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**Title:** Social Trust and Democratic Politics  
**Date:** June 2, 2000  
**Dataset(s):** 2000 Pilot Study

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## **Abstract**

The argument that democracy depends vitally on ordinary citizens taking an active part in civic life is not exactly new. More than 150 years ago, as part of his penetrating look at American life, Tocqueville prescribed civic engagement as the proper remedy for democratic ills. In recent years Tocqueville's argument has been revived, thanks primarily to the provocative work of Robert Putnam (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000). Like Tocqueville, Putnam contends that social trust and civic engagement are essential to the effective workings of democratic societies. Putnam then goes on to demonstrate that in the United States, both trust and engagement are in sharp and alarming decline.

Putnam's thesis has created a huge stir; naturally, not everyone is convinced that he is right (e.g., Ladd 1996; Levi 1996; Valley 1996). But if Putnam has failed to deliver the final word on social trust and civic engagement, he has succeeded magnificently in reinvigorating investigation into ancient and important questions of democratic politics. With this in mind, the goals of our project are to clarify the meaning of trust, to develop new measures corresponding to trust, properly conceived, and then to examine the consequences of such trust for democratic politics in the contemporary US.