

A Cognitive Anatomy of Political Trust and Respective Bases: Evidence from a Two-City Survey in China

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Building on contemporary research on social cognition and psychology, trust, political representation and accountability, and candidate evaluation, this article proposes to decompose political trust into two cognitively distinct but related components for examination: competence versus intention evaluations. This article further argues that people's evaluations of their government's competence and intention in governance can have distinct bases due to the varying accessibility of pertinent information. Using valid instruments from a unique sampling survey in two Chinese cities in 2005, this article tests the validity of this cognitive scheme. Empirical evidence shows that (1) the surveyed Chinese urban residents effectively differentiated between their central government's competence and intention in governance: on average, they had a quite positive assessment of the central government's intention to serve its people, despite their relatively pessimistic views of its competence to deliver good governance; (2) the Chinese urbanites did consult different sources of information and heuristics when evaluating their central government's competence and intention, respectively.

KEY WORDS: cognitive anatomy, political trust, competence, intention, urban China

In 2004, about two years after President Hu Jintao assumed the title of General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from his predecessor at the 16th National Congress, the CCP issued an official document on “ruling capacity.” This document emphatically claimed that enhancing government officials’ ruling capability was a vital and urgent issue for consolidating the CCP’s ruling status and meeting domestic and international challenges.¹ Seven years later, with one year left before the scheduled power transition between President Hu and his successor at the 18th National Congress, the CCP issued another official document on the significance of “ethics evaluation” for its cadre management. This document forcefully emphasized that government officials’ capability and moral character both are critical for the CCP’s governance; nevertheless, moral character should be prioritized over capability when selecting, evaluating, and promoting these cadres.² Surely, both “ruling capacity” and “ethics evaluation” are part of the CCP’s continuous but constantly adjusted strategy to prolong its survival and boost its support among the Chinese people. And this evolution of the CCP’s emphasis from “ruling capacity” to “ethics evaluation,” as it endeavors to further its authoritarian rule over the most populous society, clearly echoes China’s long tradition of Confucian statecraft that stresses the indispensability of rulers’ benign intentions in sustaining the Mandate of Heaven (e.g., Bell & Chaibong, 2003; de Bary, 2004), i.e., their legitimacy of governance. It also

¹ http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-09/27/content_378161.htm

² http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/usa/china/2011-11/04/content_14038358.htm

raises an important question for contemporary research on political trust: When citizens evaluate the trustworthiness of their government, do they cognitively differentiate between the government's competence and intention in governance?

Building on recent findings in social cognition and psychology (Abdollahi & Fiske, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Wojciszke, 2005), as well as contemporary research on trust (Hardin, 1998, 2002, 2006; Uslaner, 2002) and candidate evaluation (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004; Funk, 1999; Lupia & McCubbins, 1998), this article proposes to decompose political trust, particularly the incumbent-based one, into two cognitively distinct but related components for examination: competence versus intention evaluations. This article further argues that people's evaluations of the incumbents' competence and intention in governance can have distinct bases due to the varying accessibility of pertinent information. Using valid instruments from a unique sampling survey in two Chinese cities in 2005, this article systematically tests the validity of this cognitive scheme. The empirical evidence shows that (1) the surveyed Chinese urban residents effectively differentiated between their central government's competence and intention in governance: On average, they had a quite positive assessment of the central government's intention to serve its people, despite their relatively pessimistic views of its competence to deliver good governance; (2) the Chinese urbanites did consult different sources of information and heuristics when evaluating their government's competence and intention, respectively.

The contribution of this article is twofold. First, the proposed cognitive anatomy of political trust provides a different perspective to reexamine and reinterpret existing empirical evidence in the literature. It helps students of political trust move beyond conventional typological analysis, with more attention paid to its cognitive components and underlying cognitive processes. Therefore, researchers can more effectively engage questions like the nature and origins of political trust. Moreover, given the well-documented behavior implications of competence and intention evaluations in the literature on social cognition and psychology (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007), this cognitive scheme brings more concrete attitude-behavior connections into contemporary research, which can empower the use of political trust to explain various political phenomena. Second, this article also sheds some light on the puzzling high level of trust that the Chinese people place in their central government and suggests a plausible hypothesis that merits further research with more appropriate data: Chinese citizens' high trust in their central government could have been heavily colored by their rosy views of the CCP regime's intention in ruling China.

A Cognitive Anatomy of Political Trust and Respective Bases

A Cognitive Anatomy of Political Trust. Contemporary empirical literature on political trust primarily follows the Eastonian framework on political support (Easton, 1965, 1975). Researchers differentiate among numerous dimensions of political trust, e.g., diffuse versus specific and regime-versus incumbent-based (Boynton & Loewenberg, 1973; Loewenberg, Mishler, & Sanborn, 2010; Rose, Mishler, & Munro, 2011), and then interpret the implications of the change in political trust for various societies (Citrin, 1974; Miller, 1974; Nye, Zelikow, & King, 1997; Pharr & Putnam, 2000).³ Despite all the scholars' industrious work, existing research on political trust still cannot satisfactorily answer many questions such as its nature and origins and is not very successful in using this variable to explain other political phenomena. As Newton (2007) summarizes in a recent review of the literature, "political trust when viewed from the individual level is a puzzle. As a dependent variable, it is difficult to explain; and as an independent variable it does not seem to explain much" (p. 353). Thus, moving beyond conventional typological analysis becomes critical for furthering our

³ For recent reviews on the literature of political trust, see Braithwaite & Levi (1998) and Newton (2007).

knowledge on political trust and rejuvenating the application of this concept for understanding various political phenomena.

Recent development in cognitive science and psychology (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2007; Wojciszke, 2005), as well as existing research on political representation and accountability (Fox & Shotts, 2009; Mansbridge, 2003; Rehfeld, 2009), candidate evaluation (Funk, 1999; Lupia & McCubbins, 1998; Riggle, Ottati, Wyer, Kuklinski, & Schwarz, 1992), and the continuing debate on the conceptualization and nature of trust in general (Hardin, 1998, 2002, 2006; Uslander, 2002), actually provides a different perspective for students of political trust to reexamine their empirical evidence and engage some of the unanswered questions. This perspective especially focuses on the cognitive components of people's perceptions, as well as underlying cognitive processes. Unfortunately, with only a few exceptions (Citrin & Luks, 2001; Li, 2004, 2008),⁴ this cognitive scheme has rarely been embraced by researchers to theorize political trust and guide related empirical exercise. This article seeks to take some initial steps in applying this cognitive scheme to scrutinizing people's differentiation between government's competence and intention in governance, as well as their respective bases.

According to the most recent work in cognitive science, warmth and competence are two universal components in social cognition, i.e., determining people's perceptions of others regardless of stimuli, time, and culture (Abdollahi & Fiske, 2008; Fiske et al., 2007). Wojciszke (2005) even argues that warmth and competence together determine more than 80% of people's impressions of others. Laboratory and field experiments further show that the warmth component primarily captures traits like intention; while, the competence component reflects traits like ability (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2007). In political science, this differentiation between political leaders' competence and intention is actively engaged in the literature on political representation and accountability, particularly the delegate/trustee debate (e.g., Fox & Shotts, 2009; Mansbridge, 2003; Rehfeld, 2009), and the validity of the arguments has been confirmed by existing research on candidate evaluation that emphasizes personal traits like integrity and competence (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004; Funk, 1999; Lupia & McCubbins, 1998).

Not surprisingly, in the continuing debate on the conceptualization and nature of trust in general, competence and intention have also been explicitly or implicitly identified as two separate cognitive components of trust. In Barber's (1983) theorization, the two specific meanings of trust directly tap upon competence and intention assessment respectively: (1) "expectation of technologically competent role performance from those involved with us in social relationships and systems" and (2) "expectation that partners in interaction will carry out their fiduciary obligations and responsibilities" (p. 9). Another group of scholars pay special attention to the role of intention evaluation in their conceptualization of trust, although they use different labels like "moralistic trust" or "generalized trust" (Mansbridge, 1999; Uslander, 2002). As Uslander (2002) explicitly argues, "moralistic trust is based upon some sort of belief in the good will of the other" (p. 19). In other words, intention evaluation is indispensable for establishing moralistic trust or generalized trust. Owing to Hardin's (1998, 2002, 2006) continuous efforts, "encapsulated interest" has been recognized as a standard conceptualization of trust following the rational-choice tradition, which is also known as "strategic trust." According to the rational choice tradition, good intention per se does not necessarily guarantee trust; the evaluation of competence is indispensable as well (Hardin, 2002). For the establishment of trust, people need at least some minimum level of confidence in others' both good intention and competence: Neither incompetent good men nor proficient liars and manipulators can be trusted. Although scholars of trust in general take distinct and even conflicting

⁴ These authors do analyze competence and intention evaluations as different components of political trust. Nevertheless, none of them theorizes the empirical findings, with literally no attention paid to the underlying cognitive processes that form the bases of these two cognitive components of political trust.

stances on whether political trust makes sense,⁵ their explicit or implicit differentiation between competence and intention evaluations in trust formation actually calls for the adoption of a similar approach in contemporary literature on political trust, particularly the incumbent-based one.

Given the aforementioned findings in research on social cognition and psychology, political representation and accountability, candidate evaluation, and trust in general, people are expected to be cognitively *capable* of differentiating between their government's competence and intention in ruling and evaluating them respectively when assessing the trustworthiness of the government. Thus, the following hypothesis is to be tested in the empirical section regarding people's capability of separating these two cognitive components of political trust.

*H1: People's evaluations of political incumbents' competence and intention in governance are not highly correlated; i.e., cognitively, they are different things.*⁶

This cognitive anatomy of political trust, i.e., differentiating between competence and intention evaluations, enables contemporary research on political trust to more effectively engage questions like the origins and nature of this critical political attitude. Moreover, treating competence and intention evaluations as cognitively distinct variables has another serious implication for pertinent research. According to the previously discussed work in social cognition and psychology, competence and intention evaluations are associated with distinct types of discrimination and behavioral profiles, e.g., active attack versus passive neglect (Cuddy et al., 2007). More specific to political science, negative evaluations of a government's competence to handle socioeconomic and political issues can lead to voters casting ballots for better alternatives or major political crises. While, pessimistic views about politicians' intentions in governance may result in political alienation or even erode people's belief in the legitimacy of a regime.⁷ Therefore, the differentiation between competence and intention evaluations when examining political trust can also offer much more concrete attitude-behavior connections that are seriously lacking in contemporary literature. And these attitude-behavior connections are of significant value for using political trust to explain other political phenomena.⁸

Respective Bases of Competence and Intention Assessment. If people do differentiate between their government's competence and intention in governance when evaluating its trustworthiness, another question naturally arises: What are the bases of these two cognitive components of political trust? In other words, what kinds of information and heuristics do people consult when evaluating their government's competence and intention in ruling? Contemporary debates on trust in general and existing research on the roles of distinct types of information and heuristics in political judgment provide some relevant clues.

Generally, people's inferences about their government's competence in governance are very likely to be sensitive to the latter's outputs like public policies and socioeconomic performance. The large body of literature on economic voting, albeit short of this differentiation between competence and intention assessment, has generated abundant evidence for this effect (e.g., C. D. Anderson,

⁵ Hardin (2002) argues that generalized trust does not make much sense, and political trust makes little sense for most people most of the time. On the contrary, Uslaner (2002) believes in the validity of political trust but argues that political trust is strategic rather than moralistic.

⁶ I am not arguing that competence and intention evaluations are independent from each other. However, people are expected to be able to cognitively differentiate between the two. Therefore, a low correlation, rather than lack of correlation, is hypothesized here.

⁷ A thorough examination of the consequences of people's competence and intention evaluations should be systematically addressed with more nuanced conditional arguments, incorporating regime features, institutional settings, and even popular understandings of legitimacy. This is beyond the scope and capacity of this article but should be examined in future research.

⁸ Due to data limitations, the attitude-behavior connections cannot be examined in this article, but they definitely merit further research.

2006; Kramer, 1983). This is also compatible with the rational-choice tradition in theorizing trust, which emphasizes the indispensability of concrete personal experiences in generating necessary information for trust building (Hardin, 2002, 2006). Nevertheless, even this seemingly straightforward assessment of government's competence may not necessarily be very clear for most people, given various institutional and structural factors that could have intervened or moderated the relationship between competence and output, as well as politicians' sophistication in dodging responsibilities and overclaiming credits (C. J. Anderson, 2007).

Comparatively speaking, making inferences about a government's intention in governance is even more challenging and trickier, due to the much lower accessibility of pertinent information and deeply covered and convoluted links between a government's intention and the actual behaviors, policies, and outputs. However, this does not necessarily mean that people are clueless when inferring their government's intention. Despite its low exposure rate, scandals, particularly publicly revealed corruption or morally related misdemeanors, as well as personally experienced corruption, can be quite informative regarding government officials' possible intentions.⁹ Moreover, given the low accessibility of relevant information, a variety of heuristics might be consulted and provide the basis for intention evaluation,¹⁰ including politicians' physical features (Hart, Ottati, & Krumdick, 2011; Riggle et al., 1992) and people's internalized norms/values (Mansbridge, 1999; Uslaner, 2008). As the moralistic view of trust suggests, norms/values can be particularly useful in making inferences about the good will, i.e., intention, of others, due to shared collective experiences (Uslaner, 2002). Following the same logic, people may believe, since their incumbents are embedded in similar socialization processes and constrained by similar social sanctions that enforce shared social norms/values, the incumbents are likely to internalize the norms/values and follow them in running the country.¹¹ In other words, people are expected to form their assessment of their government's intention in governance, at least partially, based on the projections of pertinent norms/values that they have personally internalized.

Thus, theoretically, a government's performance, including but not limited to the public's experiences of political output, is expected to have significant implications for their assessment of the government's competence in governance. And given the relatively higher accessibility of such information, e.g., through the mass media or based on live experiences, heuristics like norms/values are expected to play a much limited and less significant role in this regard.¹² However, the situation is different when it comes to inferring political incumbents' possible intentions in governance. Political scandals can provide some valuable information for intention assessment. Unfortunately, there are very few empirical cases available, and most people do not have live experiences of such situations.¹³ Hence, thanks to the much lower accessibility of needed information, heuristics like norms/values, particularly those emphasizing how people should follow morally prescribed patterns in social interaction, are expected to be activated and consulted for intention evaluation. Accordingly,

⁹ For example, when the scandal of Clinton's affair with Lewinsky was revealed, the focus of public debate was Clinton's honesty, integrity, and morality rather than his competence to govern. However, it is critical to remind readers that corruption/scandals may also have implications for the public's assessment of the government's competence to constrain and deter such behaviors.

¹⁰ In their challenge against the conventional wisdom that most citizens are too uninformed to reason about public policy, Popkin and Dimock (2000) argue that "the less we actually know, the more we can project our own feelings and thoughts into a situation" (p. 216). And in most cases, "our own feelings and thoughts" are based on various heuristics.

¹¹ I am not arguing that everyone in a society shares the same norms/values. The coexistence of conflicting norms/values is quite common. The key point is that most people, without access to the internal world of other people, are inclined to project their own internalized norms/values into their beliefs on how other people may behave. For example, individualists are more likely to believe in other people's priority in securing individual interest, while collectivists are more likely to believe in other's people's priority in securing collective interest.

¹² This is compatible with Riggle et al.'s (1992) finding that stereotypic information is much less likely to be used for political judgment when other more specific information is available.

¹³ For the low exposure rate of scandals and lack of live experiences of corruption among most people, see (Zhu, Lu, & Shi, Forthcoming).

the following two hypotheses regarding the effects of different sources of information and heuristics on people's assessment of political incumbents' competence and intention in governance are to be tested in the empirical section.

H2: Comparatively speaking, information based on governmental performance like policy output is *more* influential in shaping how people evaluate political incumbents' competence rather than intentions in governance.

H3: Comparatively speaking, information based on political scandals like corruption, and projections based on socially cultivated norms/values are *more* influential in shaping how people assess political incumbents' intentions rather than competence in governance.

Competence and Intention Evaluations in Two Chinese Cities

Methodologically, mainland China offers a critical case for testing the proposed cognitive anatomy of political trust. As Wojciszke (1997) demonstrates, collectivistic cultural traditions privilege the warmth component, e.g., intention, in social cognition. A deep-rooted history of collectivism has been widely acknowledged as a salient feature of the political culture in mainland China (Shi, 2008). Moreover, the popular understanding of political legitimacy in China actually centers around political leaders' benign intentions that prioritize and serve the collective/public interest (Bell & Chaibong, 2003; de Bary, 2004). Therefore, Chinese citizens are expected to be cognitively sensitive to political incumbents' intentions in governance and also cognitively capable in differentiating between competence and intention when evaluating their government's trustworthiness. Thus, if the empirical evidence from mainland China, as the methodologically expected most likely case, does not support the derived hypotheses, the validity of the proposed cognitive scheme should be seriously questioned.

Theoretically, China is also a puzzling case for comparative studies on political trust. Despite its authoritarian nature, the Chinese government has been widely trusted by its people, as revealed by a series of surveys using various measures (e.g., J. Chen, 2004; Tang, 2005). China scholars have been working industriously to understand how this unusually high political trust has been sustained.¹⁴ The Chinese government's success in delivering material benefits (Nathan, 2003), people's exposure to the media censored and manipulated by the CCP (Kennedy, 2009), the Confucianism-dominated cultural tradition (Shi, 2008), and Chinese citizens' lack of enthusiasm for liberal democracy (J. Chen, 2004), *inter alia*, have all been identified as statistically significant and substantively important factors in this regard. Unfortunately, most studies have simply followed the "multivariable tournament" approach by incorporating as many factors as possible and interpreting each factor independently. Few scholars have explicitly adopted a coherent theoretical framework to uncover the underlying cognitive processes and dynamics that have sustained this puzzlingly high political trust.¹⁵ For example, if the CCP regime's economic performance and the lingering Confucianism both are statistically significant in explaining the high trust that Chinese citizens place in the CCP, an even more intriguing and critical question is: What are the substantively meaningful differences between the impacts of these factors? Unfortunately, little information on this question is available in contemporary literature.

¹⁴ China scholars have primarily followed conventional typological analyses of political trust and developed different labels for various types of political trust, e.g., specific versus diffuse trust, incumbent- versus regime-based trust, and trust in the central versus local governments (J. Chen, 2004; Li, 2004; Tang, 2005).

¹⁵ When analyzing Chinese rural residents' trust in the central government, Li (2004, 2008) might be the only exception in differentiating between the intention of policymaking and the capacity in policy implementation. However, Li does not theorize his findings, and he focuses on the effects of these two variables rather than their origins.

Moreover, empirically, are Chinese citizens more pessimistic about the government's competence or intention in governance, or similarly pessimistic about both? Is the sustained economic growth more beneficial to Chinese citizens' evaluations of the government's competence or intention, or is it equally beneficial to both? Given the aforementioned distinct discrimination and behavioral profiles associated with competence and intention evaluations (Cuddy et al., 2007), answers to these questions are critical for understanding the mass political behavior and even the possible political transition in today's largest authoritarian society.

Thanks to the collective and continuous efforts of survey researchers, there are a number of nationwide probability sampling surveys available, e.g., the ABS I & II, WVS, CGSS, and the China Survey.¹⁶ All of them provide conventional measures on political trust as a cognitively monolithic concept with different scales; nevertheless, few such national surveys have valid measures on Chinese citizens' evaluations of their government's competence and intention in governance. Fortunately, in a 2005 two-city GIS-sampling survey, I find valid instruments to gauge the surveyed Chinese urban residents' evaluations of the central government's competence and intention in governance. Moreover, since this survey was originally designed to examine how the Chinese people's exposure to foreign media might have weakened the CCP's efforts in media control and manipulation, it collected information on respondents' usage of media sources beyond the CCP's control, which is rarely available in large-scale national surveys.¹⁷ And this unique feature provides a great opportunity to examine how the CCP's control over information flow within its domestic media affects the Chinese people's assessment of its competence and intention in governance.

In the survey, respondents were asked to assess the Chinese central government's competence in specific issue domains on a 5-point Likert-scale: promoting economic growth, reducing corruption, lowering income inequality, and ensuring social security. A larger value indicates better perceived competence in governance.¹⁸ Answers to these four questions have been summarized in Figure 1.

It seems that in 2005, residents of sampled cities, on average, had relatively pessimistic views of the Chinese central government's competence to sustain quality governance. On the 5-point scale, the weighted mean score of the central government's competence in promoting economic growth was 3.26, merely an average score, and yet it was the highest in all four issue domains. The CCP's perceived competence in reducing corruption and lowering income inequality were both evaluated as unsatisfactory: 2.26 and 2.25, respectively. The assessment of its competence in ensuring social security was slightly more positive, at 2.62, but still below the middle point. In short, the respondents on average were not much impressed by the central government's competence in delivering public

¹⁶ For a comprehensive review of the survey industry in China, see Manion (2010).

¹⁷ Technical information about this two-city survey is provided in the appendix. This survey was done by John Aldrich and Tianjian Shi at Duke University. In the original design, Xia'men, a coastal city in Fujian province, was selected to maximize the chance of capturing the Chinese people accessing media sources beyond the CCP's control, since its residents can easily pick up radio and TV signals from Taiwan with simple antennas. And Chengdu in Sichuan province, a booming city in interior China, was selected for an identical survey to facilitate comparison and increase contrast. For detailed information on the rationale of the survey design, see Shi, Lu, & Aldrich (2011). Since this article is primarily interested in the underlying cognitive processes and dynamics rather than accurate descriptions and point estimates, it is methodologically appropriate to use this local sample (Manion, 1994). Moreover, when I check how different the respondents were from the general urban population in China, I compare their demographic features (gender, age, and education) to pertinent information based on China's national statistics in 2005 and the urban subpopulation of the 2007 WVS in mainland China. The respondents were not different in terms of gender composition and average educational attainment, although they were slightly younger. Detailed information on the comparison is provided in the appendix as Table A1. There is no obvious reason, at least, why I should treat the respondents as essentially different from China's general urban population. Of course, the three sources have slightly different definitions of urban population, and this comparison does not provide justification regarding the generalizability of my findings. I do acknowledge that any inferences based on local samples should be interpreted with caution, especially when generalized, given the possible contextual effects.

¹⁸ Theoretically, promoting economic growth, lowering income inequality, reducing corruption, and ensuring social security all can be conceptualized as providing public goods, which is the gist of good governance.

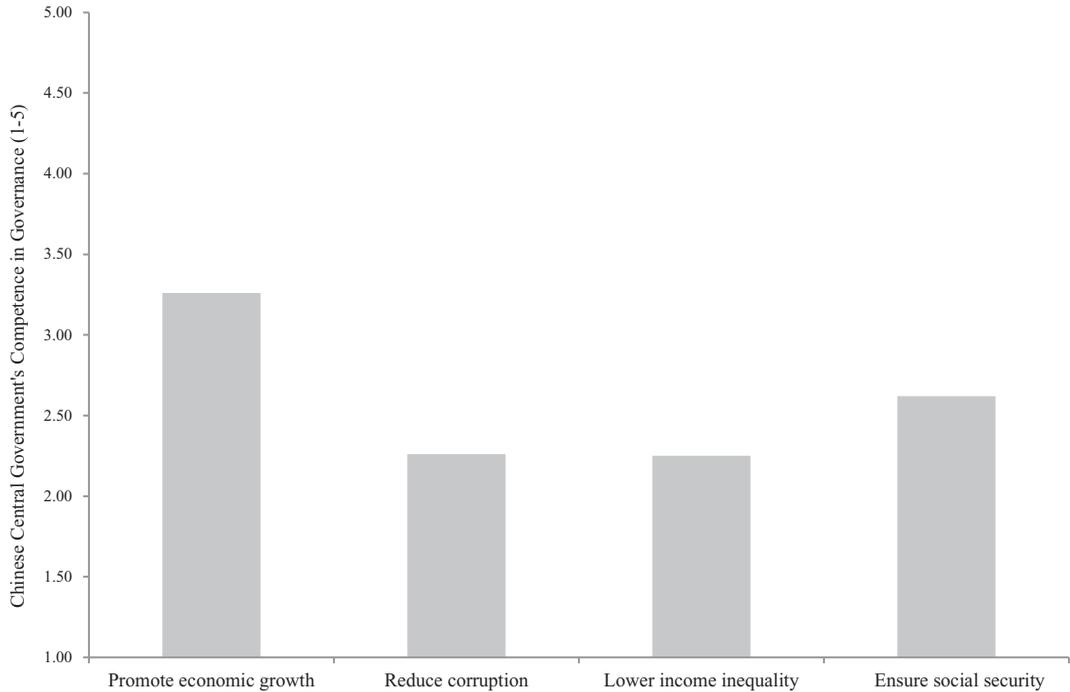


Figure 1. Surveyed Chinese urbanites' evaluations of the central government's competence in governance.
 Source: 2005 Two-City Survey ($N = 1606$).

goods and ensuring good governance. To examine the measurement validity of these four ordinal indicators, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is run. And they all tap the same underlying one-dimension latent construct with statistically and substantively significant loading factors.¹⁹

Another critical cognitive component of incumbent-based political trust is assessed intention in governance: Respondents were asked if they completely agreed, agreed, disagreed, or completely disagreed with the following statement: "Our central government is willing to do its best to serve the people and take their needs seriously." About 55% of the respondents agreed or completely agreed with this statement.²⁰ In other words, a majority of the respondents held positive or optimistic views of their central government's intention in governance, i.e., its willingness to serve the people. This is very different from their evaluations of the government's competence, as shown in Figure 1. Here, an interesting speculation about the puzzlingly high political trust in mainland China, as revealed in previous research, can be tentatively introduced: this high political trust might have been heavily colored by Chinese citizens' rosy views of the government's intention to serve the people, despite their lackluster evaluations of its competence to sustain effective and good governance. This is compatible with Li's (2004, 2008) findings based on local surveys in rural China. When examining Chinese peasants' trust in the central government, Li (2004) finds that "villagers who have more trust in higher levels sharply distinguish between the Center's intentions (believed to be good) and its

¹⁹ In subsequent analyses, this latent construct is used and incorporated through a measurement model embedded in an integrated structural equation model. The results of the CFA are not reported but available upon request. The associated CFI is 0.991, TLI is 0.996, and RMSEA is 0.045. It is important to remind readers that, given the ordinal nature of the indicators, the CFA is based on the analysis of polychoric, rather than Pearson's, correlations.

²⁰ Detailed frequency distribution: "Completely agree" (4.23%), "Agree" (50.68%), "Disagree" (29.51%), "Completely disagree" (2.49%), and "DK" (13.08%).

Table 1. Rank Correlations Between Competence and Intention Evaluations

		Promote economic growth	Reduce corruption	Lower income inequality	Ensure social security
Willing to serve the people	Spearman's Rho	0.174***	0.282***	0.298***	0.177***
	Kendall's Tau	0.093***	0.154***	0.164***	0.096***

Source. 2005 Two-City Survey ($N = 1606$).

Note. * $p < 0.1$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$ for two-tailed tests.

capacity (believed to be lacking)²¹ (p. 229). Of course, Li's work and this article are both based on local samples; thus, to rigorously test this speculation, a national survey with appropriate measures on the Chinese people's assessment of their government's intention and competence, as well as conventionally conceptualized political trust, are needed. Nevertheless, the similar findings from both urban and rural China with different local samples cannot be simply disregarded as the consequences of data uniqueness or a geographically limited phenomenon.

To make sure that the respondents did cognitively differentiate between their assessment of the government's competence and intention in governance, a correlation analysis between their self-report competence and intention evaluations is presented in Table 1. Given the ordinal nature of all measures, Spearman's Rho and Kendall's Tau are used to evaluate the strength of the rank correlations.

As displayed in Table 1, the respondents' assessment of the central government's intention in governance is positively and significantly correlated with their evaluations of its competence in promoting economic growth, reducing corruption, lowering income inequality, and ensuring social security. Basically, there is a possible "halo effect" between the two cognitive components. Nevertheless, regardless of which statistics are used, the correlation between these two evaluations is persistently weak, ranging from 0.09 to 0.30. Thus, cognitively, the central government's intention and competence in governance are distinct issues for the surveyed Chinese urbanites. Hypothesis 1 is confirmed by the evidence from the two-city survey.

Knowing that the surveyed Chinese urbanites can effectively differentiate between competence and intention in governance in their evaluations of the central government, we can take a further step to examine the respective bases of these evaluations. Due to lack of sufficient empirical literature on this topic, I specify the empirical model following the aforementioned literature on trust, economic voting, and candidate evaluation. Two typical sources of information and one critical heuristic are systematically examined: direct personal experiences, exposure to the mass media (indirect experiences), and norms/values.

Three indicators are used to measure the respondents' direct personal experiences: unemployment status,²² self-reported current economic situation,²³ and individual experience of corruption.²⁴ It is expected that their personal economic situation can offer some valuable information on how

²¹ This speculation is also compatible with Wojciszke and Klusek's (1996) findings in Poland in the early 1990s: the Polish people's approval of their president was significantly affected by their evaluations of the incumbent's morality and competence; morality was the strongest predictor. Given the shared history of Communism in mainland China and Poland, when collectivism was heavily promoted and indoctrinated (the influence of collectivism is discussed later), the similar findings are not simply a coincidence.

²² This is a binary variable with 1 coded for unemployment.

²³ This is an ordinal variable ranging from 1 to 5, with a larger value indicating better economic situation.

²⁴ This is a binary variable with 0 coded for lack of personal experience of corruption in the past few years. In the survey, respondents were not asked to differentiate between local and central government corruption. I thank one anonymous reviewer for pointing this out. However, this deficiency in the survey instrument may bias following statistical analysis toward insignificant findings, given the nature of the dependent variable (the Chinese central government's competence and intention in governance). Therefore, if I still find significant evidence using this flawed measure, I should have more confidence in the validity of my arguments.

competent the central government is in delivering socioeconomic benefits. Nevertheless, such information is expected to be of much *less* value for drawing reliable inferences about the central government's intention in governance. Different from individual economic situation, people's personal experiences of corruption should be relevant for both their intention and competence assessments of the incumbents' in Beijing. Furthermore, personal experiences of corruption are expected to be much *more* significant in challenging people's views of the incumbents' intentions, thanks to the straightforward revealing of corrupt officials' greediness and evil desires.

The mass media offers another source of information that might have been consulted when the respondents assessed the central government's competence and intention in governance, despite its indirect nature (as compared to personal experiences). Previous studies on political trust in China have examined the influence of Chinese citizens' exposure to their domestic media, but they generated some inconclusive findings (X. Chen & Shi, 2001; Kennedy, 2009). As many China scholars recognize, China's mass media is still under the CCP's firm control, despite some commercialization and marketization since the 1990s (Lynch, 1999). To increase the possible variance in the information that the respondents accessed from the mass media regarding their government's performance and behavior, I intentionally contrast those who only accessed domestic media with those who accessed both domestic and foreign media. Thus, to capture the possible impacts of media information beyond the CCP's control, a binary indicator is created to measure whether the respondents accessed overseas media, including those from Taiwan and Hong Kong, through newspapers, radio programs, satellite TVs, and the Internet, in the week before the survey.²⁵ This alternative media source is expected to provide more negative information on the Chinese government's competence and intention in governance.

As previously discussed, besides the information amassed through personal experiences and different media channels, the respondents may also consult critical heuristics like shared moral norms/values for their assessment, particularly regarding the central government's intention in governance. When there is limited information available to infer their incumbents' possible intentions, people can either assume politicians are primarily driven by self-interest or give them the benefit of the doubt and assume they are public-interest oriented. Neither strategy is mistake-proof or benefit-maximizing. In reality, the strategy people are more inclined to take is highly contingent upon their general views of others, prescribed by socially constructed and transmitted norms/values (Mansbridge, 1999; Uslander, 2002). More specifically, the surveyed Chinese urbanites who have internalized the norm/value that prioritizes collective interest over individual interest are more likely to give political incumbents the benefit of the doubt, i.e., assuming them to be public-interest-oriented until proved wrong. On the contrary, those who have internalized the norm/value prescribing that individual interest should be given priority and not be sacrificed in the name of collective interest are more likely to assume that politicians are primarily driven by their pursuit of self-interest even at the cost of the public interest. To measure the respondents' commitment to the collectivistic norm, they were asked if they completely agreed, agreed, disagreed, or completely disagreed with the following statements: (1) "When there is conflict between self-interest and national interest, people should sacrifice self-interest for national interest"; (2) "Generally speaking, individual interest should be secondary to collective interest"; and (3) "Sacrificing individual interest for collective interest is out of

²⁵ The list of foreign newspapers, radio programs, websites, and TV programs identified by the respondents is available upon request. I do realize that this measure of people's usage of alternative media sources beyond the CCP's control is rough. However, two pieces of information increase my confidence in the validity of this measure: (1) According to the survey, those who did use alternative media sources watched TV channels like CNN, Sky News, as well as China Television and ETTV News from Taiwan, and browsed websites like MSN News, New York Times, and the Wall Street Journal. (2) Subsequent analysis shows that the respondents' official affiliation with the CCP is a statistically significant predictor of their use of free media, after controlling for their socioeconomic status. These people are politically sensitive and motivated, and they are expected to pay attention to information more than just entertainment or commercial news.

date.”²⁶ Projections based on this collectivistic norm are expected to be *more* significant in shaping the respondents’ assessment of the central government’s intention in governance.

In addition to various sources of information and the collectivistic norm, the respondents’ demographic features, such as age,²⁷ educational attainment,²⁸ gender,²⁹ and city of residency³⁰ are controlled. Their internal political efficacy,³¹ political interest,³² and official affiliation with the CCP³³ are also included as necessary controls.

Structural Equation Modeling and Statistical Results

There are three major reasons that conventional single equation regressions are neither appropriate nor efficient for the empirical test in this article. First, to effectively test the cognitive anatomy of political trust, multiple dependent variables—i.e., competence and intention evaluations—should be simultaneously examined. Moreover, one original contribution of this article lies in its examination of the varying impacts that different information sources and heuristics may have for people’s evaluations of their government’s competence versus intention in governance. These goals are beyond the capability of single equation regressions, but they can be effectively achieved with the help of path-coefficient-equality tests embedded in structural equation modeling (SEM).

Second, like the people in other societies, the surveyed Chinese urbanites selected themselves into distinct media environments, e.g., accessing free media beyond the CCP’s control. Without controlling for the self-selection process, any estimation of its impact on the respondents’ assessment of the central government’s competence and intention in governance is likely to be biased (Heckman, 1979). Thus, an extra equation needs to be specified to control for this self-selection in accessing foreign media for a simultaneous estimation.

Third but not least, to minimize the possible bias introduced by measurement errors, latent factor scores extracted through measurement models with multiple ordinal indicators are much better than simple summary indexes (Bollen & Lennox, 1991). Given all these concerns, an integrated SEM with both measurement models and a simultaneous equation system is the most appropriate statistical approach.

To minimize the impact of missing values, they are filled through model-based multiple imputations following the standard procedure recommended by methodologists (King, Honaker, Joseph, & Scheve, 2001).³⁴ Five data sets are generated, and statistical inferences are made using the averaged results following the Rubin’s rule (Rubin, 1987). Survey sampling information is also systematically incorporated to correct estimated standard errors. Results of the integrated SEM are presented in Table 2.

²⁶ These instruments are ordinal variables. The validity of the three instruments in tapping an underlying one-dimensional, continuous latent construct, i.e., individualism/collectivism, has been confirmed by a CFA. This latent construct is used in subsequent analyses through a measurement model embedded in an integrated structural equation model.

²⁷ This is a continuous variable for real age. To control for a possible curvilinear effect, the quadratic term of age is also included.

²⁸ This is a continuous variable for the number of years of formal education.

²⁹ This is a binary variable, with 1 coded for males.

³⁰ This is a binary variable that is also used as the indicator of two strata, Chengdu and Xia’men, in the survey. To maximize the leverage of analysis, I use the pooled data. This pooled data can be legitimately used as a representative sample of the total population of Chengdu and Xia’men. Appropriate weighting is calculated to reflect the urban population size of the two cities.

³¹ This is an ordinal variable based on respondents’ (complete) agreement/(complete) disagreement with the following statement: “I think I know very well about the major political issues facing our country.”

³² This is an ordinal variable with 1 standing for “Completely uninterested” and 4 standing for “Very interested.”

³³ This is a binary variable with 1 coded for a formal affiliation with the CCP.

³⁴ Item nonresponse rate, i.e., percentage of “don’t knows,” for the variables used in this article ranges from 0% to 13%, which is normal compared to other surveys in China (Ren, 2009). Another SEM with the same specification is also run with the Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) to deal with missing values, instead of using multiple imputations; the results hold. The FIML results are available upon request.

Table 2. Results of an Integrated Structural Equation Model

Governance Competence		Governance Intention ^c	Access to Foreign Media ^c	Collectivism
<i>Measurement Models</i>	Measurement I			Measurement II
Promote economic growth ^c	1.000 ^a			
Reduce corruption ^c	1.475 (0.102)***			
Lower income inequality ^c	1.538 (0.096)***			
Ensure social security ^c	0.963 (0.093)***			
CID 1 ^c				1.000 ^a
CID 2 ^c				2.143 (0.358)***
CID 3 ^c				0.758 (0.090)***
<i>Structural Models</i>	Equation I	Equation II	Equation III	
Age	0.002 (0.008)	-0.012 (0.019)	-0.012 (0.027)	
Age squared	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)		
Education	-0.032 (0.005)***	-0.030 (0.012)**	0.092 (0.017)***	
Male	0.041 (0.037)	-0.103 (0.073)	0.129 (0.079)*	
Unemployment status	-0.054 (0.036) [†]	0.012 (0.081)		
Current economic situation	0.109 (0.023)***	0.050 (0.055)		
Personal experience of corruption	-0.094 (0.047)**	-0.299 (0.086)***		
Access to foreign media	-0.041 (0.022)*	-0.122 (0.060)**		
Collectivism	0.302 (0.070)***	0.861 (0.093)***		
Internal political efficacy	-0.112 (0.030)***	-0.099 (0.075) [†]	-0.159 (0.093)*	
Political interest	0.064 (0.023)***	0.109 (0.057)*	0.030 (0.064)	
Xia'men	0.205 (0.049)***	0.036 (0.107)	0.022 (0.161)	
CCP Affiliation			0.181 (0.110)*	
<i>Covariance Structure</i>				
Governance intention	0.157 (0.016)***			
<i>Model Fit Statistics</i>				
CFI	0.940, SD = 0.007, MI = 5			
TLI	0.914, SD = 0.009, MI = 5			
RMSEA	0.023, SD = 0.001, MI = 5			

Source. 2005 Two-City Survey (N = 1606).

Notes. ^aFor identification concerns, this parameter has been fixed to 1.

^bDue to space limits, estimated thresholds of ordinal endogenous variables are not reported.

^cOrdinal variables.

Coefficients and standard errors are averaged results over the estimations from five imputed data sets. Robust standard errors, corrected for the design effect of complex sampling and weighting, in parentheses. WLSMV estimators obtained through Mplus 6.0 based on delta parameterization.

Gray-shaded cells contain information directly related to hypotheses I, II, and III.

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05 ***p < 0.01 for two-tailed tests.

[†]This coefficient is significant at the 0.15 level for a two-tailed test.

Before examining the impacts of different sources of information and heuristics on the surveyed Chinese urbanites' evaluations of their central government's competence and intention in governance, it is critical to be sure that the SEM specified does allow valid statistical inferences. Three model-fit statistics are examined following best practice in the discipline: both CFI and TLI are larger than 0.9, and RMSEA is less than 0.05.³⁵ Basically, the specified model has recovered the variance-covariance matrix satisfactorily.

³⁵ For detailed information on model-fit indexes of SEM, see (Bentler, 1990, 2000; Browne & Cudeck, 1993).

For measurement models, all ordinal indicators are significantly loaded on their respective latent constructs. As shown in Measurement I, the respondents' evaluations of the central government's competence in promoting economic growth, reducing corruption, lowering income inequality, and ensuring social security all tap their latent assessment of the government's competence in delivering good governance. And their agreement with the three statements, as displayed in Measurement II, also unanimously taps their latent propensity in internalizing the norm prescribing that collective interest *should be* prioritized over individual interest.

After controlling for possible confounding variables, as well as the self-selection process in the respondents' exposure to different media environments (modeled by Equation III), the SEM results do reveal varying stories regarding the cognitive bases of the surveyed Chinese urbanites' evaluations of the central government's competence and intention in governance, as shown in Equations I and II respectively.

First, personal economic situation has significant impacts on the respondents' evaluations of their central government's competence. Those who had more negative feelings of their current economic situation or recently lost their jobs, *ceteris paribus*, held significantly lower assessment of the CCP's competence to deliver good governance. Moreover, as expected, this source of information has little impacts on their views of the central government's intention in governance. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is confirmed here.

Second, personally experienced corruption significantly lowered the respondents' both competence and intention evaluations. Nevertheless, the path coefficient for intention evaluation is almost 3.2 times that of competence assessment,³⁶ suggesting that personally experienced corruption much more significantly eroded the respondents' assessment of the central government's intention in governance. In other words, while corruption dramatically impaired the surveyed Chinese urbanites' evaluations of their government's competence in delivering public goods, it had a far larger negative effect on their assessment of the government's intention to serve the public interest. The first part of Hypothesis 3 is confirmed here.

Third, in addition to direct information from personal experiences, accessing foreign media also made the respondents lower their competence and intention evaluations of the Chinese central government simultaneously. Though it is hard to prespecify whether this affected the respondents' intention or competence assessment significantly more, the empirical evidence suggests it was much more detrimental to the former. The path coefficient of accessing foreign media on intention evaluation is around 3.0 times the coefficient regarding competence assessment.³⁷ In other words, the information from overseas media depressed the respondents' perceptions of their central government's both competence and intention in governance, but with a much larger negative influence on the latter. This finding resonates with the popular topics covered by foreign media on China, e.g., prevalent corruption, political cronyism, and the CCP's animosity against true democratic governance, which speak more directly to the CCP's possible intentions in governance.³⁸

And fourth, the norm prescribing that collective interest *should be* prioritized in social interaction significantly boosted the surveyed Chinese urbanites' evaluations of the central government's competence and intention. The stronger the respondent believed that collective interest should be

³⁶ This difference is statistically significant based on a Chi-square test with one degree of freedom. The Chi-square statistic is 6.698, and the *p*-value is 0.010. It is important to remind readers that the latent construct measuring the respondents' evaluation of the government's competence is a continuous variable. Although the indicator of their evaluations of the government's intention is an ordinal variable, the path coefficient actually taps corruption's impact on a latent continuous variable, similar to the situation of estimating ordered-Probit regressions through link functions. Thus, the path coefficients for these two latent variables can be legitimately compared in a meaningful way, given the same scale factor.

³⁷ This difference is statistically significant: Chi-square statistic is 3.451, and the *p*-value is 0.063.

³⁸ This finding again confirms the validity of the survey instruments in capturing the respondents' intention and competence evaluations, as well as the respondents' cognitive capability in differentiating between the two.

prioritized, the higher the evaluation he or she had of the central government's competence in providing public goods, as well as its "good will" to serve the people. However, the difference between these two path coefficients is both statistically and substantively significant: the coefficient on intention evaluation is around 2.9 times that of the coefficient on competence assessment.³⁹ As theoretically expected, given the much lower accessibility of pertinent information for intention evaluation, projections based on internalized norms/values are even more influential and critical for inferring intention rather than assessing competence. The empirical evidence here confirms the second part of Hypothesis 3.

Some controls perform as expected.⁴⁰ The respondents with higher levels of educational attainment held more critical views of the central government's competence and intention. In addition, those who were more interested in Chinese domestic politics held better views of the government's competence in tackling socioeconomic issues, as well as its "good will" in serving the people. On the contrary, those who believed they knew China's major political issues well, *ceteris paribus*, held more negative views of the central government's competence and intention. As displayed in Equation III, the self-selection process in accessing foreign media does not show any unexpected patterns: well-educated male respondents were more likely to access information beyond the CCP's control; and those who were officially affiliated with the CCP, due to either more concerns about the regime's future or more resources available, were also more likely to take advantage of this uncontrolled source of information.⁴¹

Finally, the significant positive correlation between the respondents' evaluations of the central government's competence in providing public goods and their assessment of its intention to serve the people confirms the findings in Table 1. Again, this low coefficient suggests that the surveyed Chinese urbanites' evaluations of their government's competence and intention in governance are conceptually, cognitively, and empirically different. And they did cognitively differentiate between the two. In a summary, the validity of this cognitive anatomy of political trust is substantiated by the evidence from the two-city survey.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Building upon the most recent work on social cognition and psychology, as well as contemporary research on political representation and accountability, candidate evaluation, and the continuing debate on the conceptualization and nature of trust in general, this article proposes a different perspective to reexamine political trust by focusing on its cognitive components and underlying cognitive processes. This cognitive anatomy of political trust identifies two cognitively distinct but related components for people's evaluations of the trustworthiness of their government, *i.e.*, competence and intention in governance. This cognitive perspective helps contemporary literature on political trust move beyond conventional typological analysis, makes it possible for researchers to more effectively engage some of the unanswered questions like the nature and origins of political trust, and provides some concrete attitude-behavior connections that can rejuvenate the use of political trust to explain various political phenomena.

³⁹ This difference is statistically significant: Chi-square statistic is 52.330, and the *p*-value is 0.000.

⁴⁰ To examine the impact of age, the same model is run without its quadratic term. Still, age does not show significant impact. The result is available upon request.

⁴¹ Respondents' affiliation with the CCP is only used in Equation III to fulfill the "exclusion restriction" required for selection models (Heckman, 1979). Empirically, the respondents' affiliation with the CCP is insignificant for their competence or intention evaluations. To test the impacts of accessing foreign media, the covariance between media exposure and competence/intention evaluation is also specified. Statistical tests show that the covariance is statistically insignificant, with a Chi-square statistic of 0.5952 and a *p*-value of 0.742. This covariance specification does not change the results; and they are available upon request.

Some useful insights are generated when this new cognitive scheme is applied to examining the puzzling high incumbent-based political trust in mainland China. A two-city survey in 2005 shows the surveyed Chinese urbanites did cognitively and effectively differentiate between competence and intention in governance when evaluating their central government. Moreover, the respondents, on average, held moderate or even low evaluations of their central government's competence in delivering good governance, while a majority of them simultaneously held a quite positive assessment of the government's intention to serve the people, and the two cognitive components are only weakly correlated. This confirms similar findings from rural China and suggests a possible explanation for the puzzling high political trust in mainland China: the high trust that Chinese citizens place in their central government might have been heavily colored by their rosy views of its intention in governance, despite their lackluster evaluations of its competence in delivering good governance. Further empirical research with more appropriate data, is needed to fully and more effectively examine this conjecture.

Systematic analyses of the two-city survey data, using an integrated structural equation model, further reveal the varying bases for the respondents' evaluations of their central government's competence and intention in governance. As expected, personal experiences, media information, and internalized norms/values were consulted for these evaluations. Moreover, these different types of information and heuristics did have their respective comparative advantages in assisting the respondents' inferences on the central government's competence versus intention in governance. Individual economic situation offered some concrete information for assessing the government's competence but was barely informative for intention evaluation. Personally experienced corruption much more significantly challenged the respondents' views of the government's intention, despite its still substantial influence over their evaluations of the government's competence. Exposure to overseas media beyond the CCP's control played a significant role in both evaluations, but it more dramatically lowered the respondents' assessment of the central government's intention. Due to the much lower accessibility of pertinent information for intention evaluation, the norm prioritizing collective interest in social interaction spoke directly and much more significantly to how the respondents might infer the central government's intention in governance.

Given the limitations of the data, there are many more interesting research questions that cannot be pursued here. For example, how do political institutional features moderate the impacts of different sources of information and heuristics on people's intention and competence assessment? How do people's competence and intention evaluations interact in shaping their political trust? How do people's competence and intention evaluations shape their propensity of political participation in various ways? This article is just the beginning of some reoriented research on political trust, with the aim of furthering our understanding of the cognitive components, as well as underlying cognitive processes, of this critical political attitude. The proposed cognitive anatomy of political trust provides not only a coherent framework with a more consolidated cognitive basis to synthesize existing empirical findings but also a different perspective for interpreting some well-documented but puzzling phenomena, such as the continuous decline of political trust in trilateral democracies and the unexpectedly high political trust in some new or nondemocracies. Moreover, this cognitive scheme also provides a promising avenue for future research on the relationship between political trust and political behavior, given the better developed and well-documented attitude-behavior connections in the literature on social cognition and psychology.

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Appendix I

Survey Data and Sampling

The data used in this analysis comes from a two-city survey based on random samples drawn from Xia'men, a city in Fujian, and Chengdu, a city in Sichuan. This survey was conducted by the Research Center of Contemporary China (RCCC) of Peking University. The population of this study is the non-institutional people (18+) residing within the metropolitan area circumscribed by the external ring road for more than one year at the time of the survey.

The randomization for sampling used GPS/GIS assistant stratified multi-stage probabilities proportional to size sampling strategy. The Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) were square grids of half degree of longitude by half degree of latitude. In Chengdu, there were 768 such grids. In Xia'men, there were 177 such grids. A total of 30 PSUs was selected for Chengdu and 20 PSUs for Xia'men. Some of the selected square grids fall into water or rice fields with no residents. After excluding those areas, there were 27 PSUs left for Chengdu and 18 PSUs left for Xia'men. The Secondary Sampling Units (SSUs) were smaller square grids of 90 meters by 90 meters within each selected PSU. All addresses within each SSU were collected. The Fifth Census Data collected in 2000 were used to define primary and secondary square grids and calculate the population density of each PSU for subsequent stages of sampling. Then, 1,141 households in Chengdu and 1,197 households in Xia'men were then randomly selected for interview.

The RCCC hired and trained university students majoring in social sciences from Chengdu and Xia'men as interviewers. All participated in a 4-day training course and passed a formal examination before going to the field. They successfully interviewed 801 respondents in Chengdu and 805 respondents in Xia'men, which reflected response rates of 70.2% for the former and 60.3% for the latter.

Appendix II

Table A1. Demographic Features of Surveyed Chinese Urban Residents

	2005 National Statistics	2005 Two-City Survey	2007 World Values Survey
Percentage of males	0.491	0.486 [0.451, 0.522]	0.507 [0.475, 0.539]
Average age ^a	42.35	37.41 [36.32, 38.49]	41.48 [40.60, 42.37]
Average education ^b	n.a.	11.43 [11.16, 11.69]	11.52 [11.26, 11.78]

Sources. 2006 Yearbook of National Statistics, 2005 Two-City Survey ($N = 1606$), 2007 World Values Survey Mainland China ($N = 2015$).

Notes. Weighted statistics in cells for the two surveys, with 95% confidence intervals in parentheses.

^aAge in years.

^bYears of formal education.