University of Kent

Kent Academic Repository

Schuck, Jakob, Greifeneder, Rainer and Lalot, Fanny (2026) *Generalized loss of trust following political betrayal: Cross-country evidence in the context of elections*. Political Psychology, 47 (4). ISSN 0162-895X.

Downloaded from
https://kar.kent.ac.uk/115651/ The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from
https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.70169

This document version
Publisher pdf

DOI for this version

Licence for this version
CC BY (Attribution)

Additional information

Versions of research works

Versions of Record
If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts
If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in ***Title of Journal*** , Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries
If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies).

Check for updates

DOI: 10.1111/pops.70169

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Political Psychology

Generalized loss of trust following political betrayal: Cross-country evidence in the context of elections

Jakob Schuck [1] | **Rainer Greifeneder** [1] | **Fanny Lalot** [1,2]

[1]Faculty of Psychology, University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland

[2]School of Psychology, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

Correspondence
Jakob Schuck, Fakultät für Psychologie, University of Basel, Missionsstrasse 64a, 4055 Basel, Switzerland.
Email: jakob.schuck@unibas.ch

Funding information
Schweizerischer Nationalfonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung, Grant/Award Number: PZ00P1_216373/1; Thüringer Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Digitale Gesellschaft; DENKBUNT—Das Thüringer Landesprogramm für Demokratie, Toleranz und Weltoffenheit; Volkswagenstiftung

Abstract

This research investigates how perceptions of *political betrayal*—that is, the perceived violation of mutually known pivotal expectations by a political entity—shape political trust. We test a generalization hypothesis that the loss of trust might extend beyond the specific political entity (i.e., the one who betrayed) and generalize to others. Across three preregistered studies (one cross-sectional and two longitudinal) in Germany, the UK, and the US ($N = 2136$), we observe that perceptions of betrayal by one political entity is consistently associated with lower trust in that same entity, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. Additionally, we find evidence for two types of generalizations: assimilative and contrastive. Perceived betrayal by one figure often decreases trust in other political entities (presumably categorized within a similar category; i.e., *assimilation*). Conversely, perceived betrayal sometimes increases trust in other political entities (most often political rivals, thus presumably categorized in different categories; i.e., *contrast*). Lastly, we observe reverse effects from trust toward betrayal, indicating that trust can function as a buffer in the political context. Additional analyses could not identify any distinct or stable partisan effects in these dynamics. We discuss implications for future research and policymaking.

KEYWORDS

elections, political betrayal, political scandals, political trust, trust violation

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.
© 2026 The Author(s). *Political Psychology* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC on behalf of International Society of Political Psychology.

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have been a stress test for many Western democratic countries, from a continuing discontent with governments (Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2024) to the rise of anti-democratic movements (Bartels, 2023; Bennett & Kneuer, 2024). In this context, political trust, and its decline, emerges as a key and often-discussed factor both to explain and potentially counteract current trends (Devine, 2024; Hetherington, 1998). One key question is *how* political entities—that is, politicians and political institutions such as parties or the government—lose the trust of their citizens.

Here, we test the hypothesis that feeling betrayed by political entities leads to a broad decrease in political trust. Specifically, we assess how feelings of political betrayal relate to trust, considering both direct effects (i.e., from betrayal by a given political entity toward trust in the same entity) and generalizations (i.e., from betrayal by a given political entity toward trust in other entities). We present the results of three preregistered studies (one cross-sectional and two longitudinal) conducted in the context of different elections in 2024: the German state elections, UK general election, and US presidential election. Across studies we assess trust in specific political figures such as the prime minister or president, and broader entities such as the parliament and congress, the media, and politicians in general. Together, the set of studies provide convergent evidence for bidirectional links between betrayal and trust.

What is political trust and why does it matter?

Political trust is commonly seen as part of a broad group of attitudes capturing how citizens feel about their government, politicians, and other (democratic) institutions (Devine, 2024; Van Der Meer, 2017). Political trust reflects the assumption that political entities generally act according to the citizens' interests and values when making political decisions (Winsvold et al., 2024). Citrin and Stoker (2018) brought forward a compelling definition of the most crucial aspects of political trust (see also Hardin, 2002; Luhmann, 1973):

> Trust—political or otherwise—is relational and domain specific. That is, A trusts B to do X. Trust always has an object or target (B), which could be a person, group, or institution, and a domain of action (X) where trust is given or withheld. The foundation of trust is that A judges B to be trustworthy, that he or she will act with integrity and competence and with A's interests paramount. In politics, those interests may include the "goals of good policy, peace and sound economic stewardship" (Keele, 2007, p. 243), in addition to the citizen's own welfare.
>
> (p. 50)

Political trust has been associated with a wide range of outcomes, ranging from institutionalized behavior (e.g., positive link with voting) to non-institutionalized behavior (e.g., negative link with demonstrating; Citrin & Stoker, 2018; Levi & Stoker, 2000). Contexts marked by low political trust face greater polarization of citizens who become more entrenched in their ideological stances and less willing to compromise (Bergbower & Allen, 2021), populism rise (Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018), democratic erosion (Van Der Meer & Zmerli, 2017), and even civil unrest, as well as riots and mass mobilization against governments (Ares & Hernández, 2017). Importantly, trust, once lost, is difficult to restore (Citrin & Green, 1986; Hetherington, 1998). Thus, understanding the mechanisms underlying political trust and its decline is a vital aspect of understanding how to strengthen democratic systems.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

What contributes to the decline of political trust?

In the past decades, political trust has seen an ongoing decline in some Western countries, such as the US and Australia (Citrin & Stoker, 2018; Dassonneville & McAllister, 2021). While some argue that political trust is a rather stable attitude with only small within-individual variation through time (Devine & Valgarðsson, 2024), others show that external events can negatively impact trust. Declines may thus potentially result from an ongoing evaluation of political outcomes (Torcal & Christmann, 2021; Van Der Meer, 2017) or a general reaction toward crises (Aassve et al., 2024). Yet, in spite of the large literature on trust decline and political scandals, questions remain as to how a common mechanism may generalize across contexts. Specifically, we explore here whether perceived political transgressions (e.g., scandals, political misdemeanor, or failed political or economic promises) (i) negatively impact political trust, and (ii) how widely they do.

Citizens are frequently confronted with breaches of trust by political entities in relation to perceptions of ability, integrity, and benevolence (Mayer et al., 1995). For example, integrity regularly gets undermined by misbehavior on systemic levels (i.e., large-scale corruption scandals) or by individual politicians (e.g., the UK Partygate during the COVID-19 pandemic). Some studies accordingly found that exposure to political scandals eroded support for politicians as well as political parties (Maier, 2011). Similarly, ability might be questioned when the economy slides into a recession or politicians fail to negotiate important outcomes (such as the failed COP climate negotiations; Maslin et al., 2023). Ignoring constituent needs, displaying elitism, or exploiting crises for political gain may also be perceived as a breach of benevolence, ultimately contributing to reducing trust. Indeed, a recent two-wave panel experiment in Germany found that fulfilled election pledges increased trust, whereas broken pledges led to a decrease in trust over the course of 2–3 weeks, although these effects emerged only among citizens who had been satisfied with the government in the past or valued the fulfilled pledge highly (Bytzek et al., 2024).

Around election periods citizens may be, for various reasons, particularly sensitive to breaches of trust. On the one hand, the adversarial tone of contemporary election campaigns—marked by overt attacks and the spread of misinformation in the form of alleged scandals or transgressions—undermines public confidence (Lau et al., 2007). On the other hand, sensationalist and partisan media emphasize political dysfunction and scandal, amplifying cynicism and emotional disengagement (Citrin & Stoker, 2018). These kinds of misdemeanors, scandals, and transgressions can be understood as specific instances of what we term *political betrayal*, a concept we now describe in detail.

Political betrayal

We draw from the literature on interpersonal trust which defines betrayal as the perception of "a voluntary violation of mutually known pivotal expectations of the trustor by the trusted party (trustee), which has the potential to threaten the well-being of the trustor" (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998, p. 548). In the political context, these "pivotal expectations" may be understood as explicit and implicit agreements between citizens and the state and its representatives (Berezin, 2002). Accordingly, Giurlando (2021) argues that breaking this implicit contract might already lead to feelings of betrayal.

It is important to note that *perceptions* or *feelings* of betrayal are inherently subjective (see Fitness & Case, 2026; Lalot, 2023): they hinge on the trustor's beliefs and expectations about how politicians should behave in a given context. Accordingly, the present paper focuses on perceptions of betrayal from citizens, not any actual scandals they might have perceived differently. This approach thus differs from recent research in political science

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

that investigated specific cases of political betrayal (e.g., Ares & Hernández, 2017; Von Sikorski et al., 2020).

From betrayal to trust in the perpetrator

Breaches of trust have consistently been found to lead to a loss of trust in the betrayer across diverse contexts, such as organizational (Kähkönen et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2007) and interpersonal settings (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017; Lount et al., 2008). Once violated, trust can be difficult to repair (Kähkönen et al., 2021; Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017). Examples of organizational-level failures (summarized as betrayals, failures, and crises) not only erode trust but trigger distrust, withdrawal, and retaliatory behaviors, indicating that trust repair is a complex challenge (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009). Moreover, negative information tends to remain especially salient in memory and shapes later evaluations through a robust negativity bias (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001).

We argue that these same mechanisms extend to political betrayal: when individuals feel betrayed by a political entity, their trust in that entity is similarly diminished. This aligns with prior studies demonstrating that scandals or broken promises, for instance, lower trust in the political entity in question (Bytzek et al., 2024; Von Sikorski et al., 2020).

From betrayal to generalized loss of trust

Beyond the dyadic relationship, the question arises as to whether betrayal may also lead to a *generalized* loss of trust toward other political entities. Recent research from organizational and personality psychology congruently suggests that individuals may generalize the loss of trust from betrayal by a specific person to uninvolved others. For example, employees who suffered a breach of trust by a colleague on one day were less trusting of all colleagues the next day (Baer et al., 2018). In another study, participants indicated lower trust toward an unfamiliar charity after having heard about a scandal involving a different charity (Chou et al., 2022). In line with this emerging evidence, one recent study in the political domain (based on a natural experiment conducted through a two-wave panel study in Austria) also observed negative generalizations from exposure to a political scandal toward trust in other uninvolved politicians and political institutions (Von Sikorski et al., 2020). Trust might thus suffer from both betrayal by the target entity and by other entities.

This question is mirrored in the early distinction made between specific and diffuse political support (Easton, 1965). Specific support refers to evaluations of particular political actors and officeholders (and their performance), whereas diffuse support reflects more generalized support for political institutions and the political system as a whole. From this perspective, betrayal by a clearly identifiable target (e.g., a politician embroiled in a corruption scandal) should primarily undermine specific trust in that actor and closely related entities, but it may also spill over if the incident is interpreted as symptomatic of broader problems. Conversely, betrayal attributed to more encompassing targets (e.g., politicians in general, parties, or core institutions) should be more likely to erode diffuse trust and thus reduce confidence not necessarily in individual actors but primarily in political institutions and their underlying principles.

Opposite dynamics may also arise. Building on the inclusion/exclusion model of assimilation and contrast effects (Bless & Schwarz, 1998; Schwarz & Bless, 1992), and the selective accessibility model (Mussweiler, 2007), we argue that breaches of trust can lead to two theoretically distinct types of consequences, depending on how they are cognitively construed.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

On the one hand, when someone viewed as a prototypical group member commits a transgression, the negative information is likely assimilated into group-level impressions through similarity testing. Individuals selectively focus on the shared category, increasing the accessibility of transgression-consistent knowledge about the group (Mussweiler, 2007). To the extent that other group members are judged based on their social category, distrust would then extend to other group members. This represents an *assimilation* effect: information about a salient individual (e.g., a politician involved in a scandal) is included in the mental representation of the broader political category, leading to more negative evaluations of that category as a whole and, consequently, a reduction in overall trust. Empirical work suggests that such inclusion processes operate by default unless individuals are explicitly cued to separate an individual from their group (Bless & Schwarz, 1998).

On the other hand, the same information can also trigger a *contrast* effect, under certain conditions. If contextual cues highlight that the transgressing actor is unrepresentative of their category or occupies a special status separating them from ordinary members, individuals may exclude them from the group representation. Contrast may also arise between individuals perceived as belonging to different groups (Damisch et al., 2006). This can shift the evaluative standard and lead to more favorable assessments of alternative, often oppositional, actors. In the political sphere, research suggests that dissatisfaction with one actor may prompt citizens to seek alternatives, potentially aligning with anti-establishment or oppositional forces (Citrin & Luks, 2001), showing a similar contrast dynamic.

The inclusion/exclusion framework thus clarifies that whether a betrayal leads to assimilation (generalized distrust) or contrast (increased relative trust in alternatives) depends on how people categorize the actor at the center of the betrayal. Tying this back to Eastonian terms, assimilation may imply generalization from specific to diffuse support when the transgressor is perceived as representative of a broader political category, whereas contrast would imply that trust losses remain largely confined to specific evaluations of the transgressor (with a countervailing trust gain for specific oppositional actors).

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

In the aftermath of various political scandals, clear misjudgments by politicians, or an open breach of promises, political commentators often argue that such a betrayal leads to a direct loss of trust in the eyes of the voters (e.g., Daum et al., 2025; Grierson, 2024; Wilkins, 2024). Yet, despite extensive work on political trust and its decline, existing research has largely focused on specific events (e.g., individual scandals, broken pledges, or crises) or on aggregate trends, leaving open questions about how citizens psychologically construe trust violations and how such experiences generalize across political targets over time.

We hypothesize that a breach of trust by one political entity may result in (1) a loss of trust in this entity, as well as (2) in other political entities. Such a generalization could be assimilative (i.e., betrayal by one entity results in lower trust in another entity; e.g., Bless & Schwarz, 1998) or contrastive (betrayal by one entity results in higher trust in another entity, most likely a political opponent; Citrin & Stoker, 2018).

We conducted three studies around elections at different political levels in different countries to investigate the cross-sectional as well as longitudinal effects of betrayal experiences on political trust. Indeed, both public state and 'anti-establishment' media frequently cover political betrayals, such as scandals or broken promises (Baumgartner & Chaqués Bonafont, 2015), but these coverages are especially prominent before elections (Garz & Sörensen, 2021), making it a prime time to study betrayal-trust dynamics.

We first seek to demonstrate that there is a consistent negative relationship between betrayal and trust in political institutions across time. We then turn to a cross-sectional design

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

to elucidate how perceptions of different political figures and institutions are intertwined. In a last step, we consider the temporal relationships of betrayal and trust across political figures and political institutions. We generally assume the same mechanisms across all three studies. Specifically, we expect negative relationships between perceived betrayal by, and trust in, each political entity, cross-sectionally and longitudinally. The two longitudinal studies also provide the opportunity to test for the opposite relationship, that is, from trust to perceived betrayal. Lastly, we expect generalizations between political entities, from betrayal by one to trust in the other (both cross-sectionally and longitudinally). However, we did not specify a direction for these effects (i.e., assimilative or contrastive) but instead considered them exploratorily.

Study 1 revolved around the state elections in the three eastern German states of Brandenburg, Thuringia, and Saxony in September 2024 ($N = 1162$). We measured trust and betrayal by politicians in general, the local government, and the public state media. *Study 2* extended these findings in a cross-sectional study conducted shortly before the UK general election in July 2024 ($N = 544$). We measured trust in political institutions but also important political figures, in this case, the party leaders of the four dominant parties. *Study 3* turned to the US presidential election of November 2024 and assessed trust in the presidential candidates Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, incumbent president Joe Biden, as well as the congress and politicians in general, both before and after the election, with a quota-based sample ($N = 430$). This study also allowed us to investigate how partisanship relates to the proposed dynamics of betrayal and trust.

All studies were preregistered (links are provided below). Data, code and materials are publicly available on the OSF: https://osf.io/cuwq9. We conducted all analyses in R 4.4.1 (R Core Team, 2023) using the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012).

STUDY 1

German state elections determine the composition of the parliaments in each federal state and, by extension, the leadership of the state government. Different from the nationwide election, the focus usually lies on parties, their election program, and election promises, rather than on single candidates. The German state elections held in three eastern German states in September 2024 were dominated by controversial debates: the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) was anticipated to gain considerable support in all three states, potentially becoming the first or second largest party at the local level. This context gave us a first opportunity to test the cross-sectional and longitudinal relationships between trust in, and betrayal by, different political figures, before and after the election. The study design, materials, planned analyses, and specific hypotheses were preregistered: https://osf.io/zp6n9.

Methods

Participants

The data were collected as part of a larger longitudinal study directed by the KomRex center of the University of Jena. The project entailed two waves of data collection, shortly before (13–25 August 2024; T1) and after (28 October–8 November and 25 November–13 December 2024; T2) the regional elections in the three German states of Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia. The independent panel provider Infas-Quo was responsible for data collection and data exclusion. The grant provider determined the sample size at $N = 1200$. We conducted a sensitivity power analysis in R with the *semPower* package (Moshagen & Bader, 2023), which suggests

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 1 Study 1: Descriptive statistics of trust in, and betrayal by various political entities.

	Politicians	Local government	Public state media
Trust in: *M* (*SD*)			
Time 1	4.06 (1.69)	3.24 (1.56)	3.52 (1.88)
Time 2	4.08 (1.60)	3.32 (1.58)	3.52 (1.83)
Betrayal by: *M* (*SD*)			
Time 1	2.99 (1.36)	3.28 (1.44)	3.11 (1.60)
Time 2	3.12 (1.29)	3.38 (1.40)	3.18 (1.63)

that, assuming moderate stability of trust and betrayal over time (i.e., .50) and small cross-lagged effects of betrayal on trust, and of trust on betrayal (i.e., .10), this planned sample size would provide .98 power to detect the cross-lagged effects.

Across the three states, 1533 participants completed the first questionnaire (with quotas set on age, gender, education, and voting intention). Of those, 1162 returned to complete the second questionnaire. As preregistered, analyses focus on this longitudinal subsample (583 men, 579 women; $M_{age} = 51.2$, $SD_{age} = 15.2$).

Measures and procedure

Participants completed an online survey in German, which included measures of political trust and political betrayal by politicians in general, the local government, and public state media at both time points. Demographic variables were collected by the panel provider beforehand. Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1.

Trust

Three items assessed how participants judged their local (state-level) politicians in general (e.g., "The currently elected state politicians look after the interests of people like me"; 6-point Likert scale, 1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). We aggregated the three items into a single score at each time point ($\alpha_{T1} = .95$, $\alpha_{T2} = .92$). Trust in the "public state media" and "local government" were measured with one item each (question stem: "How much do you personally trust the following public institutions or groups of people?"; 6-point Likert scale, 1 = *not at all*, 6 = *fully*).

Betrayal

We provided participants with a short set of instructions defining political betrayal: "Many people have experienced both minor and major breaches of trust by politicians and political institutions in the course of their lives. Here, we are interested in your previous experiences in which you felt betrayed by politicians or political institutions. The term 'betrayal' covers a variety of situations, including, for example: Dishonesty, corruption, broken promises, deception, misinformation or the disclosure of confidential information. We will now ask you various questions on this topic."

Participants then reported how often they had felt betrayed by politicians, their local government, and the public state media in the past few months (one item for each target; 6-point Likert scale, 1 = *never*, 6 = *very often*).[1]

[1]We initially preregistered the use of a second item to measure betrayal intensity. However, the data quality provided by the independent panel provider for this specific set of questions turned out poor as the variable showed a substantial amount of missings (<30%, $N_{loss} = 220–539$). We thus decided to continue only with the items we described here.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Demographics

Participants reported a number of demographics: age, gender, household size, children under 18 living in the household, education, employment status, leadership roles, political ideology, income, and liquid wealth (detail is reported in Supplementary Materials, SM1).

Results

From betrayal to trust in the same entity

We first calculated zero-order correlations between trust and betrayal for both time points cross-sectionally (Table 2). A larger correlation matrix between all measures and demographics is also reported in SM2. Supporting our hypothesis, trust in and betrayal by the same entity were strongly negatively related ($-.73 < r_s < -.40$, $p_s < .001$). Furthermore, all perceptions of betrayal were positively related ($.54 < r_s < .69$; see SM2), suggesting the existence of a diffuse perception of institutional betrayal.

We then computed cross-lagged panel models (CLPM) to assess the longitudinal effects of betrayal on trust in the same target (e.g., betrayal by, and trust in politicians in general). Given that the model was just-identified, overall fit indices (e.g., CFI, TLI, RMSEA) were non-informative. Instead, we focused our interpretation on the parameter estimates for each path. For all three models, the autoregressive paths were positive and significant (β_s between .48 and .59, $p_s < .001$).

As hypothesized, the model showed significant longitudinal effects of betrayal on trust in the same entity (Figure 1; for the full model, see SM3). The cross-lagged coefficients ranged from $\beta_s = -.11$ to $\beta_s = -.23$, $p_s < .001$. Additionally, across all three models, we found reverse effects, indicating that higher levels of trust at Time 1 were associated with lower perceptions of betrayal at Time 2, ranging from $\beta_s = -.18$ to $\beta_s = -.24$, $p_s < .001$.

To assess robustness, we conducted supplementary analyses introducing relevant demographics as covariates in the CLPMs. Based on zero-order correlations, we identified political ideology and education as the two most strongly correlated demographic variables (see SM2). When we included these covariates in the models, the results did not differ meaningfully from the simpler models without covariates, and the explained variance (R^2) remained effectively unchanged (SM4). Consequently, we proceed with the simpler models for our analysis and interpretation of the results.

From betrayal to generalized loss of trust

We finally investigated potential assimilation or contrast effects from one political entity to another. To this end, we ran a more complex CLPM modeling the relationships between all types of betrayal (across time) and all targets of trust.[2] This analysis revealed assimilation effects (see Table 3). Specifically, perceived betrayal by politicians had a negative impact on trust in the local government, above and beyond betrayal by the local government (so did betrayal by public state media); and perceived betrayal by the local government (but not by public state media) had a negative impact on trust in politicians above and beyond betrayal by politicians.

[2]We originally preregistered to run three separate models where one measure of betrayal would be regressed on all targets of trust. While this would account for potential intercorrelations between subtypes of trust, it would also ignore the potential relations between subtypes of betrayal. To better account for the high correlations between betrayal measures (SM2), we decided to deviate from preregistration and test one larger model including all variables. For transparency purposes, the preregistered analysis is reported in SM5.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 2 Study 1: Zero-order correlations between betrayal experiences and trust in political entities at T1 and T2.

			Betrayal					
			T1			T2		
		Entity	Politicians	Local government	Public state media	Politicians	Local government	Public state media
Trust	T1	Politicians	**−.48*****	−.59***	−.40***	−.41***	−.51***	−.36***
		Local government	−.46***	**−.62*****	−.44***	−.40***	−.53***	−.40***
		Public state media	−.49***	−.46***	**−.74*****	−.46***	−.44***	−.65***
	T2	Politicians	−.39***	−.45***	−.31***	**−.40*****	−.49***	−.32***
		Local government	−.43***	−.52***	−.39***	−.43***	**−.56*****	−.40***
		Public state media	−.43***	−.41***	−.64***	−.47***	−.**43*****	**−.69*****

Note: T1 = before election; T2 = after election. Values in bold (diagonal) show the cross-sectional within-entity correlations. We computed correlations between each political actor's *betrayal* and *trust* scores; thus, the coefficients above and below the diagonal differ. Columns denote betrayal measures and rows denote trust measures for the corresponding set of political entities.
***$p < .001$.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

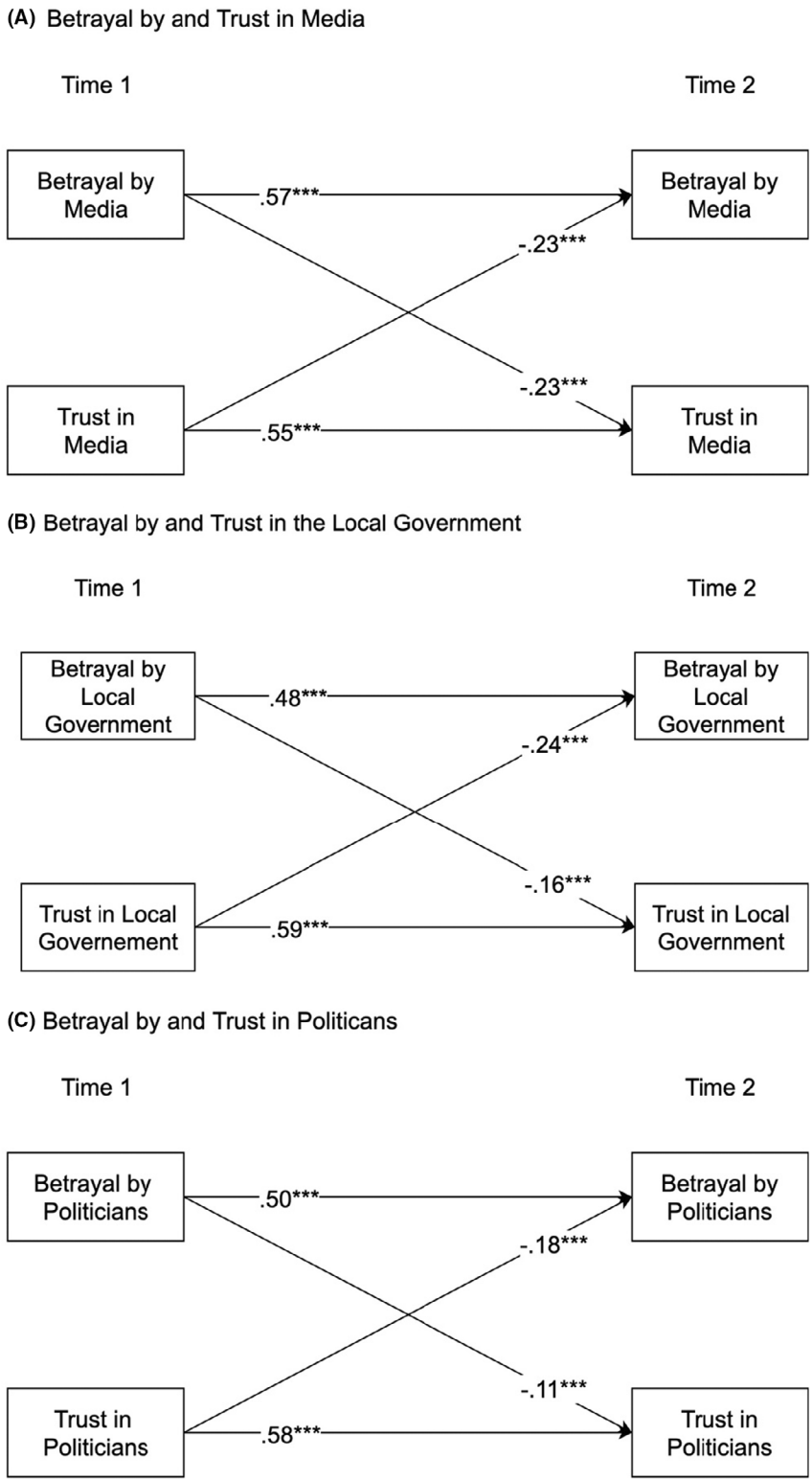


FIGURE 1 Study 1: Cross-lagged panel models testing the links between betrayal by, and trust in (A) the media, (B) the local government, and (C) politicians in general. Coefficients are standardized betas. ***$p < .001$.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 3 Study 1: Results of the cross-lagged panel model analysis for public state media, local government, and politicians in general.

	b (*SE*)	95% CI	*z*-test	*p*-value	*Standardized estimate β*
Public state media					
Trust in media T2 ~					
T1 Trust in media	.50 (.03)	[.44, .55]	17.81	<.001	.50
T1 Betrayal by media	−.21 (.03)	[−.26, −.16]	−8.12	<.001	−.25
T1 Betrayal by politicians	−.02 (.03)	[−.08, .03]	−.86	.39	−.02
T1 Betrayal by local gov.	−.00 (.03)	[−.06, .05]	−.10	.92	.00
Betrayal by media T2 ~					
T1 Betrayal by media	.48 (.03)	[.43, .53]	19.11	<.001	.51
T1 Trust in media	−.33 (.04)	[−.40, −.26]	−9.20	<.001	−.30
T1 Trust in local gov.	.02 (.04)	[−.06, .10]	.49	.62	.02
T1 Trust in politicians	.02 (.04)	[−.06, .10]	.51	.61	.02
Local government					
Trust in local gov. T2 ~					
T1 Trust in local gov.	.44 (.02)	[.40, .49]	19.08	<.001	.47
T1 Betrayal by media	−.04 (.02)	[−.08, −.00]	−2.03	.042	−.06
T1 Betrayal by politicians	−.05 (.03)	[−.10, −.00]	−2.09	.036	−.06
T1 Betrayal by local gov.	−.14 (.03)	[−.20, −.09]	−5.02	<.001	−.16
Betrayal by local gov. T2 ~					
T1 Betrayal by local gov.	.38 (.03)	[.34, .43]	15.40	<.001	.39
T1 Trust in media	−.10 (.03)	[−.15, −.04]	−3.44	.001	−.10
T1 Trust in local gov.	−.14 (.04)	[−.23, −.06]	−3.28	.001	−.13
T1 Trust in politicians	−.12 (.04)	[−.20, −.04]	−2.81	.005	−.11
Politicians in general					
Trust in politicians T2 ~					
T1 Trust in politicians	.44 (.02)	[.39, .48]	18.50	<.001	.48
T1 Betrayal by media	.00 (.02)	[−.04, .04]	.13	.90	.00
T1 Betrayal by politicians	−.06 (.03)	[−.11, −.01]	−2.37	.018	−.08
T1 Betrayal by local gov.	−.10 (.03)	[−.15, −.04]	−3.52	<.001	−.12
Betrayal by politicians T2 ~					
T1 Betrayal by politicians	.37 (.02)	[.33, .42]	15.66	<.001	.38
T1 Trust in media	−.21 (.03)	[−.27, −.15]	−6.85	<.001	−.22
T1 Trust in local gov.	.04 (.05)	[−.05, .13]	.89	.37	.04
T1 Trust in politicians	−.15 (.05)	[−.24, −.06]	−3.33	.001	−.13

Note: Fully left-justified variables are dependent variables.

However, trust in public state media was not affected by either betrayal by politicians or local government.

The analysis also identified reverse effects, from trust at T1 to betrayal at T2. Trust in the media at T1 notably was related to lower perceptions of betrayal by both the local government and politicians at T2. Trust in politicians at T1 was also negatively related to perceived betrayal by the local government at T2. Tests of directional asymmetry (see SM6) indicated

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

that the relative strength of the opposing paths differed for Public State Media, with trust-to-betrayal effects being stronger than betrayal-to-trust effects, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 4.20$, $p = .040$. No significant differences emerged for Local Government or Politicians (p_s of 1.00 and .10). Although an omnibus test across targets reached significance, $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 7.84$, $p = .049$, the pattern of results suggests that directional asymmetry was limited and primarily driven by the Public State Media target.

Discussion

This first study set out to examine the interplay between political betrayal experiences and trust in key political entities (politicians in general, local government, and public state media). Perceptions of betrayal by these different entities were positively correlated, suggesting a general, diffuse tendency to feel betrayed by institutions (see SM2). Using a longitudinal design that assessed data shortly before and after the 2024 German regional elections, we observed systematic negative associations between betrayal and trust. More specifically, participants who reported higher levels of betrayal by one political entity consistently expressed lower trust in the same entity, both cross-sectionally and over time. Although not necessarily a causal relationship, the results of these cross-lagged analyses allow us to speak of a temporal link between a past betrayal experience and trust at a subsequent point in time.

Moreover, conducting a more complex CLPM—including all measures of betrayal and of trust—we identified assimilation effects from betrayal by one entity at T1 to trust in other entities at T2. Assimilation was more clearly marked between the two "truly" political entities, that is, local government and politicians in general, than with public state media. This suggests that generalizations occur within specific boundaries. In this instance, people seem to generalize across diffuse political entities but less so with a more "neutral" entity such as the public state media.

Finally, the cross-lagged analyses revealed reverse temporal effects, that is, from trust at T1 to betrayal perceptions at T2. Those who begin with stronger trust in a given institution or entity report less betrayal later on, possibly because they are more inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt or view ambiguous actions as less indicative of deceit. Conversely, the lower one's trust in a given political entity is, from the get-go, the higher the likelihood of perceiving betrayal at a later time. Interestingly, higher trust in the media also generally buffered against betrayal experiences by politicians in general and the local government at T2; or, conversely, lower trust in the media amplified perceptions of betrayal at T2. Tests of directional asymmetry (see SM6) suggested that these reciprocal effects were generally similar in magnitude across targets, with one exception: for Public State Media, trust to betrayal effects were stronger than betrayal to trust effects, whereas no significant differences emerged for Local Government or Politicians. This highlights the reciprocal and dynamic nature of trust: while feelings of betrayal can diminish trust, trust itself can serve as a protective factor that curbs or buffers against experiences of betrayal (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Tomlinson et al., 2004).

STUDY 2

Political trust encompasses not just trust in institutions but also trust toward individual politicians. This is especially the case in systems where a prime minister or president has a substantial influence on policies and political decisions (such as the UK or the US). We conducted a second study that would turn more specifically to such political figures.

The UK General Election determines the composition of the House of Commons and, by extension, the leadership of the government. It focuses on nationwide policy areas,

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

such as the economy, healthcare, and foreign relations, over which the central government exercises considerable authority. On 4 July 2024, the UK held a general election, half a year after the last local elections in which the Conservative party, which had won the past four general elections and held the Prime Minister role for 14 years, suffered major losses. During the general election, the spotlight tends to be on the main parties and their leaders; in this case, Rishi Sunak (Conservative), Keir Starmer (Labour), Ed Davey (Liberal Democrats), and Nigel Farage (Reform UK), reflecting the United Kingdom's parliamentary system.

This election provided us with the opportunity to investigate betrayal experiences associated with specific leaders and their possible generalizations toward other political entities. The study design, materials, hypotheses, and planned analyses were preregistered: https://aspredicted.org/k8cm-vfpn.pdf.

Methods

Participants and procedure

Participants were a non-representative sample recruited and remunerated through the crowdsourcing platform Prolific. They were invited to an online survey about people's views on the current situation in the UK in the days preceding the election. The data was collected as part of a larger research project and the questionnaire included measures that pertain to other research questions and are not discussed further (for a full list, see the preregistration). Criteria for participation were British citizenship, England as the current residency, and having the right to vote.

Sample size was limited by funding constraints. We aimed to recruit sufficient numbers of voters for each of the four leading parties. Participants were thus invited based on a prescreening aiming to recruit approximately 180 Labour voters, 180 Conservative voters, 120 Reform UK voters, and 120 Liberal Democrat voters (for more detail about the recruitment procedure, see Lalot & Abrams, 2025).

Overall, 605 participants completed the study. Seventeen individuals indicated not to know Ed Davey, the LibDem party leader, and were therefore excluded from analysis, consistent with the pre-registration. This left a final sample of 588 respondents (265 men, 218 women, 5 non-binary/other or did not want to disclose; $M_{age} = 47.5$, $SD_{age} = 14.5$). A sensitivity power analysis conducted using the *semPower* package (Moshagen & Bader, 2023) indicated that, with a sample of 588 participants and 76 estimated degrees of freedom, the planned SEM had a statistical power of .99 to detect an RMSEA of .05 at $\alpha = .05$.

Materials

Trust

Participants indicated how much they trusted or distrusted a series of political leaders and entities, with one item for each party leader (i.e., Sunak, Starmer, Davey, and Farage) and political entity (i.e., the Parliament, their preferred party, and politicians in general; 7-point Likert scale, 1 = *strongly distrust*, 7 = *strongly trust*). Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 4.

Betrayal

As in Study 1, participants first read a short definition of political betrayal before reporting their feelings of betrayal: "Over the past year or so, to what extent would have you felt the

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 4 Study 2: Descriptive statistics of trust in, and betrayal by various political entities.

Trust in: *M* (*SD*)							
Sunak	**Starmer**	**Davey**	**Farage**	**Politicians**	**Preferred party**	**Parliament**	**Local government**
3.13 (1.98)	3.39 (1.91)	3.78 (1.59)	2.97 (2.14)	2.99 (1.43)	4.81 (1.28)	3.38 (1.59)	3.70 (1.57)

Betrayal by: *M* (*SD*)							
Sunak	**Starmer**	**Davey**	**Farage**	**Politicians**	**Preferred party**	–	–
4.77 (1.86)	3.90 (1.79)	3.22 (1.66)	4.12 (2.05)	5.26 (1.44)	2.98 (1.64)	–	–

Note: There was no measure of betrayal by parliament and local government. The party leaders are Rishi Sunak (Conservative), Keir Stamer (Labour), Ed Davey (Liberal Democrats), and Nigel Farage (Reform UK).

TABLE 5 Study 2: Correlations between betrayal experiences and trust in political actors.

		Betrayal by					
		Sunak	**Starmer**	**Davey**	**Farage**	**Politicians**	**Preferred party**
Trust in	Sunak	**−.78*****	.18***	.15***	−.17***	−.46***	.04
	Starmer	.23***	**−.69*****	−.45***	.39***	−.01	−.17***
	Davey	.00	−.35***	**−.56*****	.33***	−.05	−.14***
	Farage	−.08*	.40***	.41***	**−.73*****	.02	−.08
	Politicians	−.37***	−.17***	−.12**	.13**	**−.48*****	−.15***
	Preferred party	−.02	−.12**	−.05	−.09*	−.12**	**−.49*****

Note: Values in bold (diagonal) show the within-entity correlations. There was no measure of betrayal by parliament and local government. The party leaders are Rishi Sunak (Conservative), Keir Stamer (Labour), Ed Davey (Liberal Democrats), and Nigel Farage (Reform UK). We computed correlations between each political actor's betrayal and trust scores; thus, the coefficients above and below the diagonal differ. In the matrix, columns denote betrayal measures and rows denote trust measures for the same set of political entities.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

country has been betrayed or let down by (…)?". The item was repeated for each of the four political leaders and three political entities (7-point scale; 1 = *no sense of betrayal*, 7 = *felt completely betrayed*).

Demographics

Participants also reported demographics: age, gender, education, income, subjective social status, religiosity, political orientation, ethnicity, religion, and employment status (see SM7).

Results

From betrayal to trust in the same entity

Zero-order correlations between betrayal experiences and trust in the same political leader or entity are reported in the diagonal of Table 5. A larger correlation matrix between all measures of betrayal, trust, and demographics appears in SM8. As hypothesized, betrayal

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

experiences by one target were significantly and negatively associated with trust in the same target ($-.78 < r_s < -.48$, $p_s < .001$).

From betrayal to generalized loss of trust

We then turned to structural equation modeling to examine the relationships between betrayal by specific political actors and trust in others, that is, potential generalizations. We estimated a model in which all betrayal variables simultaneously predicted each of the trust variables; this included the trust measures toward the parliament and the local government (see Table 6).

Consistent with the zero-order correlations, when accounting for betrayal and trust in other targets, betrayal by a specific politician continued to be strongly related to lower trust in that politician ($\beta_s = -.53$ to $\beta_s = -.75$, $p < .001$). Some cross-entity relationships emerged as well, although not as consistently. Most notably, feelings of betrayal by Starmer (Labour) were *positively* associated with trust in Sunak (Conservative; $\beta = .11$, $p < .001$). Feeling betrayed by Sunak was similarly positively associated with trust in Starmer ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), whereas feelings of betrayal by Davey (LibDem) and Starmer showed positive effects on trust in Farage (Reform UK; $\beta = .23$ and $\beta = .13$, respectively, $p_s < .001$). Thus, perceived betrayal by one leader seems to lead participants to 'reallocate' their trust to another leader from a different party. By contrast, feelings of betrayal by more general targets (e.g., politicians in general) negatively predicted trust in multiple political entities (e.g., trust in the parliament or the local government; see Table 6).

Feelings of betrayal by two specific political figures also affected trust in the broader entities of parliament and in politicians in general. Specifically, betrayal by Sunak (Conservative leader and incumbent Prime Minister) was related to lower trust in the Parliament ($\beta = -.32$, $p < .001$) and in politicians in general ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .001$). In contrast, betrayal by Farage (leader of the populist Reform UK party) was related to higher trust in the Parliament ($\beta = .12$, $p < .001$) and in politicians in general ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$).

As a robustness check, we also conducted additional analyses controlling for demographics. Based on zero-order correlations, we identified age and political orientation as the two most strongly correlated demographic variables (see SM8). Controlling for demographics produced no substantive changes for the more diffuse trust constructs (e.g., preferred party, Parliament, politicians in general), with the main exception that betrayal by Sunak became negatively associated with trust in local government ($b = -.13$, $p = .011$; see SM9). Only a few meaningful differences emerged for leader-specific outcomes: betrayal by Sunak became a significant positive predictor of trust in Farage ($b = .08$, $p = .015$), whereas the previously significant association between betrayal by Davey and trust in Sunak attenuated to non-significance ($b = .01$, $p = .77$). Overall, the pattern of results was robust to demographic adjustment (see SM9).

Discussion

Study 2 aimed to replicate the findings from Study 1 in an electoral setting with a stronger focus on political figures. In line with our hypotheses, we observed a consistent negative correlation between betrayal experiences and trust in the associated political entity. Moreover, we found both assimilation and contrast effects from betrayal by one target to trust in other targets. We observed medium to high correlations of the betrayal measures; however, they did not seem to appear in any obvious kind of grouping akin to an Eastonian distinction (see SM8).

Assimilation effects were especially present within broader and more abstract political entities, specifically between the Parliament, politicians in general, and the local government. Furthermore, perceived betrayal by Rishik Sunak, the incumbent Prime Minister, was

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 6 Study 2: Structural equation modeling investigating the relationships between betrayal experiences and trust in Rishi Sunak, Keir Starmer, Edward Davey, Nigel Farage, participants' preferred party, politicians in general, the parliament, and local government.

	b (*SE*)	95% CI	*z*-test	*p*-value	Standardized estimate *β*
Rishi Sunak					
Effects on trust in Sunak ~					
Betrayal by Sunak	−.80 (.03)	[−.87, −.74]	−24.16	<.001	−.75
Betrayal by Starmer	.12 (.04)	[.05, .19]	3.33	.001	.11
Betrayal by Davey	.08 (.04)	[.00, .15]	2.06	.040	.07
Betrayal by Farage	−.02 (.03)	[−.06, .04]	−.58	.56	−.02
Betrayal by preferred party	.06 (.03)	[−.00, .12]	1.83	.07	.05
Betrayal by politicians in general	−.06 (.04)	[−.15, .02]	−1.48	.14	−.05
Keir Starmer					
Effects on trust in Starmer ~					
Betrayal by Sunak	.23 (.04)	[.16, .29]	6.36	<.001	.22
Betrayal by Starmer	−.64 (.04)	[−.72, −.056]	−16.59	<.001	−.60
Betrayal by Davey	−.03 (.04)	[−.10, .05]	−.63	.53	−.02
Betrayal by Farage	.20 (.03)	[.15, .25]	7.51	<.001	.22
Betrayal by preferred party	−.04 (.03)	[−.10, .03]	−1.10	.27	−.03
Betrayal by politicians in general	−.09 (.05)	[−.18, .00]	−1.98	.048	−.07
Ed Davey					
Effects on trust in Davey ~					
Betrayal by Sunak	−.04 (.04)	[−.11, .03]	−1.26	.21	−.05
Betrayal by Starmer	.05 (.04)	[−.03, .12]	1.27	.20	.06
Betrayal by Davey	−.51 (.04)	[−.59, −.43]	−12.77	<.001	−.53
Betrayal by Farage	.20 (.03)	[.15, .26]	7.58	<.001	.26
Betrayal by preferred party	−.08 (.03)	[−.15, −.01]	−2.34	.019	−.08
Betrayal by politicians in general	.02 (.05)	[−.07, .11]	.43	.67	.02
Nigel Farage					
Effects on trust in Farage ~					
Betrayal by Sunak	.01 (.04)	[−.07, .08]	.16	.87	.01
Betrayal by Starmer	.15 (.04)	[.07, .23]	3.74	<.001	.13
Betrayal by Davey	.29 (.04)	[.21, .38]	7.03	<.001	.23
Betrayal by Farage	−.68 (.03)	[−.73, −.62]	−24.30	<.001	−.65
Betrayal by preferred party	−.13 (.04)	[−.20, −.06]	−3.68	<.001	−.10
Betrayal by politicians in general	.06 (.05)	[−.03, .16]	1.30	.19	.04
Preferred party					
Effects on trust in preferred party ~					
Betrayal by Sunak	.01 (.03)	[−.05, .07]	.29	.77	.01
Betrayal by Starmer	−.03 (.03)	[−.09, .04]	−.80	.42	−.04
Betrayal by Davey	.04 (.04)	[−.03, .11]	1.20	.23	.06
Betrayal by Farage	−.03 (.02)	[−.07, .02]	−1.10	.27	−.04

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 6 (Continued)

	b (*SE*)	95% CI	*z*-test	*p*-value	Standardized estimate *β*
Betrayal by preferred party	−.37 (.03)	[−.43, −.32]	−12.40	<.001	−.48
Betrayal by politicians in general	−.02 (.04)	[−.10, .07]	−.38	.70	−.02
Politicians in general					
Effects on trust in politicians in general ~					
Betrayal by Sunak	−.14 (.04)	[−.21, −.08]	−4.25	<.001	−.19
Betrayal by Starmer	−.06 (.04)	[−.14, .01]	−1.68	.09	−.08
Betrayal by Davey	.00 (.04)	[−.08, .07]	−.03	.98	.00
Betrayal by Farage	.12 (.03)	[.07, .17]	4.64	<.001	.17
Betrayal by preferred party	−.05 (.03)	[−.12, .01]	−1.63	.10	−.06
Betrayal by politicians in general	−.35 (.05)	[−.44, −.26]	−7.87	<.001	−.35
Parliament					
Effects on trust in the parliament ~					
Betrayal by Sunak	−.27 (.04)	[−.35, −.08]	−7.28	<.001	−.32
Betrayal by Starmer	−.06 (.04)	[−.14, .03]	−1.45	.18	−.06
Betrayal by Davey	−.01 (.04)	[−.10, .07]	−.29	.77	−.01
Betrayal by Farage	.09 (.03)	[.04, .15]	3.31	<.001	.12
Betrayal by preferred party	−.03 (.04)	[−.10, .04]	−.84	.40	−.03
Betrayal by politicians in general	−.29 (.05)	[−.39, −.19]	−5.88	<.001	−.26
Local government					
Effects on trust in the local government ~					
Betrayal by Sunak	−.07 (.04)	[−.15, .01]	−1.74	.08	−.08
Betrayal by Starmer	−.03 (.04)	[−.11, .06]	−.59	.56	−.03
Betrayal by Davey	−.15 (.05)	[−.24, −.06]	−3.29	.001	−.16
Betrayal by Farage	.14 (.03)	[.08, .20]	4.64	<.001	.19
Betrayal by preferred party	−.11 (.04)	[−.18, −.03]	−2.77	.006	−.11
Betrayal by politicians in general	−.20 (.05)	[−.30, −.10]	−3.79	<.001	−.18

Note: Fully left-justified variables are dependent variables.

negatively related to trust in the parliament and politicians in general. This suggests that assimilation effects from political figures toward institutions arise mostly from figures who play a prominent role in the political system and may thus be collectively perceived as prototypical of politicians or as embodying the system (Smith, 1981).

Conversely, contrast effects between individual figures also occurred, that is, a betrayal experience elevated trust in another actor or institution. Betrayal by one was positively linked to trust in the other for what we would describe as 'direct' political opponents (most notably between Rishik Sunak and Keir Starmer, the respective leaders of the Conservative vs. Labour party). Only betrayal by Farage, the leader of the right-wing populist Reform UK and a self-declared anti-establishment figure, was positively linked to trust in the Parliament and politicians in general, indicating that individuals with greater trust in the system are more likely to feel betrayed by a politician who attacks this same system, or conversely that when one feels betrayed by an 'anti-establishment' politician, the establishment is in reverse more likely to be judged as trustworthy.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Lastly, both assimilation and contrast effects seemed to be slightly clustered in different domains, either for political actors or for political institutions. As highlighted in the introduction, this hints toward the Eastonian differentiation of diffuse and specific political support (Easton, 1965) and suggests that individuals mentally group political actors as one specific category and political institutions, as well as politicians in general, as a second, more diffuse category.

In sum, Study 2 replicated and extended the findings from Study 1, revealing dynamics of generalization from one political entity to the next, either in the form of assimilation or contrast effects. However, conclusions from Study 2 are limited by its cross-sectional design, making it impossible to test for temporal effects of betrayal on trust and vice versa. To address this limitation, we conducted a final study that would combine the features of Studies 1 and 2 and provide a final test of our hypothesis.

STUDY 3

We took advantage of the 2024 US presidential election to assess trust generalization dynamics in a bipartisan environment with a strong focus on individual political figures. Presidential elections in the US are defined by both a focus on the two main political parties, the Democratic and Republican parties, and on the presidential candidates. The 47th presidential election of the United States was held on 5 November 2024. Former US president Donald Trump ran for office again after losing to incumbent president Joe Biden in 2020. After a poor performance during the early campaigning and in the presidential debate, Biden withdrew his nomination in favor of Vice President Kamala Harris. The campaigning was characterized by false claims and misinformation from Trump's campaign team (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Guess et al., 2020) accompanied by ongoing court case(s) against Trump (Moniz & Swann, 2025). Additionally, an assassination attempt on Donald Trump in July 2024 further fueled many conspiracy myths (Ognyanova et al., 2025).

This provided us with the opportunity to test how betrayal and trust may generalize from politicians as individuals to political institutions across time. The study design, materials, planned analyses, and hypotheses were preregistered: https://aspredicted.org/whbj-h33g.pdf.

Methods

Participants and procedure

American participants were recruited through Prolific (with quotas set to match demographics by gender, age, ethnicity, and political affiliation) to fill an online survey on "the current situation in the USA and the forthcoming election." Participants had to be at least 18 years old, hold US citizenship, speak English, and currently live in the US. The first questionnaire (T1) was completed between 30 October and 2 November 2024. Participants were then invited to complete a second questionnaire (T2) 2 weeks after the election (19–25 November). At both time points, they reported their perceptions of political trust and political betrayal experiences alongside other measures that pertain to different research questions (see preregistration for the full list). Demographics were assessed at T1.

Sample size was determined by funding and feasibility constraints. We recruited 500 participants at T1, expecting to retain around 400 at T2 (i.e., 20% dropout). A sensitivity power analysis, conducted with the *semPower* package (Moshagen & Bader, 2023), suggested that assuming moderate stability of trust and betrayal over time (i.e., .50) and small cross-lagged effects of betrayal on trust and of trust on betrayal (i.e., .15), this expected final sample size ($N = 400$) would provide >.93 power to detect the cross-lagged effects.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

We excluded participants who failed two attention checks at either T1 ($n = 17$) or T2 ($n = 17$). For the cross-sectional (correlational) analysis, we used all full responses (T1: $n = 500$, T2: $n = 430$). For our main cross-lagged analysis, as preregistered we only considered participants who completed the questionnaire at both time points. This sample included 430 respondents (207 men, 216 women, 6 non-binary/other; 1 undisclosed; $M_{age} = 46.3$, $SD_{age} = 16.1$).

Materials

Trust

Participants indicated how much they trusted or distrusted a series of political leaders and entities, specifically: incumbent president Joe Biden, Democratic Party nominee Kamala Harris, Republican Party nominee Donald Trump, the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, the Congress, and politicians in general (7-point Likert scale, 1 = *strongly distrust*, 7 = *strongly trust*). Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 7.

Betrayal

Similar to Studies 1–2, participants first read a short definition of political betrayal before reporting their feelings of betrayal pertaining to the time just before the election: "Over the past few weeks, leading up to the 2024 presidential election, have you felt (…) breached your trust / betrayed the country?" The item was repeated for each of the three political leaders and four political entities (7-point scale; 1 = *no sense of betrayal*, 7 = *felt completely betrayed*).

Liking

In two sets of questions participants were asked to rate their liking of the aforementioned political leaders ("How much do you like or dislike the following political leaders?") as well as groups or institutions ("And how much do you like or dislike the following groups or institutions?"; 7-point scale; 1 = *Dislike a great deal*, 7 = *Like a great deal*).

Demographics

Participants also reported a number of demographics including their age, gender, state of residence, whether they lived in an urban or rural area, education level, employment status, income, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and religiosity. They also reported subjective socioeconomic status, political orientation (left–right), and political affiliation and leaning (two items; see SM10).

TABLE 7 Study 3: Descriptive statistics of trust in, betrayal by, and liking of various political entities.

	Harris	Biden	Trump	Democrats	Republicans	Congress	Politicians
Trust in: M (SD)							
T1	3.51 (2.27)	3.35 (2.12)	3.13 (2.35)	3.47 (2.04)	3.12 (2.10)	3.00 (1.38)	2.77 (1.41)
T2	3.39 (2.26)	3.30 (2.05)	3.26 (2.38)	3.32 (1.96)	3.10 (2.05)	2.97 (1.39)	2.70 (1.34)
Betrayal by: M (SD)							
T1	3.78 (2.44)	3.84 (2.30)	4.30 (2.47)	3.97 (2.29)	4.40 (2.29)	4.17 (1.69)	4.62 (1.47)
T2	3.33 (2.30)	3.42 (2.25)	3.72 (2.50)	4.01 (2.17)	3.97 (2.39)	3.81 (1.86)	4.32 (1.76)
Liking by: M (SD)							
T1	3.83 (2.44)	3.44 (2.13)	3.26 (2.46)	3.79 (2.10)	3.39 (2.26)	3.29 (1.42)	2.94 (1.44)
T2	3.68 (2.39)	3.38 (2.06)	3.41 (2.53)	3.62 (2.06)	3.42 (2.27)	3.23 (1.42)	2.95 (1.43)

Note: For T1: $N = 500$; T2: $N = 430$.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Results

From betrayal to trust in the same entity

We first computed zero-order correlations to investigate the cross-sectional relationship between perceived betrayal and trust in each target, at both time points (see Table 8 for correlations, and SM11 for the larger correlation matrix also including demographics). As hypothesized and replicating Studies 1 and 2, we observed strong negative relationships across all betrayal-trust pairs, ranging from $r = -.33$, $p < .001$, for betrayal by and trust in politicians, to $r = -.83$, $p < .001$, for betrayal by and trust in Trump.

We then investigated cross-lagged relationships using CLPMs. For each of the betrayal/trust pairs, we fitted the autoregressive paths from T1 to T2 for both trust and betrayal and included the cross-lagged paths. For all models, the autoregressive paths were positive and significant (β_s between .42 and .84, $p_s < .001$; Figure 2).

Again, results highlighted a consistent trend that perceived betrayal by one target at T1 was negatively related to trust in the same target at T2 (see SM12 for the full model descriptions). Specifically, this path was significant for Biden ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .001$), Harris ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .001$), the Democratic Party ($\beta = -.11$, $p = .005$), Trump ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .001$), politicians in general ($\beta = -.12$, $p = .007$), and the Congress ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .001$). For the Republican Party, the path was descriptively negative but nonsignificant ($\beta = -.07$, $p = .081$).

There were also some significant reverse relationships between trust at T1 and betrayal at T2, although those were less consistent. Specifically, the relationship emerged for Trump ($\beta = -.22$, $p = .001$), the Democratic Party ($\beta = -.17$, $p = .010$), the Republican Party ($\beta = -.34$, $p < .001$), and the Congress ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .001$).

To assess robustness, we conducted supplementary analyses introducing relevant demographics as covariates in the CLPMs. Based on zero-order correlations, we identified political orientation and religiosity as the two most strongly correlated demographic variables (see SM11). When we included these covariates in the models, the results did not differ meaningfully from the simpler models without covariates, and the explained variance (R^2) remained effectively unchanged (see SM13).

We finally wanted to ensure that our trust items really captured trust and not general positive attitudes toward the different political figures. We thus conducted a final robustness check including the measure of liking of each political figure in the CLPMs (at both time points). These models yielded identical results with no meaningful differences compared with the simpler model, and R^2 remained unchanged (SM14). Consequently, we focus our interpretation on the simpler models.

From betrayal to a generalized loss of trust

We finally investigated potential assimilation or contrast effects from one political entity to another. To this end, we ran a more complex CLPM modeling the relationships between all types of betrayal (across time) and all targets of trust (Table 9).[3] This model revealed both assimilation and contrast effects.

Assimilation occurred both within the same partisan affiliation (e.g., betrayal by the Democratic Party was negatively related to trust in Harris, $\beta = -.09$, $p = .032$) but also outside it

[3]Similar to our first study, we originally preregistered we would run three different models where one type of betrayal was regressed on all targets of trust. To better control for the intercorrelations between measures of trust on the one hand, and of betrayal on the other hand, we decided to deviate from preregistration and test one large model including all variables. The full preregistered analysis can be found in SM15.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 8 Study 3: Correlations between betrayal experiences and trust in political actors.

			Betrayal by													
			T1							T2						
			Harris	Biden	Trump	Dem.	Rep.	Congress	Politicians	Harris	Biden	Trump	Dem.	Rep.	Congress	Politicians
Trust in	T1	Harris	**−.82*****	−.72***	.74***	−.79***	.60***	−.02	−.12*	−.64***	−.56***	.71***	−.52***	.61***	.16**	.16**
		Biden	−.77***	**−.74*****	.70***	−.75***	.57***	−.02	−.12*	−.63***	−.58***	.66***	−.51***	.57***	.12*	.12*
		Trump	.73***	.64***	**−.83*****	.64***	−.72***	−.11*	−.04	.59***	.53***	−.73***	.42***	−.66***	−.25***	−.23***
		Democrats	−.72***	−.64***	.64***	**−.76*****	.50***	−.10*	−.20***	−.59***	−.53***	.61***	−.54***	.49***	.07	.06
		Republicans	.59***	.51***	−.72***	.51***	**−.76*****	−.28***	−.18***	.45***	.40***	−.69***	.28***	−.70***	−.33***	−.34***
		Congress	−.08	−.05	−.05	−.15**	−.19***	**−.43*****	−.34***	−.06	−.06	−.10*	−.18***	−.18***	−.36***	−.30***
		Politicians	−.14**	−.13**	.02	−.20***	−.08	−.32***	**−.39*****	−.11*	−.08	.03	−.16***	−.06	−.22***	−.22***
	T2	Harris	−.81***	−.71***	.74***	−.77***	.60***	−.03	−.11*	**−.67*****	−.58***	.72***	−.54***	.62***	.17***	.15**
		Biden	−.75***	−.73***	.67***	−.72***	.55***	−.03	−.12*	−.64***	**−.63*****	.63***	−.55***	.54***	.10*	.08
		Trump	.73***	.65***	−.83***	.63***	−.71***	−.13**	−.06	.59***	.53***	**−.77*****	.42***	−.68***	−.26***	−.25***
		Democrats	−.67***	−.59***	.61***	−.71***	.48***	−.11*	−.19***	−.58***	−.50***	.59***	**−.57*****	.48***	.06	.04
		Republicans	.56***	.49***	−.68***	.48***	−.71***	−.26***	−.18***	.44***	.38***	−.68***	.26***	**−.71*****	−.34***	−.34***
		Congress	.02	.03	−.11*	−.04	−.25***	−.42***	−.35***	.01	−.02	−.17***	−.17***	−.28***	**−.43*****	−.38***
		Politicians	−.09	−.06	−.02	−.13**	−.12*	−.29***	−.35***	−.08	−.07	−.04	−.19***	−.14**	−.26***	**−.33*****

Note: Values in bold (diagonal) show the cross-sectional within-entity correlations. We computed correlations between each political actor's betrayal and trust scores; thus, the coefficients above and below the diagonal differ. In the matrix, columns denote betrayal measures and rows denote trust measures for the same set of political entities.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

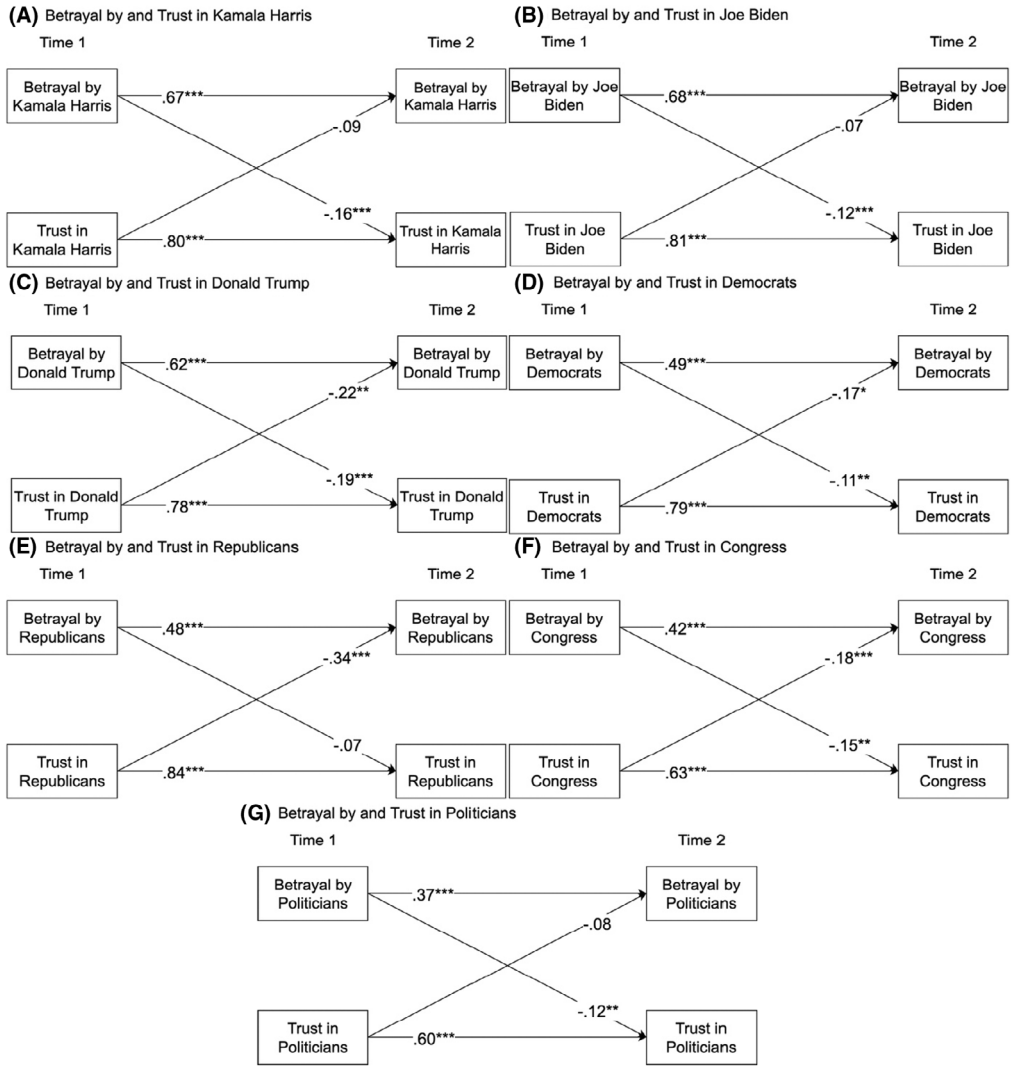


FIGURE 2 Study 3: Cross-lagged panel models testing the links between betrayal by, and trust in (A) Kamala Harris, (B) Joe Biden, (C) Donald Trump, (D) Democratic Party, (E) Republican Party, (F) the Congress, and (G) Politicians in general. Coefficients are standardized betas. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

and across the more diffuse political institutions (e.g., betrayal by politicians in general was negatively related to trust in Congress, $\beta = -.14$, $p = .004$). We must note, however, that not all relationships were significant. For instance, betrayal by the Democratic Party was not related to trust in Biden, nor was betrayal by the Republican Party related to trust in Trump (nor vice versa).

Conversely, contrast effects emerged across partisan lines. Betrayal by Trump was positively related to trust in Democratic-aligned targets, including Harris ($\beta = .11$, $p = .002$), Biden ($\beta = .09$, $p = .027$), and the Democratic Party ($\beta = .11$, $p = .024$). Likewise, betrayal by Harris was positively related to subsequent trust in Trump ($\beta = .09$, $p = .042$) or toward the Republican Party ($\beta = .12$, $p = .030$). These findings suggest that betrayal experiences may not only erode trust but also shift trust toward perceived political alternatives.

Cross-lagged effects from trust at T1 to betrayal at T2 were also substantial, particularly across partisan targets. For instance, higher trust in Trump was associated with increased subsequent perceptions of betrayal from Democratic-aligned actors such as Harris ($\beta = .31$,

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 9 Study 3: Results of the cross-lagged panel analysis investigating the relationships between betrayal experiences and trust, for Kamala Harris, Joe Biden, Donald Trump, Democratic Party, Republican party, Congress, and Politicians in general.

	b (SE)	95% CI	*z*-test	*p*-value	Standardized estimate *β*
Kamala Harris					
Trust in Harris T2 ~					
T1 Trust in Harris	.61 (.03)	[.55, .66]	20.31	<.001	.62
T1 Betrayal by Harris	−.14 (.04)	[−.23, −.06]	−3.34	.001	−.16
T1 Betrayal by Biden	.02 (.03)	[−.05, .08]	.47	.64	.02
T1 Betrayal by Trump	.10 (.03)	[.04, .16]	3.05	.002	.11
T1 Betrayal by Democrats	−.08 (.04)	[−.16, −.01]	−2.15	.032	−.09
T1 Betrayal by Republicans	.04 (.03)	[−.03, .10]	1.14	.26	.04
T1 Betrayal by Congress	−.02 (.03)	[−.08, .05]	−.48	.63	−.01
T1 Betrayal by politicians	−.01 (.04)	[−.08, .06]	−.26	.79	−.01
Betrayal by Harris T2 ~					
T1 Betrayal by Harris	.37 (.04)	[.29, .46]	8.67	<.001	.41
T1 Trust in Harris	−.04 (.10)	[−.23, .16]	−.36	.72	−.04
T1 Trust in Biden	−.13 (.09)	[−.30, .04]	−1.47	.14	−.12
T1 Trust in Trump	.29 (.07)	[.15, .44]	4.03	<.001	.31
T1 Trust in Democrats	−.08 (.08)	[−.24, .08]	−.97	.33	−.07
T1 Trust in Republicans	−.20 (.08)	[−.35, −.05]	−2.61	.009	−.19
T1 Trust in Congress	.03 (.09)	[−.14, .20]	.37	.71	.02
T1 Trust in politicians	.05 (.08)	[−.12, .21]	.54	.59	.03
Joe Biden					
Trust in Biden T2 ~					
T1 Trust in Biden	.60 (.03)	[.55, .66]	20.41	<.001	.65
T1 Betrayal by Harris	−.05 (.04)	[−.13, .04]	−1.06	.29	−.06
T1 Betrayal by Biden	−.08 (.04)	[−.15, −.01]	−2.23	.026	−.09
T1 Betrayal by Trump	.07 (.03)	[.01, .14]	2.22	.027	.09
T1 Betrayal by Democrats	−.05 (.04)	[−.13, .03]	−1.30	.19	−.06
T1 Betrayal by Republicans	.02 (.03)	[−.04, .09]	.62	.54	.02
T1 Betrayal by Congress	.01 (.03)	[−.06, .07]	.16	.87	.01
T1 Betrayal by politicians	−.02 (.04)	[−.09, .05]	−.55	.58	−.02
Betrayal by Biden T2 ~					
T1 Betrayal by Biden	.40 (.04)	[.33, .48]	10.16	<.001	.44
T1 Trust in Harris	.08 (.10)	[−.11, .27]	.82	.41	.08
T1 Trust in Biden	−.16 (.09)	[−.34, .02]	−1.73	.08	−.16
T1 Trust in Trump	.25 (.07)	[.11, .39]	3.48	.001	.27
T1 Trust in Democrats	−.12 (.08)	[−.28, .04]	−1.49	.14	−.11
T1 Trust in Republicans	−.14 (.08)	[−.29, .01]	−1.84	.07	−.14
T1 Trust in Congress	−.09 (.09)	[−.25, .08]	−1.04	.30	−.06
T1 Trust in politicians	.17 (.08)	[.01, .34]	2.09	.037	.11

(Continues)

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [13/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 9 (Continued)

	b (SE)	95% CI	*z*-test	*p*-value	Standardized estimate *β*
Donald Trump					
Trust in Trump T2 ~					
T1 Trust in Trump	.69 (.03)	[.63, .74]	22.93	<.001	.69
T1 Betrayal by Harris	.08 (.04)	[.00, .17]	2.03	.042	.09
T1 Betrayal by Biden	.07 (.03)	[.00, .13]	1.97	.049	.06
T1 Betrayal by Trump	−.18 (.03)	[−.25, −.12]	−5.44	<.001	−.19
T1 Betrayal by Democrats	−.03 (.04)	[−.10, .04]	−.82	.42	−.03
T1 Betrayal by Republicans	.01 (.03)	[−.05, .07]	.31	.76	.01
T1 Betrayal by Congress	−.01 (.03)	[−.07, .06]	−.18	.86	.00
T1 Betrayal by politicians	−.04 (.04)	[−.11, .03]	−1.23	.22	−.03
Betrayal by Trump T2 ~					
T1 Betrayal by Trump	.33 (.04)	[.25, .40]	8.13	<.001	.33
T1 Trust in Harris	.36 (.09)	[.19, .53]	4.21	<.001	.34
T1 Trust in Biden	−.05 (.08)	[−.21, .10]	−.69	.49	−.05
T1 Trust in Trump	−.07 (.07)	[−.20, .06]	−1.07	.28	−.07
T1 Trust in Democrats	−.01 (.07)	[−.15, .12]	−.19	.85	−.01
T1 Trust in Republicans	−.27 (.07)	[−.40, −.13]	−3.97	<.001	−.23
T1 Trust in Congress	−.18 (.08)	[−.33, −.03]	−2.42	.016	−.10
T1 Trust in politicians	.17 (.07)	[.03, .32]	2.39	.017	.10
Democratic party					
Trust in Democrats T2 ~					
T1 Trust in Democrats	.61 (.03)	[.54, .67]	18.95	<.001	.65
T1 Betrayal by Harris	.00 (.05)	[−.09, .10]	.07	.94	.00
T1 Betrayal by Biden	.04 (.04)	[−.03, .12]	1.10	.27	.05
T1 Betrayal by Trump	.08 (.04)	[.01, .15]	2.26	.024	.11
T1 Betrayal by Democrats	−.14 (.05)	[−.23, −.05]	−3.13	.002	−.17
T1 Betrayal by Republicans	.05 (.04)	[−.02, .12]	1.33	.19	.06
T1 Betrayal by Congress	−.05 (.04)	[−.12, .02]	−1.44	.15	−.05
T1 Betrayal by politicians	−.03 (.04)	[−.11, .05]	−.79	.43	−.03
Betrayal by Democrats T2 ~					
T1 Betrayal by Democrats	.30 (.05)	[.21, .39]	6.56	<.001	.33
T1 Trust in Harris	.08 (.11)	[−.13, .29]	.77	.44	.09
T1 Trust in Biden	−.06 (.10)	[−.25, .13]	−.65	.52	−.06
T1 Trust in Trump	.22 (.08)	[.06, .37]	2.79	.005	.24
T1 Trust in Democrats	−.25 (.09)	[−.43, −.08]	−2.85	.004	−.25
T1 Trust in Republicans	−.15 (.08)	[−.31, .01]	−1.80	.07	−.15
T1 Trust in Congress	−.18 (.09)	[−.36, .00]	−1.95	.05	−.12
T1 Trust in politicians	.20 (.09)	[.03, .38]	2.23	.026	.13

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 9 (Continued)

	b (SE)	95% CI	*z*-test	*p*-value	Standardized estimate *β*
Republican party					
Trust in Republicans T2 ~					
T1 Trust in Republicans	.68 (.03)	[.62, .74]	21.87	<.001	.72
T1 Betrayal by Harris	.10 (.05)	[.01, .19]	2.17	.030	.12
T1 Betrayal by Biden	.01 (.04)	[−.06, .08]	.24	.81	.01
T1 Betrayal by Trump	−.04 (.04)	[−.11, .03]	−1.06	.29	−.05
T1 Betrayal by Democrats	−.03 (.04)	[−.11, .06]	−.59	.56	−.03
T1 Betrayal by Republicans	−.06 (.04)	[−.13, .02]	−1.48	.14	−.07
T1 Betrayal by Congress	−.03 (.04)	[−.10, .04]	−.79	.43	−.02
T1 Betrayal by politicians	−.02 (.04)	[−.10, .06]	−.48	.63	−.01
Betrayal by Republicans T2 ~					
T1 Betrayal by Republicans	.21 (.04)	[.14, .28]	5.78	<.001	.21
T1 Trust in Harris	.35 (.09)	[.17, .53]	3.73	<.001	.34
T1 Trust in Biden	.04 (.08)	[−.13, .21]	.48	.63	.04
T1 Trust in Trump	.06 (.07)	[−.08, .19]	.85	.39	.06
T1 Trust in Democrats	−.11 (.08)	[−.26, .04]	−1.44	.15	−.10
T1 Trust in Republicans	−.47 (.08)	[−.61, −.32]	−6.10	<.001	−.42
T1 Trust in Congress	−.14 (.08)	[−.29, .02]	−1.68	.09	−.08
T1 Trust in politicians	.13 (.08)	[−.02, .29]	1.66	.10	.08
Congress					
Trust in Congress T2 ~					
T1 Trust in Congress	.52 (.03)	[.45, .58]	15.78	<.001	.54
T1 Betrayal by Harris	.03 (.05)	[−.06, .12]	.61	.54	.06
T1 Betrayal by Biden	.05 (.04)	[−.03, .13]	1.23	.22	.09
T1 Betrayal by Trump	.10 (.04)	[.02, .17]	2.60	.009	.18
T1 Betrayal by Democrats	.06 (.04)	[−.03, .14]	1.29	.20	.10
T1 Betrayal by Republicans	−.04 (.04)	[−.11, .03]	−1.09	.28	−.07
T1 Betrayal by Congress	−.13 (.04)	[−.20, −.05]	−3.31	.001	−.16
T1 Betrayal by politicians	−.12 (.04)	[−.21, −.04]	−2.89	.004	−.14
Betrayal by Congress T2 ~					
T1 Betrayal by Congress	.25 (.04)	[.17, .32]	6.49	<.001	.23
T1 Trust in Harris	.25 (.10)	[.06, .45]	2.60	.009	.32
T1 Trust in Biden	−.13 (.09)	[−.31, .04]	−1.48	.14	−.16
T1 Trust in Trump	.01 (.07)	[−.13, .15]	.13	.90	.01
T1 Trust in Democrats	−.03 (.08)	[−.19, .13]	−.37	.71	−.03
T1 Trust in Republicans	−.07 (.08)	[−.22, .08]	−.93	.35	−.08
T1 Trust in Congress	−.43 (.09)	[−.60, −.26]	−4.94	<.001	−.33
T1 Trust in politicians	.15 (.08)	[−.01, .32]	1.84	.07	.12

(Continues)

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 9 (Continued)

	b (SE)	95% CI	*z*-test	*p*-value	Standardized estimate *β*
Politicians in general					
Trust in politicians T2 ~					
T1 Trust in politicians	.44 (.03)	[.38, .50]	13.47	<.001	.48
T1 Betrayal by Harris	−.06 (.05)	[−.16, .04]	−1.19	.23	−.12
T1 Betrayal by Biden	.08 (.04)	[−.00, .16]	1.85	.07	.14
T1 Betrayal by Trump	.05 (.04)	[−.02, .13]	1.31	.19	.10
T1 Betrayal by Democrats	.06 (.05)	[−.04, .15]	1.18	.24	.10
T1 Betrayal by Republicans	−.01 (.04)	[−.09, .06]	−.34	.74	−.02
T1 Betrayal by Congress	−.05 (.04)	[−.13, .03]	−1.21	.23	−.06
T1 Betrayal by politicians	−.17 (.05)	[−.26, −.08]	−3.67	<.001	−.20
Betrayal by politicians T2 ~					
T1 Betrayal by politicians	.21 (.04)	[.13, .29]	5.04	<.001	.18
T1 Trust in Harris	.28 (.10)	[.09, .47]	2.87	.004	.37
T1 Trust in Biden	−.11 (.09)	[−.28, .06]	−1.25	.21	−.14
T1 Trust in Trump	.13 (.07)	[−.01, .27]	1.82	.07	.18
T1 Trust in Democrats	−.05 (.08)	[−.21, .11]	−.64	.52	−.06
T1 Trust in Republicans	−.21 (.08)	[−.36, −.06]	−2.78	.005	−.26
T1 Trust in Congress	−.24 (.08)	[−.40, −.07]	−2.81	.005	−.19
T1 Trust in politicians	.04 (.08)	[−.12, .21]	.52	.61	.04

Note: Fully left-justified variables are dependent variables.

$p < .001$) and Biden ($\beta = .27$, $p = .001$). Conversely, higher trust in Republicans predicted lower subsequent perceptions of betrayal by the Republican Party itself ($\beta = -.42$, $p < .001$), and higher trust in Congress predicted lower subsequent perceived betrayal by the Congress ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .001$). In general, the association between the matching betrayal-trust pairs was significant for all pairs except Harris and politicians in general.

A formal test of directional asymmetry (see SM16 for full output) further indicated that the relative strength of these opposing paths differed across domains, with trust-to-betrayal effects being stronger for the Republican party, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 30.20$, $p < .001$, and Congress, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 10.90$, $p < .001$, whereas betrayal-to-trust effects were stronger for politicians in general, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 4.64$, $p = .031$. Overall, the results suggest a bidirectional relationship between betrayal and trust, with the dominant direction depending on the target.

Betrayal, trust, and partisanship

Finally, we examined whether the longitudinal associations between betrayal and trust differed by partisan affiliation. We divided participants based on their reported vote at T2 and estimated a multiple-group CLPM (see SM17). Overall, the pattern suggested selective rather than uniform moderation by partisanship. Importantly, differences were not observed for the most direct, within-target associations: none of the "matched" paths from betrayal by a given target at T1 to trust in the same target at T2 differed significantly between Democrats and Republicans (for the test of difference, all $p_s > .26$). In other words, the basic within-target link between betrayal and later trust emerged similarly across the two partisan groups.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Where group differences did emerge, they were primarily concentrated in cross-target generalizations. Several such generalizations showed significant differences, for example, betrayal-related generalizations differed across groups for *betrayal by Biden → trust in Harris*, $\chi^2 = 6.65$, $p = .010$, as well as for *betrayal by Harris → trust in Trump*, $\chi^2 = 10.87$, $p = .001$, and *betrayal by politicians → trust in Trump*, $\chi^2 = 7.25$, $p = .007$. Similarly, differences emerged for institutional generalizations involving Congress and politicians in general (e.g., *betrayal by politicians → trust in Congress*, $\chi^2 = 5.69$, $p = .017$; *betrayal by Congress → trust in politicians*, $\chi^2 = 4.43$, $p = .035$). A smaller set of reverse-direction generalizations (trust toward betrayal) also differed by political group (e.g., *trust in Trump → betrayal by Biden*, $\chi^2 = 4.71$, $p = .030$; *trust in politicians → betrayal by Congress*, $\chi^2 = 4.43$, $p = .035$).

Taken together, these findings suggest that partisanship does not broadly change whether betrayal relates to later trust. Instead, partisan affiliation seems to matter most for how betrayal and trust generalize across targets, especially for generalizations that map onto partisan opponents and more diffuse political objects.

Discussion

Study 3 aimed to test the generalizability of the findings of Studies 1 and 2 in two respects: first, it tested the (temporal) interplay of betrayal and trust in a presidential election, and second, it assessed how generalizations of loss of trust from betrayals occur over time between political figures and political institutions, and vice versa. In line with Easton's distinction between diffuse and specific political support, zero-order correlations suggested two clusters: one that corresponds to specific beliefs (betrayal/trust in politicians and as well as their parties) and the other to diffuse beliefs (betrayal/trust in Congress and politicians in general, as well as the two parties; see SM11). Second, correlations revealed that perceived betrayal by various political entities was strongly negatively correlated with trust in the same entity at both time points. The CLPMs consistently indicate that experiences of betrayal at T1 were linked with trust in the associated targets at T2.

Additionally, we again observed generalization effects. Betrayal by some political entities was associated with lower trust in another entity within the same political affiliation (i.e., assimilation effects, such as between betrayal by the Democratic Party and trust in Harris). Betrayal experiences were also linked to higher levels of trust in a political entity of another political affiliation (i.e., contrast effects, such as between Harris and Trump).

Finally, Study 3 allowed us to explore whether these betrayal-trust dynamics differed by partisan affiliation. Overall, the pattern of results suggests that the temporal associations between betrayal and trust were largely comparable across partisan groups. While some cross-target generalizations differed in magnitude between Democrats and Republicans, most paths from betrayal to trust did not show systematic differences depending on partisanship. This pattern reflects predictions derived from partisan motivated reasoning and selective attribution models (Bisgaard, 2015, 2019), which emphasize identity-driven divergence in political evaluations. Thus, even in a highly polarized U.S. election context, partisan effects appear best characterized as structured and target-specific, rather than pervasive across the full set of trust-betrayal relations.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Despite the centrality of trust in political life, the mechanisms through which trust is damaged and lost remain poorly understood (Brezzi et al., 2021; Carstens, 2023; Torcal & Christmann, 2021). While it seems straightforward to expect that perceived *betrayal* by political

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

figures diminishes trust, as illustrated specifically with cases of election pledges being broken (Bytzek et al., 2024) or the occurrence of political scandals (Von Sikorski et al., 2020), evidence for this link in the political realm in broader terms remains sparse. Specifically, it is not well understood how much the loss of trust might generalize to other targets, either in an assimilative (i.e., also decreasing trust in other targets) or contrastive way (i.e., increasing trust in targets perceived as political alternatives in a compensation dynamics).

Drawing from recent research in organizational and social psychology (Baer et al., 2018; Chou et al., 2022), we hypothesized that perceived betrayal by a political entity—that is, the feelings that a political actor or institution is corrupt, lying, or engaging in other misconduct which does not seem fit for the political sphere—would decrease trust not just in this entity but also affect trust in others through either assimilation or contrast effects. In three studies, we aimed to test whether perceived betrayal leads to a decline in political trust, both directly and through assimilation or contrast effects. By adopting a general approach in assessing perceived betrayal judgments, rather than focusing on specific political events or scandals, we could establish general effects on how perceived betrayal experiences map onto political trust. This research thus highlights betrayal as an important mechanism refining the understanding of why and how trust in political entities erodes.

Evidence for a generalized loss of trust

We found support for negative associations between betrayal and trust across three preregistered studies. Betrayal experiences and trust *in the same political entity* were consistently negatively related cross-sectionally (Study 1–3). Longitudinally, higher betrayal at T1 was also associated with reduced trust at T2 (Studies 1 and 3). This suggests a temporal link from betrayal perceptions to subsequent decline of trust.

More interestingly, we also observed assimilation and contrast effects. There were *assimilation* effects, hinting at how citizens may generalize a sense of betrayal from one figure to a broader range of political targets, thereby amplifying distrust across the board (see Bytzek et al., 2024; Chou et al., 2022). *Contrast* effects also occurred, although less consistently. These effects show how disillusionment with one political entity may lead citizens to invest greater trust in political actors or institutions that are perceived as alternatives to the one that they feel betrayed them. People might simply turn to other mainstream parties, assuming they perceive them as 'viable alternatives' (Jankowski et al., 2023). However, this also hints at how lower levels of political trust in general (or in 'the system') may lead individuals to turn toward anti-establishment or alternative parties and ideas (Citrin & Stoker, 2018).

We observed that generalizations tend to cluster within political actors and institutions rather than spread uniformly across all political entities. This could be surprising given prior findings that individuals often fail to distinguish between trust in institutions and trust in the politicians who run them (Muñoz, 2017; Norris, 2017). On the other hand, these results align with Easton's (1965) original theoretical distinction between specific and diffuse support: citizens may in fact exhibit finer cognitive granularity when evaluating different political targets. Thus, while betrayal by one politician may erode trust in other politicians within the same domain, it does not automatically diminish trust in separate modalities of governance. Indeed, prior work shows generalization effects occur primarily when targets share a nominal group identity with the betrayer (Chou et al., 2022), suggesting that people use simple categorization heuristics to guide their trust judgments across different levels of the political system. Only political actors who fill central roles within the system (such as prime ministers or presidents) seem subject to provoking a generalized loss of trust in more diffuse entities such as the government or politicians in general.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

From trust to perceptions of betrayal

We also found negative temporal links from trust (T1) to betrayal (T2) in both longitudinal studies (Studies 1 and 3), indicating a reverse effect of trust on betrayal. This suggests that individuals with higher levels of trust are less likely to feel betrayed at a later time. Longitudinally, betrayal and trust mostly showed reciprocal links of similar strength (with only small, target-specific variations), suggesting a real feedback dynamic of perceived betrayals and trust judgments.

Interestingly, opposite effects have been discussed in the literature, with high-trust individuals experiencing a greater loss of trust after a betrayal experience compared with their low-trust counterparts (e.g., for trust in healthcare institutions, Smith, 2017; and perceptions of procedural justice and company turnover; Bal et al., 2011). It seems that more work is required to better understand the effect of trust on betrayal perceptions and define the conditions under which it is more likely to act as a buffer against, or an amplifier for, perceived betrayals. In the political context, it is possible that stronger affective ties—such as partisan attachment or social identification—foster motivated reasoning and in-group favoritism (Turner et al., 1979), making trust act as a buffer (but see Lalot & Abrams, 2025). The degree to which these identity-driven processes moderate the impact of trust on perceived betrayal remains an open question for future research.

Notably, both the betrayal-to-trust as well as the trust-to-betrayal associations were not always limited to the associated trust target; both pathways showed evidence of generalizations to other political actors and institutions, indicating that the generalizations are not confined to either one of the pathways.

Partisanship and generalization dynamics

An open question was whether partisanship would moderate the strength of the associations between trust and betrayal, both in the same and in different targets. We leveraged the large sample size, and clear biparty context provided by our US sample (Study 3) to explore such differences. While we found isolated differences between different partisan alignments and their betrayal/trust judgments, no clear pattern emerged. These findings suggest that while partisanship may shape trust judgments in some highly salient or identity-relevant cases, it does not necessarily alter broader betrayal-trust dynamics. Rather than indicating underlying motivated reasoning, the results point to a more selective role of partisan identity in how betrayal perceptions affect trust judgments. This implies that political betrayal might operate more like a relatively general mechanism of trust erosion that extends beyond partisan divides, even in a highly polarized context such as the U.S. However, the context of this U.S. election was unusual. The shift from Biden to Harris as the Democratic nominee occurred very late in the campaign cycle, creating uncertainty and strategic challenges for the party. At the same time, both major parties were experiencing internal divisions. In particular, the Republican Party remained split, with a significant number of members expressing skepticism about Trump.

Limitations and future directions

The present research has some limitations that future research needs to address. Firstly, our longitudinal studies only included two measurement points. This limited the analysis strategy to 'classical' CLPMs with no possibility to integrate random intercept cross-lagged panel models (RI-CLPM). RI-CLPM is currently discussed as a better solution to longitudinal data analysis since it allows for distinction between within-person and between-person variance

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

(Lucas, 2023). Classical CLPM, as used here, can only detect *temporal* relationships between variables and is thus not fully fit for *causal* explanations (Singh et al., 2024). To better ascertain causal relationships between political betrayal and trust, future research is needed that includes more measurement points and fully tests for within-person variation through time. Moreover, our longitudinal studies were conducted over a relatively short period of time (within 2 months each), limiting us to assess only short-term fluctuations in trust levels. Consequently, it remains an open question whether the mechanisms of betrayal are indeed responsible for long-term losses of trust.

This research sought to establish a first, thorough test of the relationships between trust and betrayal in the political context across political entities. It was thus beyond the scope of the studies to include potential moderators of this relationship. Future research can now tackle this next step. We believe social identity (Carlin & Love, 2013; Polipciuc, 2022), moral disengagement (Alessandri et al., 2020), and emotional regulation (Lee et al., 2013) may be particularly interesting factors to consider. Moreover, context effects have been discussed as central in the evaluation of trust breaches and following trust judgments (Schwarz & Bless, 1992). Higher granularity in the data could provide the means to observe trust changes with accompanying changes in the political system (i.e., changes of the party in power or an elected president). Uncovering these context effects could help clarify why some betrayals generalize while others induce trust reallocations.

In line with our general approach to betrayal, we provided participants with a predefined description of possible cases of betrayal and only measured the frequency of perceived betrayal, but not its precise typology. Although this methodological choice ensures a better comparability of frequency reported across participants, it also limits us in understanding where the betrayal experience of the individual stems from: a political scandal they heard of, the perception that a politician does not keep their election promises, etc. Future research may want to refine the analysis of the typology of betrayal in the political realm (see Lalot, 2023) to better understand how citizens react to different types of betrayals and to provide concrete policy recommendations.

Types of betrayal might also differ in the specific dimensions of trust they violate. For example, perceived failures in regulatory or policy performance may primarily undermine evaluations of ability, whereas ethical or moral transgressions may disproportionately erode integrity-based trust. While our conceptual framework distinguishes between these dimensions of trustworthiness, our measures did not allow us to empirically differentiate between them. Future research should therefore examine whether specific betrayal experiences differentially shape subdimensions of trustworthiness.

Relatedly, although our use of a unidimensional trust measure was motivated by pragmatic considerations and the need for comparability across surveys, recent work argues that political trust is better understood as a "trust family" comprising trust, mistrust, and distrust, which are conceptually distinct and may have different political consequences (Devine et al., 2024; Jennings et al., 2021). There is still discussion in the field over how trust is measured and operationalized across studies, particularly noting that simple, unidimensional trust metrics may obscure important variations in how people view political actors and institutions (Devine, 2024). Incorporating multidimensional measures in future research would allow for a more fine-grained assessment of how specific types of betrayal shape distinct components of trust, distrust, and mistrust, and thus might yield more precise predictions regarding political behavior and its consequences.

The present investigation focused on subjective perceptions of political betrayal, which may not necessarily be aligned with episodes of "objective" breaches of trust. Recent research on politicians' perceptual accuracy provides interesting insights in the distinction between the two. Politicians can hold opinions that are relatively close to those of citizens, yet misperceive public opinion and underestimate support for particular policy positions (Walgrave &

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Soontjens, 2025). They might also misunderstand the priorities and views of their voters. If political actors base their decisions on these inaccurate perceptions, citizens may see their expectations disappointed while the actor remains persuaded that they are acting in the interest of the citizens. This underscores that breakdowns in political trust may stem not only from strategic misconduct but also from misperceived representations (for a similar discussion, see Lalot et al., 2026). Our findings that pre-existing trust also determines future feelings of betrayal suggest that trust is not just an outcome of political experiences but that it also works as a psychological buffer against perceived betrayals. Higher prior trust could foster resilience by shaping how citizens interpret political actions, making them less likely to construe transgressions or ambiguous events as betrayals. Future research could explicitly test this buffering or resilience function of trust.

Finally, our data does not allow us to assess whether and how betrayal experiences and trust perceptions are shaped by post-betrayal political communication. Prior research suggests that trust-related judgments are sensitive to informational cues and contextual interpretations, implying that how political actors explain or justify contentious decisions may affect downstream trust responses (Weinberg, 2023, 2024). Future work should therefore integrate communicative dynamics (e.g., explanations, acknowledgements of failure) to better understand when perceived betrayal translates into sustained trust losses, and how it can be mitigated.

CONCLUSIONS

This research highlights that perceived betrayal by one political entity not just decreases trust in this entity but also affects trust in other entities. In line with social cognition theories, we found both assimilation effects (reflecting a generalized loss of trust) and contrast effects (reflecting a compensatory increase of trust in another entity). Assimilation effects seemed to cluster within the more "diffuse" political targets as well as within partisan boundaries. Contrast effects seemed to occur specifically between political figures perceived as opponents or rivals.

Together, these results illustrate how perceived betrayal, stemming for example from a local scandal, may negatively influence trust in other institutions, even those that are only loosely connected. In parallel, they hint at how feeling betrayed by 'mainstream' politicians may push people to place greater trust in populist, anti-establishment figures. Consequently, promoting and maintaining trust within a single branch of governance might have a broader protective influence across the political landscape as a whole than commonly thought. Moreover, our results suggest that trust might work as a buffer against betrayal experiences, pointing to potential for virtuous cycle dynamics. Future work should continue probing the conditions that determine whether the effects of betrayals are assimilative or contrastive, and how they persist through time. The present studies provide a solid starting point to further explore the relationship between perceived betrayal experiences and trust in the political domain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Elias Knobeloch for assisting with the supplementary material. Moreover, we would like to thank the team of the KomRex center for the organization and access to the Wahlstudie 2024. Open access publishing facilitated by Universitat Basel, as part of the Wiley - Universitat Basel agreement via the Consortium Of Swiss Academic Libraries.

FUNDING INFORMATION

The author(s) declare that financial support was received for the research and/or publication of this article. JS and FL are supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (grant number:

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [13/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

PZ00P1_216373/1). Study 1 was supported by the Thüringer Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Digitale Gesellschaft, DENKBUNT—Das Thüringer Landesprogramm für Demokratie, Toleranz und Weltoffenheit, and the Volkswagenstiftung.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data and code for analysis: https://osf.io/cuwq9. Data and full materials of Study 1 will be made publicly available by the organizer/funder of the project in December 2026.

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

Preregistrations: Study 1: https://osf.io/zp6n9; Study 2: https://aspredicted.org/k8cm-vfpn.pdf; Study 3: https://aspredicted.org/whbj-h33g.pdf.

ORCID

Jakob Schuck https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6469-0018
Rainer Greifeneder https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0725-5626
Fanny Lalot https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1237-5585

REFERENCES

Aassve, A., Capezzone, T., Cavalli, N., Conzo, P., & Peng, C. (2024). Social and political trust diverge during a crisis. *Scientific Reports*, *14*(1), 331. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-50898-4

Alessandri, G., Filosa, L., Tisak, M. S., Crocetti, E., Crea, G., & Avanzi, L. (2020). Moral disengagement and generalized social trust as mediators and moderators of rule-respecting behaviors during the COVID-19 outbreak. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*, 2102. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02102

Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *31*(2), 211–236. https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211

Ares, M., & Hernández, E. (2017). The corrosive effect of corruption on trust in politicians: Evidence from a natural experiment. *Research & Politics*, *4*(2), 2053168017714185. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168017714185

Baer, M. D., Matta, F. K., Kim, J. K., Welsh, D. T., & Garud, N. (2018). It's not you, it's them: Social influences on trust propensity and trust dynamics. *Personnel Psychology*, *71*(3), 423–455. https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12265

Bal, P. M., De Lange, A. H., Ybema, J. F., Jansen, P. G. W., & Van Der Velde, M. E. G. (2011). Age and trust as moderators in the relation between procedural justice and turnover: A large-scale longitudinal study. *Applied Psychology*, *60*(1), 66–86. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2010.00427.x

Bartels, L. M. (2023). *Democracy erodes from the top: Leaders, citizens, and the challenge of populism in Europe*. Princeton University Press.

Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*, *5*(4), 323–370. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.5.4.323

Baumgartner, F. R., & Chaqués Bonafont, L. (2015). All news is bad news: Newspaper coverage of political parties in Spain. *Political Communication*, *32*(2), 268–291. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2014.919974

Bennett, W. L., & Kneuer, M. (2024). Communication and democratic erosion: The rise of illiberal public spheres. *European Journal of Communication*, *39*(2), 177–196. https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231231217378

Berezin, M. (2002). Secure states: Towards a political sociology of emotion. *The Sociological Review*, *50*(2_suppl), 33–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2002.tb03590.x

Bergbower, M. L., & Allen, L. G. (2021). Trust in the American political parties and support for public policy: Why Republicans benefit from political distrust. *Journal of Trust Research*, *11*(1), 42–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/21515581.2021.2014336

Bisgaard, M. (2015). Bias will find a way: Economic perceptions, attributions of blame, and partisan-motivated reasoning during crisis. *The Journal of Politics*, *77*(3), 849–860. https://doi.org/10.1086/681591

Bisgaard, M. (2019). How getting the facts right can fuel partisan-motivated reasoning. *American Journal of Political Science*, *63*(4), 824–839. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12432

Bless, H., & Schwarz, N. (1998). Context effects in political judgement: Assimilation and contrast as a function of categorization processes. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *28*(2), 159–172. https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1099-0992(199803/04)28:2%253C159::aid-ejsp860%253E3.0.co;2-4

Brezzi, M., González, S., Ngyuen, D., & Prats, M. (2021). *An updated OECD framework on drivers of trust in public institutions to meet current and future challenges*. (OECD Working Papers on Public Governance No. 48; OECD Working Papers on Public Governance, Bd. 48). https://doi.org/10.1787/b6c5478c-en

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Bytzek, E., Dupont, J. C., Steffens, M. C., Knab, N., & Schneider, F. M. (2024). Do election pledges matter? The effects of broken and kept election pledges on citizens' trust in government. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, *66*, 785–804. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11615-024-00567-6

Carlin, R. E., & Love, G. J. (2013). The politics of interpersonal trust and reciprocity: An experimental approach. *Political Behavior*, *35*(1), 43–63. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-011-9181-x

Carstens, J. (2023). Unpacking political trust: A review of conceptualisations, determinants, and consequences. *French Politics*, *21*(3), 295–314. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41253-023-00220-5

Chou, E. Y., Hsu, D. Y., & Myung, N. (2022). Once bitten, twice shy: The negative spillover effect of seeing betrayal of trust. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, *28*(2), 360–378. https://doi.org/10.1037/xap0000301

Citrin, J., & Green, D. P. (1986). Presidential leadership and the resurgence of trust in government. *British Journal of Political Science*, *16*(4), 431–453. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400004518

Citrin, J., & Luks, S. (2001). Political trust revisited: Déjà vu all over again? In *What is it about government that Americans dislike?* (pp. 9–27). Cambridge University Press.

Citrin, J., & Stoker, L. (2018). Political trust in a cynical age. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *21*(1), 49–70. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050316-092550

Damisch, L., Mussweiler, T., & Plessner, H. (2006). Olympic medals as fruits of comparison? Assimilation and contrast in sequential performance judgments. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, *12*(3), 166–178. https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-898X.12.3.166

Dassonneville, R., & McAllister, I. (2021). Explaining the decline of political trust in Australia. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, *56*(3), 280–297. https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2021.1960272

Daum, M., Jacobsen, L., & Gasser, F. (2025). *Österreich wirft sich Kickl in die Arme*. [Broadcast].

Devine, D. (2024). Does political trust matter? A meta-analysis on the consequences of trust. *Political Behavior*, *46*, 2241–2262. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-024-09916-y

Devine, D., & Valgarðsson, V. O. (2024). Stability and change in political trust: Evidence and implications from six panel studies. *European Journal of Political Research*, *63*(2), 478–497. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12606

Devine, D., Valgarðsson, V. O., Jennings, W., Stoker, G., & Gaskell, J. (2024). *Beyond trust: A tripartite framework for analyzing political trust, distrust, and mistrust*. Open Science Framework. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/urqcn

Easton, D. (1965). *A systems analysis of political life ER*. Wiley.

Elangovan, A. R., & Shapiro, D. L. (1998). Betrayal of Trust in Organizations. *The Academy of Management Review*, *23*(3), 547. https://doi.org/10.2307/259294

Fitness, J., & Case, T. I. (2026). Betrayal and punishment within intimate relationships. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *68*, 102262. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2025.102262

Garz, M., & Sörensen, J. (2021). Political scandals, newspapers, and the election cycle. *Political Behavior*, *43*(3), 1017–1036. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-019-09577-2

Gillespie, N., & Dietz, G. (2009). Trust repair after an organization-level failure. *Academy of Management Review*, *34*(1), 127–145. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.35713319

Giurlando, P. (2021). Political betrayal, political agency, and international politics. In J. D. Sinnott & J. S. Rabin (Eds.), *The psychology of political behavior in a time of change* (pp. 559–574). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38270-4_24

Grierson, J. (2024, June 7). 'People feel betrayed by Labour': Bristol's Green surge continues. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/jun/07/people-feel-betrayed-by-labour-bristols-green-surge-continues

Guess, A. M., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2020). Exposure to untrustworthy websites in the 2016 US election. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *4*(5), 472–480. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0833-x

Hardin, R. (2002). *Trust and trustworthiness*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Hetherington, M. J. (1998). The political relevance of political trust. *American Political Science Review*, *92*(4), 791–808. https://doi.org/10.2307/2586304

Hooghe, M., & Dassonneville, R. (2018). A spiral of distrust: A panel study on the relation between political distrust and protest voting in Belgium. *Government and Opposition*, *53*(1), 104–130. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2016.18

Jankowski, M., Juen, C.-M., & Lewandowsky, M. (2023). Turning a blind eye on the black sheep: When are voters loyal to corrupt politicians? *Acta Politica*, *58*(4), 765–791. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-022-00263-6

Jennings, W., Stoker, G., Valgarðsson, V., Devine, D., & Gaskell, J. (2021). How trust, mistrust and distrust shape the governance of the COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *28*(8), 1174–1196. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2021.1942151

Kähkönen, T., Blomqvist, K., Gillespie, N., & Vanhala, M. (2021). Employee trust repair: A systematic review of 20 years of empirical research and future research directions. *Journal of Business Research*, *130*, 98–109. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.03.019

Keele, L. (2007). Social capital and the dynamics of trust in government. *American Journal of Political Science*, *51*(2), 241–254. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00248.x

Lalot, F. (2023). The unkindest cut of all: A quantitative study of betrayal narratives. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *33*(6), 1580–1601. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2738

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Lalot, F., & Abrams, D. (2025). Partisan forgiveness of political leadership in the 2024 UK general election: Are there limits to transgression credit? *Advances in Psychology*, *2*(1), e972114. https://doi.org/10.56296/aip00040

Lalot, F., Bertram, A. -M., Schuck, J., Maritz, L., & Bardeau, A. (2026). The things we do to each other: A study of betrayal narratives from the betrayer's perspective. *Personal Relationships*, *33*(2), 70065. https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.70065

Lau, R. R., Sigelman, L., & Rovner, I. B. (2007). The effects of negative political campaigns: A meta-analytic reassessment. *The Journal of Politics*, *69*(4), 1176–1209. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2007.00618.x

Lee, J. J., Sohn, Y., & Fowler, J. H. (2013). Emotion regulation as the foundation of political attitudes: Does reappraisal decrease support for conservative policies? *PLoS One*, *8*(12), e83143. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0083143

Levi, M., & Stoker, L. (2000). Political trust and trustworthiness. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *3*(1), 475–507. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.475

Lewicki, R. J., & Brinsfield, C. (2017). Trust repair. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, *4*(1), 287–313. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113147

Lewicki, R. J., & Bunker, B. B. (1996). Developing and maintaining trust in work relationships. In R. M. Kramer & T. R. Tyler (Eds.), *Trust in organizations: Frontiers of theory and research*. Sage.

Lount, R. B., Zhong, C.-B., Sivanathan, N., & Murnighan, J. K. (2008). Getting off on the wrong foot: The timing of a breach and the restoration of trust. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *34*(12), 1601–1612. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167208324512

Lucas, R. E. (2023). Why the cross-lagged panel model is almost never the right choice. *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science*, *6*(1), 25152459231158378. https://doi.org/10.1177/25152459231158378

Luhmann, N. (1973). *Vertrauen: E. Mechanismus d. Reduktion sozialer Komplexität* (2., erw. ed.). Enke.

Maier, J. (2011). The impact of political scandals on political support: An experimental test of two theories. *International Political Science Review*, *32*(3), 283–302. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512110378056

Maslin, M. A., Lang, J., & Harvey, F. (2023). A short history of the successes and failures of the international climate change negotiations. *UCL Open Environment*, *5*, e059. https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444/ucloe.000059

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *The Academy of Management Review*, *20*(3), 709. https://doi.org/10.2307/258792

Moniz, P., & Swann, W. B. (2025). The power of Trump's big lie: Identity fusion, internalizing misinformation, and support for Trump. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *58*(3), 363–368. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096524001203

Moshagen, M., & Bader, M. (2023). semPower: General power analysis for structural equation models. *Behavior Research Methods*, *56*(4), 2901–2922. https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-023-02254-7

Muñoz, J. (2017). Political trust and multilevel government. In S. Zmerli & T. W. G. Van Der Meer (Eds.), *Handbook on political trust* (pp. 69–88). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781782545118.00015

Mussweiler, T. (2007). Assimilation and contrast as comparison effects: A selective accessibility model. In D. A. Stapel & J. Suls (Eds.), *Assimilation and contrast in social psychology* (pp. 165–185). Psychology Press.

Norris, P. (2017). The conceptual framework of political support. In S. Zmerli & T. W. G. Van Der Meer (Eds.), *Handbook on political trust* (pp. 19–32). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781782545118.00012

Ognyanova, K., Druckman, J. N., Schulman, J., Baum, M. A., Perlis, R. H., & Lazer, D. (2025). Information from social ties predicts conspiracy beliefs: Evidence from the attempted assassination of Donald Trump. *PNAS Nexus*, *4*(6), pgaf193. https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgaf193

Polipciuc, M.-E. (2022). Group identity and betrayal: Decomposing trust. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4264157

R Core Team. (2023). *R: A language and environment for statistical computing [Software]*. R Foundation for Statistical Computing. https://www.R-project.org/

Rodríguez-Pose, A., Dijkstra, L., & Poelman, H. (2024). The geography of EU discontent and the regional development trap. *Economic Geography*, *100*(3), 213–245. https://doi.org/10.1080/00130095.2024.2337657

Rosseel, Y. (2012). lavaan: An *R* package for structural equation modeling. *Journal of Statistical Software*, *48*(2), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.18637/jss.v048.i02

Rozin, P., & Royzman, E. B. (2001). Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *5*(4), 296–320. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0504_2

Schwarz, N., & Bless, H. (1992). Scandals and the public's trust in politicians: Assimilation and contrast effects. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *18*(5), 574–579. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167292185007

Singh, M., Verhulst, B., Vinh, P., Zhou, Y. D., Castro-de-Araujo, L. F. S., Hottenga, J.-J., Pool, R., De Geus, E. J. C., Vink, J. M., Boomsma, D. I., Maes, H. H. M., Dolan, C. V., & Neale, M. C. (2024). Using instrumental variables to measure causation over time in cross-lagged panel models. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, *59*(2), 342–370. https://doi.org/10.1080/00273171.2023.2283634

Smith, C. (2017). First, do no harm: Institutional betrayal and trust in health care organizations. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, *10*, 133–144. https://doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S125885

Smith, K. B. (1981). The representative role of the president. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *11*(2), 203–213.

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Tomlinson, E. C., Dineen, B. R., & Lewicki, R. J. (2004). The road to reconciliation: Antecedents of victim willingness to reconcile following a broken promise. *Journal of Management*, *30*(2), 165–187. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jm.2003.01.003

Torcal, M., & Christmann, P. (2021). Responsiveness, performance and corruption: Reasons for the decline of political trust. *Frontiers in Political Science*, *3*, 676672. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.676672

Turner, J. C., Brown, R. J., & Tajfel, H. (1979). Social comparison and group interest in ingroup favouritism. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *9*(2), 187–204. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420090207

Van Der Meer, T. W. G. (2017). Political trust and the "crisis of democracy". In T. W. G. Van Der Meer (Ed.), *Oxford research encyclopedia of politics*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.77

Van Der Meer, T. W. G., & Zmerli, S. (2017). The deeply rooted concern with political trust. In S. Zmerli & T. W. G. Van Der Meer (Eds.), *Handbook on political trust* (pp. 1–16). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781782545118.00010

Von Sikorski, C., Heiss, R., & Matthes, J. (2020). How political scandals affect the electorate. Tracing the eroding and spillover effects of scandals with a panel study. *Political Psychology*, *41*(3), 549–568. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12638

Walgrave, M., & Soontjens, K. (2025). Responsive nor responsible? Politicians' climate change policy preferences and public opinion perceptions. *Environmental Politics*, *35*(3), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2025.2492439

Weinberg, J. (2023). Feelings of trust, distrust and risky decision-making in political office. An experimental study with national politicians in three democracies. *Comparative Political Studies*, *56*(7), 935–967. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140221139376

Weinberg, J. (2024). Building trust in political office: Testing the efficacy of political contact and authentic communication. *Political Studies*, *72*(4), 1288–1312. https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217231185706

Wilkins, C. (2024, September 7). French protesters rage at 'stolen election' as Macron picks conservative Barnier for PM. *France24*. https://www.france24.com/en/france/20240907-french-protesters-rage-at-stolen-election-as-macron-picks-conservative-barnier-for-pm

Winsvold, M., Haugsgjerd, A., Saglie, J., & Segaard, S. B. (2024). What makes people trust or distrust politicians? Insights from open-ended survey questions. *West European Politics*, *47*(4), 759–783. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2268459

Zhao, H., Wayne, S. J., Glibkowski, B. C., & Bravo, J. (2007). The impact of psychological contract breach on work-related outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, *60*(3), 647–680. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2007.00087.x

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

How to cite this article: Schuck, J., Greifeneder, R., & Lalot, F. (2026). Generalized loss of trust following political betrayal: Cross-country evidence in the context of elections. *Political Psychology*, *47*, e70169. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.70169

14679221, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pops.70169 by NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Wiley Online Library on [19/06/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License