the rules of probity. However, in this situation there is no guarantee that the trusted person will actually perform as expected, because a high value is not placed on probity by the actor.

perceptions of official process performance because an absence of actual adherence to acceptable processes by officials can prevent the translation of citizens' desires into actions, regardless of a countries' economic position. Finally, and most importantly, in causal terms perceptions of the economy appear a dubious cause of trust. Indeed, the decline in political trust in the United States seen since the 1960s '*predates* the period of slow productivity growth, increasing inequality, globalization, and technological change' (Lawrence, 1997, p.112). This is a pattern seen more generally; Dalton (2004, p.30-1) argues that patterns of changes in political trust from countries all over the world are seen '[r]egardless of recent trends in the economy'.

It thus appears that perceptions of the performance of political authorities – and especially the authorities' 'process performance' – are substantively important perceptions from the point of view of political trust. Yet within the 'package' of perceptions that generally may be called 'performance', it is still inadequately understood whether the perceptions of one institution dominate general perceptions, or if general perceptions dominate perceptions of specific institutions (see Van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003; Yang and Holzer, 2006, p.117). Thus, little relevant information is available to aid in our understanding of whether perceptions of standards in public life, a measure of process performance that is very general in its terms of reference, should be prior to perceptions of the performance of MPs, which as formulated here has a primary focus upon procedural matters but is much narrower in its terms of reference. Williams (1985, p.132) demonstrated for the United States that general institutional ratings acted as a cause of approval ratings of both congress and the president. If this relationship holds more generally, it may be expected that system-wide ratings would be causally prior to ratings of specific institutions. However, the small amount of extant research in this area prevents the formation of any specific hypotheses in this area.

4.2.2 The trust view

The performance view of political trust appears intuitive. Yet if political trust is primarily a consequence of political performance, politicians, who enjoy very low levels of trust in comparison to other institutions⁴, would be expected to be extremely poor performing and corrupt (a similar point is made by Inglehart, 1997). Whilst this proposition cannot be evaluated easily, it would be surprising if the performance of current political incumbents (on any indicator of performance) was sufficiently poor to explain the extremely negative perceptions citizens hold.

Moreover, there is no *a priori* reason to assume that citizens in fact evaluate political authorities or political institutions in a 'performance view' way. Indeed, because the performance view suggests that at some level citizens are making judgements based upon the performance of political objects, a requirement is introduced that at some level citizens are engaging with the performance of political objects. Whilst the engagement is subjective (Yang and Holzer, 2006, p.115), and probably intermixed with ideological concerns (Downs and Larkey, 1986, p.2-3), there must ultimately be some (subjective) engagement with the actual performance of the relevant political authorities or political institutions. Yet evaluating the performance (of any kind) of political authorities places a burden upon citizens. This burden is in terms of both acquiring the information, and applying it to the 'correct' authority (i.e. the performance of MPs in parliament should be applied to beliefs about MPs in parliament, but is of little use when evaluating local councillors). It would appear to be far simpler for citizens to report perceptions of

⁴ As many politicians in western liberal democracies presently do. Indeed, Hay (2007: 34) shows that in 2004 citizen 'net trust' (i.e. the percentage of people 'trusting' minus the percentage of people 'not trusting') in several political institutions for the US, UK, France, Germany and EU was very low. For example, in the US, political parties had a net trust of -69%, in the UK national government had a net trust of -50%, and parliament in Germany had a net trust of -31%. This contrasts with the far higher levels of trust citizens place in the voluntary sector, or the military. In the UK in 2004, net trust in the voluntary sector stood at +43%, and in the military at +47% (Hay, 2007, p.34).

performance as some function of political trust, such that perceived performance is caused by political trust. Trust in this sense acts as a heuristic in place of knowledge that is more detailed when that knowledge would be too expensive or time consuming to compile (a similar point is made by Scholz and Lubell, 1998). Providing evidence for this, research has shown that political trust is used as a heuristic when deciding on whether or not to comply with tax authorities (Scholz and Lubell, 1998, p.409). Indeed, political trust is actually a better predictor of tax compliance than instrumental concerns about the tax system (Scholz and Lubell, 1998, p.409). This suggests that the 'trust heuristic' – where the level of political trust substitutes for knowledge of performance – could be the primary way through which citizens' evaluations of government performance are generated.

That general evaluations of the government are used as a substitute for concrete performance evaluations is a finding replicated in other research. For example, van der Eijk et al. (2007) have shown that government approval affects subjective assessments of the economy. Chanley et al. (2001, p.69) demonstrate that perceived responsiveness of the political system is caused, at least in part, by political trust. Moreover, Hetherington (1998, p.797) has demonstrated that political trust is a stronger predictor of a US congressional feelings thermometer than congressional approval. Elsewhere the same author (Hetherington 2005, p.64) argues that declines in US presidential approval are caused by a contemporaneous decline in political trust⁵. Hetherington (2005, p.64) contends that the mechanism through which trust influences these perceptions is based upon heuristics where general perceptions influence specific responses. The trust view might suggest that the fact that trust has fallen would have more to do with the

⁵ It may be objected that 'approval' (in the abstract) is likely to be very close to 'trust' (in the abstract) in citizens' minds. Whilst there may be some overlap, it appears more likely that approval is tapping beliefs closer to performance evaluations. Indeed, some formulations of questions concerning approval explicitly ask about the extent to which the respondent approves or disapproves of 'the government's record to date' (this is the formulation used by political polling firm YouGov). In this formulation, it appears that the question is significantly closer to an evaluation of performance than an evaluation of trust, even if there is some overlap between the two.

denunciations of politics in the media and by politicians than with individual aspects of performance (Orren, 1997, p.94-9; see also Hay, 2007, p.1). Whilst these denunciations may occasionally reference performance, they are by no means inherently performance-based.

4.2.3 Other potential causes of political trust and political perceptions of performance

Of course, this does not suggest that political trust or political perceptions of performance are created (or destroyed) *ex nihilo*. Indeed, under either of these causal schemes the other causes of political trust or political perceptions of performance of any kind are unspecified but may include: value change (see Inglehart, 1997), social capital (Newton, 2006, p.859), partisanship (Anderson and LoTempio, 2002), the impact of the media (Bartels, 1993; Shaw, 1999; cf. Zaller, 2002), political scandals (Bowler and Karp, 2004), interest in politics (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003, p.100; Cook and Gronke, 2005, p. 794), or attitude strength (Miller and Peterson, 2004). Moreover, it is possible that the process that generates an individual citizen's perception of performance (of any kind) and level of trust may be reciprocal; where both perceptions drive the other to an extent. Whilst a 'reciprocal causation' between citizens' political trust and perceptions of political performance has not been discussed thus far, it appears sensible to consider it as a possibility. Indeed, previous empirical (for example, Hetherington, 2005, p.68) and theoretical (Gelman, 2010) work suggests the possibility of reciprocal causation between political trust and political performance.

However, that there may be other causally prior drivers of trust or performance does not change the causal relations that are of primary interest here: between trust and perceptions of process performance.

4.3 Data and Methods

Both putative models of causality discussed thus far are theoretically plausible. Before presenting and analysing statistical models of each putative causal model, the data upon which the analyses are based, the variables used, the analysis technique, and decisions made concerning individual aspects of the analysis are discussed in more detail.

The analyses reported in this chapter are based on data Survey 1, the *Public Attitudes* survey conducted between November 2003 and March 2004⁶. Within this dataset, no items are available dealing with subjective perceptions of the economy. Moreover, as there is little to no observable variation in the 'objective' economic circumstances within Great Britain during the fieldwork period (November 2003 to March 2004) economic circumstances cannot be modelled. However, because of this chapter's focus upon the procedural aspect of performance, this does not pose a serious theoretical challenge to the analysis presented here. Moreover, because of the substantive focus, the absence of economic variables will not prejudice the analytical conclusions offered here (similar reasoning is followed in van der Eijk et al., 2007, p.7-8). Three variables are of primary interest in order to evaluate the theoretical models discussed above:

- i. Political trust
- ii. Perceptions of standards in public life, a measure of general procedural performance
- iii. Perceptions of the specific process performance of MPs

⁶ Note that because of the use of split ballot methods on some control variables used here, some variables contain a large proportion of missing data. However, because the missing data are missing at random (conditional on random assignment) the missing-ness should not bias the analytic results data.

The justification for, and construction of, these variables has been discussed at length in Chapter 3. The latter two variables will allow for an evaluation of whether perceptions which are more specific cause perceptions which are more general, or if this effect is essentially reversed.

These measures are used to analyse the extent to which empirical support is leant to models that view perceptions of performance (here specifically thought of as process performance) as being caused by political trust or vice-versa. Moreover, the analysis will allow a discussion of whether there is more empirical support for a theorised model that sees general process performance as a cause of perceptions that are more specific, or vice-versa. In order to evaluate the relative merit of the two causal schemes discussed above – the performance view and the trust view – it is necessary to engage in comparative assessment of models that differ in the hypothesised causal directionality. Regression analyses are unable to yield this (van der Eijk, 2007; see also Pearl, 2009, p.103-4), but structural equation modelling does allow this. Structural equation models allow the explicit modelling of hypothesised causal connections between a set of variables (for a discussion, see Byrne, 2001; Kline, 2005)⁷. Whilst it should be noted that structural equation modelling cannot directly model causes themselves, structural equation modelling can test whether a hypothesised causal model can be rejected by the empirical data considered. This is done through an analysis of the extent to which the implied covariances of the estimated model differ from the sample covariances (based on the data) (Arbuckle, 2006, p.57). Moreover, the method used allows for the comparative analysis of rivalling causal structures⁸.

⁷ It is important to note that whilst we may be modelling the "causes" of an endogenous variable, in the sense that changes in an exogenous variable may be sufficient for changes in the endogenous variable, the process by which this actually occurs in reality is not modelled (Fox, 2008, p.3). The process is based upon social-psychological factors, which are not observed and are therefore outside the scope of the present study.

⁸ In the case of nested models, where one model can be considered a proper sub-set of the other in terms of regression parameters to be estimated, the models' Chi-square values can be directly compared, the difference itself being chi-square distributed with degrees of freedom equal to the degrees of freedom

Structural equation models of this sort have been criticised because they hypothesise 'zero' relations between variables, such that there is no causal connection between them (Gelman, 2010). Gelman's objection is based upon a claim that, in the social world, it is almost never the case that the true relationship between two variables, in either causal direction, is actually zero (see Gelman, 2010). Thus in social science structural equation models, anything other than a 'full' model specifying maximal and reciprocal connections between variables could be seen as inappropriate from a causal perspective. However, this view of statistical modelling ignores the fact that 'all models are wrong but some are useful' (Box cited in Fox, 2008, p.1). Being *right* – which arguably would require a massive and unworkable model – is less important than the utility of the model. As such, where the objective is to evaluate which models are most useful to describe the social world, there is no need to specify all potential connections.

Statistically, model fit can be evaluated with reference to several different criteria. The focus here will be upon chi-square statistics and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Chi-square statistics evaluate the extent to which the model deviates from the null hypothesis of perfect fit (Byrne, 2001, p.79-81). Non-significant Chi-square values therefore represent very well fitting models. As with other Chi-square measures, a large sample size increases the chance of attaining significant values, *ceteris paribus* (Arbuckle, 2006, p.534). A Chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio will also be used. This test both punishes for lack of parsimony (because it divides by degrees of freedom), and is somewhat less susceptible to large samples (for a detailed discussion see Byrne, 2001, p.81). Values of the ratio greater than 3 are considered to indicate poor fit (Arbuckle, 2006, p.535). Problematically, however, the data are multivariate non-normal, resulting in inflated values of Chi-square (Byrne, 2001, p.268). Thus, strict interpretations of Chi-square values against a hypothetical ideal may underestimate the

difference between the models. Where models are not nested, statistical comparisons can only be made by reference to the null-hypothesis of perfect fit, without the possibility of statistically assessing whether differences in fit are significant.

extent to which the model adequately represents the causal connections in the population. However, this problem affects all models equally that include the same set of variables, and is therefore of no relevance for the model comparisons on which we will focus. The RMSEA is a parsimony-adjusted measure, which assesses the fit of the covariance matrix (Byrne, 2001, p.84). It is generally taken that values of RMSEA significantly greater than 0.05 are problematic (Byrne, 2001, p.85; Chen et al., 2008, p.465). The use of a fixed cut-off point has been criticised because it relies on assumptions about how correct the model specification is, and is seriously affected by sample size (Chen et al., 2008). However, for the current model, where $n=1097$, a cut-off value of 0.05 will perform adequately for rejecting severely miss-specified models, whilst allowing flexibility with models which are only moderately miss-specified (see Chen et al., 2008).

Structural equation modelling can also be used to produce point estimates and standard errors of the regression coefficients, as well as squared multiple correlations for the endogenous variables within the model. However, because the objective of this chapter is to evaluate which model of causality fits the data best, as a way to evaluate which theoretical model is most useful, these coefficients are not of primary concern. Indeed, because the objective is not to build a predictive model *per se* but instead to evaluate which model which is most in agreement with the data, these statistics are not inherently necessary. Moreover, because the number of predictors of the endogenous variables are different based on which model is being evaluated, the individual R^2 values will almost certainly differ without implying that one model is superior to another. Thus, the model fit criteria will be considered in isolation.

Finally, comparative modelling of the type used here is capable of highlighting the extent to which a theoretical model is in accordance with the data. It may be possible to reject an empirical model, and thus to provide evidence against the theoretic model it is operationalising. However, where a model cannot be rejected, this does not ensure that

the model is mapping the only possible connections. Adequate model fit is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for model acceptance (cf. van der Eijk et al., 2007, p.15). However, where a model is found to fit acceptably, the theoretic model that the empirical model is based on can be viewed as plausible given the data.

4.4 Empirical Models

From what has been discussed thus far, several empirical models can be constructed that reflect the rivalling ‘views’ to be evaluated; *viz.* political trust as the cause of perceptions of process performance, or perceptions of process performance as the cause of political trust. In particular, several empirical models can be created responding to the different theoretical models;

- 1) $T \rightarrow GP; T \rightarrow SP; GP \rightarrow SP$
- 2) $T \rightarrow GP; T \rightarrow SP; SP \rightarrow GP$
- 3) $GP \rightarrow T; SP \rightarrow T; GP \rightarrow SP$
- 4) $GP \rightarrow T; SP \rightarrow T; SP \rightarrow GP$

where T=political trust, GP=general process performance perceptions (perceptions of standards in public life), and SP=specific process performance perceptions (perceptions of the performance of MPs).

As has previous been discussed in Sections 4.2.3 and 4.3, the causal connections between political trust and perceptions of performance may be reciprocal – such that citizens’ levels of political trust have a causal impact upon their perceptions of process performance, which in turn has a causal impact upon their levels of political trust (see also Hetherington, 2005, p.68; Gelman, 2010). Allowing reciprocal relationships within

the empirical model, by the explicit inclusion of additional arrows between the main three variables, produces a model in which the other models are nested. This model can be represented as:

- 5) $T \leftrightarrow GP; T \leftrightarrow SP; GP \leftrightarrow SP$.

This allows direct comparisons of the other models with this reciprocal model. This is a result of the difference in Chi-square values ($\Delta\chi^2$) between nested models being itself Chi-square distributed on degrees of freedom equal to the difference in degrees of freedom (Δdf) (Byrne, 2001, p.114-5). Because models 1-4 are each nested within model 5, model 5 will inherently fit the data at least as well as any of models 1-4; since model 5 is a more restricted version of these models. This does not mean that model 5 should inherently be preferred. An important consideration is the parsimony of the models; model 5 is inherently less parsimonious than models 1-4. As such, whenever models 1-4 do not fit the data significantly worse than model 5, they are to be preferred.

However, any model specifying connections between three observed variables which specifies three structural connections has zero degrees of freedom, so that model fit cannot be assessed (Arbuckle, 2006, p.77). Adding one or several additional variables may help to yield an identified model. Variables chosen for this purpose should be substantively related, with this established from the extant literature, and should not be statistically so poorly fitting that they result in a model that is very poorly fitting. The latter criterion ensures that the ability to discriminate between the main theoretical models is not lost because of the inclusion of very poorly fitting items. The addition of well chosen additional variables also has the virtue of enhancing our ability to discriminate between the empirical models by virtue of allowing greater opportunities for the specified models to deviate from the data. The additional variables chosen are: confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life; political party preference; perceptions of the dedication to public service of top civil servants; and perceptions of how careful top civil servants are with public money. The theoretical

bases of these choices are elaborated immediately below, and the specific operationalisation of each concept is discussed, before these are placed within elaborated versions of the models above. Because discrimination between models is not aided when connections are hypothesised between an additional variable and all main variables in the analysis, connections will be restricted to apply to at most two of the three core variables.

Confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life

Confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life is an important variable from the point of citizen perceptions. The media have been shown to have an important, and fairly consistent, impact upon political perceptions (see for example, Bartels, 1993; Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Shaw, 1999, p.393). This variable directly probes the confidence that citizens place in the media, and so should be more closely related citizen perceptions than a mere assessment of media usage as it is possible to consume media for almost-exclusively non-political reasons. Those people who consume media for non-political reasons may or may not have confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing; but this cannot be inferred from their consumption of media alone (see also Stroud, 2008, p.345). Thus, the confidence which citizens have in the media is potentially more important than the amount of media they consume as a basis upon which to base inferences.

This variable is operationalised directly by questioning how confident respondents are that the media will generally uncover wrongdoing by those in public life. Answer categories were: very confident, fairly confident, don't know, not very confident, or not at all confident. Where people are most confident in the media to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life, the media may be seen as effectively acting as an additional regulator of the process performance of those working in public life. As such, a close

(positive) relationship between confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing and general process performance would be expected. For this reason, this variable is placed prior to the general process performance measure (standards in public life).

Political party preference

Research from the United States demonstrates a strong relation between political performance perceptions on the one hand, and, on the other, affinity to the party holding the presidency (Evans and Pickup, 2010). If a similar relationship holds in Great Britain, those who support the 'opposition' would experience worse performance perceptions. Moreover, following Hetherington (2005, p.64), those who were politically further away (in partisan terms) from the incumbent party would show more negative appraisals in general. Because the data come from 2003-4, when Labour formed the government, this implies that Conservatives would, *ceteris paribus*, score lower on perceptions of political performance. Party political preference for the Liberal Democrats may similarly be expected to impact upon political trust and political perceptions of performance. However, in issue terms, the Liberal Democrats have previously been perceived as being significantly closer to Labour than the Conservatives are. Indeed, during the 2005 election (one year after the data for the present study was collected), voters perceived only marginal differences between Labour and the Liberal Democrats in terms of issue position (Whiteley, 2005, p.806-7). Thus it may be the case that supporters of the Liberal Democrats do not experience this effect.

In empirical analyses (shown in Appendix B.3), Liberal Democrat party support⁹ was substantively and statistically unimportant in the model, confirming the theoretical suspicion; thus is not included in the analysis. Political party preference is therefore

⁹ Respondents were questioned which political party they were closer to. Party support for the Liberal Democrats was operationalised as the respondent indicating they were closer to the Liberal Democrats. This variable was coded as a yes/no dichotomy.

operationalised as party preference for the Conservative party; operationalised as self-reporting being closer to the Conservative party than any other political party (coded as a yes/no dichotomy). Because party preference cannot be helpfully specified as being a cause of all three of the core variables (as it would not add discriminatory power), it will be placed prior to the general and specific process performance measures.

Perceptions of senior civil servants

That citizens perceive civil servants as an integral part of the political system has already been demonstrated by their inclusion as a manifest indicator of political trust (see Chapter 3). This suggestion is also supported by a wealth of theoretical and empirical work (for notable examples, see Easton 1965, p.212-9; Kaase, 1999, p.10-11). Moreover, and most relevant for this present study, an important connection between perceptions of the political system and perceptions of civil servants has been shown empirically (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003, p.102). It should thus not be controversial to expect that perceptions of civil servants to have a direct impact upon other political perceptions.

Perceptions of civil servants are operationalised as perceptions of senior civil servants. Specifically, these are operationalised as ratings of the dedication to public service of top civil servants¹⁰ and perceptions of how careful they are with public money¹¹. It may be questioned whether these variables should be placed as prior to one or more of the main variables of interest or as a consequence of them (i.e. it can be questioned if they are endogenous or exogenous). This is in line with the general GP $\leftarrow \rightarrow$ SP issue, which is still to be assessed. However, the suggestion that these variables may be endogenous is

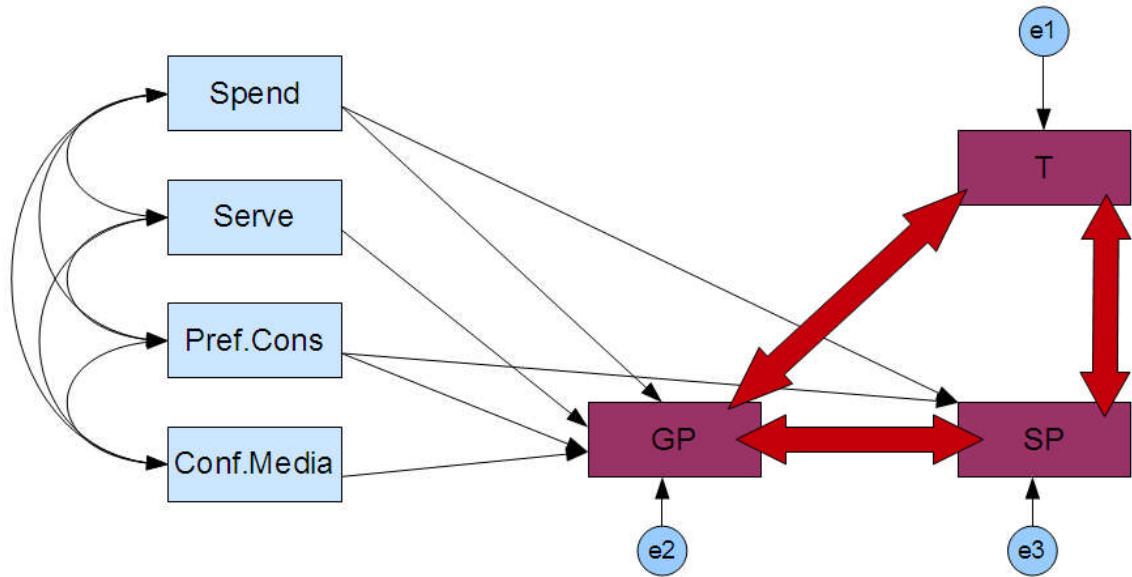
¹⁰ This survey item directly questioned respondents' views on how dedicated top civil servants were to public service. There were seven available response options ranging from '[top civil servants are] dedicated to public service' to '[top civil servants] put their careers above the public interest'.

¹¹ This survey item directly questioned respondents' views on how top civil servants spent public money. There were seven available response options ranging from '[top civil servants] spend public money wisely' to '[top civil servants] waste public money'.

strongly rejected empirically (analysis shown in Appendix B.4). Because the immediate objective is to discuss the empirical relationships between the two measures of process performance and political trust, the empirical findings will be followed. The implications of this finding are considered in more depth in the discussion. Thus, perceptions of dedication to public service will be placed prior to general process performance measure, and views on the care with which civil servants are with public money as prior to both process performance measures.

As has been argued, the variables discussed are plausibly connected to at least one of the main analysis variables. Including these variables in the models, in the way specified, results in a non-zero number of degrees of freedom, which allows the models to be evaluated. The 'elaborated' model 5 is shown graphically in Figure 4.1 below. The curved arrows in Figure 4.1 indicate covariance, and the straight arrows indicate direct 'causal' impact. Variables e1-3 represent residual unexplained variance of the endogenous variables. This model stipulates reciprocal effects between the main variables of interest. Therefore, all empirical models 1-4 are nested within the more elaborated causal structure of model 5.

Figure 4.1 – Model 5: A Reciprocal Model of Political Trust and Political Performance.



T=political trust, GP=general process performance perceptions, SP=specific (MP) process performance perceptions, Conf.Media=confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life, Pref.Cons=political party preference for the Conservative Party, Serve=perceptions of the dedication to public service of top civil servants, and Spend=perceptions of how careful top civil servants are with public money.

4.5 Empirical Findings

The models discussed in Section 5 were analysed. The fit statistics for each of the empirical models are shown in Table 4.1¹².

¹² The full structural models are shown in Appendix B.2. Model coefficients were estimated with AMOS.

Table 4.1 – Comparative Structural Model Fit

Model description	Impact directionality	Chi-square	df	Chi-square/df	P	RMSEA
1. 'Trust view' model	T → GP, T → SP	83.4	6	13.90	0.00	0.11
	GP → SP					
2. 'Trust view' model	T → GP, T → SP	100.1	6	16.66	0.00	0.12
	SP → GP					
3. 'Performance view' model	GP → T, SP → T	11.8	6	1.96	0.07	0.03
	GP → SP					
4. 'Performance view' model	GP → T, SP → T	42.0	6	7.01	0.00	0.07
	SP → GP					
5. Reciprocal model	T ↔ GP; T ↔ SP	5.0	3	1.65	0.18	0.02
	GP ↔ SP					

n=1097

The most apparent finding from the models is that the 'performance view' models perform far better than the 'trust view' models. Indeed, the Chi-square of model 3 is not significant. Thus, the hypothesis that model 3 differs significantly from a perfectly fitting model cannot be rejected. This is especially impressive given that $n>1000$, a situation which *ceteris paribus* decreases p-values, and given that the data are multivariate non-normal, which increases the Chi-square and thus reduces the associated p-value (Byrne, 2001, p.268). Models 1, 2, and 4 also fit poorly on standard statistical criteria for evaluating structural equation models. Indeed, the RMSEA for the three models is greater than 0.05. In view of the size of the sample ($n>1000$), an RMSEA this large would not be expected even after allowing for moderate misspecification (see Chen et al., 2008). All models fit significantly worse than the reciprocal model ($p < 0.001$), with the exception of model 3. Model 3 fits no worse than model 5 statistically ($\Delta\chi^2 = 6.8$; $\Delta df=3$; $p>0.05$). As with all models, the more parsimonious model is to be preferred when two or more models fit the data equally well. Since model 3 has three extra

degrees of freedom, it is therefore more parsimonious, and should be preferred. Statistically, the gains in parsimony are reflected in the extremely close Chi-square/degrees of freedom and RMSEA values. Indeed, the upper 90 percent confidence interval for the RMSEA of model 3 is actually *lower* than that of model 5 (absolute values shown in Appendix B.5). Thus, given that a more parsimonious model is always better than a more complex one *ceteris paribus*, there is no reason to model reciprocal causation.

Interestingly, in all formulations of the models, when the impact directionality is set to SP → GP the fit is appreciably worse. This is especially noticeable in the 'performance view' models, where the fit decreases from not being statistically different to the null hypothesis of perfect fit, to being significantly different at $p < 0.01$. This finding is in line with a large pre-existing literature dealing with political perceptions and heuristics (see, for example, Williams, 1985, p.135; Scholz and Lubell, 1998; Hetherington, 2005, p.64).

4.6 Discussion

The empirical findings provide several important conclusions. Firstly, there is strong evidence that political trust is not a cause of political process performance perceptions but is itself caused by them. This finding is interesting because it provides direct support for the 'performance view' against the 'trust view' of public opinion of politics within Great Britain. Research that had previously provided empirical support for the performance view did so in contexts that diverged from Britain during 2003-4 in potentially important ways. Williams' (1985) causal analysis of American perceptions of trust differs in both location and time (and thus political context). Mishler and Rose (2005) analyse the causes of political trust in Russia during 2001 is importantly different in location, though with data from a similar time. Yet despite these differences in

context, substantively similar results are found between these papers and this chapter. This consistency across contexts provides strong evidence for the generalisability of the findings. As such, it is unsurprising that the well-fitting ‘performance view’ model (model 3) could be replicated with data from Survey 3, the 2008 survey, to produce a well fitting model (analysis shown in Appendix B.6¹³). Also of note is that within the extant literature, when the ‘performance view’ was systematically analysed, it was evaluated only against the null-hypothesis of perfect fit without considering the fit of other theoretically plausible models. That the performance view fits the data so well in light of other plausible models, and indeed in comparison to a reciprocal model, provides firm evidence of its utility.

Secondly, it was discovered that specific perceptions (i.e., perceptions of the process performance of MPs) are most usefully viewed as being caused by general perceptions of (process) performance. This provides empirical evidence for Hetherington’s (2005, p.64) claim that general perceptions will usually cause perceptions that are more specific. However, despite the strength of this finding for the main variables in the analysis, it was not replicated for specific perceptions concerning civil servants. This may at first appear incongruent, especially because the items probing perceptions of civil servants appear to specifically concern process performance at the micro level. However, a plausible theoretical argument can be made suggesting that this occurred because the general perception is used as a heuristic in place of more specific information, only where specific information or specific perceptions are not readily available (a similar point is noted in Cook and Gronke, 2005, p.800-1). This argument may suggest that a more detailed consideration of top civil servants by citizens had taken place that informed the general heuristic about the ‘process performance’ of the political system in general, which in turn influences other perceptions (this is similar to the hypothesised use of heuristics in Scholz and Lubell, 1998). Moreover, the argument suggests that the

¹³ Whilst the 2008 data lacks variables concerning perceptions of civil servants, which prevents a full replication, the consistency is encouraging.

general→specific relationship is contingent upon the presence or absence of relevant information, and not necessarily a general feature of political attitudes. Conversely, this finding may suggest that there is something qualitatively different about perceptions of top civil servants that result in perceptions of top civil servants acting in a different way perceptually. Ultimately however, in common with all structural equation models (Fox, 2008, p.3), the process by which the empirical connections are generated cannot be modelled with static observational data. Without a fuller understanding of the process, putative causal mechanisms (as distinct from empirical connections) remain theoretically driven hypotheses, the observable implications of which have not been contradicted by the data. The findings presented here suggest that investigating this mechanism could prove profitable for our further understanding of political attitudes.

The implications of the general findings are important for understanding of the meaning of levels of political trust. Because political process performance is structurally best viewed as an antecedent to political trust, 'low' levels of political trust (see fn.4) are harder to view as normatively virtuous. Indeed, whilst previous analyses have argued that low levels of political trust are 'not necessarily... bad news' (Cook and Gronke, 2005, p.801), this analysis reasserts the 'badness' of low levels of political trust. It is not the case, as some contend (for a discussion see Orren, 1997, p.77-8), that declining trust is merely a restatement of traditional weariness of the government. Of course, declining political trust could *also* be a restatement of traditional weariness, or any one of a wealth of putative causes; yet it is definitely also a reflection of perceived poor process performance. As was argued in Chapter 2, this has important implications for citizens' perceptions of the empirical legitimacy of political regimes. That perceived legitimacy may be challenged re-affirms that not only is this 'bad news', it is also a serious political concern.

The findings of this chapter are of central importance for this thesis. They clearly show that it is not helpful to consider political trust as a cause of perceptions of standards.

Thus, it is not appropriate to consider the impact of political trust upon perceptions of standards. Similarly, it is not helpful to consider the impact of more specific process performance perceptions, at least insofar as those perceptions relate to MPs. Yet moreover, these findings have an importance beyond this thesis. Within the wider academic literature, there has been a debate about whether political trust is appropriately considered an independent or dependent variable (see, for example, Hetherington, 1998). At least as far as process performance is concerned, a helpful answer can now be provided; political trust is the dependent variable, an effect rather than a cause.

Part 2

Causes of Perceptions of Standards

Part 1 considered broad questions of the conceptualisation, measurement and structure of citizen beliefs, and in particular perceptions of standards in public life. Part 1 therefore provides a conceptual and empirical foundation upon which further empirical analyses can be conducted. Moreover, by connecting perceptions of standards in public life, among other citizen beliefs, to political legitimacy, Part 1 provided an account of the importance of these beliefs.

However, if standards are taken as being a prior concern to political trust or the process performance of MPs, it may be questioned what things can sensibly be viewed as causing perceptions of standards. Part 2 begins an attempt to answer this question. Part 2 investigates three political 'conditions': partisan co-alignment between citizens and governors (Chapter 5), the 'scandal' concerning Derek Conway's use of parliamentary expenses (Chapter 6), and the MPs' expenses scandal (Chapter 7).

Chapter 5

Partisan Co-alignment and Perceptions of Standards

Hitherto in this thesis it has been shown that we can think of perceptions of standards as something empirically and conceptually distinct from a range of other citizen beliefs.

Moreover, we have seen that it is not necessary to conceptualise perceptions of standards as being caused by other important beliefs about government, in particular political trust and perceptions of the 'process performance' of legislators. We are thus left with questions concerning what factors can plausibly be thought of as causing perceptions of standards. One potentially crucial factor is the role of partisan alignment.

Partisan identification has previously been shown to be relevant for a wide variety of citizen beliefs about government (see, for example, Bartels, 2002; Anderson et al., 2005; Evans and Anderson, 2006; Gaines et al., 2007; Ladner and Wlezien, 2007; Evans and Pickup, 2010; Singh et al., 2011; Esaiasson 2011). Thus, among other things, partisanship has been shown to matter for beliefs about the economy (Evans and Anderson, 2006; Ladner and Wlezien, 2007; Evans and Pickup, 2010), armed conflicts (Gaines et al., 2007), protection of the environment (Bartels, 2002, p.136), and – of particular relevance for this study – the procedural fairness of elections (Singh et al., 2011, p.705). Of course, it is not the case that supporters of one party are always more positive than supporters of other parties. In each circumstance, the more positive beliefs among some citizens are seen as being a result of the congruence between their partisan identification and that of relevant governors. Those citizens whose partisan alignment is not congruent with relevant governors have less positive beliefs about government.

Thus, the effect is more properly one of *partisan co-alignment*; therefore, this terminology will be used in this chapter.

Two distinct processes could plausibly cause observed effects of partisan co-alignment. Firstly, it may be the case that citizens evaluate parties' performance against a set of personally relevant criteria, and select a party to support based upon which party is perceived as performing 'best' at that moment (as in some formulations of the valence model; see, for example, Sanders et al., 2011, p.290). In this case, the 'causal arrow' runs from performance perceptions (or, indeed, beliefs about government in general) to party support. Thus, those who share a partisan alignment with relevant governors have beliefs about government that are more positive, purely because their (pre-existing) positive perceptions about the party of the governors caused them to support that party. Such a process is benign, insofar as we may *hope* that citizen preferences are structured in this way; citizens make a good-faith effort to evaluate the available political information and update their preferences for parties or candidates in light of that information. Secondly, the fact that a citizen supports a party may cause – in and of itself – their beliefs about government to be more positive whenever that party holds a relevant political office. In such a formulation, citizen beliefs about government are the effect. This interpretation of the process is potentially more problematic, as it is indicative of a relatively unconsidered political outlook that may lead to undesired outcomes (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). Importantly, if the second causal schema holds, a very strong 'co-alignment effect' could undermine a straightforward interpretation of responses to questions probing beliefs about standards in public life. In such a circumstance, responses may not indicate perceptions of standards across the whole of public life, but instead may be little more than a measure of satisfaction with the partisan attachments of current incumbent politicians. Thus, probing the impact of partisan co-alignment upon perceptions of standards is of obvious importance in the context of this thesis.

The academic debate regarding which of these processes is the most plausible explanation for co-alignment effects reported in the literature is still unsettled. However, most empirical research suggests an independent causal effect of partisan attitudes upon citizens' beliefs (see, for example, Evans and Anderson, 2006; Evans and Pickup, 2010; see also van der Eijk et al., 2007). Indeed, such a causal mechanism remains the assumption within much of the extant research evaluating the role of partisan co-alignment (see, for example, Anderson et al., 2005; Blais and Gélineau, 2007; Esaiasson, 2011). Of course, it may be the case that both processes have complementary roles in creating co-alignment effects. However, minimally, it thus appears sensible to assume that co-alignment can have an independent causal effect on perceived standards. The aim of this chapter is not to evaluate rivalling hypotheses about the direction of influence of whatever co-alignment effect may be present in citizens' perceptions of standards and related beliefs about government, but rather to assess the strength of this relationship for different kinds of co-alignment (as explained below). Importantly, the potentially problematic implications of partisan co-alignment for the interpretation of responses to questions probing beliefs about standards are only relevant if a strong effect is found to exist. However, if there is no important relationship between the two, the question of causal ordering is of little actual relevance.

This chapter discusses the impact of partisan co-alignment upon perceptions of standards, analysing individual-level data from Great Britain. Models are built and tested that analyse the effect of co-alignment at the national-level and (Scottish) sub-national level. This allows a more detailed consideration of the impact of partisan co-alignment in multi-level systems. This chapter finds that some forms of co-alignment have an important impact – but not of overwhelming magnitude – upon perceptions of standards. However, this effect varies importantly between the national and sub-national political contexts.

5.1 The Nature of the Problem

It has been shown in a number of contexts that congruence between a citizen's personal party preference and the governing party has implications for a wide variety of beliefs about government. An important strand of this research has focused upon the perceptual impact of electoral outcomes, and in particular the impact of 'winning' in an electoral competition¹ (see, for example, Norris, 1999, p.230; Anderson and Tverdova, 2001, p.332; Anderson and LoTempio, 2002; Anderson et al., 2005, p.10; Blais and Gélineau, 2007; Ladner and Wlezien, 2007; Esaiasson, 2011; Singh et al., 2011). Citizens who see their preferred party win in an electoral competition become co-aligned (in partisan terms) with the elected officials. Thus, this research provides a useful way to consider the problem under investigation here. Of course, it may be the case that the psychological impact of 'winning' alone – independent from the consequences of co-alignment – produces the perceptual effect seen in these studies. Indeed, research has shown that citizens respond psychologically to 'winning' electoral competitions (Stanton et al., 2009), and that winning – even in non-political contests – results in more positive political beliefs (Healy et al., 2010). However, the general consistency in the findings of research on the perceptual consequences of having 'won' an electoral competition, regardless of whether the data were collected immediately after the election or a few years after, suggests that the results can plausibly be ascribed to partisan co-alignment.

In general, the extant research finds that partisan co-alignment with political authorities results in more positive beliefs about the political system. Yet investigations into the co-alignment effect have hitherto not considered the impact upon perceived standards across the range of public life; nor have many investigations dealt with the multi-level

¹This is 'winning' in the sense that the party the citizen voted for went on to win the relevant electoral competition, rather than winning in an electoral competition *personally*, in the sense of winning a seat in a legislature, say.

structure of modern political systems. Both of these issues are key challenges for understanding the seriousness of the phenomenon for political perceptions most generally. Each issue is considered in turn.

Within analyses investigating the impact of partisan co-alignment, the dependent variable is commonly satisfaction with democracy (Anderson et al., 2005, p.42; Blais and Gélineau, 2007; Esaiasson, 2011) or political trust (Anderson and Tverdova, 2001, p.329; Anderson and LoTempio, 2002). However, whilst these variables are undoubtedly related to perceived standards, they do not take account of much of what makes perceptions of standards important. Indeed, in both cases the analyses cannot probe deeper perceptions of the objectivity, accountability, or openness of the system.

Satisfaction with democracy may appear to provide some information about these concerns; however, in practice it appears to be closer to a particularistic evaluation of regime (output) performance and executive approval (Linde and Ekman, 2003, p.399; Blais and Gélineau, 2007, p.428). Whilst some work has analysed specific perceptions of procedural fairness, such as perceptions of whether the election was conducted fairly (for example Singh et al., 2011), no work has thus far analysed the impact upon general perceptions of standards in public life. This leaves an inadequate level of extant literature to guide our understanding of the impact of partisan co-alignment between governors and citizens, or the absence thereof, upon perceptions of standards.

Of course, even the finding that political trust may be challenged by the absence of partisan co-alignment is a serious concern. Indeed, as was argued in Chapter 2 of this thesis, political trust is an important constituent of the empirical component of political legitimacy. To the extent that trust is undermined among citizens, the legitimacy of the political system may be questioned. However, perceptions of standards are arguably more important still. Perceptions of standards, similarly to political trust, provide information about legitimacy. Yet whereas trust is not essential for assuming that the political system will respond to you fairly (for example, if you can have faith in the

regulatory system itself; Parry, 1976, p.142), perceived standards underwrite the basic assumption of good faith about public life. Thus, the effect of partisan co-alignment upon perceptions of standards remains an incredibly important concern; a concern that has hitherto not received serious academic attention.

However, before any analysis can be conducted on the impact of partisan co-alignment upon perceived standards, it is necessary to specify systematically what co-alignment means. At base, it is simply sharing the same partisan attachment as a relevant governor. Frequently, the relevant governors are taken to be those who form the national-level government of a country (see, for example, Anderson et al., 2005, p.34; Esaiasson, 2011; see also Anderson and LoTempio, 2002; cf. Blais and Gélineau, 2007). Of course, the holders of positions in the national executive may be particularly important; as was noted in Chapter 2, a core of very high-profile political actors are likely to be especially important from the point of view of public perceptions, and members of the national executive are often the most-high profile of legislators. Yet such a view bypasses many important political offices (see Anderson et al., 2005, p.34). In the UK, as in most electoral democracies, political offices exist at many different 'levels', and it is possible that constituents would share a partisan alignment with one public office holder but not another. Minimally in the UK, these levels cover the national executive, sub-national devolved executives, individual constituencies at the national level, individual constituencies at the sub-national level, local councils, council wards, and European electoral constituencies. There are thus no fewer than seven different opportunities to share a partisan alignment with a governor. Invariably, some of these offices will be much less important to the majority of citizens than others. This is probably the case for offices filled by 'second-order' elections, such as those for European Parliament constituencies (van der Eijk and Franklin, 2009, p.134). Similarly, without any explicit legislative competency, local councils may be seen as less important, and will theoretically have much less of an impact upon perceptions. However, even after removing elections to European Parliament constituencies, council wards, and local

councils generally, there remain four putatively relevant levels of public office holders: the national executive, national constituencies, sub-national (devolved) executives, and sub-national (devolved) constituencies. In each case, specific legislative competencies are attached to the role. Even where, for example, an MP comes from the non-governing party, they still have a legislative competency in the sense that they can still propose laws individually and can vote on the passage of laws. Moreover, in the UK system, MPs from all parties act as the primary conduit between individual constituents and the government more generally.

The importance of the existence of multiple putatively important legislators for the effect of partisan co-alignment should not be discounted. Indeed, Blais and Gélineau (2007, p.431) ostensibly showed an additive effect on satisfaction with democracy of co-alignment at various levels in Canada; yet they only considered the federal and constituency level, rather than probing deeper into the sub-national domain. If such additivity did hold more generally, it may be the case that every (elected) partisan political office, provides an opportunity to confer some of the positive benefits of partisan co-alignment to the domain of perceptions, expectations and attitudes. There is here a notion that within multi-level systems, it is not always helpful to think of partisan co-alignment without qualification. Citizens very rarely share a partisan alignment with all relevant office holders. With a more nuanced conception, it becomes apparent that there are many different ways in which a citizen can have qualified partisan co-alignment with relevant public office holders. These possible relations are shown schematically in Tables 5.1 and 5.2.

Table 5.1 – A Typology of Unqualified Co-alignment

Level	Unqualified Co-alignment	Unqualified Non-alignment
National	1	0
National Constituency	1	0
Sub-national Executive	1	0
Sub-national Constituency	1	0

Table 5.2 – A Typology of Qualified Co-alignment

Level	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
National	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1
National Constituency	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Sub-national Executive	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Sub-national Constituency	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0

However, assuming that co-alignment has a substantive impact, the typologies do not provide any information about the relative importance of each level. It is thus impossible to form expectations to guide the empirical analysis of the impact of partisan co-alignment upon perceptions of standards at this stage. Moreover, no information has yet been reviewed to help formulate expectations about the magnitude of the effect of co-alignment upon perceptions of standards. In the following section, a review of extant literature dealing with the general topic will be provided in order to better specify expectations to guide the analysis.

5.2 Substantive Background

The extant research analysing the impact of partisan co-alignment on beliefs about government fairly consistently finds a positive effect of partisan co-alignment across a range of different dependent variables. However, the magnitudes of the effects seen are not always consistent across different dependent variables. As such not even general expectations about the magnitude of the effect of partisan co-alignment upon perceptions of standards can be specified at this stage.

The effect of partisan co-alignment tends to be strongest for variables that explicitly tap evaluations of the present government. Singh et al. (2011, pp.703-704) run a series of analyses using a constant set of independent variables to explain a range of dependent variables. The findings show that the effect of partisan co-alignment with the national executive has by far the strongest effect upon evaluations of the national executives' policy performance, with far smaller effects for 'procedural fairness' variables. Indeed, the size of the regression coefficient was over seven times larger for evaluations of the national executives' policy performance than perceptions that elections are conducted fairly (Singh et al., 2011, p.704). The independent variables account for between 25 and 28% of the variance of perceptions of the policy performance of the national executive, yet only 6% of the variance of perceptions of the fairness of elections. As perceptions of the fairness of elections and perceptions of standards both relate to procedural aspects of governance, the findings give rise to the expectation that partisan co-alignment will not have an especially important effect upon perceptions of standards in public life. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2005, p.40) find a small average effect of partisan co-alignment with the national executive upon perceptions that elections are conducted fairly. Yet whilst Anderson et al. do not find especially large effects of partisan co-alignment with the national executive upon perceptions of the fairness of the electoral system *on average*, this masks significant variations. Thus, in the Czech Republic those who share a partisan alignment with the national executive were over 15 percentage points more positive about the fairness of elections than those without this co-alignment. Similarly, in Japan this difference was over 10 percentage points.

With the finding in mind that partisan co-alignment tends to have the strongest effect upon evaluations of the present government, the results of many analyses of partisan co-alignment are unsurprising. Anderson and Tverdova (2001, p.332) show that generic perceptions of current political performance are often significantly and strongly correlated with partisan co-alignment with the national executive. Norris (1999, p.230) finds partisan co-alignment with the national executive has a significant effect upon

institutional confidence across a range of countries. Evans and Pickup (2010) show that partisan co-alignment has a substantial and highly significant impact upon present economic evaluations (see also Ladner and Wlezien, 2007).

It is thus plausible to consider partisan co-alignment to have an important and fairly large impact upon variables that primarily tap political *outcome* perceptions, yet a much smaller effect upon variables that concern perceptions of the political *process*. As perceptions of standards concern the process of governing, it may be expected that partisan co-alignment would have a relatively small effect. However, whilst such analyses are helpful, they focus almost exclusively upon co-alignment with national executives. Yet, as has been discussed, this is merely one 'level' at which co-alignment can be considered. Relatively little literature investigates 'lower levels' in this regard. Blais and Gélineau (2007, p.432) investigate how partisan co-alignment at the national executive and local constituency level affects satisfaction with democracy in the Canadian parliamentary system. They find that co-alignment at both the national executive *and* local constituency level does not result in significantly more positive evaluations than co-alignment at only the national executive or only the local constituency level. Individually all categories with some measure of partisan co-alignment have a significantly more positive effect than having no co-alignment. This finding differs from Anderson and LoTempio's (2002) analysis of the impact of co-alignment at the presidential and congressional level upon political trust in the United States. They find (2002, p.342) that partisan co-alignment with the president increases trust significantly, yet congressional co-alignment has no substantive effect. Similarly, Singh et al. (2011, pp.703-704) found no systematic effect at the local level across a range of dependent variables; indeed, local level co-alignment has a significant impact upon only one of eight dependent variables analysed (who is in power matters).

Thus, in general, co-alignment has positive implications for beliefs about government; yet the effect of co-alignment is consistently found to be smaller for variables explicitly

concerning political processes. This allows the formulation of the expectation that co-alignment (at some level) will have a noticeable, though fairly small, effect upon perceptions of standards in public life. Yet the picture is ambiguous when it comes to analyses at different political 'levels'; local-level co-alignment often has no substantively important impact, yet occasionally does. Moreover, we have essentially no information about how sub-national legislatures will alter the effects seen.

5.3 Data and Methods

In order to provide an account of the impact of partisan co-alignment upon perceptions of standards, it is necessary to consider data that allows distinctions to be drawn between those citizens whose partisan preferences are co-aligned with political authorities at various levels, and those who are not. To distinguish between the effects of partisan co-alignment between levels, it is necessary to select data in which more than one party holds the political offices considered. Without this, it is impossible to evaluate the consequences of citizens having co-aligned party preferences with authorities at one level but not others. Moreover, practically, an adequate number of cases for analysis at each level considered are required. Indeed, an analysis focusing upon a devolved administration can only be conducted upon citizens who are subject to the decisions of that administration. Not all available data are therefore helpful in this regard. Surveys 1 (2003-4) and 4 (2010) did not oversample within any of the devolved countries, and thus contain an inadequate number of cases to provide a useful analysis of any effect within a devolved administration (for a discussion of this problem, see Kavanagh, 1989). Moreover, for the surveys in which oversampling in the devolved countries was conducted, Survey 2 (2005-6) and Survey 3 (2008), only Survey 3 was conducted in a context in which a sub-national executive was led by a party who did not

also form the national-level executive. For this reason, the data from 2008 will be used in this analysis. Finally, because of the very different political environment there, in this analysis, data from Northern Ireland are not considered here.

The objective of this chapter is to provide an account of the impact of partisan co-alignment between citizens and their governors upon the citizens' perceptions of standards. For the purpose of this chapter, 'governors' are taken to be only those with a legislative competency; thus the analysis excludes considerations of local councils. Who these governors are differs, to some extent, by geographic area. At the national level alone, the governors (so defined) are only the national executive and the local (Westminster) MP. Yet for those living in a devolved administration, the governors will also include the sub-national executive and elected Members from sub-national constituencies. This creates a measure of asymmetry across the people of Great Britain in terms of the number of governors relevant for analysis. Because of this asymmetry, a simultaneous analysis all countries of Great Britain is impractical, because all respondents who do not live in a devolved administration will be treated as 'missing'. For this reason, two separate analyses will be conducted. The first will use data from across Great Britain in order to assess the impact of partisan co-alignment at the level of the national executive and national (Westminster) constituencies. The second analysis will analyse the effect at both the national and sub-national levels. This allows an analysis of the simultaneous impact of co-alignment, or the absence thereof, with the national executive, national (Westminster) constituencies, the sub-national executive, and sub-national constituencies. The latter analysis will be restricted to the Scottish respondents alone. As has been noted, Northern Ireland has a different political environment, and a different party system, and is thus excluded. For the Welsh case, insufficient information exists to determine which Welsh Assembly constituency respondents resided in. Whilst these constituencies are sometimes the same as Westminster constituencies, they are not always so. In the absence of more detailed information, it therefore becomes

practically impossible to determine whether respondents in fact share a partisan alignment with the governors.

The dependent variable for this analysis is 'perceptions of standards', which has already been discussed at length in Chapter 3². The main independent variable is a measure of partisan co-alignment between the individual respondent and their governors. This is operationalised as congruence between the party a respondent would be most inclined to vote³ for and the party of the relevant governor. The set of responses are built into the following typology, shown here for the national level, which will be analysed as nominal categories:

No co-alignment at any level

Co-alignment with the local representative but not the national executive

Co-alignment with the national executive but not the local representative

Co-alignment with both the local representative and national executive

Mutatis mutandis, this typology will also be used for analyses at the sub-national level.

The typology will be constructed separately at the national (Westminster) and sub-national (Scottish) level and analysed as separate variables.

Importantly, Scottish sub-national local representatives exist in two forms: single member 'constituency' members and regional members from multi-member regions. It is possible that the absence of a single high-profile figure among the regional

² To reiterate briefly, this variable is a composite measure of five items probing: confidence that the authorities will punish those caught doing wrong, confidence in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life, a rating of how standards compare to a few years ago, an overall rating of standards, and confidence in the authorities to uphold standards. This variable has a range of 20.

³ This operationalisation is not uncommon within the literature (see, for example, Anderson, 2005, p.35). Of course, this is only a representation of partisan identification under a very rigid understanding of partisan identification, such as the Michigan model (see Bartels, 2002, p.117). We may be suspicious of such strong claims, not least because it appears that a sizable minority of citizens actually have closely tied first preferences for parties, at least electorally (van der Eijk and Franklin, 2009, p.52). However, here, the loss of complexity by focusing upon the single most preferred party is not overly problematic; as the congruence between a citizens' most preferred party and the political authorities' partisan identification is an informative way to consider the general 'co-alignment effect'.

representatives could produce a diluted effect for co-alignment at the sub-national constituency level. Indeed, respondents may not be aware of the partisan affiliation of their multi-member constituency members. Similarly, the broader geographic area over which a regional constituency exists could serve to reduce subjective feelings that multi-member constituency representatives are 'relevant' officials, in the sense discussed here. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate these suggestions. However, given that both suggestions are at least plausible, this analysis will focus upon the single member constituency representatives, rather than the multi-member regional representatives. As all Scottish respondents have a constituency representative, this choice does not affect the number of cases available for analysis.

Of course, matching vote intention to representatives' partisan attachment leaves open the criticism that respondents may be most inclined to vote for a party they do not identify with most. Such a situation could arise as a result of tactical voting. Tactical voting occurs when voters, voting in a non-proportional system, allocate their vote to a party they regard as a second-best choice in order to avoid any less preferred outcomes (for a more in-depth review of the concept, see Johnston and Pattie, 2011). Votes are usually cast in this way in situations where the most preferred candidate has essentially no chance of being elected, and so any vote for that candidate would be 'wasted' (in the sense that it would not 'count' towards a final result). Thus, to the extent that tactical voting exists – and research has suggested that as many as 15% of voters voted tactically in 2010 (Johnston and Pattie, 2011, p.1328) – the mapping of party preference to the party the respondent would be most inclined to vote for may be imperfect. This may suggest an error rate in this variable of 15% solely due to tactical voting. However, this may be less problematic than it would at first appear. Despite the fact that a significant proportion of voters are inclined to support their 'second-best' party in actual elections, it would not be surprising if such tactical behaviour was much less prevalent in the context of answering vote intention questions in a survey that is not conducted at the time of an actual election. Such a suggestion cannot be proved (or disproved) with

the data available, yet if the suggestion were correct the error rate introduced by tactical voting would be much less than 15%.

To assess the impact of partisan co-alignment upon perceptions of standards, a regression analysis is conducted⁴. However, without controlling for relevant (causally prior) covariates, an analysis of this form could produce unhelpful results. Often, political analyses control for demographic variables; on the assumption either that the values of the dependent variable can be affected directly by demographics, or that the functioning of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables can be altered by demographic differences. For the national-level analysis, following Singh et al. (2011), controls are introduced for age, gender, and education⁵. As the national-level analysis includes cases from England, Scotland, and Wales, the local (political and non-political) climate may differ between respondents who reside in different countries. This is potentially an important difference between respondents, and thus will be controlled for⁶. Finally, respondents may differ in other relevant beliefs about government. To the extent that these beliefs are causally prior to perceptions of standards, leaving these beliefs uncontrolled may challenge interpretations about the relationship between partisan co-alignment and perceptions of standards. In Chapter 4, 'confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing' was argued to be a relevant belief from the point of view of standards, and the empirical model analysed there did not reject the hypothesis that it is causally prior to standards. For these reasons, a control is introduced for respondents' confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life⁷.

⁴ The regression reported does not use cluster-robust standard errors. Whilst cluster-robust procedures are sometimes used within the literature (see, for example, Singh et al., 2011), such a correction is not necessary here. The effect probed is a within constituency (and thus within cluster) effect. However, if any correction were applied it would not alter the substantive results.

⁵ Age is operationalised as the respondents raw age, gender is a male/female dichotomy (1 = male, 2 = female), and education is a five category variable capturing respondents' highest qualification (1 = degree or higher, 2 = other higher education, 3 = A-levels and equivalents, 4 = trade apprenticeships, 5 = GCSEs and below).

⁶ 'Country' is operationalised as nominal-level dummies for Wales, England, and Scotland.

⁷ This variable is coded on a five-point scale (1 = not at all confident, 2 = not very confident, 3 = don't know, 4 = fairly confident, 5 = very confident).

At the time that the data were collected that are analysed here, the most recent General Election in the UK occurred in 2005. This election produced a majority Labour government. In national constituency terms, Labour won 355 seats, the Conservative party won 198 seats, the Liberal Democrats won 62 seats, and the Scottish National Party (SNP) won 6 seats (Mellows-Facer, 2006). The previous Scottish parliament election occurred in 2007. In terms of all seats contested, the SNP won 47 seats, Scottish Labour won 46 seats, the Scottish Conservatives won 17 seats, the Scottish Liberal Democrats won 16 seats, and the Scottish Green Party won 2 seats (Herbert et al., 2007). The SNP formed a minority government following the election. Thus, in Scotland, it is impossible for a respondent to be considered co-aligned with all relevant national and sub-national representatives. As England does not have a sub-national parliament, Labour supporters in Labour constituencies in England can be considered co-aligned with all relevant representatives.

Only people on the electoral register in Scotland can vote in elections to the Scottish Parliament. All people living in the UK and on the electoral register may vote for candidates in national-level constituencies, and thus have an (indirect) vote for the national executive. 1898 cases are available for an analysis considering the national-level effect. These cases are distributed such that 447 cases come from Wales, 538 from Scotland, and 946 from England. However, as some variables have missing data, the actual number of cases in the analyses will be slightly reduced.

5.4 Results

Table 5.3 presents the results of a regression using data from across Britain analysing the impact of partisan co-alignment with relevant national-level governors. Model 1 is the base model with only control variables included; model 2 adds the variable tapping

partisan co-alignment. This allows for a consideration of the additional impact of partisan co-alignment, over and above the control variables.

Table 5.3 – Predictors of Perceived Standards at the National Level

	(1)	(2)
Intercept	13.88 *** (0.57)	13.52 *** (0.56)
National constituency co-alignment only (ref cat: No co-alignment)		0.67 * (0.30)
National executive co-alignment only (ref cat: No co-alignment)		2.18 *** (0.38)
National executive and constituency co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		2.11 *** (0.22)
Sex (male = 1, female = 2)	-0.16 (0.18)	-0.19 (0.18)
Education (lower = more education)	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.11 * (0.06)
Age	-0.02 *** (0.01)	-0.02 ** (0.01)
Confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing (higher = more confidence)	0.49 *** (0.08)	0.49 *** (0.08)
Scotland (ref cat: Wales)	0.04 (0.25)	0.15 (0.25)
England (ref cat: Wales)	-0.06 (0.23)	-0.06 (0.23)
Adjusted R ²	0.03	0.08
n	1820	1820

*Note: Entries show un-standardised coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Significance codes: † = p<0.1, * = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01, *** = p<0.001. Coefficients are shown to two decimal places, except in situations where such a representation would result in a coefficient of zero.*

As is apparent from model 2, co-alignment in party support between citizens and their governors has a positive impact upon perceptions of standards in public life. The effect is significant for all types of co-alignment analysed, though is much stronger for co-alignment with the national executive. Interestingly, despite the fact that co-alignment

at the constituency level alone was significant, the effects for national executive and constituency are clearly not additive. Indeed, co-alignment with both the national executive and local member actually has a smaller (positive) impact than only co-alignment at the national level, though the difference between these categories is not significant. The effect is also reasonably strong. The dependent variable (perceptions of standards) has a range of 20, thus partisan co-alignment with the national executive alone has an impact of slightly over 10% of the range of the dependent variable. Yet, despite this obvious importance, the variance explained by the model remains low. This does not imply that the effect is not real, or is of no consequence, but does show that perceived standards are not solely – or even mainly – an effect of partisan co-alignment. Indeed, the addition of the variable tapping partisan co-alignment only increases the variance explained by 5% over the base model.

As was noted above, the analysis at the national-level alone ignores the deeper opportunities for co-alignment that exist within multi-level systems. Data from Scotland are shown in Table 5.4. This analysis includes both the partisan co-alignment variable from model 2 of Table 5.3, as well as a similar variable probing co-alignment with Scottish sub-national representatives. As was mentioned above, the sub-national constituencies considered here are the single member constituencies of the Scottish Parliament, to the exclusion of a consideration of the role of multi-member regional constituencies. However, this choice had no impact upon the analytic results presented here. The results are substantively the same regardless of whether co-alignment in the regional constituencies is included (reported in Appendix B.7). As above, model 1 of Table 5.4 contains only the control variables; model 2 also includes the main analysis variables. The control for ‘country’ has been removed, as this is a constant in this analysis.

Table 5.4 – Predictors of Perceived Standards in Scotland

	(1)	(2)
Intercept	14.05 *** (1.13)	14.2 *** (1.14)
National constituency co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		1.41† (0.81)
National executive co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		1.18 (0.99)
National executive and constituency co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		0.30 (0.61)
Sub-national constituency co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		0.89 (0.63)
Sub-national executive co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		-0.03 (0.49)
Sub-national executive and sub-national constituency co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		-0.46 (0.55)
Sex (male = 1, female = 2)	-0.42 (0.34)	-0.45 (0.34)
Education (lower = more education)	-0.001 (0.10)	0.0004 (0.11)
Age	-0.02 * (0.01)	-0.02 * (0.01)
Confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing (higher = more confidence)	0.45 *** (0.15)	0.42 ** (0.15)
Adjusted R2	0.02	0.04
n	505	505

*Note: Entries show un-standardised coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Significance codes: † = p<0.1, * = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01, *** = p<0.001.*

The results of this more detailed analysis show a far more mixed picture than the results shown in Table 5.3. No effects related to co-alignment are significant, once sub-national effects are included in the analysis. Interestingly, whilst the majority of the effects are ‘appropriately’ signed, in the sense that co-alignment has a positive impact, this does not hold uniformly. Indeed, sharing a partisan alignment with the sub-national executive

has a (non-significant) *negative*⁸ effect upon perceptions of standards. This negative effect holds regardless of whether or not co-alignment also exists at the sub-national constituency level. The fact that the coefficient was not significant and positive is in itself interesting. It is possible – though cannot be tested here – that supporters of the SNP *do* experience an increase in positive perceptions of standards, but that this increase does not stretch across the whole of public life. It may be the case that the positive effect seen *only* applies to beliefs that explicitly relate to Scotland. Indeed, Carman (2010, p.746) showed that positive experiences with the Scottish Parliament petitioning system had no bearing upon UK-level trust, but did significantly affect Scottish-level trust.

Also of note is the fact that the coefficients seen for partisan co-alignment with the national executive are non-significant at $p < 0.05$, and are at most half the size of the respective coefficients in Table 5.3. The absence of significant differences here is consistent with sub-national representation having an important mediating effect upon the impact of co-alignment; at least where the sub-national legislature has primary legislative powers⁹. Indeed, in such circumstances the national-level parliament ceases to be the 'only game in town'; thus the diminished effect of partisan co-alignment at this level is not surprising. Whether or not strong, significant effects would be seen for co-alignment if a single party controlled both the sub-national executive and the national executive remains an open question.

Finally, the variance in perceptions of standards explained by the model remains small. In the model shown in Table 5.4, only an additional 1% of the variance in perceptions of standards is gained by the addition of variables evaluating partisan co-alignment.

⁸ As the effect was not statistically significant, interpretations must inherently be cautious. Indeed, assuming that there was no difference between the perceptions of standards of those respondents co-aligned with the sub-national executive, an effect this large would be seen roughly 40% of the time.

⁹ This is not to suggest that without primary legislative powers the effect would not be seen, only that the available data does not necessarily allow us to draw inferences about these types of election.

5.5 Discussion and conclusion

Conventional wisdom holds that games are much more fun when you are winning (Singh et al., 2011, p.707). A similar reasoning appears to hold true for some aspects of political support. As the literature considered in this chapter showed, those people who see 'their' representatives in positions of power appear to be more supportive of various aspects of the (output) performance of the representatives than those who do not enjoy such co-alignment. The empirical results here indicate that such conventional wisdom appears to hold for standards too. Yet the effect is importantly contingent. The effect of co-alignment undoubtedly exists at the national level; indeed, it is fairly strong. However, the effect almost completely disappears when the model analysed also includes sub-national legislatures. Yet such a pattern of results is not paradoxical.

With each new political office considered, *ceteris paribus*, the potential for partisan co-alignment between the citizenry and at least one representative increases. In the national case considered in Table 5.3, only three opportunities existed for partisan co-alignment. In order for a respondent to have any measure of partisan co-alignment with their governors, they had to support the party of their local representative, the national executive, or both. Once this typology was expanded to include the sub-national level, fully 15 categories provided some measure of partisan co-alignment. As the number of relevant governors expands, so too does the number of categories that provides at least some measure of co-alignment. For nine relevant governors, 511 opportunities exist to share at least some measure of partisan co-alignment. Thus, the effect seen at the national level may be importantly affected by the lack of legislatively important sub-national representatives in England. In this respect, the findings of this chapter challenge some of the findings within the extant literature. Both Anderson and LoTempio (2002, p.342) and Singh et al. (2011, pp.703-704) find no substantively important effect for co-alignment with the local representative. This research reaches importantly different

conclusions. Not only do increasingly 'lower-levels' of political office matter substantively, they matter precisely because they are able to reduce the magnitude of the national-level effect.

The findings of this chapter suggest that there is indeed some positive effect of partisan co-alignment upon perceptions of standards. This means that there is also a negative effect upon perceptions of standards of an absence of partisan co-alignment¹⁰. Whilst the results here suggest that greater opportunities for co-alignment could go a long way towards ameliorating this effect, this can only apply for those people who support parties that have a realistic chance of being elected. Citizens with a singular, strong preference for the BNP, say, may never have this opportunity actualised. Indeed, like most minor parties, the BNP has never gained a seat in the national parliament, or any sub-national devolved administration. The same is true for most minor parties. Indeed, for supporters of very minor parties increasing opportunities for co-alignment may even be counterproductive. Gamson (1968, p.51) noted the adverse consequences for beliefs about government when 'when an undesirable outcome is seen as a member of a class of decisions with similar results'. Those people who continue to fail to gain any measure of partisan co-alignment may similarly generalise the negative results, thus resulting in even more hostile beliefs. Indeed, Grasso et al. (2011, p.47) show that those who support minor parties have significantly more negative political beliefs, including more negative perceptions of standards, than those who support one of the three main national parties.

Ultimately, when the analysis is constrained to focus upon only the national executive and national-level constituencies, the effect of co-alignment is of an important

¹⁰ This is true by definition when considered relative to those people who enjoy partisan co-alignment. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to evaluate whether a lack of partisan co-alignment has a negative impact absolutely. However, Esaiasson (2011), investigating satisfaction with democracy, suggests that when a citizen gains partisan co-alignment with relevant governors, those citizens tend to become more positive in their political beliefs. Those people who do not gain partisan co-alignment sometimes become more negative, more often keep the same beliefs, and sometimes become more positive (though almost always less than those who gained partisan co-alignment).

magnitude. Yet the explanatory power of the effect remains small. The addition in the adjusted R² resulting from the inclusion of parameters to account for partisan co-alignment did not exceed 5%. It is not the case that partisan co-alignment is sole, or even main, driver of any individual's perceptions of standards in public life. Thus, perceptions of standards in public life cannot simply be dismissed as a reflection of partisan co-alignment. The following two chapters continue the search for explanations of citizens' perceptions of standards, focusing upon high profile 'scandals'.

Chapter 6

'Why We Hate Politics'? The Impact of Negative Political Events upon Political Perceptions of Standards in Public Life

Within the thesis thus far, it has been discovered that it is possible to view perceptions of standards as structurally exogenous in relation to trust and specific evaluations of MPs as a group. Moreover, it has been shown that perceptions of standards are not solely, or even mainly, caused by partisan co-alignment. There thus remains a question as to what other things can plausibly be viewed as causes of perceptions of standards. This problem takes on a particular importance given the generally negative perceptions held by citizens (see, for example, Miller, 1974; Nye et al., 2997; Hay, 2007; Norris, 2011). One area that is often suggested as a particularly important cause, at least by political practitioners, is the role of specific negative political events (NPEs). This chapter attempts to specify the impact of these types of events upon perceptions of standards in public life through the analysis of survey responses collected both during NPEs and during 'quieter' periods.

An NPE, as considered here, is any event that focuses large amounts of attention upon an apparently negative aspect of governance. Thus these events are often referred to as 'scandals' and 'sleaze', although it is possible that an NPE could be created through a well-intentioned policy failure which involved no genuine impropriety (Easton, 1965; although the inclusion of policy failures can be contested, see Bovens and 't Hart, 1996, pp.12-13; Gray, 1998, p.8). The impacts of these types of events upon perceptions of politics have generally been assumed to be unquestionably negative. Miller (1974,

p.971), for example, uncritically took the impact of the Watergate scandal as having a large and wholly negative impact upon evaluations of trust in government in America. Yet research on the related field of media effects often finds effects that are sufficiently small that they appear an unlikely candidate to explain the observed increase in political cynicism (Cappella and Jamieson, 1996, p.84; Moy and Scheufele, 2000, p.750; Zaller, 2002). Moreover, even the Iran-Contra scandal in the USA failed to produce significant changes in beliefs about government even in the short term (Miller and Borrelli, 1991, 152). Whilst this does not provide evidence that adverse political reports are not driving negative beliefs about government, it does suggest that the evidence needs to be carefully considered.

Even when effects of NPEs are shown to exist, the focus of the investigation is often narrowly defined in terms of support for a particular elected official, candidate, or policy (see, for example, Miller and Borrelli, 1991; Shaw, 1999; Zaller, 2002). We are thus still left with little real information about how these sorts of events affect citizens' generalised view of politics as distinct from judgements about specific persons or specific policies. This is especially important given what has been noted in Chapter 2 about the potential of hostile citizen perceptions to pose a challenge to the (empirical) legitimacy of a democracy. Thus, questions such as whether or not a single negative event can have an appreciable impact on generalised political perceptions are incredibly important. Of course, questions concerning the impact of these types of event are also important for specific incumbents (Easton, 1965, p.468). Yet given the potential for such events to pose a challenge to the legitimacy of a political system, the questions have a far-reaching importance for all democratic systems. This importance to the political regime speaks to questions concerning the 'rules' which need to be created and upheld to ensure those specific failures are addressed sufficiently to prevent serious declines in generalised support.

In this chapter, I address this issue by focusing on the impact of one specific NPE upon political perceptions. This NPE concerns revelations about the use of parliamentary allowances by Derek Conway MP, and in particular allegations that he employed his son with public funds whilst his son was not, and could not have, worked in the capacity he was employed in. This chapter concludes by arguing that, far from always harming general perceptions of politics, these events can in fact have a positive impact. It is argued that a sensible interpretation of these results is that NPEs can provide public officials with opportunities to demonstrate a commitment to upholding regime norms.

6.1 The Nature of the Problem

The available research into the impact of NPEs (conceived in the widest terms to include sleaze, scandals, policy failures, etc.) upon affective and evaluative political beliefs (again conceived generally) has provided mixed evidence (see, for example, Bartels, 1993; Shaw, 1999). Partly this may be because the research often investigates different 'objects of support' (Easton, 1965). Thus, whilst a consistency may be expected between the impact of an NPE upon evaluations of specific authorities and more general beliefs about the system, this need not always be the case (Easton, 1965, p.165; Newton, 2006, p.846). As such, a lack of research into the impact on more generalised political perceptions leaves us without a clear and well-grounded sense of the actual impact of these events. Of course, the available research on support for specific authorities is helpful for forming expectations. Yet the distinction between support for specific authorities and support for the political system more generally is of practical importance when considering consequences for 'process' perceptions across the whole range of public life. The research problem can thus be stated as 'what is the effect of NPEs upon perceptions of standards in public life?' This chapter investigates this issue directly.

High profile NPEs, by their very nature, are likely to impinge upon the vast majority of citizens within the country whilst they are occurring. Firstly, many individuals are likely to gain knowledge of these events directly from media: newspapers, TV, the internet etc. Yet, secondly, even for those who do not regularly read newspapers or see television news, the effect of intense media focus upon an issue is likely to still be felt. This is because of what Bartels (1993, p.276) calls 'Barr's Law', which states that even if a person does not directly consume the mass media's output they are still likely to be informed about the largest events and stories; through interpersonal communications (see also Dalton, 2002, p.21). There thus exists a large 'constituency' of individuals who have some direct or indirect awareness of the NPE in question. Yet research has repeatedly shown that the political effect of 'random shocks' (in this case an NPE) are only reliably detectable for a short period following 'shock'. Thus, an investigation of campaign effects in US presidential elections suggests 'relatively durable' campaign events last until the next event, but are still usefully detectable 10 days after the event (Shaw, 1999, p.404). Moreover, van der Eijk and van Praag have shown that 'random shocks' generally adhere to a moving average model¹ with a period of about two weeks (van der Eijk and van Praag, 1986, p.70). That similar findings on the length of the impact of media stories have been noted in different contexts adds credence to this finding (see, for example, Phillips, 1980, p.1005). Thus, the 'constituency' of individuals who presently have direct awareness of the NPE is temporally specific; whatever the direct impact of NPEs are, the event itself will eventually leave the popular consciousness. As such it will be extremely hard to discern the impact of a single event after a large amount of time has passed.

Precisely because the impact of the event is likely to be most discernable in the period immediately following the initial uncovering of the event, two distinct groups can be

¹ A moving average model describes a process by which a 'random shock' produces a broadly consistent effect for a given period, before ceasing to produce that effect. When the effect has ceased, the value of whatever is being tracked reverts to the value which existed before the 'shock'.

identified within surveys for which fieldwork is spread out over time. Firstly, those who are questioned during or soon after an NPE and, secondly, those who are questioned before or sufficiently far after an NPE². If we know when individuals were questioned, it is possible to analyse the average effect of an NPE by analysing the differences between these two groups upon their perceptions of standards in public life whilst controlling for confounding factors.

The analysis is complicated because the individuals within the groups may not be comparable for a variety of reasons. One crucially important reason for non-comparability is that pre-existing attitudes between the two groups may differ in ways that are not related to the NPE under study (Cochran and Rubin, 1973, p.417).

Depending upon how attitudes were distributed within the two groups, this problem could mask any effect of the event or artificially suggest an effect where none existed.

6.2 Substantive Background

Within the extant literature, research findings have putatively provided evidence for three distinct understandings of the impact of NPEs covering negative effects, no significant effects, and positive effects.

A negative effect on citizens' political orientations in the period immediately following an NPE is an intuitive expectation. Given that people place a high value on probity of those in government (Almond and Verba, 1965, p.72; deLeon, 1993, p.34), it would be entirely understandable if following a revelation that the official rules of probity had not

² Whilst the language here has been of two groups consisting of different people there is no theoretical reason why the two groups could not consist of the same people interviewed at different times. Moreover, the discussion has been of dichotomous specification of groups of respondents as 'within' or 'outside' of an NPE, this is justified to the extent that a moving average model is applicable.

been adhered to citizens' beliefs about government became more negative. If we suppose that citizens react to new information by updating their perceptions allowing new information to move their original perception in proportion to how important the new evidence is (see Bartels, 1993, p.268), then to the extent that those citizens drew negative substantive conclusions we would expect to see this negative effect fairly quickly and consistently across all (informed) citizens. Similarly to this 'quasi-Bayesian' view, Downs and Larkey (1986, p.2-3) suggest that 'popular conceptions of government performance are not founded on careful analysis but on an amalgam of ideology, anecdotal evidence, and invidious comparison'. This view, which Downs and Larkey apply to perceptions of government (output) performance, could easily be applied more generally.

To the extent that these understandings of human behaviour suggest an average negative effect, they find some support within the extant literature. This support comes in several forms. Indeed, both Miller (1974) and Citrin (1974)³ implicitly accept this theory. More concretely, Pharr (2000, pp.198-9) finds strong links between reports of officials' misconduct and political dissatisfaction in Japan. Chanley et al. (2000) find that scandals within the United States congress have a small but statistically significant negative impact upon political trust. Bowler and Karp (2004) show in a range of contexts that scandals can have a negative effect upon citizens' beliefs about government. Similarly, Maier (2011, p.290) shows scandals can have negative effects upon 'process' evaluations of politicians (specifically the honesty of politicians). Moreover, a wealth of literature links perceptions of government performance to generalised perceptions of politics (see, for example, Hetherington, 1998; Newton and Norris, 2000; Mishler and Rose, 2005; Newton, 2006, p.847). To the extent that NPEs carry information about the (outcome or process) performance of government we should also expect to see some important negative effects upon generalised perceptions. Roger Mortimore (1995, p.37)

³ Although it is important to note that Citrin presumed a different cause and effect for this relationship than Miller.

sums up the relationship between individual NPEs and public perceptions succinctly; 'mud sticks'.

Despite this seemingly strong evidence of negative effects upon political perceptions, some research has shown insignificant effects in areas where strong effects might have been expected. Indeed, Miller and Borrelli (1991, pp.152-3), using individual-level responses to an election survey conducted before and during the Iran-Contra scandal, found no significant differences in political trust between those who could have been aware of the scandal and those who could not. They did, however, find a significant decline in presidential approval (from 67% to 59%). This serves to highlight the need to analyse the impact of NPEs upon more general and more specific perceptions separately. Yet when Shaw (1999, p.408) analysed the impact of 'scandals' upon citizens' evaluations of presidential candidates he found an insignificant negative effect (a finding that receives some empirical support from Gelman and King, 1993). However, this may not be enough to suggest that scandals (and thus NPEs generally) have no impact upon more general political perceptions. Two points are pertinent here: (1) the fact that little change occurs for a given candidate does not mean that no change will occur for perceptions of the political system more generally, and (2) Shaw's (1999, p.395) definition of a scandal includes allegations that are levelled at candidate's friends and family. Whilst it could certainly be the case that people infer negative things about a candidate from the actions of their family or friends, it could easily be the case that it would not affect perceptions. The reluctance to draw negative inferences would, presumably, be strongest when the 'scandal' related to a family member towards whom the candidate was seen as having no formal care-giving role. Thus, it may easily be the case that Shaw missed a potentially important effect because of the decision to include references to candidate's family members. These criticisms are in line with other work in the available literature. Bartels (1993, p.272) notes that some strong effects can be seen when analysing the impact of the media but that these can be hidden behind random noise in the data. Indeed, Shaw (1999, p.408) *did* find substantial negative

effects upon evaluations of candidates after they committed ‘blunders’. Here, ‘blunders’ to refer to situations in which the ‘candidate or a representative of the campaign says something offensive, erroneous or simply ill-received’ (Shaw, 1999, p.395). Whilst we may hesitate to say that ‘blunders’, so defined, are properly NPEs as defined here, the finding is suggestive of some strong negative effects for candidates and political authorities. Of course, the distinction between on the one hand large negative effects for individual political candidates and politicians more generally, and on the other hand no substantively important effect upon beliefs about the political system more generally are not necessarily aberrant. Indeed, such a claim is in line with the findings of Maier (2011), where beliefs about politicians specifically are affected by scandals, but beliefs about the system more generally are not.

A more dramatic challenge to the notion of increasing negativity toward political issues following an NPE can be made from within the theoretical literature. Markovitz and Silverstein (1988, pp.2-3) suggest that NPEs can provide an opportunity for ‘self-legitimation’ of a political regime by showing its self-cleansing capability via a robust response to infractions of the political rules. Moreover, the response to NPEs can publically demonstrate that the rules and norms of the system are important and ‘lead to the affirmation of general principles about how the country should be run’ (Gluckman, 1959, p.135; see also Nye, 1967, p.417). If NPEs work in this way – and are seen to work in this way – then the expectation would be shifted towards seeing increasing positive perceptions. Moreover, if this action corrects a previously unknown flaw in the regulatory arrangements then the whole of the regulatory system may be tightened up because of a single incident. If we assume that citizens are updating their beliefs in response to new information, then there should be no surprise in seeing citizens’ perceptions become more positive following a tightening of the rules.

Empirical support for a ‘positive’ view has been more limited than the theoretical support; yet some empirical support can still be found. Robinton (1970, pp.256-8)

noted that the ‘Lynskey’ tribunal – which ‘disclosed that two government officials had accepted gifts... to secure help for the donors’ – had the effect of re-affirming the probity of both the civil service and Parliament. Similarly, Dewan and Dowding (2005, pp.46-56) have shown that what are here termed NPEs can boost the popularity of governments if they result in a ministerial resignation. In both these circumstances, a strong official response underpins an increase in positive perceptions; the opportunity for self-legitimation is utilised.

Thus, whilst the extant literature provides many reasons to assume that some perceptions will become more negative after an NPE, there remain potential difficulties with applying this analysis to perceptions of standards in public life. As such, some weariness of specifying a hypothesis should be noted. However, it remains the expectation that, despite the findings of Maier (2011), an NPE will have an on-average negative effect upon perceived standards.

6.3 Data

Within this chapter, data are taken from Survey 3, the 2008 *Public Attitudes* survey. Because interviewing in excess of 2000 people in face-to-face interviews is time consuming, the data were collected over several months. Indeed, for 2008, data were collected between January and May 2008 (Hayward et al., 2008, p.4). This range is sufficient to allow a comparison between those interviewed during an NPE and those who were interviewed when no comparable event was occurring.

The surveys contain a number of variables that are likely to be of interest when analysing the impact of NPEs upon political perceptions. In this analysis, the dependent variable is the generalised measure of perceptions of standards in public life, described

in Chapter 3. Whilst the variable seemingly taps a variety of concerns, the item response theoretic model applied in Chapter 3 demonstrates that citizens do not perceive of these concerns as being qualitatively distinct⁴.

The objective of this chapter is to establish the impact of NPEs upon political perceptions. The specific NPE chosen for analysis relates to the revelations concerning Derek Conway's use of his parliamentary allowances. In order to establish what impact this NPE had upon perceptions, respondents need to be selected for comparison who were either questioned during this NPE or who can be taken as 'control' cases, from when no NPE was occurring. Because the date of the interviews is known, it is possible to select cases according to these criteria.

As has already been mentioned, the impact of NPEs approximates a moving average model with a period of approximately two weeks (van der Eijk and van Praag, 1986, p.70). Thus, selecting respondents for the 'NPE group' within the period two weeks after the emergence of the event seems appropriate, so long as no other event occurred and reports are continuing within the media. This length of time should be sufficiently small that the event still has a sense of being novel or surprising (following Luhmann, 2000, p.28). This should provide the best chance of seeing any effect, especially if the event is still being discussed within the media throughout this period. However, one key problem remains. If the concern is to uncover the impact of this event upon perceptions – the amount of 'stress' put upon the system, in Easton's terms (see 1965, p.220) – it becomes immediately apparent that only those events which the public are aware of may be considered. Whilst this may appear to be a trivial observation, it has some important implications. Crucially, this implies that in some sense the issue must be sufficiently large as to be likely to be perceived by most citizens. The consequence of this is that the absolute beginning of an event's 'lifecycle' – the first mention – is not *necessarily* the

⁴ By way of a brief reminder, this variable is a composite measure of five items probing: confidence that the authorities will punish those caught doing wrong, confidence in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life, a rating of how standards compare to a few years ago, confidence in the authorities to uphold standards, and an overall rating of standards. This variable has a range of 20.

appropriate time to begin analysis (on the lifecycle of issues see Dunleavy and Weir, 1995, p.59). As such, it appears necessary to base the assumed 'start' point upon an analysis of media reports.

Figure 6.1 shows the number of mentions in UK national newspapers of the NPE under consideration. The issue seems most prominent between the 29th of January and 11th of February 2008; thus, those respondents interviewed during this period will be taken as having been interviewed during an NPE⁵. This provides 363 cases for analysis from during the NPE in question.

Figure 6.1

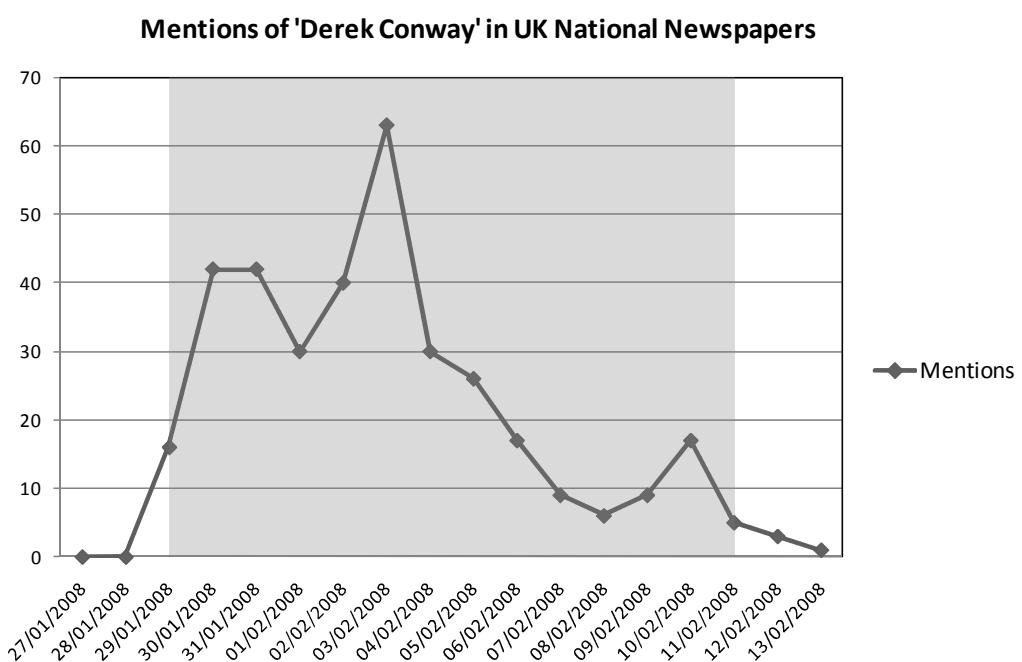


Figure showing the number of mentions in UK national newspapers of the search term 'Derek Conway' between the 27th of January and the 13th of February 2008. The shaded area represents the date range taken to be during an NPE.

⁵The data for this graph come from a LexisNexis search of the archives of UK national newspapers using the term 'Derek Conway' (between the 27th of January 2008 and the 13th of February 2008).

The 'control' cases are those where the respondent was interviewed at a time when no NPE was occurring. This presents a difficulty insomuch as reports of NPEs are generally the norm in the press (Orren, 1997, pp.98-9). However, if during these periods the number of mentions is orders of magnitude below what it is during an NPE then the difficulty has been minimized and causal inferences should remain sound. As such 'control' cases were selected such that: (1) no major NPE was occurring and (2) the number of negative mentions of politics in the media was minimal⁶.

The 'control' cases were selected based upon these criteria. Because of emerging events, the 'control' cases had to be taken from two different periods. The control periods selected were between the 1st of March 2008 and the 12th of March as well as the 4th of May to the 22nd of May. However, a LexisNexis search revealed that on the 15th of May several suggestions were made in the media that Michael Martin's wife used a taxi paid for from official funds to attend non-official events. Whilst the magnitude of references to the event was small in total, and the story did not endure, it still seems sensible to remove that day and those in the period immediately following (following Shaw, 1999, p.404). Thus, the 'control' periods finally selected were 1st March 2008 to the 12th March, 4th May to 14th May, and 18th May to 22nd May. That this set of dates is helpful for the analysis was established by searching through UK national newspapers during these periods for the word 'sleaze', easily the media's favourite 'signature phrase' to express low standards in public life (Dunleavy and Weir, 1995; Orpin, 2005). This search reveals, on average, only 1.5 uses per day⁷ compared to 25.1 mentions of the NPE during the NPE period. This provides 460 'control' cases.

⁶ In the first place, the absence of a major NPE was established by examining the 'key national political stories' list during the data fieldwork period contained within the official report of the data (Haywood et al., 2008, pp.106-111). The selected dates were then investigated using a LexisNexis search for the word 'sleaze' in UK national newspapers. This establishes that there was in fact an absence of NPEs during this period (results described in text).

⁷ Note that the search focused solely upon use of the word in a political context referring to the UK.

6.4 Methods

As noted in the preceding section, the data available allow the construction of an index of perceptions of standards in public life, and knowledge of the interview date allows the creation of a dummy variable expressing whether or not the respondent was interviewed during an NPE or not. In order to investigate the impact of the latter upon the former it is necessary to analyse the effect of the NPE variable upon perceptions of standards whilst controlling for confounding variables. This confounding is especially important here because the analysis periods were selected after data collection. Because of this, there are likely to be differences between those who were interviewed during an NPE and those who were not interviewed during an NPE. These differences are purely a result of fieldwork logistics and the inability to know the pre-existing views of respondents. Thus if those who were interviewed during an NPE – for no reason other than irrelevant factors (such as fieldwork logistics), and possibly sample variation – happened to be older, and if those who are older have less positive perceptions, then any negative effect may be artificial. If uncontrolled these differences can severely undermine causal inferences (Cochran and Rubin, 1973, p.417).

One way to achieve control of imbalances, which is sometimes used within the literature, is via linear multiple regression (see, for example, Bartels, 1993, p.273; Pharr, 2000, 198). Yet because of the nature of the key variable of interest (interviewed during an NPE or not) this form of analysis may be problematic. This is because the variable itself tells us little about the specific interactions between respondents and the events. Thus we know little about the level of exposure to the event over and above the (simple) claim that those who were interviewed during this NPE were logically far more likely to have been affected by it than those interviewed before or sufficiently late after. Moreover, because issues resonate differently with different individuals based upon those

individual's own 'latent' concerns, even those who have the same exposure to the event may have perceived the stories in a qualitatively different way (Erbring et al., 1980, p.45). Thus, the causal effect may be importantly non-homogenous, even after controlling for those factors that can be controlled in a regression framework.

These problems are not necessarily insurmountable. For example, Zaller (2002, p.322) notes that in many circumstances a simpler model with no accounting of exposure can be more likely to find (rightly) an effect than one that takes account of exposure. Further, whilst the 'latent' importance of issues to individuals cannot be known, it is possible to introduce controls that will provide some useful control over the audience-event interaction problem. As such, linear regression may provide useful information about the effect of NPEs. Yet the result may still be highly dependent upon the model's functional form. Ho et al. (2007, pp.210-1) demonstrate that the parameter estimates for a dichotomous variable (depicting causal effect) can be radically altered depending upon the statistical model that is applied to the control variables (see also King and Zeng, 2006, p.133). As such, the difference between a linear and quadratic model can be incredibly pronounced, and yet not necessarily distinguishable on statistical or substantive criteria (King and Zeng, 2006, p.150; Ho et al., 2007, p.210; on the difficulty of substantively specifying the appropriate model see Zaller, 2002, pp.304-5).

A potential solution to the problem of model dependency is to use a case matching strategy to process the data before estimating the causal effect (Ho et al., 2007, p.210). This method is far more robust to model specification and still allows imbalances to be controlled between those who were interviewed during an NPE and those not (Iacus et al., 2009a, p.2; Ho et al., 2007). Here imbalance is thought of in terms of lack of overlap in k -dimensional histograms of the distributions of the causally prior covariates that will be matched on between the 'treatment' and 'control' groups (Iacus et al., 2009a, p.4). The degree of imbalance can be quantified by the L1 measure. This measure quantifies the lack of overlap between the k -dimensional histograms on a scale between 0 and 1;

where 0 indicates no imbalance, 1 indicates maximal imbalance, and a coefficient of 0.4 indicates 60% overlap of the two histogram's densities (Iacus et al., 2009a, pp.3-4).

Once the imbalance has been removed, the causal effect can be estimated directly, usually by analysing the average effect upon a 'treatment' group within the sample (Ho et al., 2007, p.204). Here the 'treatment' effect of concern is the effect of an NPE.

In order to use a case matching strategy it is necessary to select appropriate covariates that can be matched upon, and thus controlled. Age is often taken as an important predictor of several political orientations including likelihood of voting and partisan attachment (see Dalton, 2002, p.50; p.178). Moreover, the empirical models presented in Chapter 5 showed that age tends to have a significant effect upon perceptions of standards; thus, it should be controlled⁸. The level of confidence that a respondent places in the media to uncover wrongdoing in public life is also an important control.

Firstly, as has been noted earlier in the thesis, because when the media are uncovering wrongdoing in public life, they are effectively acting as an additional form of regulation for the political system. Secondly, as seen in Chapter 5, this variable can have a highly significant effect upon perceived standards⁹. Similarly, the respondent's perceptions of the competence of government ministers at performing their job, which taps into (process) performance evaluations of government ministers, has been shown empirically to be important (see, for example, Hetherington, 1998, p.796; Espinal, 2006, pp.206-

⁸ Here, age is coded in six banded categories (18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65+). Whilst the respondents 'raw' age is available, the necessity of 'banding' continuous control variables when used within matching strategies (either automatically within the matching method or based on substantive concerns), justifies the use of the banded item.

⁹ Unlike at other stages of the thesis (where 'don't know' was included as a middle response), this variable is coded as a four-category likert scale tapping whether respondents are very confident, fairly confident, not very confident, or not at all confident in the media to uncover wrongdoing. As the 'don't know' response in this dataset was chosen by relatively few respondents (relative to the other categories), the inclusion of 'don't know' responses complicates the matching procedure. Indeed, if it is included, the variable would need to be 'coarsened', such that the responses on this variable would be included with other answer categories. As the categories do not lend themselves to this form of coarsening, the 'don't know' option will be excluded.

16) and so will be controlled¹⁰. Finally, it is also important to attempt to control for how likely the respondent is to be influenced by the event in question. It is possible to control, to some extent, for this because respondents were asked to self-report if they had been influenced by any recent political event whilst being interviewed¹¹.

Whilst it is possible to control for several known causally prior correlates of political perceptions, variables were not available to control for some substantively important predictors. Subjective level of interest in politics has been shown to be a good predictor of general perceptions of system performance (Newton, 2007, p.352; Anderson and Tverdova, 2003, p.100). Similarly, political sophistication has been shown to be an important variable in assigning blame in the wake of a policy scandal. Gomez and Wilson (2008) demonstrate that those with the lowest levels of political sophistication were more likely to assign blame for inaction following hurricane Katrina at the federal level. By implication, this suggests that those people with the lowest levels of political sophistication are more likely to generalise blame for an NPE. However, the inability to control for these factors will only bias estimates if: (1) the distributions of these factors within the two groups analysed is significantly different, and (2) the differences between the groups on these factors are not controlled through controlling their covariates (for example age, confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing, etc.).

The covariates specified for controlling should be thought of as unrelated to the event considered. During the 'Conway' case, there was never a suggestion that a government minister was not competent at their job¹². Similarly, the media did not uncover the

¹⁰ This was asked as an evaluation of the proportion of government ministers who are competent at their jobs. The variable was coded as a five category likert scale (all, most, about half, a few, none).

¹¹ This variable is a dichotomy formed in response to whether a respondent self-reported specific event they had in mind whilst answering the survey. This question was asked in an open format, and thus allowed respondents to list any number of events, and indicate what those events were.

¹² It may be noted that perceptions of the competence of government ministers taps similar concerns to perceptions of the competence of MPs. The latter of these variables formed part of an index that was shown to be causally subsequent to perceptions of standards in Chapter 4. Therefore it may be objected that perceptions of the competence of government ministers *could* be causally subsequent to perceptions of standards (although the variables are not available to test this in a model similar to that used in Chapter 4).

wrongdoing¹³. Moreover, the respondent's age is obviously unrelated to the event in question. The variable probing whether the respondent had been influenced by any recent political event is more problematic. This is because a large number of the responses will have been caused by the NPE in question, and so there exists an endogeneity problem. Controlling for this would therefore bias any detected causal effect. To solve this issue, mentions of the NPE in question will be disregarded and only those who self-reported being influenced by an event not directly related to the NPE in question will be included. This variable will thus highlight those people who are most likely to remember other NPEs by highlighting individuals who recall events from some time previously. This is likely to convey important information as to the individual's propensity to remember and engage with events.

All variables are significant¹⁴ in a multiple regression against the dependent variable ('perceptions of standards') with the exception of whether the respondent was influenced by a political event. Collectively these variables have an adjusted R^2 of 0.22. Whilst 'influenced by a political event' was not significant ($p>0.1$), it still appears sensible to include it in the analysis because of its substantive importance and its likely effect on how the NPE is perceived directly. Failure to reach statistical significance is easily understood because of the removal of mentions of the latest event for all cases in the

However, this is not a concern here. Perceptions of the competence of government ministers cannot sensibly be considered to have been affected by a scandal that concerned a single (non-governmental) MP. Thus, matching on this item will not bias our understanding of the impact of the NPE in question, nor will it alter the parameter estimates. Indeed, by virtue of being causally subsequent to perceptions of standards, the 'perceptions of the competence of government ministers' variable can act as a control of pre-existing attitudes, in a similar way to the use of a ($t-n$) lagged dependent variable.

¹³ Whilst the media were obviously important in spreading the story, the event was initially begun by the action of regulators. The involvement of these regulators in uncovering the wrongdoing was widely reported in the press during the reports. Indeed, the Standards and Privileges Committee began the event by censuring Conway over his expenses. This fact was widely reported. For example the *Mirror* referred to action by "Parliament's sleaze watchdog, the Commons Standards and Privileges Committee" (29th January, 2008, p.6), the *Daily Express* referred to a "Commons committee report" (3rd February, 2008, p.2), and *The Independent* discussed "the report from the Commons Standards and Privileges Committee which sparked [Conway's] downfall" (3rd February, 2008, p.18).

¹⁴ Confidence in the media and perceived competence of government ministers were significant at $p<0.01$. Age was marginally significant ($p<0.1$), however given the logical certainty that this variable can only be causally prior to perceptions of standards, and the relatively strong extant theory, it will be included as a control.

'during an event' group. Without these mentions, the direct explanatory power of the variable is likely to be reduced, but it still provides important information about how the event will be perceived and how past events will be remembered.

6.5 Results

The two groups analysed here (during an NPE or not) have an L1 imbalance measure of 0.334. This means that 66.6% of the densities of the two group's histograms overlap. This amount of imbalance may be perfectly acceptable for many uses and would be readily acceptable where a large effect was suggested. Yet in this analysis, given the mixed findings in the extant literature, a large effect would not be expected. More theoretically, a single NPE is still only one piece of information among many that citizens may use to evaluate their perceptions of standards in public life (following Bartels' 'quasi-Bayesian' model of information updating, 1993, p.268). Thus it is important that, as much as possible, the imbalance in the data is removed. Because none of the specific operationalisations of the covariates used for matching in this study are coded as continuous, an exact matching solution is possible. This matching procedure removes all detected imbalances within the data. Obtaining this solution, where $L1=0$, with the available data results in the removal of 29 'during an NPE' cases and 59 'not during an NPE' cases. These cases were removed because it was not possible to find a suitable match, given the covariates matched on.

However, removing cases from the 'during an NPE' group is problematic. This is because the causal effect to be estimated is specified as the sample average treatment effect upon the treated (where here 'treatment' reflects being interviewed during an NPE). As such when some who were interviewed during an NPE are not considered, the quantity

measured is no longer the sample average effect upon the ‘treatment’ cases; because some cases are not considered (see Iacus et al., 2009b, p.7). The quantity of interest has changed. To address this problem, two different methods of analysis will be pursued. Firstly, the ‘local effects’ will be analysed in isolation. Here, the local effects are the within sample effects upon the ‘treatment’ cases for which good matches exist within the control group, rather than the effect upon all ‘treatment’ cases. This provides a robust estimate of the impact of an NPE upon generalised perceptions of standards within the group analysed and, subject to the statistical model being correct, may provide a good estimate of the generalised effect of an NPE upon citizens’ perceptions of standards. Secondly, an extrapolation will be conducted to provide suitable (extrapolated) ‘control’ (i.e. not during an NPE) cases for the analysis, which can then include all ‘treatment’ cases (Iacus et al., 2009a, p.7). Both of these measures introduce an element of model dependence. However because the analytic or statistical extrapolation occurs only a short way outside the convex hull of the existing control data (and indeed, within the convex hull of the treatment data) it is hoped that the model dependence introduced should not provide problematic results (King and Zeng, 2006, pp.138-9).

After matching standard parametric analysis techniques are appropriate to analyse the causal effect (Ho et al., 2007, p.223). Here, following Iacus et al. (2009a, p.16), a regression analysis will be conducted. However, the effect of an NPE will not be homogenous across the range of respondents; nor would it be for citizens generally. Partly this is because those who possess little political information will be swayed to a greater extent by new information than those who possess a large amount (Converse, 1962, p.583; Bartels, 1993, p.268). Moreover, whilst it can be assumed, following ‘Barr’s law’ (Bartels, 1993, p.276), that all respondents interviewed during the NPE had heard about it, the level of exposure may have differed importantly (see Converse, 1962, p.586). Thus a linear random effects model, which takes account of the heterogeneity in the causal effect, will be used for the regression analysis (Iacus et al., 2009a, p.17). The results of this analysis are presented in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 – Average NPE ‘Treatment’ Effects

	Causal Effect	95% Confidence Intervals
‘Local’ average causal effect of an NPE upon perceptions of standards in public life	+0.428	0.361 - 0.495
Sample average causal effect (with extrapolation) of an NPE upon perceptions of standards in public life	+0.391	0.332 - 0.454

For the ‘local’ average causal effect, the analysis was conducted upon 334 ‘NPE’ cases and 401 ‘no NPE’ cases.

For the sample average causal effect model results were extrapolated for all ‘NPE’ cases, including those not matched to ‘no NPE’ cases. The causal effect represents a positive impact of approximately 2 percent of the range of the dependent variable.

The two estimates shown in Table 6.1 are sufficiently close to ameliorate worries concerning bias introduced by model dependence. Further, they both show a positive causal effect and have 95% confidence intervals that overlap. The magnitude of the causal impact is small, but reliably detectable. This finding means that, after conditioning on the impact of pre-treatment covariates and ensuring balance in the k -dimensional histograms, people who were questioned about their perceptions of standards in public life during the height of an NPE had on average slightly *more positive* perceptions of standards.

6.6 Discussion

The results reported at first seem somewhat surprising. NPEs, on average, cause citizens’ perceptions of standards in public life to be made more positive. The reason for this increase is likely to be related to the nature of the event analysed and how this interplayed with the political system. As has been briefly noted above, the event was brought to light by an official regulatory agency; the Standards and Privileges Committee. As such, this event may have served to highlight that the political regulatory system not only can but does act as an effective control on those in political office. This

conclusion is similar to that found by Dewan and Dowding (2005) insofar as the politically ‘negative’ aspects of the information contained within the reports were overwhelmed by the ‘positive’ aspects. Thus it appears that NPEs in general allow regulatory agencies to engage in ‘self-legitimation and purification’ not only for the individual Committee or Commission in question, but also for the system as a whole (see Markovits and Silverstein, 1988, pp.2-3).

This ‘self-legitimation’ effect is multi-faceted. Firstly, the legitimisation effect results from the regulatory system showing that it actually works. This has important implications because it speaks directly to the political process performance of the regulatory system. Indeed, given the importance placed upon process performance for citizens’ evaluations in other contexts it would have been highly surprising if the same relationship was not seen there. Secondly, the legitimisation can result from the political system – in one form or another – actually ‘improving’ after an event. This ‘improvement’ may take the form of closing the particular hole in the regulatory system that allowed the event to take place. One concrete example of this occurred in the wake of the ‘cash for questions’ scandal in the UK during the 1990s. The scandal had been initiated at least in part because of an absence of codified guidelines on what was considered appropriate standards in public life (see Oliver, 1995, p.592). Without these rules, MPs could claim that they had abided by appropriate standards so long as they made declarations in the register of members interests; even if they then allowed these interests to affect how they discharged their duties (Oliver, 1995, p.592). After this scandal the clearer codification provided by the *Seven Principles of Public Life*, as well as other regulatory reform, reduced the possibility of a similar event occurring in the future (Oliver, 1995, p.593). Thus the political system is provided with an opportunity to demonstrate that it can respond to ‘stress’ effectively (Easton, 1965, p.225).

Whilst the magnitude of the causal effect seen here was small, this does not undermine the importance of the findings. Indeed, the findings show that the causal impact of NPEs

does not have to be negative. This finding is interesting in its own right, if positive perceptions of the political system are as important as has been conceptualised here. Moreover, if the political system can be seen to be continually performing well then, even within the moving average model of reactions to NPEs, more positive perceptions can become entrenched (for a discussion of the generalisation of political perceptions, see Miller, 1974, p.964). This is especially likely to occur if other examples of commitments to upholding standards occur whilst the original effect is still occurring.

One question that naturally follows from this research is the extent to which this positive effect should be expected in various circumstances. Does it imply that all or most NPEs will have a positive impact upon citizens' perceptions of politics generally? Whilst no evidence is presently available to allow careful analysis of this issue, a couple of suggestions can be made. Firstly, it appears extremely unlikely that all or most NPEs have a generalised positive impact upon perceptions of politics. Were this to be the case then the explanation for the decline in positive political beliefs over time (especially since the early 1960s) would have to rest primarily upon some form of value change (for an argument that value change is indeed the main cause, see Inglehart, 1997). Secondly, some events are qualitatively different vis-à-vis the political system than those discussed here. By way of an example, the recent event in the UK concerning MPs' expenses in general was largely driven by the *Daily Telegraph* and their almost daily revelations of expenses claims of MPs. It may be expected that because the media were driving this event and because the public perceived that Parliament was unable or unwilling to reform itself, negative perceptions would be increased.

Ultimately, it may be the case that every NPE, in one way or another, provides some opportunity for 'self-legitimation'; and thus for increasing positive perceptions of 'politics' most generally. That systems are not always effective, let alone seen to be effective, goes some way towards suggesting why it is that some events are so damaging. The next chapter investigates this issue in more depth, focusing on the impact of the MPs'

expenses scandal; an NPE where the system was seen as decisively *unable* to respond to the issue.

Chapter 7

Perceptions of Standards after 'MPs' Expenses': The Impact of the Local MP's Performance

In Chapter 6 it was shown that perceptions of standards *could* be made more positive following a single high-profile negative political event (NPE). This finding does much to assuage fears that a slow-drip of political 'scandals' will necessarily undermine perceived standards. Yet the findings from Chapter 6 arise from an analysis in which the NPE was a single 'random shock' to the system, and thus the conclusions only directly apply to those circumstances in which this "single 'random shock' model" holds. This model covers most forms of NPE¹. Yet this particular form of NPE by no means exhausts the totality of potential events. Some events occur over an extended period, having a longevity far outlasting the two-week window discussed in Chapter 6. The impact of such events may be importantly different.

This chapter focuses upon the 'MPs' expenses' scandal, and the interplay of this event with the general election of May 2010. The scandal, beginning in May 2009, related to the use of the Additional Costs Allowance (ACA) by a wide variety of MPs, who were found to have claimed extensively – either appropriately or inappropriately – which the public at large did not find reasonable. The event was largely driven by the *Daily Telegraph*, who had obtained the full, unedited, list of claims made by MPs for parliamentary allowances. Individual MPs were highlighted on the front page of the *Daily*

¹ The duration of an NPE is directly related to its severity, because it is necessary for citizens, politicians, or the media to continue to be interested in the NPE to keep it going. It is possible, though beyond the scope of this thesis to test, that NPEs are 'fractal', in the sense that they are self-similar and conform to a power-law distribution (Brown and Liebovitch, 2010). This hypothesis appears sensible, given large number of relatively small NPEs, and the diminishing numbers of increasingly large NPEs. If it is the case that NPEs are fractal, hypotheses could be made about the probability of larger NPEs, given observed smaller NPEs. However, the property of self-similarity does not ensure that NPEs are self-similar in their perceptual impacts.

Telegraph for their claims over a period of several months; from duck houses and moat cleaning, to claims for second homes despite living just a few miles from parliament (see also Allington and Peele, 2010; Fielding, 2010, p.102). This 'drip-feed' approach allowed the event to remain as essentially the most important story within the UK over several months, a tactic which enhanced the visibility of the event and its impact (Kelso, 2009, p.329). This made 'MPs' expenses' an event of a magnitude not seen for at least a generation in the UK, provoking a particularly vitriolic public reaction even by the standards of contemporary lay political discourse (for a discussion, see Kenny, 2009a; Kelso, 2009; Allington and Peele, 2010; see also Fielding, 2010; Levy, 2010). MPs were publicly heckled, berated, and denounced. At the time, fears were expressed that this event may be of such a magnitude that public trust would struggle to ever recover. As Kelso (2009) noted, parliament appeared to be 'on its knees'.

This event was, in its severity, somewhat exceptional. Moreover, unlike the Conway case discussed in Chapter 6, 'MPs' expenses' touched a great variety of MPs from across the country. This is both unusual and important, because it gives a personal connection between the person found doing wrong (the MP) and their constituent. As similar events played out in a huge number of constituencies, many citizens had a personal connection to those accused of wrongdoing (the local MP). Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, because 'MPs' expenses' relates to legislators (MPs) who are directly elected by their constituents, the event has further unexplored dimensions relating to the power of electoral competitions to restore public confidence. Indeed, the Conservative Party publicly called for a general election in the hope of stemming the tide of discontent and restoring some measure of public confidence (Kenny, 2009a, p.507). New brooms are said to sweep clean, yet it remains largely unresolved whether a similar process can cleanse the stain of such a high profile NPE, especially as the personnel did not always change.

This chapter focuses upon the impact of the 'MPs' expenses' event after the May 2010 general election, investigating whether – even after an election – the impact of 'MPs' expenses' can still be seen at the local level. Politically, this is an important question as it provides evidence about the extent to which actual performance by the local MP shaped the impact of the event.

7.1 The nature of the problem

As with all NPEs, there is an expectation that some perceptual changes will occur within citizens generally. These events provide new information, which allows previous perceptions to be 'updated' (Bartles, 1993, p.268). Theoretically, this updating process would take account of the importance of the information, the relevance of the information and the strength of the 'prior' perception. Information that is very important, and very relevant, will thus have the strongest impact. 'MPs' expenses' is thus a particularly good case to consider when analysing changes in perceptions of standards in response to a major event. The event was very important, through both its scope and severity, and is highly relevant for considerations of standards in public life. This is evidenced by a July 2009 BES/YouGov survey in which over 90% of respondents claimed to be 'very angry' about the NPE (cited in Allington and Peele, 2010, p.388). Moreover, those MPs who claimed inappropriately were engaging in actions which are antithesis of 'standards'.

The scholarly research dealing with changes in political perceptions following NPEs has been discussed in depth in Chapter 6. Yet, as was noted in the introduction of this chapter, the 'MPs' expenses' event was importantly different in severity, magnitude, and length when compared to many of the NPEs previously discussed. Very little scholarly

research exists to guide expectations when considering events of the magnitude of 'MPs' expenses'. Thus, our understanding of the perceptual impact of such events is at best highly limited. Indeed, even the findings from Chapter 6 may not be particularly useful for an event of the type and magnitude of 'MPs' expenses'. Indeed, almost everything about 'MPs' expenses' was on an unprecedented scale. This is particularly evident within Parliament itself. Fully 149 MPs quit Parliament before the 2010 general election²; more than have ever retired at a single election during the post-war era (Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010, p.30). Michael Martin became the first speaker of the House of Commons to resign for over 300 years (Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010, p.29). Moreover, Chapter 6 demonstrated that perceptions of standards in public life could become more positive following an NPE, and it was hypothesised that this was a result of a strong and timely response emerging from within the state's regulatory framework. These factors apply to a far smaller degree in the case of 'MPs' expenses', where one of the greatest cries from the public was that those in public life simply did not 'get it' (see Kenny, 2009b). However, whilst this may appear to suggest that perceptions will become more negative, this cannot be said with any degree of certainty.

Yet whilst, when compared to that noted in Chapter 6, the differences due to the magnitude of 'MPs' expenses' will be important, other – potentially crucial – differences can be noted. Indeed, the data used in this analysis come from after the general election following 'MPs' expenses'. Given the intimate connection between voters and the representative of their local constituency (see Mitchell, 2000, p.342), important connections may be seen. There may be a difference psychologically; an MP in the UK system is a personal representative, in the sense that in parliament your MP is your only direct representative³. Yet moreover, because an election theoretically provides the opportunity to vote out MPs who have performed badly, and re-elect those who have

² Note that this figure reflects all retirements, and does not specifically reflect the effect of 'MPs' expenses'. However, to the extent that 'MPs' expenses' was exceptional in its severity, it would be surprising if the number of resignations did not – in part – reflect the severity of 'expenses'.

³ In the UK, MPs traditionally do not reply to letters written by people who are not constituents, and non-constituents are unlikely to be seen at surgeries (see also Oliver, 1997, p.546).

performed acceptably, the election might serve to quell disaffection resulting from such an event. In this case, it remains somewhat of an open question whether the electoral competition itself would have 'cleansed' perceptions, even without a change of personnel. Yet such an effect may occur if the electoral process forced a more general consideration of the actions of a representative and the context within representatives operate. In this sense we can build a typology of the interaction between the election and the event:

- 1) The local MP was not implicated in the event, and was re-elected
- 2) The local MP was implicated in the event, and was re-elected
- 3) The local MP was not implicated in the event, by virtue of being elected after the event

The local MP being implicated in the event and not being re-elected, whilst being possible - and perhaps probable - is not considered here, since the (former) MP would no longer have a constituency to represent. These MPs have ceased to operate in public life, and have been replaced by (putatively) more important actors⁴.

Within the categories of this typology, further distinctions can be made. In the first category, a distinction can be made between those who claimed but did so appropriately, given the law and the rules of the ACA allowances, and those who did not claim anything, who *could not* have claimed inappropriately. This distinction may be especially

⁴ It may be objected that this introduces a source of heterogeneity into the class of newly elected MPs. It may, perhaps, be the case that those newly elected MPs who followed a particularly 'bad' MP (from the point of view of 'expenses') may be more negative because of this fact. However, it remains the hope of democratic systems that replacing the personnel can 'cleanse' the system. New brooms should sweep clean. To the extent that this operates, there ought to be no heterogeneity in the class of newly elected MPs. Where this is actually the case or not is an empirical question, but is not a topic considered in this chapter. However, future research could profitably consider this relationship.

important, given that the media not only focused condemnation upon those who had claimed large amounts, but also periodically praised those MPs who had claimed little or nothing (Kelso, 2009, p.335). In the second category, distinctions can be made on the grounds of the amount claimed inappropriately. If an MP accidentally claimed for the same cheap train fare twice, this might be perceived as a single instance of poor bookkeeping rather than low standards. If an MP claimed tens of thousands of pounds for a mortgage they did not have, this might be perceived as low standards rather than a clerical error. Thus, the typology can be expanded somewhat to reflect:

1a) The local MP was not implicated in the event, because they had not claimed anything under the ACA, and was re-elected

1b) The local MP was not implicated in the event, despite making claims under the ACA, and was re-elected

2a) The local MP was implicated in the event, though only for a small amount of money, and was re-elected

2b) The local MP was implicate in the event, for a large amount of money, and was re-elected

3) The local MP was not implicated in the event, by virtue of being elected after the event

To the extent that the particular behaviour of the local MP has any impact on average perceptions of standards within this event, differences should be seen between the types noted. Yet it may be objected that we should not expect the public to make such fine distinctions. Indeed, the political climate that gripped the country during the event was ruthlessly negative; and it may have been the case that all MPs were viewed in exactly

the same (negative) way. Even those who did not claim at all could be seen as guilty by association (Oliver, 1997, p.574). Thus, the NPE could become important for the heuristics often used by citizens to form political judgements. If this were the case, there would be no important effect visible by constituency. However, such a hypothesis is open to challenge in the case of MPs' expenses. Lau and Redlawsk (2001, p.968), in a detailed discussion of political heuristic use, note that (cognitively) able citizens evaluate highly relevant information with far more effort, and far more systematically, than they evaluate less relevant information. That the message was relevant has already been established; overwhelming numbers of people were both aware of the event, and responded to it. Moreover, because the discussion here concerns the *local* MP, citizens had access to disproportionate amounts of information about their specific MP; both from the local media, from the MP themselves through direct communication (see Allington and Peele, 2010), and from other people locally. Indeed, it is also plausible to suppose that greater attention would be paid to one's own MP when viewing national-level information. This suggests that we cannot *a priori* dismiss the notion that citizens, on average, responded to MPs' expenses in a relatively sophisticated way.

7.2 Substantive Background

As has been mentioned, relatively little extant literature is available to aid in forming hypotheses about the impact of the local MPs' involvement in the 'expenses' event and perceptions of standards in public life of that MPs' constituents. Much of the available literature relating to what has here been termed NPEs has been discussed in Chapter 6. In general, the survey of the literature provided in Chapter 6 noted that the perceptual affect of NPEs could vary. Positive effects, negative effects, and no effects have all been noted within the literature. Chapter 6 demonstrated that standards in public life could

become more positive following an NPE, but that this was probably related to how the NPE emerged and how the authorities responded to it. However, as had been noted, concerns about how directly applicable the literature is to this chapter's substantive problem remain; in particular because of the potential intervening effect of an election. However, because the objective here is to examine both the 'MPs' expenses' event and its interplay with an election simultaneously, some additional literature concerning elections and NPEs is relevant. This is discussed presently.

Instances of (proven and alleged) serious wrongdoing do not necessarily result in perceptions of legislators which are more negative than for those not involved in wrongdoing. Chang et al. (2010, p.199) show that for Italian national elections between 1948 and 1992, re-election was either significantly more likely (for the 1948 election) or the effect was statistically insignificant for those charged with serious wrongdoing. Only in the 1994 election, the last considered by the authors, is the probability of being re-elected significantly lower after being charged with a serious offence (Chang et al., 2010, p.197). Of course, voting in elections and perceptions of standards are two very different sorts of evaluation; yet the result remains relevant because each expresses some measure of positive or negative evaluation. We could imagine that should a person have a particularly negative perception of a candidate they would either vote for a different candidate, or not vote at all. If this is the case, voting carries some information about positive political perceptions more generally.

However, it may not be sensible to infer from these findings that we should expect an event such as 'MPs' expenses' to have a positive impact upon perceived standards, even after an election. Indeed, the negative effect for the 1994 Italian election is interpreted by the authors as a result of the major 'Clean Hands' event and the rise in media attention which accompanied it (Chang et al., 2010, p.206; Heywood, 1997, p.418-9). 'Clean Hands' (*Mani Pulite*) was the name given to a major judicial investigation of serious impropriety in Italian public life, resulting in the prosecution of numerous

politicians, including senior politicians and ministers (della Porta and Vannucci, 2007, p.843). In this sense, this scandal has much in common with 'MPs' expenses', insofar as it related to a great many deputies in the legislature, and was accompanied by a huge wave of media interest. Such a finding is important for suggesting that, even during an election some years after the initial emergence of a scandal, negative effects can be seen. Moreover, this finding is important as it connects the personal actions of specific legislators with perceptual consequences.

A specific effect related to the individual local member of the legislature is a finding that can be observed outside of major NPEs. Blais et al., (2003) demonstrate that in Canadian elections there is a specific effect for the incumbent representing several percent of the vote. Similarly, Wood and Norton (1992) demonstrate an effect attached to specific candidates, independent of other concerns. Again, these findings are not necessarily applicable to general evaluations of the political system, such as perceptions of standards in public life. Yet they do show that local people notice the performance of their local representative, and that this specific performance can have behavioural and perceptual consequences.

The 'House Banking scandal', concerning the use of a free overdraft facility for 'bounced' cheques by members of the US House of Representatives, is more directly analogous to 'MPs' expenses' (on the House Banking scandal, see Williams, 1995, p.92). This scandal undoubtedly caused some retirements from the House of Representatives before the 1992 election, though the specific number can be debated⁵. Some of these retirements may have been driven by a belief that the specific member of congress would lose, if they stood for re-election. Indeed, Groseclose and Krehbiel (1994, p.94) estimate that this belief would have been true for approximately 14 of the 53 retirees in total. In terms of the direct *perceptual* consequences – over and above related voting choice data –

⁵ Williams (1995, p.92) claimed that as many as 43 Representatives retired because of the scandal, whilst a more-sophisticated analysis by Groseclose and Krehbiel (1994, p.92) suggests a much smaller figure of approximately 5. The discrepancy is primarily driven by the latter's attempt to focus upon the number of retirements observed minus the number that would have been expected, given other known factors.

Chanley et al. (2000, p.251) estimate that the scandal reduced average trust in government by approximately four percent, although this finding's long-term stability is not evaluated.

There thus remains reason to believe that the 'MPs' expenses' NPE would have an important impact, up to and including the following election. Yet we are still left with very little information about how these effects look after an election. Does it remain the case that an MP who was heavily involved in the event remains 'tainted' even after the election? Or do elections offer some 'cleansing'?

7.3 Data and Variables

The data used here come from Survey 4, described in the Introduction, conducted at the end of 2010 and beginning of 2011. This data was collected seven months after the previous general election, and 19 months after the beginning of 'MPs' expenses'. Whilst this means a significant amount of time had elapsed between the event under question and the data collection, the extant literature discussed above – and in particular the case of the 1994 Italian election, after the scandal of 1992 – suggests that an event of this magnitude should still be visible after this amount of time (see Chang et al., 2010). This data contains the same battery of questions concerning 'standards in public life' that was analysed in Chapter 3, and thus the general index of 'perceived standards' discussed in Chapter 3⁶ will be used as the dependent variable.

This chapter focuses upon use of the Additional Costs Allowance (ACA) by MPs, and the wrongdoing (regardless of *legality*) noted in the ACA Review by Sir Thomas Legg (2010).

⁶ To reiterate, this variable is a composite measure of five items probing: confidence that the authorities will punish those caught doing wrong, confidence in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life, a rating of how standards compare to a few years ago, confidence in the authorities to uphold standards, and an overall rating of standards. This variable has a range of 20.

This report discussed, per MP, spending under the ACA. The report investigated the period 2004-5 to 2008-9. This report also specified how much had been claimed inappropriately, which was required to be repaid⁷. This data is available for all MPs who had been elected prior to 2009⁸. These figures provide the raw data for the operationalisation of the typology discussed earlier in this chapter. This typology is operationalised as a series of unordered categories. This allows a discussion of the impact of each category, relative to a reference category, without requiring an assumption of ordinal categories.

Respondents are allocated to categories of the typology to reflect the involvement of their MP. This typology distinguishes (with number of respondents whose MPs are of this type in brackets): those MPs who did not claim anything (90), those who claimed but not inappropriately (483), those who claimed and were asked to repay less than £1000 (286), those who claimed and were asked to repay more than £1000 (356), and those MPs who were newly elected in 2010 (676). Of course, the decision to separate those who were asked to repay more than £1000 and those asked to repay less than £1000 is arbitrary. However, the hope is to give some indication of the seriousness of the infraction whilst providing a sufficient number of cases in each category for a robust analysis⁹.

It is expected that those respondents who live in constituencies of MPs who had not claimed inappropriately would have relatively high perception of standards. Thus, it may

⁷ Note that the figures used within this report take account of successful appeals against Sir Thomas's judgements, to the extent that they are reported in the ACA review, as amended (2010).

⁸ In practice, the overwhelming majority of MPs who were elected prior to 2009 were elected at or before the 2005 General Election. Thus, for the vast majority of MPs, the period under which all MP's expenses were evaluated is thus roughly consistent, regardless of how 'new' the MP is to parliament.

⁹ Because of the nature of the relationships between the categories of the typology, it is not helpful to analyse the problem simultaneously with the original (un-categorised) repayment values. This is because of the existence of 'structural', and often non-meaningful, zeroes in the analysis. MPs who had never made a claim cannot have a repayment value higher than zero. Similarly, a newly elected MP has a non-meaningful repayment value of zero. Because of this, the results from the analysis would be less helpful than an analysis of un-ordered categories that avoids the problems of structural zeroes.

be expected that those respondents who live in constituencies where the local MP never claimed under the ACA or was newly elected, both groups who by necessity could not have claimed inappropriately, would have relatively high perceptions of standards. It would also be expected that those people who live in constituencies in which the local MP did claim under the ACA, but did so entirely appropriately, would have relatively high perceptions of standards. Indeed, because MPs who did claim, but did so appropriately, have proven themselves capable of adhering to standards, it may be the case that their constituents have *higher* perceptions of standards. Respondents living in constituencies in which the local MP claimed inappropriately would be expected to be relatively negative, and this effect would be expected to be most severe for those who claimed more than £1000 inappropriately.

Because the distinctions discussed relate voters to MPs, it is important to control for potential unrelated differences in perceptions of standards of citizens. This is especially important given that constituencies are geographical boundaries as well as political. This geographical factor creates some measure of ‘clustering’¹⁰. People who live in the same constituency are (*ceteris paribus*) more similar to each other than people in other

¹⁰ Occasionally within the extant literature, this problem is tackled by the use of ‘Huber-White’ cluster robust regression (see Singh et al., 2011). However, such a correction is only necessary in situations where an unacceptably high Intra-Class Correlation (ICC) exists (on the concept and ramifications of ICCs, see Kreft and de Leeuw, 1998). The impact of the ICC is determined both by the magnitude of the ICC and the size of the groups in which it is found; in both cases, larger values are more problematic. Kreft and de Leeuw (1998, p.10) suggest that an ICC of 0.20 in groups of size 10, would lead to significantly underestimated p-values. Thus, an apparent p-value of 0.05 would actually (after correction) be indicative of $p < 0.28$. The average group size in the data analysed here is 9.72, and the ICC can sensibly be considered 0.05. This is based upon the predictive power of the clusters on the dependent variable, given the independents and controls used within the analysis, minus the predictive power of random clusters on the dependent variable. Such controls are particularly necessary here. A random formation of 202 clusters drawn from a uniform distribution produced an ICC of 0.123. That is to say the observed value of the ICC here, even if the true connection is 0, could be at least as high as 0.123. Thus, subtracting this from the observed ICC provides the amount of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the substantively important clustering alone. This would mean that – at very most – p-values should be around twice the size they are in the model presented here. As the p-values of the main substantive effect in this analysis are all < 0.001 , such a correction would not alter the interpretation of the coefficients, nor the claim that they are highly significant. Whilst we can think of p-values being half the size they should be as a ‘worst case’, it is not immediately apparent what the distribution is of likely p-value inflations. For this reason, the p-values presented will be the analytically derived ‘uncorrected’ p-values. These do represent a ‘best case’ from the point of view of the ICC inflation; though have the advantage of representing the actual data more accurately. Without further information about the likely degree of p-value inflations, this appears a sensible choice.

constituencies (Pattie and Johnston, 2000; Johnston et al., 2007). To this extent, voters within a constituency may not be strictly comparable with voters in other constituencies. Thus, it is important to attempt to control for variables that might indicate pre-existing differences in perceptions of standards, but which could not also have been caused by the main independent variable of interest. Because Survey 4 was designed as a monitoring survey, relatively few variables are available which fulfil this condition. Thus, it is impossible to control for potentially useful variables such as urban/rural differences in the respondent's location, education, or housing tenure. Following the control variables used by Johnson et al. (2007) when investigating geographic effects, controls will be introduced for age, sex, class, working status, and party support. Age is coded as raw (unbounded) age, and sex is a male/female dichotomy. Class categories respondents in the usual way: A, B, C1, C2, D, and E. Class is treated as an ordered categorical variable. Working status classifies respondents as either: working full time, working part time, not working though actively looking for work, not working and not looking for work, retired, or in full-time education. Because not all of these categories cannot be sensibly ordered against each other, these will be treated as nominal categories. Finally, as 'average' party support varies by constituency, it may be an important source of heterogeneity between people in different constituencies; party support will thus be controlled for. This is operationalised as three dichotomies probing whether respondents would consider voting for the Conservatives, Labour, or the Liberal Democrats at a general election. Respondents could select none, one, or more of these parties. This is thus a weaker display of support than being a member of a party, or naming a single party as the party for which you are most likely to vote. However, this has the advantage of giving a somewhat more detailed picture for those people who are most inclined to vote for one party, but are not hostile to others¹¹.

¹¹ Whilst these party support variables have a significant effect upon perceptions of standards in the model presented in Table 7.1, and are theoretically important, the main conclusions of the model are substantively identical regardless of whether they are included.

7.4 Results

The results of linear regression analysing the impact of the categories of the hypothesised typology upon perceptions of standards in public life are presented in Table 7.1. As the typology variable takes the form of a comparison across five un-ordered categories, the effects of four of the categories are analysed as a mean-comparison against a single reference category. For clarity, each of these categories are colour coded in blue, with each category representing a separate comparison against the same reference category. This colour coding is not repeated for similarly compared control variables. Model 1 represents the 'base' model, showing only the effect of the controls upon the dependent variable.

Model 2 tests the typology discussed above. This shows strong, significant, and negative effects for all categories compared to those who claimed nothing under the ACA between 2004-5 and 2008-9. Here, few differences can be seen between the other categories. Having a newly elected MP has the least negative effect, when compared to having an MP who made no claims. However, substantively, the magnitude of this effect is almost indistinguishable from having an MP who was asked to repay more than £1000. Indeed, the only substantively and statistically significant distinction is between constituents of MPs who claimed nothing, and all others. This finding also provides clear evidence against the initial expectations discussed in this chapter.

Table 7.1 – Impact of Local MPs’ ‘Expenses’ Involvement upon Perceptions of Standards in Public Life

	(1)	(2)
Intercept	15.39 *** (0.53)	16.62 *** (0.66)
Claim, no repay (ref. cat: no claim)		-1.65 *** (0.45)
Repay < £1000 (ref. cat: no claim)		-1.78 *** (0.48)
Repay > £1000 (ref. cat: no claim)		-1.61 *** (0.47)
Newly elected MP (ref. cat: no claim)		-1.59 *** (0.44)
Sex	-0.18 (0.19)	-0.15 (0.19)
Class	-0.24 *** (0.07)	-0.23 ** (0.07)
Age	-0.02 * (0.01)	-0.01† (0.01)
Part-time	0.43 (0.31)	0.42 (0.32)
Not working, looking	0.38 (0.42)	0.35 (0.43)
Not working, not looking	0.01 (0.34)	0.15 (0.35)
Retired	0.35 (0.33)	0.20 (0.33)
Full-time education	1.24 ** (0.47)	1.12 * (0.5)
Conservative	1.25 *** (0.22)	1.30 *** (0.23)
Lib Dem	1.13 *** (0.29)	1.15 *** (0.29)
Labour	0.78 *** (0.19)	0.68 *** (0.19)
<i>n</i>	1833	1763
Adjusted R ²	0.05	0.05

Note: Entries show un-standardised coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Significance codes: † = $p < 0.1$, * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$.

Finally, the gap between the event and the data collection allow for a mass of other, potentially relevant factors to impact upon citizens’ perceptions of standards in a way

that cannot be controlled with the data available. In particular, the election itself and the coalition formation that followed may be a source of resentment. This is especially so for those people who supported the Liberal Democrats who, as the junior partner in the coalition, moved a significant distance from their manifesto in the coalition agreement. This is not a serious issue for two main reasons. Firstly, the analysis is conducted upon citizens *qua* constituents, and thus uses independent variables that tap the actions of the local MP. Assuming that Liberal Democrats were not systematically more likely to be involved with the event, the impact of the coalition agreement negotiations should not bias the result. Secondly, and reported in Appendix B.8, the analysis is repeated excluding Liberal Democrat supporters. The results are not substantively different.

7.5 Discussion

The results presented allow for a deeper understanding of the typology discussed above. In terms of the typology, types 1b – 3 had essentially the same impact. This can be interpreted as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ news. Positively, it demonstrates that the actions of some MPs have not caused a collapse in perceived standards among their constituents. The tide of furious anger expressed against some MPs – the ‘sinners’, as the media portrayed them (Kelso, 2009) – has not endured. Yet, less positively, this analysis shows that in general, little MPs did concerning upholding standards mattered to their constituents. Indeed, the difference between using an allowance appropriately in accordance with all formal rules and misusing an allowance should be important. More worrying, perhaps, is the (comparatively) large positive effect of making no claim under the ACA whatsoever. These were the ‘saints’ heralded in the media, supposedly representing good value for their constituents (Kelso, 2009, p.335). Hood (1995) called this ‘the politics of feasting and fasting’; citizens do not appear to want to watch their

leaders 'feast' on public funds. Yet, as Kelso (2009, p.335) notes, parliamentary allowances are essential for the proper performance of parliamentary duties for the majority of MPs. An allowance claim is not inherently bad; it ought not to represent low standards. There remains a risk that these perceptions could undermine the ability of those without large personal fortunes to enter politics (cf. Hood, 1995, p.193)¹². Undoubtedly, this is a serious concern for any democracy that desires to see the job of legislator open to anyone.

A similar duality of interpretations is possible for the insignificance of differences in perceived standards between constituents of new MPs and constituents of MPs who had been elected prior to 2010. Positively, it is not the case that that everyone who was in parliament during the 'MPs' expenses' event has been discredited in standards-terms. It is not the case that parliament can only recover its authority through systematically replacing all MPs from pre-2010 cohorts. Yet, negatively, it remains possible that perceptions have shifted such that it is now the case that citizens view *all* MPs negatively by default. In such a scenario, only those who go 'above and beyond' can personally have a positive impact upon their constituents' perceptions.

Politically, it is interesting that the amount repaid (either more than or less than £1000) had no significant effect upon perceived standards at the constituency level. In the immediate aftermath of 'MPs' expenses' there appeared to be a perception within the main parties' leadership that forcing their MPs to quickly announce their wrongdoing and pay back large amounts of money would stem the tide of negativity (Kenny, 2009a, p.507). This 'self-implication' did not harm perceptions, yet it did not help restore any measure of confidence in the probity of public life, at least at the constituency level. Of course, it may be the case that it *did* help preserve perceptions of standards across the citizenry as a whole, independent of constituency. One of the principle arguments

¹² Indeed, in the wake of 'MPs' expenses' some MPs explicitly made reference to this issue. Allington and Peele (2010, pp.37-8) cite Linda Walther, the Labour member of Stourbridge, who 'argued that without allowances a working class person such as herself "could not consider" being an MP'.

against politicians in the aftermath of the crisis is that they simply did not 'get it' (Kenny, 2009b). A strong response might have been necessary; though this analysis provides no evidence for this suggestion.

In this analysis, the *specific* (per MP) effect of 'MPs' expenses' remains conspicuous by its absence. The effect of wrongfully claiming more than £1000 is statistically indistinguishable from the effect of claiming entirely appropriately. This is potentially positive, insofar as it may show some measure of robustness from citizens to the negative effects of NPEs resulting from the actions of their local MP. This, at least, is important given that local representatives are by far more trusted and respected than politicians in general (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995, pp.43-45). It may be the case that this store of faith in the local representative could be important in times where faith in the political class is undermined. None of this, of course, suggests that 'MPs' expenses' itself was unimportant for political perceptions at the time. However, the fact that a *specific* effect of wrongdoing is absent after such a short period – without always requiring a change of personnel – is positive. Indeed, given the close connections between citizens and their MPs (see fn.3 of this chapter), this is arguably more helpful than seeing a smaller general (all MPs) effect, but larger specific effect.

The expectations of this chapter have not been fully borne out by the empirical results. Yet, in general, the *general* negative effect related to 'MPs' expenses' should not be a surprise, given what has been noted in Chapter 6. In Chapter 6, it was argued that the positive effect was a result of the event being initiated by the official regulatory framework. Thus, the event provided the opportunity for the political system as a whole to engage in 'self-legitimation', showing that the system can respond to lapses in standards, and indeed that it can uncover those lapses (for a theoretical discussion, see Markovitz and Silverstein, 1988, pp.2-3). As 'MPs' expenses' was initiated and driven by the media, no positive information about the regulatory system was contained in the event.

Indeed, the absence of pre-emptive or ameliorative action on the part of the regulatory system provides the 'expenses' event with a strongly negative focus.

Ultimately, the lasting legacy of 'MPs' expenses' may well be a restriction in the extent of the allowances that are available to new MPs, and more transparency (Kelly, 2009, p.8). The latter is potentially politically helpful (Warren, 2006; Kelly, 2009, p.8), although, as has been noted, the former is not.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: Standards in Public Life

This thesis began with a general objective, to analyse citizens' perceptions of standards in public life; to understand why such citizen perceptions may matter for political systems, and to begin to understand why citizens come to have the perceptions they do. As was discussed in the introduction, the focus upon standards in public life places this thesis within the context of analysing procedural questions, rather than probing the impact of political outputs more directly. This focus allows the thesis to comment on an area of research that has received relatively little attention hitherto. This chapter concludes the thesis by summarising the individual findings, and more generally discussing the implications of the findings of the thesis as a whole. The implications are both academic and practical. Thus, this concluding chapter also discusses how the findings could be useful within the realm of public policy. The conclusion also discusses potentially fruitful avenues for future research in this area. In doing so, this conclusion aims to go some way towards elucidating the 'gaps' in present academic knowledge within this field of substantive inquiry.

8.1 The Findings of This Study: Academic Importance

This thesis has taken on the task of investigating perceptions of standards in public life. In doing so, it has addressed both conceptual and empirical questions about 'standards'.

This task was handled in two parts. The general findings of each part are elaborated below.

8.1.1 Part 1

Part 1 considered broad questions of conceptualisation, measurement and structure. Part 1 therefore laid the foundations for the empirical analyses that followed in Part 2. Yet, the findings of Part 1 have relevance beyond this thesis alone. Indeed, the findings of Part 1 are useful for considering more general questions about the meaning and structure of citizens' political beliefs.

Within the thesis, perceptions of standards in public life, along with citizens' political trust and perceptions of the performance of key political actors, have been conceptualised as providing information about complementary aspects of citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of political systems. Such a conceptualisation rests on the notion that citizens' beliefs matter – to any degree – for discussions of political legitimacy. The contention that citizens' beliefs *do* matter in this way is by no means uncontested, yet this thesis has sought to make a case for this proposition. In doing so, an argument has been made that takes the inherently contextual nature of definitions seriously (on contextual definitions, see Dan-Cohen, 2001). Thus, the analysis in Chapter 2 did not consider whether a 'universal' definition of political legitimacy could be uncovered; instead, it aimed to re-focus the debate upon the question of what political legitimacy means in a contemporary democracy. Given that democratic legitimacy rests upon the role of citizens in the system, a measure of citizen satisfaction with how the system is *actually* perceived should be important. By considering the debate in this way, the importance of citizens' beliefs for our understanding of legitimacy becomes more apparent.

Within the context of the conceptualisation of political legitimacy, perceptions of standards are especially important, since these perceptions tap how citizens feel about the *process* of governing. If the political process itself is not open or not fair, how can citizens approach any element of the system with the assumption that it is operating in of good faith? Of course, perceptions of standards are not the only relevant citizen beliefs for legitimacy, nor are they the only beliefs that tap process perceptions. Indeed, political trust and perceptions of the performance of key political actors were also conceptualised as relevant for legitimacy in Chapter 2. Yet perceptions of standards are putatively important by virtue of their general nature, concerning the whole of public life.

Yet, whilst a conceptual argument allows for a theoretical discussion of what makes perceptions of standards distinct to other beliefs about government, a conceptual argument does not provide – in and of itself – any assurances that citizens actually conceive of these beliefs as distinct. Thus, it cannot immediately be assumed that citizens do have a unified perception of standards in public life that is distinct from other beliefs. Indeed, precisely because perceptions of standards, political trust, and perceptions of the performance of key political actors all relate to legitimacy, it may be the case that all are seen as part of a single unified belief about the legitimacy of political systems. Chapter 3 investigated this issue, and found that whilst it is the case that the beliefs considered here are related, they cannot be plausibly thought of as part of a single over-arching perception. It appears that citizens do have a unified and suitably distinct perception of standards in public life, in the same way as they have unified, but distinct, beliefs about political trust and the process performance of legislators. These findings allowed for the construction of the measures used within this study.

Knowing that citizens have beliefs that are sufficiently distinct to justify their operationalisation as separate measures does not, however, provide any information about the relations between these beliefs. It is unknown, for example, whether citizens' perceptions of standards in public life are caused by their political trust, say, or vice-

versa. Theoretically, if citizens are ‘cognitive misers’ they may (on average) make use of heuristics to infer beliefs in one area from their beliefs in another (on the concept and implications of the theory of citizens as cognitive misers, see for example Orbell and Dawes, 1991; on political heuristic use see Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). For example, citizens may decide whether they trust a given set of people in public life, and then use this trust to condition their beliefs about standards. Conversely, it is possible that citizens perceive a level of adherence to standards by those in public life, and this determines whether they can trust those in public life. Somewhat similar is the question of whether perceived standards, as a perception very general in its reference, are best thought of as subsequent or prior to perceptions that are more specific. Thus, it is unknown whether perceptions of standards are prior to perceptions of the ‘process performance’ of MPs, or vice-versa. Whilst some previous theory exists in this regard, the rarity of fully testing competing models means that we cannot assume (*a priori*) that one of these hypotheses is more helpful than the other. Chapter 4 analysed the hypothesised connections of the rivalling models. The empirical results strongly suggest that perceptions of standards in public life are the prior concern; thus, it is analytically most useful to consider trust and perceptions of the process performance of MPs as caused by citizens’ perceptions of standards.

Whilst this structure could not have been known before analysis, it helps us to better understand the connections between perceived standards and trust. Simulation studies have shown that whenever governments seriously violated what has here been called standards¹, trust would be reduced significantly (Phelan, 2006). Moreover, as

¹ Phelan (2006) is specifically concerned with ‘government betrayal’, in the sense of the government confiscating the economic output of the citizenry, for the benefit of the governors. Since this would inherently violate standards, as defined here, the conclusions hold for all sufficiently serious violations of standards. Moreover, they hold for all instances of suitably poor process performance. Yet this conclusion also holds, more weakly, for more minor violations of standards. Since a more minor violation of standards is procedurally negative, the consequences for trust are (*mutatis mutandis*) very similar to those seen in the case of a more severe violation. This assumes that any violation of standards has a non-zero cost for a significant section of the population. Whilst some have attempted to suggest that violations of standards are economically efficient

governments who violate standards can be assumed to be systematically more likely to do so in the future, violations of standards undermine the rational basis for high degrees of trust, at least for a given time period (Phelan, 2006, p.42). Where standards are maximally low, trust also is perpetually at the maximally low level (Phelan, 2006, p.32-3). Such findings allow the interpretation that perceived standards are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for trust.

Refocusing the 'citizen attitudes' debate away from trust as the independent variable² also helpfully allows us to probe the attitudes of those who systematically do not trust political actors. Indeed, as was mentioned in Chapter 4, there exists a tradition, especially associated with Thomas Jefferson, that governments should not be trusted (Nye, 1997, p.3; Orren, 1997, p.78). This is not merely an ideology borne out of pathological hatred for the state, political actors, and government (though those who have such hatred no doubt share an underlying hostility). Indeed, in February 2011, the Deputy Prime Minister of the United Kingdom said:

I need to say this - you shouldn't trust any government, actually including this one. You should not trust government - full stop. The natural inclination of government is to hoard power and information; to accrue power to itself in the name of the public good (Nick Clegg, cited in Porter, 2011).

People who remain steadfastly distrustful of politicians for philosophical reasons are not necessarily indicating that they are profoundly at odds with the system; they do not necessarily oppose the system. Yet trust-focused analyses fail to distinguish between such principled objections on the one hand, and on the other the lamentations of those who experience deep disaffection with the political system. In this respect, a move to a more process-orientated analysis would be helpful; we can assume that citizens always

(the principle behind this is discussed in Salinas-Jiménez and Salinas-Jiménez, 2007), this argument has found little support empirically (see for example Djankov et al, 2002; Salinas-Jiménez and Salinas-Jiménez, 2007). Thus, there remain at least some negative consequences.

² The conceptualisation of political trust as the independent variable is, indeed, common within the academic literature (see, for example, Hetherington, 1998; Hetherington, 1999; Levi and Stoker, 2000, p.501; Pharr, 2000; Citrin and Luks, 2001, p.21; Mishler and Rose, 2005, p.1063).

want better process performance, even if we cannot assume they want to trust more. Yet it is not the case that all ways of measuring process performance are equally useful for analyses of citizens' beliefs about government. Thus, a focus upon perceived corruption may make the debate too 'narrow'. As was noted in Chapter 2, it is possible not to be corrupt (formally), whilst still acting in a way that violates standards. In this respect, 'Quality of Government' is a useful measure (on Quality of Government generally, see Rothstein and Teorell, 2008). Indeed, this thesis should add some weight behind the concept. Yet - similarly to many other related concepts - this measure is less broad than perceptions of standards. If we wish to investigate in broad terms how citizens see the political system, a broader measure can be more useful.

8.1.2 Part 2

The findings of Part 1 provide a base upon which future analyses can be built. Once it is known that perceptions of standards are important, that they can be measured, and that they are not best viewed as being caused by trust or perceptions of the 'process performance' of MPs, a question which naturally follows is what can plausibly be thought of as causing perceptions of standards. Part 2 investigated three aspects of political 'conditions': partisan co-alignment (Chapter 5), the 'scandal' concerning Derek Conway's use of parliamentary expenses to employ his son to do essentially no work (Chapter 6), and the MPs' expenses scandal (Chapter 7).

Partisan co-alignment was defined in this thesis as the congruence between the partisan identity ('alignment') of a citizen and relevant governors. The topic of how to consider which governors are relevant was considered in Chapter 5 (in general, relevant governors are those with legislative competencies). The role of partisan co-alignment is especially important for conceptualisations of perceptions of standards that see these perceptions as reflecting upon public life as a whole. To the extent that perceptions of

standards in public life tell us something about process performance of public life in the widest sense of the word, it should not be determined simply by partisan co-alignment. Whilst it was found that partisan co-alignment did have a noticeable effect, insofar as it was moderately large and highly significant, perceived standards cannot be regarded as reflecting solely, or even mainly, partisan co-alignment. This finding implies that our measure of perceptions of standards is a valid tool for gauging perceived process performance of, in this case, contemporary British democracy³.

'Negative political events', here taken to be the general class of which scandals, blunders, and policy failures are elements, have often been cited as a potential cause of citizens' negative political beliefs. Here, two 'events' were considered, Derek Conway's use of his parliamentary expenses, and the more general 'MPs' expenses' event. These two events are in some ways similar; indeed, it is plausible – with hindsight – to take the 'Conway' case as the opening stage of the more general MPs' expenses. Yet, despite the connections between these events, some crucial differences exist. Whilst the 'Conway' event was major news at the time, it applied only to a single MP and made few headlines a couple of weeks after emerging. MPs' expenses dominated political media coverage for months, and concerned a massive number of MPs. Another important difference between these events was the manner in which they emerged. Derek Conway's misbehaviour was uncovered within the official regulatory system, and widely reported as such. 'MPs' expenses' was driven by the *Daily Telegraph*'s investigations.

Because of the differences noted, it should not be surprising that the 'Conway' case had a different impact to 'MPs' expenses' on perceptions of standards in public life. Whilst the effect of 'MPs' expenses' upon perceptions of standards was *not* found to be very large, there existed a notable negative effect even after a period of 19 months. More problematically, such negative consequences applied to all MPs, with the sole exception of those MPs who had never claimed under the Additional Costs Allowance, despite the

³ It may be suspected that a similar measure would be equally valid in other political systems, but definitive statements to that effect require, of course, independent empirical assessment.

opportunity to have done so. Such negative effects contrast with the findings from Chapter 6 concerning Derek Conway. Indeed, in contrast to what might be expected, this analysis found a small, but significantly *positive* effect from the negative political event. This positive effect, it was hypothesised, connected to the manner in which the event came about, i.e., in a way that vindicated official channels of oversight and control: the event provided an opportunity for the system to show itself as being effective.

These findings are not only helpful for considering the question of the causes of perceptions of standards. They are also helpful for considering the utility of the measure 'perceptions of standards'. The effects that we see in Part 2 clearly show that citizens' perceptions of standards respond to events in public life that reflect upon the process side of democracy; citizens are clearly 'updating' their beliefs in response to new information. However, because this is only a single piece of new information, it cannot radically shift perceptions of standards. This is suggestive of perceptions of standards tracking something general that citizens view in a reasonably considered way. If such new information about a single aspect of 'public life' (such as parliament) did radically alter perceptions, this would be indicative of perceived standards tracking much more transient and specific perceptions.

8.2 The Findings of This Study: What We May Have Missed

As was mentioned in the introduction, this thesis speaks to questions about the process of governing, as distinct from political outputs. This focus has allowed a detailed consideration of how adherence to the 'rules of the game' by those in public life can matter for the political legitimacy of political regimes. Moreover, it has served to provide some counterweight to the often-investigated 'output' side of politics. This has served to provide the thesis with a more general academic importance. Yet this choice of focus

also means that the consequences of political outputs have not been investigated in the thesis. Somewhat similarly, this thesis has not been able to investigate the impact of actual adherence to standards upon perceptions of standards, except in the case of two high-profile cases relating to parliamentarians. Finally, this thesis has not investigated the behavioural consequences of perceptions of standards in public specifically, or perceptions of the process performance of public life more generally. These three areas are discussed below as potentially fruitful avenues for future research.

Political outputs, in the sense of economic growth, healthcare provision, and education, etc. are of obvious importance when evaluating democratic political systems. Indeed, under the Hobbesian view (see Hobbes, 1651), politics itself is created to allow such political outputs by solving the collective action problem. It would therefore be surprising if citizens' perceptions did not also respond (at least in some way) to the objective outputs from their political systems. As was noted in Chapter 5, conventional wisdom holds that games are more fun when you are winning; why would it *not* be the case that seeing desired outputs delivered has a positive impact upon beliefs about government? Certainly, this line of thinking has been influential in the 'political output' literature. For example, Downs (1957, p.49) discusses political preferences in terms of a utility calculation based on 'the utility income from Government activity'. Yet investigations into the impact of political outcomes upon beliefs about government have not provided empirical justifications for such a strong view. Thus, Carman's (2010) investigation into the petitioning process in Scotland revealed that whilst process perceptions had a large and significant effect upon political trust, actual outcome evaluations had an insignificant effect; as he put it, 'the process is the reality' (Carman, 2010, p.731). Of course, the surprising *lack* of importance of political outcomes has been observed elsewhere too. For example, empirical results have suggested that political beliefs *cause* perceptions of the economy (Evans and Andersen, 2006; van der Eijk et al., 2007; Evans and Pickup, 2010). Such findings suggest that the substantive impact on my findings of ignoring political outputs may be substantially less important than might be assumed. Yet, it

would be wrong to disregard all political outputs, even though those (putatively important) outputs discussed here appear to have no important impact upon citizen beliefs. This suggests that considering the role of political outputs in shaping citizen beliefs is a potentially fruitful avenue for investigation.

An area that has not been fully investigated in this thesis is the relationship between citizens' perceptions of standards in public life and actual instances of violations of standards. This is a question of how citizen beliefs about procedural aspects of governance respond to actual 'process performance'. Whilst this thesis has looked in detail at the impact of two particularly high-profile lapses in standards (the Conway case, discussed in Chapter 6, and 'MPs' expenses', discussed in Chapter 7), it has not been possible to investigate the wealth of low-profile day-to-day violations of standards in public life. It may be hypothesised that an individual who has personal experience of unfair processes in public life would have significantly more negative beliefs about the whole of public life. In this sense, we may expect that even a single encounter of poor process performance by a single public official may be generalised to the entire class of those working in public life. Such an expectation may appear reasonable, but as yet is untested. On the other hand, we cannot disregard the possibility of negative views of standards that are not informed by any concrete experience, but that reflect a pathological hatred of the state, political actors, and government. The origins of such beliefs are equally in need of further empirical scrutiny.

Finally, the behavioural consequences of perceptions of standards in particular, and perceived process performance in general, have not been investigated here.

Hetherington (1999, p.311) notes that political trust has consistently been shown to have no substantively important impact upon political participation (see also Citrin, 1974, p.983). Because, as shown in Chapter 4, perceptions of standards are an antecedent to political trust, it may be assumed that this relationship would hold for perceptions of standards too. Indeed, because political trust may hold the status of an

intervening variable, the direct effect of trust on a number of behavioural consequences may be less informative than a consideration of the total effect of perceptions of the process performance of those in public life. However, political trust has been shown to have consistent and, indeed, strong behavioural consequences upon taxpaying (see, for example, Scholz and Lubell, 1998). Yet, similarly, we may doubt whether the 'trust – taxpaying' relationship accounts for the whole of the effect of citizens' beliefs about government upon taxpaying. Rothstein (2000) recalls a conversation with a senior official from Russia's tax authority. The official claimed that, at that time, only 26% of taxes owed to the government were collected; an effect, the official argued, caused by poor perceptions of the process of tax collection (Rothstein, 2000, pp.477-478). Effectively, citizens could not have confidence that 'standards' would be adhered to, and thus felt that paying taxes was a futile exercise. In such a situation, the direct effect of trust upon taxpaying would likely be smaller than the total effect of officials' process performance upon taxpaying. There is thus room for the large effects of beliefs about government upon taxpaying seen hitherto to actually be even larger than estimated in previous analyses. Again, this is a potentially fruitful avenue for future research.

8.3 The Findings of This Study: Political Importance

The fact that not every fruitful avenue for research could be explored within this thesis does not mean that the findings are of no practical benefit. Indeed, the findings of this thesis also have a practical relevance for political questions of maintaining perceived standards. In the following section, a discussion is provided concerning the practical application of the findings within this thesis, from the perspective of wanting to see perceptions of standards improve. Of course, the desirability of standards being perceived as high is somewhat dependent upon the actual process performance of those

working in public life. In situations in which process performance is poor, it may be desirable for standards to be perceived as low as well. However, here it is assumed that the process performance of those in public life in contemporary Britain is not sufficiently poor to raise these concerns. Three practical implications of the findings of this thesis are considered.

An important claim within Chapter 2 was that empirical conceptions of legitimacy were at stake in discussions of perceptions of standards. When appropriate standards are not adhered to, public life itself is injured. This account brings standards to the heart of the discussion of not only public ethics, but also general discussions about democratic legitimacy (see esp. Warren, 2006). The conclusion that perceived standards matter for legitimacy is strengthened by the analysis in Chapter 5, which demonstrated that perceived standards could not be written off merely as a function of seeing your preferred party in control of the national executive, or seeing your preferred party hold the local legislative seat. There is much more to perceived standards than only partisan co-alignment. Such conclusions justify a far stronger focus upon standards generally within political regulatory frameworks. Standards really matter, and should be treated accordingly. Taking standards seriously is in part about government making a public commitment to upholding standards. This can take many forms. Some countries have statutory bodies tasked with ensuring high 'standards'⁴. In the UK, the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) is the main body tasked with designing institutional arrangements to ensure high standards of conduct, with specific regulatory functions handled by a range of other bodies. In the US, the US Government Accountability Office fulfils a similar role, though has a more direct focus upon financial accountability⁵. Moreover, in many countries Ombudsmen are charged with ensuring acceptable standards are adhered to.

⁴ Although, it should be noted, the specific bundle of standards may not be defined formally in the same way as 'standards' has been conceptualised here

⁵ See <http://www.gao.gov/about/index.html>

Formal regulation may help to ensure government spending is accountable, or to ensure that public servants are open and honest. In this sense, the regulation is useful. Yet this regulation seldom focuses upon explaining to the public the justifications for the institutional arrangements that exist. However, without doing so, even appropriate political arrangements can cause beliefs about government to become more hostile. The analysis in Chapter 7 concerning the Additional Costs Allowance (ACA) demonstrates an example of this problem. The ACA was devised as a means to allow those MPs who were not privately wealthy to be able to conduct parliamentary business (Kelso, 2009, p.331). For such MPs, the ACA was essential in order to operate effectively (see Allington and Peele, 2010, pp.37-8). This is a clear and strong rationale for an allowance of some description. Yet the case for the ACA, as for MPs' pay in general, was frequently avoided as a topic of discussion politically (Kelso, 2009, p.331). Instead of asserting the necessity of an allowance such as the ACA to the public at large, and providing an open and honest discussion about the trade-offs between cheap government and effective legislatures, the issue was handled without public engagement. The negative consequences of this are not merely that some MPs claimed more than they should have done. Indeed, for a country the size of the UK the financial losses are ostensibly irrelevant. The more serious problem, revealed in the findings from Chapter 7, is the negative perceptual consequences resulting from the appropriate use of the ACA. Of course, any use of public funds, even if understood to be necessary, may attract some disapproval – merely because people do not enjoy paying taxes. Yet the fact that there was no significant difference in the negativity caused by an MP who wrongly claimed more than £1000, and one who claimed entirely appropriately (see Table 7.1), can plausibly be associated with a lack of justificatory discussion about the necessity of the allowance. The problem of the negative effect of the appropriate use of allowances is complex. Yet if the regulatory agencies had been more open and honest about discussions concerning MPs' pay and expenses, the negative sentiments attached to the appropriate use of allowances may not have arisen.

Of course, despite public and well-justified systems, 'negative political events' can still occur because of poor procedural performance by public officials. Traditional wisdom among practitioners holds that this is a major source of hostile beliefs (Oliver, 1997, p.574). Such fears may not be entirely ungrounded, but they do not account for the whole story. Indeed, a negative political event can be an opportunity as much as a threat. Chapter 6 is instructive in this regard. An MP, Derek Conway, was found to have not adhered to acceptable standards of conduct. This discovery – arising from within the regulatory framework – resulted in the timely use of appropriate sanctions against the MP. As was noted in Chapter 6, this directed the focus of media commentary towards the helpful work conducted by the regulatory agency involved. By virtue of being proactive, by virtue of not being afraid to uncover wrongdoing, the regulatory system showed itself to be effective.

Ultimately, the findings of this thesis suggest that engaging the public more directly than is presently common would prove fruitful. Whether the public *can* be engaged remains an open question.

Appendix A

This appendix describes the exact question wording of the three batteries of items investigated in Chapter 3, along with the coding used to conduct the scale analysis in that chapter. Unless explicitly mentioned, the questions remained consistent across the four datasets. The headings here follow the substantive interpretations given to the item batteries in Chapter 3, and were not included in the questionnaire.

Trust questions:

Interviewer: I'd like to start by asking you a question about trust.

These cards show different types of people. Please put them on this board to show which you would generally trust to tell the truth and which you wouldn't.

Interviewer, if necessary: If there are any you are not sure about, please put them to one side [coded 'don't know']

Cards represented:

Tabloid journalists
Estate Agents
Government ministers
People who run large companies
MPs in general
Senior managers in local councils
Broadsheet journalists
Top civil servants
Local councillors
Senior managers in the NHS
TV news journalists
Your local MP
Senior police officers
Local police officers
Judges
Head teachers in schools
Family doctors

This is coded as:

1 = Do not trust

2 = Don't know

3 = Trust

Perceptions of the performance of MPs:

Actions

Interviewer: Now I'd like to ask you a question about elected national politicians – that is, MPs and government ministers.

MPs are politicians whom the general public has elected to represent them in the House of Commons in Westminster. Among other things, they represent a constituency and vote on new laws.

Government ministers are chosen by the Prime Minister and are usually elected MPs. They are either Cabinet Ministers, like the Home Secretary or Foreign Secretary, or junior ministers within a Department.

Please say how many MPs... you think actually do these things:

1. They are dedicated to doing a good job for the public
2. They use their power for their own personal gain [here re-coded to indicate 'they *do not* use their power for their own personal gain']
3. They take bribes [here re-coded to indicate 'they *do not* take bribes']
4. They own up when they make mistakes
5. They explain the reasons for their actions and decisions
6. They set a good example in their private lives
7. They tell the truth
8. They make sure public money is used wisely
9. They are in touch with what the general public thinks is important
10. They are competent at their jobs

For the scale analysis in Chapter 3, the following coding is used:

1 = None

2 = A few

3 = About half

4 = Most

5 = All

Missing = Don't know

Note that as part of the 'weighting' procedure applied to these variables, the coding was changed, as described in the main text of Chapter 3.

Importance

Interviewer: Thinking about these... politicians, please put these cards on this board to show how important you think it is that MPs and government ministers do the things shown on the cards

1. They should be dedicated to doing a good job for the public
2. They should not use their power for their own personal gain
3. They should not take bribes
4. They should own up when they make mistakes
5. They should explain the reasons for their actions and decisions
6. They should set a good example in their private lives
7. They should tell the truth
8. They should make sure public money is used wisely
9. They should be in touch with what the general public thinks is important
10. They should be competent at their jobs

Coding:

1 = Not at all important

2 = Not very important

3 = Quite important

4 = Very important

5 = Extremely important

Missing = Don't know

Interviewer: Looking at these cards which you rated as important, which three do you think are most important for elected national politicians that is, MPs and Government Ministers whom the general public has elected to represent them in the House of Commons in Westminster?

[three most important selected]

Perceptions of Standards in Public Life:

Interviewer: Now I would like to ask you some questions about public office holders as a whole – by this I mean government ministers, MPs, local councillors and public officials with jobs in government departments, local councils or other public bodies.

Overall, how would you rate the standards of conduct of public office holders in the United Kingdom?

Coding:

1 = Very low

2 = Quite low

3 = Neither high nor low

4 = Quite High

5 = Very high

Missing = Don't know

And how do you think standards of public office holders in the United Kingdom today compare with a few years ago?

Coding:

1 = Got a lot worse

2 = Got a bit worse

3 = Stayed the same

4 = Improved a little

5 = Improved a lot

Missing = Don't know

And how do you think standards of public office holders in the United Kingdom today compare with those elsewhere in Europe?

Note: this question was not asked in Surveys 3 and 4

Coding:

1 = Among the highest in Europe

2 = Higher than average

3 = About average

4 = Lower than Average

5 = Among the lowest in Europe

Missing = Don't know

How confident do you feel that the authorities in the United Kingdom are committed to improving standards in public life?

Note: this was asked as 'upholding standards in public life' in Surveys 2, 3, and 4.

Coding:

1 = Not at all confident

2 = Not very confident

3 = Don't know

4 = Fairly confident

5 = Very confident

And how confident do you feel that the authorities will generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public life?

Coding:

1 = Not at all confident

2 = Not very confident

3 = Don't know

4 = Fairly confident

5 = Very confident

And how confident do you feel that the media will generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public life?

Coding:

1 = Not at all confident

2 = Not very confident

3 = Don't know

4 = Fairly confident

5 = Very confident

And when people in public life are caught doing wrong, how confident do you feel that the authorities will punish them?

Coding:

1 = Not at all confident

2 = Not very confident

3 = Don't know

4 = Fairly confident

5 = Very confident

Appendix B

Technical Appendix

B.1 Replication of Mokken Scale ‘Search’ Procedure on ‘Standards’ Items in 2006-2010 Data

Table B1.1 – Results of a Mokken Scale Analysis of ‘Standards’ Items in Three Datasets

Scale range	Item	2006	2008	2010
1 – 5	Confidence that the authorities will punish those caught doing wrong	0.37	0.39	0.44
	Confidence in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life	0.42	0.41	0.44
	How standards compares to a few years ago	0.39	0.41	0.46
	Confidence in the authorities to uphold standards	0.50	0.52	0.35
	How standards compare to elsewhere in Europe	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Overall rating of standards	0.39	0.45	0.51
	Confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing by those in public life	0.12	0.12	0.17
	Overall scale coefficient (H)	0.41	0.44	0.48
<i>n</i>		1713	2210	1895

Result of a ‘search’ procedure on the ‘standards’ items of the remaining three datasets not analysed in the main body of text (2006, 2008, and 2010).

B.2 Full-Information Maximum Likelihood Estimates of Model Coefficients for Structural Equation Models Reported on p.108

Note that for all models, p=*** is equivalent to p<0.001.

B2.1 Model 1

Regression Weights:

			Estimate	S.E.	P
General Performance	<---	media.conf	.573	.087	***
General Performance	<---	pref.cons	-.906	.276	.001
General Performance	<---	serve	-.535	.101	***
General Performance	<---	spend	-.396	.100	***
General Performance	<---	Political Trust	.243	.018	***
Specific Performance	<---	pref.cons	-.128	.096	.183
Specific Performance	<---	spend	.180	.030	***
Specific Performance	<---	General Performance	-.130	.012	***
Specific Performance	<---	Political Trust	-.076	.007	***

Means:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
media.conf	3.860	.033	***
spend	4.094	.065	***
serve	3.842	.065	***
pref.cons	.143	.011	***

Intercepts:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
Political Trust	20.268	.157	***
General Performance	11.635	.605	***
Specific Performance	6.996	.244	***

Covariances:

			Estimate	S.E.	P
serve	<-->	spend	1.516	.124	***
media.conf	<-->	spend	.013	.071	.857
pref.cons	<-->	spend	.044	.023	.052
media.conf	<-->	serve	-.094	.071	.187
pref.cons	<-->	serve	.037	.023	.102
media.conf	<-->	pref.cons	.018	.012	.119

Variances:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
e1	27.186	1.161	***
media.conf	1.226	.052	***
pref.cons	.123	.005	***
serve	2.454	.148	***
spend	2.497	.152	***
e2	8.331	.416	***
e3	1.066	.050	***

B2.2 Model 2

Regression Weights:

		Estimate	S.E.	P
Specific Performance	<---	pref.cons	-.016	.105 .877
Specific Performance	<---	spend	.275	.029 ***
Specific Performance	<---	Political Trust	-.111	.007 ***
General Performance	<---	media.conf	.478	.080 ***
General Performance	<---	pref.cons	-.909	.254 ***
General Performance	<---	serve	-.436	.096 ***
General Performance	<---	spend	-.220	.101 .030
General Performance	<---	Political Trust	.148	.019 ***
General Performance	<---	Specific Performance	-.887	.085 ***

Means:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
spend	4.097	.065	***
pref.cons	.143	.011	***
media.conf	3.860	.033	***
serve	3.849	.065	***

Intercepts:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
Political Trust	20.268	.157	***
Specific Performance	5.344	.185	***
General Performance	16.571	.697	***

Covariances:

			Estimate	S.E.	P
pref.cons	<-->	spend	.045	.023	.050
serve	<-->	spend	1.527	.125	***
media.conf	<-->	spend	-.026	.070	.707
media.conf	<-->	serve	-.116	.072	.105
serve	<-->	pref.cons	.037	.023	.101
media.conf	<-->	pref.cons	.018	.012	.119

Variances:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
e1	27.186	1.161	***
pref.cons	.123	.005	***
spend	2.505	.152	***
e3	1.218	.060	***
media.conf	1.226	.052	***
serve	2.465	.149	***
e2	7.423	.356	***

B2.3 Model 3

Regression Weights:

			Estimate	S.E.	P
General Performance	<---	media.conf	.620	.094	***
General Performance	<---	pref.cons	-.833	.299	.005
General Performance	<---	serve	-.703	.106	***
General Performance	<---	spend	-.524	.105	***
Specific Performance	<---	pref.cons	-.184	.101	.067
Specific Performance	<---	spend	.228	.032	***
Specific Performance	<---	General Performance	-.166	.011	***
Political Trust	<---	General Performance	.347	.046	***
Political Trust	<---	Specific Performance	-1.343	.124	***

Means:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
media.conf	3.860	.033	***
spend	4.107	.064	***
serve	3.857	.063	***
pref.cons	.143	.011	***

Intercepts:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
General Performance	17.547	.516	***
Specific Performance	5.804	.268	***
Political Trust	20.745	1.082	***

Covariances:

		Estimate	S.E.	P
serve	<-->	spend	1.508	.122 ***
media.conf	<-->	spend	.001	.070 .985
pref.cons	<-->	spend	.045	.022 .046
media.conf	<-->	serve	-.106	.070 .130
pref.cons	<-->	serve	.037	.022 .095
media.conf	<-->	pref.cons	.018	.012 .119

Variances:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
media.conf	1.226	.052	***
pref.cons	.123	.005	***
serve	2.446	.147	***
spend	2.492	.150	***
e2	9.295	.482	***
e3	1.158	.056	***
e1	19.830	.855	***

B2.4 Model 4

Regression Weights:

		Estimate	S.E.	P
Specific Performance	<---	pref.cons	-.055	.117 .639
Specific Performance	<---	spend	.391	.030 ***
General Performance	<---	media.conf	.476	.082 ***
General Performance	<---	pref.cons	-.875	.261 ***
General Performance	<---	serve	-.501	.097 ***
General Performance	<---	spend	-.241	.106 .023
General Performance	<---	Specific Performance	-1.087	.082 ***
Political Trust	<---	General Performance	.347	.046 ***
Political Trust	<---	Specific Performance	-1.347	.121 ***

Means:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
spend	4.113	.064	***
pref.cons	.143	.011	***
media.conf	3.860	.033	***
serve	3.863	.065	***

Intercepts:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
Specific Performance	2.621	.131	***
General Performance	20.762	.494	***
Political Trust	20.767	1.059	***

Covariances:

		Estimate	S.E.	P
pref.cons	<-->	spend	.045	.022 .043
serve	<-->	spend	1.529	.124 ***
media.conf	<-->	spend	-.056	.068 .407
media.conf	<-->	serve	-.135	.071 .056
serve	<-->	pref.cons	.038	.023 .096
media.conf	<-->	pref.cons	.018	.012 .119

Variances:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
pref.cons	.123	.005	***
spend	2.510	.151	***
e3	1.441	.074	***
media.conf	1.226	.052	***
serve	2.466	.149	***
e2	7.723	.375	***
e1	19.805	.854	***

B2.5 Model 5

Estimates

Regression Weights:

			Estimate	S.E.	P
General Performance	<---	media.conf	.716	.128	***
Specific Performance	<---	pref.cons	-.312	.130	.016
General Performance	<---	pref.cons	-.798	.349	.022
General Performance	<---	serve	-.849	.140	***
General Performance	<---	spend	-.723	.169	***
Specific Performance	<---	spend	.197	.059	***
General Performance	<---	Specific Performance	.725	.385	.059
Political Trust	<---	General Performance	.034	.294	.909
Political Trust	<---	Specific Performance	-2.545	.885	.004
General Performance	<---	Political Trust	-.007	.068	.914
Specific Performance	<---	General Performance	-.293	.063	***
Specific Performance	<---	Political Trust	.087	.072	.225

Means:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
media.conf	3.860	.033	***
spend	4.110	.064	***
serve	3.854	.063	***
pref.cons	.143	.011	***

Intercepts:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
Specific Performance	6.076	1.169	***
General Performance	15.642	2.109	***
Political Trust	30.509	8.039	***

Covariances:

		Estimate	S.E.	P	
serve	<-->	spend	1.510	.122	***
media.conf	<-->	spend	.016	.070	.823
pref.cons	<-->	spend	.045	.022	.046
media.conf	<-->	serve	-.099	.070	.157
pref.cons	<-->	serve	.037	.022	.094
media.conf	<-->	pref.cons	.018	.012	.119

Variances:

	Estimate	S.E.	P
media.conf	1.226	.052	***
pref.cons	.123	.005	***
serve	2.447	.147	***
spend	2.496	.150	***
e1	21.751	3.023	***
e2	12.200	2.136	***
e3	1.641	.506	.001

B.3 Full-Information Maximum Likelihood Estimates of Model Regression Coefficients for Reciprocal Structural Equation Model (Model 5) Including Liberal Democrat Support

Regression Weights:

			Estimate	S.E.	P
General Performance	<---	media.conf	.712	.128	***
Specific Performance	<---	pref.cons	-.319	.122	.009
General Performance	<---	pref.cons	-.748	.353	.034
General Performance	<---	serve	-.860	.140	***
General Performance	<---	spend	-.728	.171	***
Specific Performance	<---	spend	.192	.054	***
General Performance	<---	pref.lib	.699	.544	.199
Specific Performance	<---	pref.lib	-.350	.171	.040
Political Trust	<---	General Performance	.127	.267	.633
Political Trust	<---	Specific Performance	-2.254	.790	.004
Specific Performance	<---	General Performance	-.278	.057	***
General Performance	<---	Political Trust	-.019	.067	.775
General Performance	<---	Specific Performance	.713	.389	.067
Specific Performance	<---	Political Trust	.064	.061	.291

B.4 Model Fit of Reciprocal Structural Equation Model (Model 5) with Reversed Relationship Between General Performance and Perceptions of Civil Servants

	Impact directionality	Chi- square	df	Chi-square/df	P	RMSEA
5. Reciprocal model	T \leftrightarrow GP; T \leftrightarrow SP GP \leftrightarrow SP	174.79	8	21.85	0.00	0.138

B.5 Absolute RMSEA Values for Structural Models 3 and 5

	RMSEA	Lower 90% c.i.	Upper 90% c.i.	p(RMSEA<0.05)
Model 3	.030	.000	.055	.904
Model 5	.024	.000	.061	.852

B.6 Model Fit of Partial Replication of Structural Model 3 with Survey 3 (2008)

Note that this model only contains a single control – confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing – and thus is a partial replication.

	Impact directionality	Chi- square	df	Chi-square/df	P	RMSEA
'Performance view' model (3)	GP → T, SP → T GP → SP	8.199	2	4.10	0.02	0.04

B.7 Co-alignment Effect upon Perceived Standards for Scottish Respondents, with Co-alignment also Defined with Reference to Top-up Constituencies

Table B7.1 – Predictors of Perceived Standards in Scotland (including top-up constituency co-alignment)

	(1)	(2)
Intercept	13.71 *** (1.06)	13.85 *** (1.06)
National constituency co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		1.78 * (0.75)
National executive co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		1.04 (1.01)
National executive and constituency co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		0.51 (0.55)
Sub-national constituency co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		0.41 (0.50)
Sub-national executive co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		n/a
Sub-national executive and sub-national constituency co-alignment (ref cat: No co-alignment)		-0.25 (0.43)
Sex (male = 1, female = 2)	-0.42 (0.34)	-0.44 (0.34)
Education (lower = more education)	-0.02 (0.11)	-0.03 (0.11)
Age	-0.02 * (0.01)	-0.03 * (0.01)
Confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing (higher = more confidence)	0.74 *** (0.22)	0.69 ** (0.22)
Adjusted R2	0.03	0.04
n	508	508

*Note: Entries show un-standardised coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Significance codes: + = p<0.1, * = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01, *** = p<0.001.*

B.8 Effect upon Perceived Standards of the Local MPs' Involvement in 'MPs' Expenses', Excluding Respondents with a Liberal Democrat Partisan Attachment

*Table B8 – Impact of Local MPs' 'Expenses' Involvement upon Perceptions of Standards in Public Life
(excluding those with a Liberal Democrat Partisan Attachment)*

	(1)	(2)
Intercept	15.09 *** (0.56)	16.21 *** (0.69)
Claim, no repay (ref. cat: no claim)		-1.57 *** (0.48)
Repay < £1000 (ref. cat: no claim)		-1.70 *** (0.50)
Repay > £1000 (ref. cat: no claim)		-1.68 *** (0.50)
Newly elected MP (ref. cat: no claim)		-1.52 ** (0.46)
Sex	-0.16 (0.20)	-0.11 (0.20)
Class	-0.20 *** (0.08)	-0.19 * (0.08)
Age	-0.02 * (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Part-time	0.45 (0.34)	0.40 (0.35)
Not working, looking	0.48 (0.44)	0.41 (0.45)
Not working, not looking	-0.09 (0.36)	0.04 (0.37)
Retired	0.28 (0.36)	0.10 (0.37)
Full-time education	1.63 ** (0.36)	1.54 ** (0.54)
Conservative	1.57 *** (0.25)	1.61 *** (0.25)
Lib Dem	n/a	n/a
Labour	0.98 *** (0.20)	0.87 *** (0.21)
<i>n</i>	1630	1566
Adjusted R ²	0.05	0.05

Note: Entries show un-standardised coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Significance codes: † = p<0.1, * = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01, *** = p<0.001.

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