

# Political corruption has impact on social trust

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Residents of states with more government corruption may not only lose trust in political officials, but also have less trust in the general public, according to a new study by Sean Richey, an assistant professor of political science at Georgia State University.

Richey studied arrests of government officials in 50 states combined with 2002 through 2004 survey data of the American National Election Studies panel, which produces data on voting, public opinion and political participation.

"Stories of political corruption are constantly in the media, and this research reveals that governmental corruption has large corrosive effects on civil society," Richey said. "I find that increases in corruption in the period before the survey was taken leads to decreases in belief that [government officials](#) and ordinary citizens are trustworthy. It was the first empirical test of this concept."

Previous research notes that societies with more trust are more efficient and better working, with more desirable living conditions, such as equality and health, Richey said. Some researchers have also found that certain factors correlate with social trust, such as income equality and laws that permit widespread use of labor unions.

The findings show that people living in a state with more convictions for felony [corruption](#) from the previous two year period had a negative effect on generalized trust. The study also shows that people in the

middle-aged generation and people who volunteer are associated with an increase in trust, while having conservative ideology and media usage correlate with decreased levels of trust.

"There is further research needed, but this study may begin to help explain how institutional action influences trust. It suggests that people attribute the untrustworthy behavior of politicians to people generally," Richey said.

The study will be published in the March 2010 issue of the journal *American Politics Research*.

Provided by Georgia State University

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