Capturing Young American Trust in National Databases

Lauren A. Menard

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Abstract

A pattern of decreasing trusting proportions in each consecutive decade and increasing trusting proportions with age was revealed in data. Although trust levels were lower in younger adults and the 2000s, findings did not support hypotheses of more rapidly falling trust levels or a college degree procuring less trust in the 2000s. A hypothesis of upswings in trust for young adults following September 11, 2001 was supported. Logistic regression analyses identified the 1990s, not the 2000s, as the decade with the weakest associations between trust and college degree and life stage product term variables. Two exceptions to patterns in the 2000s—no change in the proportion of trusting 25 to 29-year-olds and an increase in the trusting proportion of 18 to 24-year-old college graduates—suggested Putnam (2005) may have cause to look more closely to emerging adults today for a possibility of the next greatest civic generation of Americans.

Keywords: Adult transitioning, emerging adulthood, attitudinal values, civic engagement

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The trust levels of Americans were investigated with a correlational research design utilizing multiple age categories, two national surveys, and data spanning 1972 through 2010. Declining social trust is a concern for democracies (Flanagan, Osgood, Briddel, Wray, & Syversten, 2006), and Putnam (1995; 1996; 2002; 2005) has identified downward trends in American social trust. A main purpose of the current study was to measure and compare American social trust in like age groups through four decades. As educational attainment was found a strong correlate of social trust (Flanagan, Levine, & Settersten, 2009; Helliwell & Putnam, 2007; Putnam, 1996), trust levels of college graduates were also compared in age and decade groups. Primary research questions were the following:

1. Do American trust levels vary in age by decade groups?
2. Do American trust levels vary in age by decade groups for college graduates?

A unique methodological approach presented the opportunity to explore the following two research questions of secondary interest:

3. Do American trust levels vary by each age within emerging adulthood?
4. Are findings supported by analyses from a second national survey?

Study hypotheses were guided by recognition of an Age of Instability in emerging adulthood theory (Arnett, 2004), observations of upswings in trust following September 11, 2001 (Kirlin & Kirlin, 2002; Putnam, 2002), and the financial instability of the 2000s (Shin, 2009). The current study contributed to the mission of gaining better understandings of American social trust through research (Flanagan et al., 2006; Putnam, 2005).

Introduction

Aeschylus (1876), the Greek dramatist, reflected on a tragic disease of tyranny—trusting no friends. One type of trust is *particularized* trust, that is, trust in *my* kind, *my* friends

(Fukuyama, 1991; Uslaner, 1991). In contrast to the social connectedness and interaction vital to thriving democracies, particularized trust is trust in one's own or one's own kind to the exclusion or disadvantage of others. Fukuyama (1991) observed particularized trust holds a negative externality of hostility towards outsiders. Neither particularized, no-risk, friends only trust, nor the isolating total distrust of tyranny, is a value fundamental to strong civil societies. Social capital reflects *generalized* trust, a type of trust embodying the reciprocity and cooperation leading citizens "to take active roles in their community, to behave morally, and to compromise" (Uslaner, 1991, p. 122). According to Fukuyama (1991), social capital parallels trust and civil society—enlarging the radius of trust. Modern societies are composed of "concentric and overlapping radii of trust" (Fukuyama, 1991, p.8). In this same light, Putnam (1995) in *Bowling Alone* observed, "networks of interaction probably broaden the participants' sense of self, developing the *I* into the *we*" (p. 67).

Uslaner (1991) identified a chicken and egg dilemma for democracy and social capital, which also applies to the interdependent relationships between social trust and societal contexts. Are trusting individuals more likely to join and build social connections, or do enhanced social networks develop and nurture the roots of individual trust from which civic engagement blooms? Democracies nurture (not create) trust in citizens, and trusting individuals are more likely to participate and strengthen democratic societies (Uslaner, 1991). It follows, trust wilts in autocracies, and wary, disengaged citizens do not produce the social capital necessary for thriving societies. The health of democracies, social trust, and economical and political contexts are interconnected.

There is consensus on the need for research leading to the restoration of American social trust and reversals of trends in social disconnection (Flanagan et al., 2006; Putnam, 1995; 2005). As justification for the current study, trust patterns across the life course and over decades were

constructed from national survey data. Observing the trust levels of young adults forebodes the civic-minded values of tomorrow's America. Quantifying trust levels in age by decade groups sets tick marks for where we've been and where we seem to be headed as a trusting nation. Realistic understandings of the barrier social distrust presents in American society lay foundations for effective initiates committed to improving social connectedness. Flanagan et al. (2006) observed, "Social trust is considered the grease that keeps Civil Society going since it is positively correlated with cooperation and with joining community organizations. Thus, the declines in trust have been a cause of concern for many who are worried about the state of democracy" (p.7). This study heeded a call for examination of American trust levels.

Review of Literature

Emerging Adulthood

The normative stage of emerging adulthood now exists in developed countries and is of growing research interest (Arnett, 2004). A premise of emerging adulthood theory is the life cycle has been altered by unprecedented changes in social structure, an adaptation evidenced by rising ages for reaching classic adult milestones (i.e., finishing school, establishing a career, financial independence, marriage, and parenting). According to Arnett (2007), "as cultures change across historical time, development, too, changes" (p. 81). Today, adult transitioning is affected by societal macroevolutions, including globalalization, knowledge societies, and technological advances. For example, many young adults today find increased education or training is necessary to get a job with a decent wage. Marriage and parenting are often further delayed until the milestones of finishing school and establishing a career are reached.

Age groups in the current study were defined by life stage, transitioning stage, and each age of emerging adulthood. Rumbaut (2004) and Rumbaut and Komaie (2007) painted demographic and socioeconomic portraits of Americans in adult transitioning stages with

national data. The current study defines young adults by transitioning stages, but etches profiles of an attitudinal value in young Americans.

Dwindling Trust Levels for Young Americans

In *The Strange Disappearance of Civic America*, Putnam (1996) attributed those age-related differences evident in data to generational effects. Regarding widespread downtrends in trusting and joining, Putnam (1996) acknowledged, "We have found no evidence that the youngest generation will come to match their grandparents' higher levels of civic engagement" (p. 44). Using national survey research on generational gaps of attitudinal differences, Smith (2004) found young Americans were "more disconnected from society on a number of fronts" (p.5). Smith (2004) echoed Putnam's (1995) observation of dwindling social capital, and noted young adults today were more cynical and "less likely to believe people are trustworthy, helpful, and fair" (p.5). An implication from previous research (Putnam, 1996; Smith, 2004) for the current study was social trust was expected to be lower in young adult Americans than in older Americans.

When Putnam (1996) investigated the disappearance of civic America and identified television as a primary suspect, the theory of emerging adulthood was not available from which to inform a generational versus life cycle effects debate. Television may have been just one aspect of a dynamically changing social structure—the more likely villain in Putnam's narrative. The theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004) purports unprecedented changes have altered the life cycle with a new stage of emerging adulthood between the stages of adolescence and full-fledged adulthood. As a theoretical framework for examining age-related differences in trust, emerging adulthood theory was conceptualized as more encompassing than generational theory. According to Arnett (2004), "the changes that have created emerging adulthood are here to stay—Generations X, Y, Z, and beyond will experience an extended period of exploration and

instability in their late teens and twenties" (p. 4). With a theory of essential features describing the distinct stage of emerging adulthood and data through the 2000s, Putnam (1996) may have reconsidered the effects of life cycle and interpreted age-related differences differently.

Educational Attainment and Social Trust

Education is a strong correlate to social trust (Flanagan, et al., 2009; Helliwell & Putnam, 2007; Putnam, 1996). According to Helliwell and Putnam (2007), "Education is one of the most important predictors—usually, in fact, the most important predictor—of many forms of political and social engagement" (p.1). When education's association with other forms of civic engagement were dissolved through complex analyses, positive cumulative effects of higher educational attainment on trust continued to be confirmed (Helliwell & Putnam). Increased educational attainment influences a self-reinforcing climate of trust. According to Helliwell and Putnam (2007), "If individuals know that higher education levels make others more likely to be trusting (and perhaps also more trustworthy), then they are in turn more likely to trust others" (p. 5). The current study used a different analytical approach, but the same social survey prompt for measuring trust as utilized by Putnam (1995; 1996) and Helliwell and Putnam (2007). An expectation was college graduates would have higher trust levels.

Increased Trust Following September 11, 2001

Positive shifts in social trust and interest in government were observed following the September 11 terrorist attacks of 2001 (Kirlin & Kirlin, 2002; Putnam, 2002). According to Putnam (2002), upswings spanned ethnic and social class boundaries:

> As 2001 ended, Americans were more united, readier for collective sacrifice, and more attuned to public purpose than we have been for several decades. Indeed, we have a more capacious sense of *we* than we have had in the adult experience of most Americans now alive. The images of shared suffering that followed the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington suggested a powerful idea of cross-class, cross-ethnic solidarity. (p.22)

From volunteering and giving blood to donating time and money, civic-minded behaviors increased in the aftermath of 9/11(Kirlin & Kirlin, 2002). Trust in local leaders following 9/11 was nearly five times greater for young adults than older adults (Putnam, 2002). While flourishing civic engagement and a vibrant democracy might be the best memorial for victims of September 11 (Kirlin & Kirlin, 2002), upswings in civic-minded attitudes after 9/11 were not coupled with sustained changes in civic behaviors (Putnam, 2002). According to Kirlin and Kirlin (2002), "Donating blood and writing checks do not require citizens to engage others" (p.83). Responses to the terrorist attacks did little to improve civic skills or build ongoing commitments for "engaging other public issues as they arise, to become more informed about what happened and why, or to articulate views" (Kirlin & Kirlin, 2002, p.83).

In a hopeful search for harbingers of the next greatest generation of civic Americans, Putnam (2005) observed, "Among younger Americans—those in high school and college on 9/11—the upsurge in community involvement and interest in public affairs has not faded" (p. 8). As trust is a measure of civic-minded attitudes, a hypothesis of the current study was trust would be higher in the 2000s—especillly for young adults.

Insecurity and Economic Context

According to the Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development, trust develops through consistency and learning "to rely on the sameness and continuity of the outer providers" (Erikson, 1968, p. 102*).* The risk taking/ trust exchange of increased risk and lowered trust in times of uncertainty was also recognized within an economic context (Zanini, 2007).

Variability in employment, residence instability, and more uncertainty in adult transitioning pathways represent an Age of Instability in emerging adulthood theory (Arnett, 2004). The plans young adults develop to guide pathways to adulthood are frequently revised in response to explorations. In the capricious process of planning and re-planning a path towards

adulthood, young adults may discover college majors less interesting, coursework more difficult, love interests short-lived, and good jobs hard to find without more training (Arnett). Thus, change, variability, and uncertainty characterize emerging adults. Understandings of the development of trust through consistency (Erikson, 1968) and insecurity as an essential feature of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004) bolstered the rationale for expecting trust to be lower in young Americans.

Uslaner (1991) observed distrust in a mean world—perhaps this meanness takes into account the economic bleakness of high unemployment and student indebtedness faced by American college graduates in the 2000s (Shin, 2009). According to the Washington Post, "unemployment among college-educated workers is likely to surpass four percent, which would be the highest rate since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began tracking unemployment by education level in 1970" (Shin, 2009, ¶ 8). Debt is another worry. The number of college graduates carrying more than $7,000 worth of debt has doubled in only four years (Sullivan, 2009). In a University of Texas speech, President Obama noted college tuition rose "faster than the costs of housing, transportation, and even health care" (Graves, 2010, ¶7).

Growing wealth inequities compound economic bleakness. Slater (2001) expounded on Wolff's (1995) observation of America's dramatic wealth inequities:

> Today, in what is touted as the world's greatest democracy, under 1% of the population owns more than 45% of the wealth (Wolff, 1995). Putting it the other way round, 45% of the country's bank accounts, stocks, bonds, life insurance, savings, mutual fund shares, houses, unincorporated businesses, consumer durables like cars and major appliances, the value of pension rights, 45% of all this—minus liabilities such as consumer debt, mortgage and other debt—is owned by less than 1% of the population. (p. 172)

Norton and Ariely (2011) reported imbalances have risen to 1% of Americans now holding 50% of wealth—above the inequity level observed before the Great Depression of 1920. According to Uslaner (1991), "When things look bleak, as in periods of increasing income inequality that have marked contemporary America, trust makes less sense for the downtrodden" (p.139). With large

proportions of those *less well-off*, trust may be too risky for many Americans. Uslaner (1991) observed, "During the Great Depression, when most people were poorly off, giving others the benefit of the doubt was too risky for many. So stores hung out the sign, *In God we trust, all others pay cash*" (p. 139).

Considering the gloomy economic context of recent times, rising college tuition, and growing student debt, could Uslaner's (1991) characterization of the less trusting downtrodden be applicable to young college graduates in the 2000s? In other words, did a college degree procure as much trust for young adults in the 2000s as in previous decades? An alternative research hypothesis was trust would be lower in the 2000s than previous decades, especially for college graduates. The economic context and downwards trends in trust over time (Putnam: 1995; 1996; 2002; 2005) held an opposite indication for trust levels in the 2000s than post 9/11 shift.

Conceptual Framework

The theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004; 2007) and the work of Putnam (1995; 1996; 2002; 2005; Helliwell & Putnam, 2007) were study frameworks. Findings of dwindling trust over time and lowered trust in younger adults than older adults informed hypotheses (Putnam, 1995; 1996). Investigations along these lines explored difference in trust levels between young and older Americans through four decades. Trust was expected to be lower in young adults because of downtrends in trust and because of different characteristics associated with distinct life stages—particularly, the essential features of uncertainty and instability in emerging adults (Arnett, 2004; 2007). Education was identified as a strong correlate to social trust (Helliwell & Putnam, 2007). A line of inquiry here was whether a college degree increased trust similarly in all age groups. Upswings in civic-minded attitudes following September 11, 2001 (Putnam, 2002; 2005) and economic challenges were two contextual factors holding

opposite implications for trust in the 2000s. The theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004) informed hypotheses, interpretations, and practical implications.

Purpose

The main purpose of the current investigation was to measure and compare American trust levels in age by decade groups through four decades of national survey data (1972-2010). To this end, four guiding research questions were developed:

1. Do American trust levels vary in age by decade groups?
2. Do American trust levels vary in age by decade groups in college graduates?
3. Do American trust levels vary by each age within emerging adulthood (18-29 years)?
4. Are findings supported by analyses from a second national survey?

Methods

Research questions were investigated by survey data analysis within a correlational research design utilizing four decades of extant data. The 1972-2010 General Social Survey Datafile (GSS) (Davis, Smith, & Marsden, 2011) was a primary data source (accessed through: http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10). The availability of a second national survey with a similar trust prompt offered the opportunity to search for supporting evidence. The 1948-2004 American National Election Studies (ANES) Cumulative Datafile (Sapiro, Rosenstone, & the National Election Studies, 2007-2009) was an alternate data source (accessed through: http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgibin/hsda?harcsda+nes2004c). Web-based access to the national omnibus surveys offered an economical method of reliable data collection. The online data analyses program of the surveys also provided an efficient method of collapsing variable categories.

The General Social Survey (GSS) tracks the beliefs, opinions, and behaviors of non-institutionalized, English and Spanish speaking Americans over the age of 18 (Inter-University

Consortium for Political and Social Research [ICPSRa], 2011). The GSS contains a replicating core of survey prompts and special interest topic modules on attitudinal measures. The same prompt used to measure trust levels in the current study was in the replicating core of GSS since the first survey in 1972. Block quota sampling was used prior to 1976, and surveys from half of 1975 through 2010 utilized full probability sampling (ICPSRa, 2011). Non-respondents were sub-sampled since 2004. Surveys 2006-2010 utilized sampling based on the United States Census (ICPSRa, 2011). A survey default weight (compwt) was selected to ensure national representation and adjusted for number of adults in a household, black over sampling, randomization issues, and other household probability issues (GSS 1972-2000 Cumulative Datafile, 2010). Response rates varied slightly for each survey year, with a total response rate of approximately 70% (ICPSRa, 2011). The total unweighted sample size for GSS analyses in the current study ranged from 36,162 to 55,087. Sample sizes varied because some questions were included in more surveys than others were, yearly samples differed, and the number of invalid responses varied by prompts. For more information on the GSS, including sampling, weights, and mode of data collection, see reference sources (GSS 1972-2000 Cumulative Datafile [2010]); ICPRSa [2011])

The ANES tracks national beliefs, opinions, and behaviors on social and political values (ICPRSb, 2011). The ANES data source was selected because the survey contained variables similar to GSS variables for trust, age, and educational attainment. Cross-sectional, equal probability sampling was the most common sampling procedures in ANES surveys (ANES, nd). The total unweighted sample sizes for variables used in the current study with ANES data ranged from 18,911- 46,968. Sample sizes varied by survey prompt in ANES data for the same reasons as in GSS data. Four 17-year-olds were in the ANES sample and were included with early transitioning or emerging adults to simplify percentaging. A Type 0 stratified (pre and post)

weight was applied to ensure national representation (Survey Documentation and Analysis, nd). See reference sources for more information (ANES [nd]; Survey Documentation and Analysis [nd]). Variables, samples used in the current study, and identified areas of difference between GSS and ANES data are discussed in Appendix A.

Independent Variables

Age group (life stage or adult transitioning stage), educational attainment (post-secondary degree status), and decade were independent variables. Survey years recoded for decades was an independent variable for time. Only ANES years 1972-2004 were used in the current study because 1972 was the first year of GSS and 2004 was the most recent year available for ANES. There was no ANES trust data available for the 1980s. Survey years were recoded for decades as follows: 1970s (1972-1979), 1980s (1980-1989), 1990s (1990-1999), and 2000s (2000-2010).

A GSS survey mnemonic measured respondents' ages. In ANES data, the mnemonic measured respondents' birth years, and ages were derived from birth years. Ages were collapsed into two life stage groups: emerging adults (18-29) and older adults (30 years and older). Ages were also collapsed into four adult transitioning stage groups: early transitioning (18-24 years), middle transitioning (25-29 years), late transitioning (30-34 years), and older adults (35 and older). To answer Research Question Three, trust was investigated by each age of emerging adulthood (i.e., 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29 years).

Having a college degree was an independent, filter variable in analyses investigating differences in social trust by life stage and decade. The survey question for educational attainment asked, *If highest grade of education is 13+ years: What is the highest degree that you have earned?* The variable was controlled for one group of those with any college or advanced degree. Associate Degree was collapsed in the college degree group for GSS, but there was not a separate category for Associate Degree in ANES.

Dependent Variable

The GSS trust prompt asked, *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in life*? Response categories were the following: 1) Can trust, 2) Cannot trust, and 3) Depends. Responses were recoded into two groups: 1) Can trust, and 2) Cannot trust (previous Categories Two and Three). The ANES trust prompt was similar: *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?* Response categories were: 1) Can't be too careful, 2) Most people can be trusted, and 9) Depends, don't know (and other non-responses). Responses were recoded into the following two categories: 1) Can trust (previous Category Two), and 2) Cannot trust (previous Categories One and Nine). For more information on study variables see Appendix A.

Analysis

Frequency cross-tabulations were performed to measure differences in trust by age and decade groups, and in age and decade groups filtered for college graduates. Analytical procedures to answer Research Questions One, Two, and Three were performed with GSS data. Cross-tabulations performed to investigate Research Questions One and Two were repeated with ANES data to answer Research Question Four. In GSS analyses, a stratified cluster sample design and Taylor series approximation method was utilized. Frequencies, percentages, confidence intervals, Pearson Chi-Squares, and significance levels were reported in tables for significant results. In GSS analyses, a Rao-Scott adjustment was calculated for each Chi-Square to address small significance levels in complex samples. The adjusted Rao-Scott statistic was used to derive an F statistic, which was added to the analysis. Specifically, reported significance levels were from the F-value for cross-tabulations using GSS data.

Independent logistic regressions and logistic regression models were performed with GSS

data to better observe the strength and direction of associations. All variables were expressed as dichotomous. Logistic regression coefficients (B) measured the effects of one unit change for predictors on believing others could be trusted. Standard error (SE [B]), confidence intervals (CI [B]), and significance levels (p) were reported. The exponential of the logistic regression (EXP [B]) expressed the odds of one unit change in predictors on a score of one versus zero for can trust. Logistic regression was selected over multiple regression because variables were well suited to dichotomizing. Logistic regression was selected over the similar probit regression because using the inverse of the cumulative distribution over the natural logarithm would yield no apparent advantage in the current study. Product term variables were used in regression models. Emerging adult college graduates (18-29-year-olds with a college degree) and older adult college graduates (those age 30 and over with a college degree) were predictors regressed on trust. Educational attainment was controlled to express having a college degree because literature identified an association between higher educational attainment and social trust. To capture changes in relationships over time, logistic regressions were repeated for each decade.

Separate cross-tabulations and logistic regressions were performed to give overviews of trust in data and to investigate specific hypotheses. Independent analyses were identified and discussed in the Results section, but not reported in main study tables. A 95% confidence level was applied throughout all procedures. The threshold of .05 determined statistical significance.

Results

Descriptive differences between the two national surveys and implications for trust from these differences are shown on Appendix A. Data printouts for all study analyses are shown in Appendix B. Comparisons of overall trust levels by data source and preliminary logistic regressions begin the Results section.

Overall Trust by Data Source

General trust levels in both data sources were compared before answering research questions. Independent frequency-cross tabulations with 1972-2010 GSS data (N=36,162) found the proportion of not trusting Americans (62%) was 24 percentage points larger than that of trusting Americans (38%). With ANES data from 1972-2004 (N=18,911), the proportion of not trusting Americans (53%) was six percentage points larger than that of trusting Americans (47%). Both data sources reported smaller percentages for trusting than not trusting. However, a nine percentage points larger trusting proportion was found in ANES than GSS, and the gap of difference between trusting and not trusting proportions was smaller with ANES data.

One rationale for expecting lower trust levels with GSS data was because survey years extended through 2010—and trust dwindled over time, with perhaps an upswing following September 11, 2001. To explore this conjecture, 2000s GSS data was controlled for years 2000 through 2004—eliminating the possibility that varying time spans for surveys were reasons for differences in trusting percentages. The trusting proportion of Americans (40%) in GSS data increased two percentage points when years were limited to 2004 (x^2= 127.16, $p \leq .001$, N= 36,162). This finding supports previous observations regarding greater civic-mindedness following 9/11(Kirlin & Kirlin, 2002; Putnam, 2002; 2005). However, the proportion of trusting Americans continued to be seven percentage points greater in ANES data even when both data sources were controlled for years 1972-2004. Thus, the rationale for expecting larger trusting proportions in ANES because of a two percentage point larger sample of (presumed) less trusting, young adults in GSS may be supported, while the expectation of greater trusting proportions in GSS data because of a larger sample of college graduates contradicted (Appendix A). As discussed following, another possibility—the two percentage point difference in samples was inconsequential to findings.

A Preliminary Logistic Regression Model

Previous literature held the following propositions for trust levels: (a) older adults were more likely than young adults to trust (Arnett, 2004; Putnam, 1995; 1996); (b) higher educational attainment was a strong correlate to trust (Flanagan et al., 2009; Helliwell & Putnam, 2007; Putnam, 1996): and (c)American social trust was higher in previous decades (and in years immediately following 9/11) (Putnam, 1996). The most straightforward method of comparing the effects of these influences on trust was in a preliminary logistic regression model with the three predictors of being an older adult (30 years and older), having a college degree, and earlier decades (1972-1999 data). All three predictors in the model were found significant. College degree was the strongest predictor of social trust (B= .856, SE= .025, $p \leq .001$, N= 35,940), and those with a college degree had over twice the odds for trust (EXP [B] = 2.353). Older ages (B= .477, SE= .027, $p \leq .001$) and years 1972-1999 (B= .448, SE= .025, $p \leq .001$) were also positively associated with trust in GSS data. When years were controlled for earlier decades (1972-1989) all predictors in the preliminary model became more strongly correlated with social trust. Similar results were found when procedures were repeated with ANES data (Appendix A; Appendix B). Findings have theoretical relevance in support of the study framework.

Finding educational attainment a stronger predictor of trust than life stage or decade in both data sources was not surprising considering correlations identified in previous literature. However, finding a larger trusting proportion in ANES data, which had a smaller proportion of college graduates than GSS (Appendix A), seems at odds with regressions identifying the strong association between a post-secondary level of education and social trust. In total, preliminary analyses suggested differences in the reported percentage of trusting Americans will vary by data source, and differences in trusting proportions are due to factor(s) other than differences in

samples (e.g., weighting, or slight variation in prompt wording). In the following sections, results were discussed and presented by research questions.

Do American Trust Levels Vary in Age by Decade Groups?

A pattern of decreasing overall trusting proportions in each consecutive decade was revealed in data—from 43% in the 1970s to 33% in the 2000s (Table 1). However, the decline was not similar among decades. A one percentage point drop in trusting proportions between the 1970s and 1980s, a six percentage point drop between the 1980s and 1990s, and a three percentage point drop in overall trust levels between the 1990s and 2000s were evident in data. Results supported a hypothesis of lowered trust in the 2000s, but did not support a notion of more rapidly falling trust levels in the 2000s. Considering the challenging economic context, a larger drop in trusting was expected, yet, data revealed the trusting drop in the 2000s was half the size of the trusting downslide in the 1990s. By age group, as expected, the smallest trusting proportion was found for early transitioning adults (28%) and the largest trusting proportion was found for older adults (42%). Four patterns emerged in data: (a) Overall trusting proportions decreased in each decade; (b) Trust increased with age; (c) Early transitioning adults had the smallest trusting proportion, and the largest trusting proportion was found for older adults; and (d) The trusting proportion of late transitioning adults was closest to the trusting proportion of older adults. Exceptions to these patterns were not larger than one percentage point. Findings supported study hypotheses of falling trust levels over time and increasing trust levels with age.

By age and decade group, the smallest trusting proportion was found for 18 to 24-year-olds in the 2000s (22%), and the largest for older adults in the 1980s (47%) (Table 1). The largest drop in trusting percentages, without educational attainment considered, was for late transitioning adults between the 1990s and the 2000s. Trusting proportions fell in each consecutive decade in nearly every age group. One of two exceptions to this pattern was no

change in the proportion of trusting 25 to 29-year-olds between the 1990s and 2000s—a finding in support of Putnam's (2005) observation of unwavering civic-minded attitudes for young adults who were in high school or college on 9/11.

An interesting finding of growing change in the gap of difference in trust among transitioning stages supports a premise of emerging adulthood theory (Figure One). The gap of difference between early transitioning and late transitioning adults and the gap between late transitioning adults and older adults were compared over time (Table 1). In the 1970s, the gap of difference in trusting proportions between early and late transitioning adults was 11 percentage points, with the gap of difference between early transitioning adults and older adults being nearly the same (12 percentage points). The gap between youngest and oldest age groups—early transitioning and older adults- remained at 16 percentage points through the 2000s. However, the gap in trust between early and late transitioning adults narrowed to seven percentage points, with the gap between early transitioning adults and older adults growing to 16 percentage points in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the pattern continued—there was no gap between early and middle transitioning adults, and the gap in trusting proportions for early and middle transitioning adults and late transitioning adults fell to five percentage points (Table 1; Figure 1). In the 2000s, trusting proportions of late transitioning adults was lower than that of middle transitioning adults (for the first time), with the gap between early and late transitioning adults falling to two percentage points. Transitioning adults became more like each other over time, but they did not become more like older adults—at least for the measure of trust. This finding is interpreted as evidence of an emerging adult stage of life.

Generational effects may be an alternative interpretation—a less trusting age group replaced a more trusting transitioning group in each consecutive decade (Table 1). In the current investigation, generational effects were not adequate for explaining changing gaps of differences

among transitioning stages because the late transitioning adults of the 2000s (30-34 years) would not have been the middle transitioning adults of the 1990s, but rather early transitioning adults (18-24 years). From the 1980s to the 2000s difference in trust between early and late transitioning adults changed minimally.

Do American Trust Levels Vary in Age by Decade Groups in College Graduates?

A post-secondary degree status increased trusting proportions for all age and decade groups (Table 2). By decade, the largest increase in trust with a college degree was in the 1970s (20 percentage points) and the smallest increase was in the 1990s and 2000s (15 percentage points). From this point of view, a college degree generally procuring less trust in the 2000s than in the 1990s was not evident in data. By transitioning stage, a college degree had greatest effects on trust for older adults (a 15 percentage point increase), with the increase for early transitioning adults only one percent point lower (14 percentage points). The effects of a college degree on middle and late transitioning adults were the same (12 percentage points).

By age and decade, a college degree had the strongest effects on trust for older adults in the 1970s (23 percentage points) and weakest effects for early transitioning adults in the 1990s and late transitioning adults in the 2000s (nine percentage points) (Table 1; Table 2). An interesting finding was revealed. For the first time in four decades the trusting proportion of early transitioning adults with a college degree in the 2000s *rose* two percentage points and the proportion of trusting early transitioning college graduates was not lower than that of middle transitioning college graduates (Table 2). Findings without a filter for college degree suggested Putnam (2005) may look more closely to *middle* transitioning adults in the 2000s for any possibility of the next greatest civic generation of Americans. With educational attainment added to the equation, findings suggested more positive civic minded attitudes for *early* transitioning adults in the 2000s. In other words, encouraging findings for social trust were revealed for

emerging adults (18 to 29-year olds) in the 2000s—perhaps, despite a challenging economic context and because of solidarity following 9/11.

Evidence was found to support and negate the expectation of a college degree purchasing less trust for young adults in the 2000s. The effects of a college degree on trust were greater in the 2000s than the 1990s for early and middle transitioning adults, but weaker for late transitioning adults (Table 2).

Relationships were explored further with a logistic regression model using product variables for educational attainment and life stage (Table 3). Associations between trust and having a college degree were positive in every decade, but over twice as strong with the product term variable for older adults (B range: .98-1.06) than with emerging adults (B range: .37-54). Older adult college graduates had over twice the odds for trust in every decade (Exp[B] range: 2.65-3.03). Emerging adult college graduates had nearly 50% and over greater odds for trust in every decade (Exp[B] range: 1.45-1.72). Findings supported study hypotheses and cross-tabulation findings. By decade, as expected, strongest associations for both life stages were in the earliest decade—the 1970s. Interestingly, however, and contrary to hypotheses and cross-tabulation findings, regression analyses identified the 1990s for both life stages as the decade with the weakest associations between trusting and predictors (Table 3). Associations between trust were greater in the 2000s than in the 1990s—and nearly as strong as those in the 1980s—for both product term predictors.

Do American Trust Levels Vary by Each Age within Emerging Adulthood (18-29 years)?

Findings revealed distinctions lost without disaggregating data by each age of emerging adulthood and decade. The proportion of trusting 18-year-olds was higher or equal to trusting proportions of any other young adult ages in 1980s through 2000s data (Figure 2). With combined decades (1972-2010 data), the trusting proportion of 18-year-olds was more similar to

that of older adults than any other young adult age. The z magnitudes for trusting proportions of 18-years-olds in the 1980s (z= 1.616) and 1990s (z= .714) were found to have opposite directions than all other ages of emerging adults (19 to 29 years) in the 1980s (z range: -6.236 to -.779) and 1990s (z range: -5.425 to -2.056). The all-time low of only 15% of 21-year-olds in the 2000s believing others could be trusted may reflect newfound, trust lowering, experiences of uncertainty and change—experiences more typical for 19-year-olds in the 1980s and 1990s(Figure 2).

A finding of varying trust levels by each age of emerging adults was interpreted as support for two theory domains: Age of Instability and Age of Possibilities (Arnett, 2004). Trust may be higher in 18-year-olds because of a more undaunted hopefulness in future possibilities and because of increased instability, change, and life-testing experiences (Arnett, 2004). In describing an Age of Possibilities in emerging adulthood theory, Arnett (2004) observed emerging adults have had "few of their dreams have been tested in the fires of real life" (p. 17). To develop into an independent adult is to change, and optimism in one's capacity to accomplish goals—to dream big—leads to new experiences. Realistic adjustments shape adult pathways as ideals and identity solidify with life experiences. With 19 years or 21 years in the 2000's, trust may falls because of inexperience with coping to new experiences, change, and uncertainty. Changes in residence, employment, school, and support systems may be new norms for older emerging adults, but stability, and so trust, remains lower for emerging adults than older adults.

Are Findings Supported by Analyses from a Second National Survey?

No ANES trust data was available for the 1980s and cross-tabulations for the 1970s with ANES data were insignificant (Table 4). Without considering transitioning stage or educational attainment, trust levels were lower in the 1990s(41%) than the 2000s(48%) in ANES data. Cross-tabulation findings with GSS data found trust levels fell in the 2000s. By age group, the

pattern of increasing trusting proportions with each next transitioning stage that was revealed in four decades of GSS data, was a perfect pattern in 1990s and the 2000s ANES data. By age and decade, trusting proportions *increased* between the 1990s and 2000s in each age group. Findings with ANES data were similar for college graduates. Between the 1990s and the 2000s, trusting proportions *increased* for each transitioning stage. The trusting proportion for college graduates was larger than those without a college degree in every age and decade group.

The most obvious difference by data source was the larger proportions of trusting observed with ANES data (Tables 1; Table 2; Table 4). The smallest trusting proportion was found for early transitioning adults in the 1990s(25%), and the largest trusting proportion was found for older adult college graduates in the 2000s (70%) with ANES data. Analyses with ANES data offered more support for the hypothesis of higher trust following September 11, 2001 than cross-tabulations with GSS data (Table 1; Table 2). Sample differences between surveys are discussed and identified in Appendix A. However, observed differences in the direction of trust levels in the 2000s between data sources were not reliably explained by sample differences.

Discussion and Conclusion

Finding a prompt asked similarly with the same meaning throughout decades is an advantage in longitudinal, social science research. Social trust is unlike other measures whose meanings are redefined by historical times, even when the same survey prompt is used year after year. However, the premise is American young adults themselves have changed—adulthood delayed, adolescence prolonged, and not yet full-fledged adults emerging. An examination of trust levels held an opportunity to explore tenants of emerging adulthood theory.

Study findings interpreted within theory strengthen the knowledge base from which to guide individual adult transitioning pathways and give those interested in nurturing adult independence better descriptions of emerging adults, as well as American trust levels. The

research worth of findings for the observed drop in trusting percentages between 18 and 19-year-olds is not simply age related. As eighteen-year-olds have just stepped onto the threshold of legal *adulthood*, they may be more likely to depend on past support systems and have little experience with the uncertainty and change associated with transitioning to independent adulthood. A bigger implication is trust may be lower for young adults of any age who have more frequent experiences of the Age of Instability. One practical implication from findings is researchers investigating American social trust in populations limited to 18-year-olds or high school seniors, such as Monitoring the Future data, may report higher trust levels for young adults.

Findings from the current study may be at odds, in part, with preliminary reports from an upcoming study. Flanagan and Osgood (2006) observed moderate increases in trust between ages 18 and 28 and overall declines in trust between 1980 and 1993. Trust levels in high school students were compared by ethnicity and post-high school educational plans in Flanagan and Osgood's work—rather than defining educational attainment as post-secondary degree status, as in the current study. Flanagan and Osgood (2006) observed, "The increase in trust with age is limited to whites and respondents who (as high school seniors) planned to graduate from a four-year college" (¶ 5). The current study examined trust levels in two national surveys, and a different national survey will be used in Flanagan and Osgood's work. A research contribution of the current study is the identification of several reasons to expect differences in reported trust levels by data source, even among reliable, national surveys(Table One).

A lack of observations by ethnicity was no small limitation of the current study. In an observation of connections between wartime mobilization, social justice, racial integration, and the civil rights movement of the 1990s, Putnam (2005) observed:

> Americans today, our survey suggests, are more open than ever to the idea that people of all backgrounds should be full members of our national community. Progress should work to translate that national mood into concrete policy initiatives that bridge the ethnic and class cleavages in our increasingly multicultural society. (p. 22)

Some may believe social justice and multiculturalism, as in strength in diversity, empty mumblings from one political agenda—twisted ideals too costly to afford all Americans. Yet, at the Republican national convention in 1992, private citizen Ronald Reagan stated:

> Whether we come from poverty or wealth, whether we are Afro-American or Irish-American, Christian or Jewish, from big cities or small towns, we are all equal in the eyes of God. But as Americans, that is not enough. We must be equal in the eyes of each other. We can no longer judge each other on the basis of what we are, but must, instead, start finding out who we are. In America, our origins matter less than our destinations and that is what democracy is all about. (The Heritage Foundation, 2011, ¶44)

An appreciation of differences, reduction of isolation, and a common purpose may increase social trust for all Americans—bringing with it greater social capital and a stronger democracy. A challenge for future trust research is to develop multi-variate approaches for investigating trust by age, decade, educational attainment, and ethnicity.

The absence of 1980s and 2005-2010 ANES trust data was a limitation. This limit notwithstanding, results pointed towards peculiarities between data sources. For example, some patterns identified in GSS data were not supported with ANES data and ANES reported higher overall trust percentages. A recommended area of future study is to compare trust levels with more complex statistical analysis in GSS, ANES, and Monitoring the Future data or other national survey. Future investigations with the most current data may find more definitive results for trust levels in the 2000s.

Understanding trust levels in age and decade groups by educational attainment holds practical implications for American organizations and institutions. Extraordinarily low trust levels of young adults in the 2000's was a dramatic finding—less than a quarter of early transitioning Americans in GSS data believed others could be trusted. Recognition of the barrier social distrust presents to organizational systems today can improve the effectiveness of collaboration. Tschannen-Moran (2000) observed colleagues must trust each other "to break down norms of isolation and to sacrifice some of the autonomy they value so highly in order to

reap the potential benefits of greater collaboration" (p.311). A finding of greater trusting proportions in college graduates intensifies Putnam's (2005) belief that schools and youth organizations have a chance "to influence a whole new generation of Americans before it is too late" (p. 8).

Exceptions to patterns in emerging adults and the more subtle disappearance of trust in the 2000s offer a glimmer of cautious optimism to civic America. As with unity following the terrorist attacks in 2001, if trust did increase in the 2000s—even if only for some age groups—it may have been because of economic hardships, not despite them. America's greatest challenge, then, may be complacency. The less steep decline of trust against a bleak economic backdrop may support the notion of civic renewal and a shift towards a more civic-minded future. According to Putnam (2005), "We don't like what we've become, and now, growing numbers of us are ready and eager to embark on a national journey of civic renewal. It is time for individual and institutional innovation" (p. 7). The strength of America's civic reawakening will likely depend on cross-class, cross-ethnic solidarity—that capacious sense of we observed following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, rather than a particularized, less generally trusting, less civically engaged, progressively shrinking we (Putnam, 2002).

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Table 1. Trust by Age and Decade: Percentages (Frequencies)

		Transitioning Group					
		18-24	25-29	30-34	35 +	Total	X^2
Decade							
1970s							
	Can Trust	34(405)	41(371)	45(336)	46(2,174)	43(*3,287*)	61.68*
	CI	*(30-38)*	*(37-45)*	*(40-49)*	*(44-49)*	*(41-45)*	
	Cannot	66(793)	59(534)	55(417)	54(2,540)	57(4,284)	
	Total	100(1,199)	100(905)	100(753)	100(4,715)	100(7,571)	
1980s							
	Can Trust	31(386)	36(391)	38(393)	47(2,621)	42(3,791)	132.98*
	CI	*(27-35)*	*(32-40)*	*(35-41)*	*(44-49)*	*(40-44)*	
	Cannot	69(865)	64(690)	62(637)	53(3,006)	58(5,198)	
	Total	100(1,251)	100 (1,081)	100 (1,030)	100 (5,627)	100 (8,989)	
1990s							
	Can Trust	25(247)	25(233)	30(335)	41(2,482)	36 (3,297)	180.29*
	CI	*(22-29)*	*(22-28)*	*(27-33)*	*(39-43)*	*(34-38)*	
	Cannot	75(740)	75(714)	70(786)	59(3,630)	64(5,869)	
	Total	100(986)	100(946)	100(1,121)	100(6,112)	100(9,166)	
2000s							
	Can Trust	22(253)	25(239)	24(235)	38(2,692)	33(3,419)	199.87*
	CI	*(19-25)*	*(22-28)*	*(21-27)*	*(36-39)*	*(32-35)*	
	Cannot	78(896)	75(726)	76(762)	62(4,472)	67(6,857)	
	Total	100 (1,150)	100 (965)	100 (997)	100 (7,164)	100 (10,275)	
Total							
	Can Trust	28(1,291)	32(1,234)	33(1,300)	42(9,969)	38(13,793)	467.1*
	CI	*(26-30)*	*(30-34)*	*(32-35)*	*(41-43)*	*(37-39)*	
	Cannot	72(3,295)	68(2,663)	67(2,602)	58(13,648)	62(22,208)	
	Total	100 (4,585)	100 (3,897)	100 (3,901)	100 (23,618)	100 (36,001)	

Note: Percent (Frequency); *(Confidence Interval);* *p≤.001; Unweighted *N*=36,043.

Source: General Social Survey

Table 2. Trust by Age and Decade in College Graduates: Percentages (Frequencies)

		Transitioning Group					
		18-24	25-29	30-34	35 +	Total	X^2
Decade							
1970s							
	Can Trust	50 (48)	55(140)	60(88)	69(402)	63(678)	24.3*
	CI	*(38-62)*	*(48-62)*	*(49-70)*	*(64-73)*	*(59-66)*	
	Cannot	50(49)	45(113)	40(60)	31(180)	37(402)	
	Total	100(97)	100(253)	100(148)	100(582)	100(1,080)	
1980s							
	Can Trust	48(57)	50(147)	54(169)	66(757)	60(1,129)	43.3*
	CI	*(36-59)*	*(43-57)*	*(48-60)*	*(63-69)*	*(57-63)*	
	Cannot	52(62)	50(148)	46(145)	34(392)	40(746)	
	Total	100(119)	100 (294)	100 (313)	100 (1,149)	100 (1,129)	
1990s							
	Can Trust	34(35)	40(132)	43(156)	55(1,018)	51(1,341)	52.8*
	CI	*(24-46)*	*(34-45)*	*(38-48)*	*(53-58)*	*(48-53)*	
	Cannot	66(69)	60(201)	57(206)	45(825)	49(1,301)	
	Total	100(104)	100(334)	100(362)	100(1,843)	100(2,642)	
2000s							
	Can Trust	36(51)	36(135)	33(124)	52(1,343)	48(1,654)	89.3*
	CI	*(26-48)*	*(30-42)*	*(28-38)*	*(50-55)*	*(45-50)*	
	Cannot	64(90)	64(245)	67(257)	48(1,215)	52(1,806)	
	Total	100 (141)	100 (380)	100 (381)	100 (2,558)	100 (3,460)	
Total							
	Can Trust	42(191)	44(555)	45(537)	57(3,520)	53(4,803)	151.0*
	CI	*(36-48)*	*(41-47)*	*(41-48)*	*(56-59)*	*(51-55)*	
	Cannot	58(269)	56(707)	55(667)	43(2,613)	47(4,256)	
	Total	100 (461)	100 (1,261)	100 (1,204)	100 (6,133)	100 (9,059)	

Note: Percent (weighted sample size); *(Confidence Interval);* *p≤.001; Unweighted *N*=36,043.

Source: General Social Survey

Table 3. Product Life Stage and Educational Attainment Term Variables on Trust

Logit Coefficients					Test That Each Coefficient = 0					
Decade on Can Trust by Life Stage										
Decade										
	Emerging adult college graduate					Older adult college graduate				
	B	SE (B)	Exp (B)	T-Test	CI (B)	B	SE (B)	Exp (B)	T-Test	CI (B)	*n*
1970s	.54*	.11	1.72	4.95	.33 .76	1.11*	.08	3.03	13.39	.95 1.27	7,526
1980s	.48*	.10	1.62	4.77	.29 .68	1.06*	.06	2.89	17.81	.94 1.18	8,959
1990s	.37*	.10	1.45	3.64	.17 .57	.98*	.05	2.65	19.34	.88 1.07	9,177
2000s	.47*	.10	1.60	4.93	.28 .66	1.05*	.05	2.85	22.76	.96 1.14	10,278

Note: *p≤.001

Source: General Social Survey

Table 4. Trust by Age and Decade with ANES Data: Percentages (Frequencies)

		Transitioning Group					
		18-24	25-29	30-34	35 +	Total	X^2
Decade							
1990s							
	Can Trust	25(146)	33(174)	41(246)	44(1,552)	41(2,118)	87.5*
	CI	*(*22-29)	*(29-38)*	*(37-44)*	*(43-46)*	*(39-42)*	
	Cannot	75(433)	67(351)	59(361)	56(1,958)	59(3,104)	
	Total	100(579)	100(526)	100(607)	100(3,510)	100(5,222)	
2000s							
	Can Trust	31(141)	39(135)	44(151)	52(1,444)	48(1,872)	82.9*
	CI	*(26-37)*	*(34-45)*	*(38-49)*	*(50-54)*	*(46-49)*	
	Cannot	69(309)	61(210)	56(195)	48(1,325)	52(2,039)	
	Total	100(450)	100 (345)	100 (347)	100 (2,769)	100 (3,911)	
		College Graduates					
1990s							
	Can Trust	48(21)	50(69)	59(91)	66(548)	63(729)	21.3*
	CI	*(32-64)*	*(42-59)*	*(52-66)*	*(63-69)*	*(60-65)*	
	Cannot	52(22)	50(69)	41(63)	34(278)	37(432)	
	Total	100(43)	100(138)	100(154)	100(826)	100(1,161)	
2000s							
	Can Trust	52(18)	60(57)	68(77)	70(510)	68(662)	12.0*
	CI	*(35-69)*	*(50-69)*	*(60-75)*	*(67-73)*	*(66-71)*	
	Cannot	48(17)	40(39)	32(36)	30(215)	32(306)	
	Total	100 (34)	100 (96)	100 (113)	100 (725)	100 (968)	

Note: 1970s and 1980s not significant. Percent (weighted sample size); *(Confidence Interval);* *p≤.001; Unweighted *N*=36,043.

Source: General Social Survey

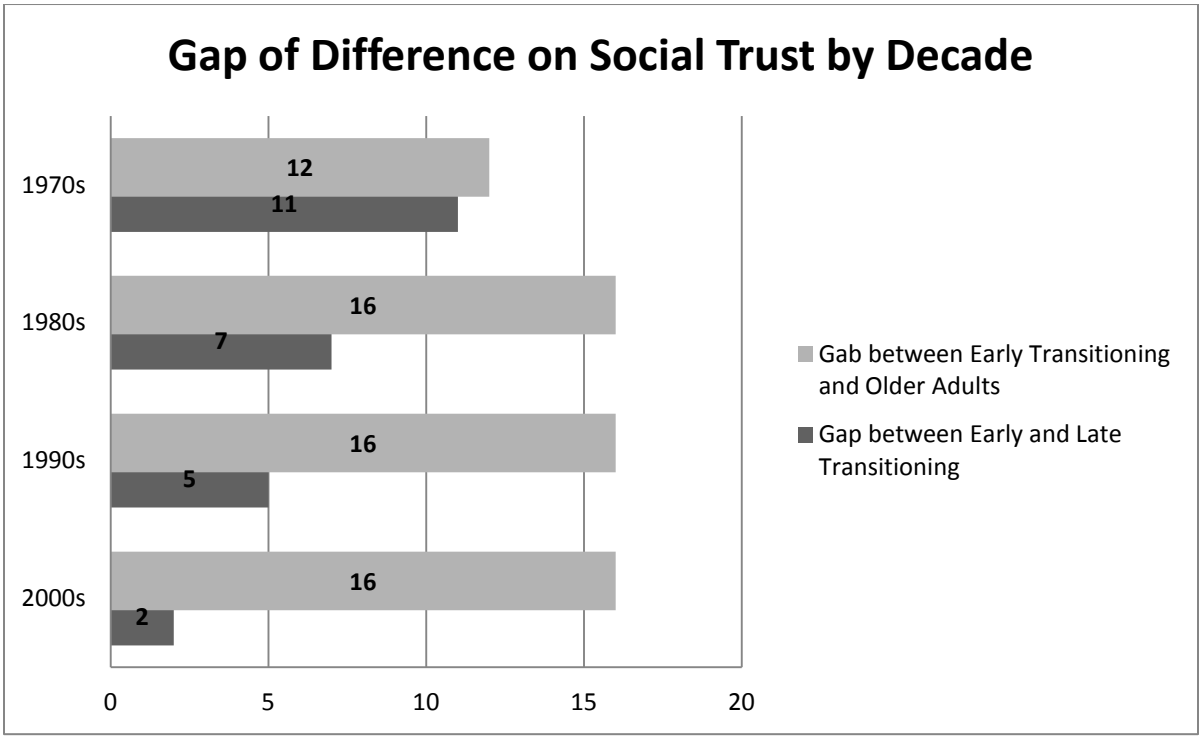
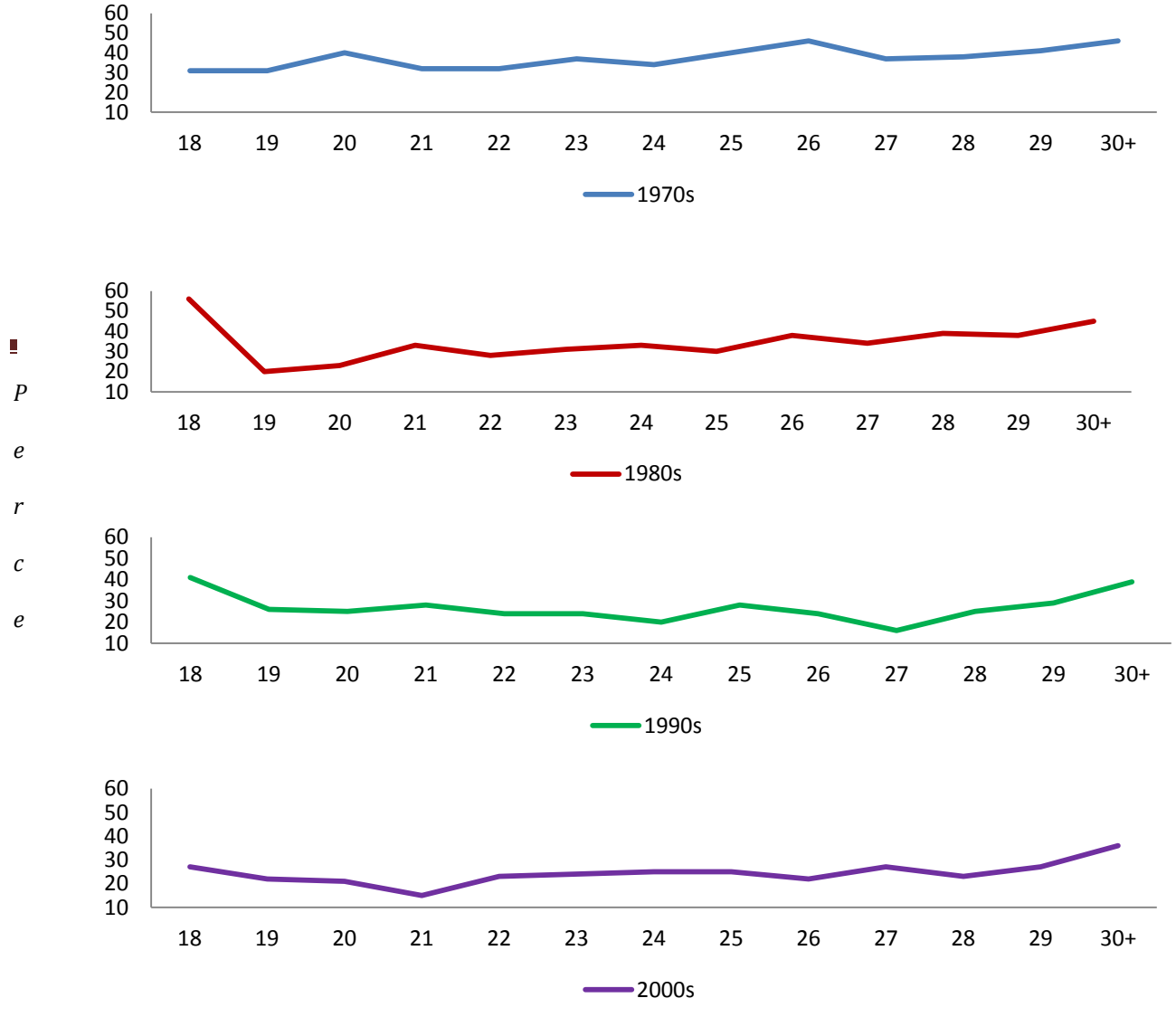


Figure 1. Between the 1970s and the 1980s the gap of difference between early transitioning adults (18 to 24-year-olds) and older adults (35 years and older) grew four percentage points, remaining at a 16 percentage point gap through the next three decades. The gap between early transitioning adults (18 to 24-year-olds) and late transitioning adults dropped steady, falling to a gap of only two percentage points in the 2000s. Transitioning adults grew more alike, but did not grow more like older adults. This finding is interpreted as evidence of an emerging adult stage of life.



Source: General Social Survey 1972-2010 Datafile

Note: N=36,043; 1970s: X2=68.6, p≤.001, SD=.5; 1980s: X2=148.1, p≤.001, SD=.4-.5; 1990s: X2=148.3, p≤.001, SD=.4-.5; 2000s: X2=130.3, p≤.001, SD=.4-.5

Figure 2. Can Trust by Decade and Each Age of Emerging Adulthood *(in percentages)*

The proportion of trusting 18-year-olds was higher or equal to trusting proportions of any other young adult ages in 1980s through 2000s data (Figure 2). With combined decades (1972-2010 data), the trusting proportion of 18-year-olds was more similar to that of older adults than any other young adult age. The all-time low of only 15% of 21-year-olds in the 2000s believing others could be trusted may reflect newfound experiences of uncertainty and change (lowering trust)—experiences more typical for 19-year-olds in the 1980s and 1990s

Appendix A

Differences between GSS and ANES Surveys for Social Trust

Previous literature informed a comparison of GSS and ANES samples used in the current study, and reported levels of trust were expected to vary by data source (Table A). Putnam (1996) observed a downward trend in trust over time. Lower trust levels might be found in GSS than ANES because 2000s data extended to 2010 in GSS—suggesting GSS had a larger proportion of less trusting Americans in the 2000s. This rationale also held for differences in 1970s samples. Shifts in civic-minded attitudes after 9/11 informed a hypothesis of greater trusting proportions in years immediately following 2001, and Putnam(2005) observed some waning of civic values for older adults. Accordingly, trust might be found greater in ANES because data only continued to 2004—a time closer to the period of elevated civic-mindedness after September 11, 2001. Putnam (1996) and Smith (2004) identified lower trust in young adults. Since the early transitioning and emerging adult samples in GSS were two percentage points larger than ANES, GSS may have a larger proportion of less trusting young Americans. Contrarily, the effect of higher education on trust levels was a reason to hypothesize trust might be higher in GSS. The proportion of college graduates was nine percentage points larger in GSS than in ANES.

In a preliminary logistic regression model with ANES data (Appendix B), a predictor for earlier decades (years 1972-1999) was not significant and educational attainment was the strongest predictor on social trust (B= 1.097, SE= .044, $p \leq .001$, N= 14,675). Those with a college degree had nearly three times the odds of trusting in ANES data (EXP [B] = 2.995). Older adult was also a significant predictor (B= .335, SE= .040, $p \leq .001$). When years were limited to the 1970s and 1980s, all predictors became more strongly associated with social trust—and decade became significant.

Table A. Differences Between GSS and ANES Data Sources

Measure	Description	GSS	ANES	Implications
Total population	*Total unweighted cases*	36,162-55,087	18,911-46,968	GSS data may be more reliable because of larger samples and more survey years.
Survey years	*Years of survey for social trust*	1972-2010: 1972, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010	1942-2004: 1972, 1974, 1976, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004	By excluding years prior to 1972 in ANES, remaining survey year differences were the absence of 1980s ANES data; no ANES data for 1978, 1990, and 1994; and the absence of 2005(6)-2010 years in ANES data.
Decade	*Years recoded for decade*	1970s 19%(10,647) 1980s 26%(14,276) 1990s 24%(13,217) 2000s 31% (16,993) *N*=55,087	1970s 31%(10,402) 1980s 28%(9,505) 1990s 27%(9,258) 2000s 13%(4,530) *N*=32,122	The smallest sample for GSS was the 1970s—2000s the largest. The smallest sample for ANES was the 2000s—1970s the largest. Considering Putnam's (1996) observation of dwindling trust levels over time, a reasonable inference was trusting proportions may vary between surveys because ANES had a larger sample from a more trusting time, while GSS had a larger sample from a less trusting time.(Table A-Table B1)
Social trust	*Belief others can be trusted*	Can trust 38%(13,823) Cannot trust 62%(22,279) *N*=36,162	Can trust 47%(9,154) Cannot trust 53%(9,757) *N*=18,911	Trusting percentages by age/ decade/educational attainment groups will likely be affected by the nine percentage point larger trusting proportion found in ANES data (Table C; Table D)

Transitioning stage	*Age recoded into four groups*	18-24 13%(7,048) 25-29 11%(5,977) 30-34 11%(5,849) 35+ 66%(36,098) *N*=54,890	18-24 11%**(**5,238) 25-29 11%(5,484) 30-34 11%(5,208) 35+ 67%(32,094) *N*=45,324	GSS had a two percentage point larger proportion of early transitioning adults. Considering previous findings of reduced trust in young Americans (Putnam, 1996; Smith, 2004), GSS may report lower overall trust because of the larger proportion of young adults.(Table E- Table F1)
Life stage	*Age recoded into two groups*	18-29 24%(13,025) 30+ 76%(41,947) *N*=54,890	18-29 22**(**10,722) 30+: 78%(37,302) *N*=45,324	See above. (Table E- Table F1)
Educational attainment	*Educational attainment recoded for post-secondary degree status*	College degree 25%(13,991) No college degree 75%(40,981) *N*=54,922	College degree 16%(8,059) No college degree 84%(38,909) *N*=46,968	The proportion of those with a college degree was smaller in ANES data (a nine percentage point difference). If higher educational attainment influences higher trust (Helliwell & Putnam, 2007; Putnam, 1996), trust may be higher in GSS data because of a larger sample for college graduates.(Table I; Table J)

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding. Unweighted samples noted for *N*, but weighted samples noted for (*n*) to be consistent with percentaging. Four 17-year-olds were in the ANES sample.