P200 / Trust and Regulation: Institutions, Governance and Public Policy

Topic : Regulation and Regulatory Governance

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Trust and regulation are often treated as alternative mechanisms of governance: trust is associated with discretion, cooperation, and informal coordination, while regulation is associated with rules, monitoring, enforcement, and formal control. Yet in practice, the relationship between trust and regulation is considerably more complex. Regulation can generate trust by reducing uncertainty, constraining opportunism, and providing credible assurance. At the same time, extensive regulation may signal distrust, crowd out cooperative relations, or generate new forms of suspicion. Trust can facilitate regulatory compliance and reduce enforcement costs, but it can also create vulnerabilities where oversight is weak or misplaced.

This panel invites papers that examine the relationship between trust, distrust, and regulation in domestic, comparative, European, and transnational governance. We are interested in the ways in which different forms of trust shape regulatory institutions and behavior, and in how regulatory arrangements in turn influence trust in governments, regulators, firms, experts, professions, and other institutions.

The panel welcomes theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions. Relevant questions include: When does regulation substitute for trust, and when does it reinforce or produce trust? Can regulation compensate for low levels of interpersonal or institutional trust? Under what conditions does regulatory intensity undermine trust? How do different forms of regulation—such as command-and-control, self-regulation, co-regulation, disclosure, auditing, certification, or risk-based regulation—interact with different forms and objects of trust? How do monitoring, verification, transparency, and enforcement affect trust and distrust?

We also welcome papers examining variation across countries, sectors, institutions, and regulatory traditions. Contributions may address trust in regulators and public authorities, trust in business and markets, trust in experts and professionals, regulatory legitimacy, compliance, crisis governance, digital regulation, environmental governance, finance, health, labor regulation, artificial intelligence, and other areas of public policy.

The panel is particularly interested in work that moves beyond the assumption that either trust or regulation is inherently desirable. Trust may facilitate cooperation but can also be misplaced; regulation may provide assurance but can also produce rigidity, administrative burden, or distrust. Papers that distinguish among different forms of trust, different types of regulation, and different levels of analysis are especially encouraged.

More broadly, the panel seeks to develop a research agenda on the co-evolution of trust and regulation. By bringing these literatures together, we aim to better understand how societies construct credible governance arrangements, how regulatory institutions respond to changing levels of trust and distrust, and what these interactions imply for regulatory governance, institutional design, legitimacy, and democratic public policy.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Trust and regulation are central mechanisms of social, economic and political governance. Yet their relationship remains theoretically contested and empirically underexplored. Conventional approaches often treat trust and regulation as substitutes: trust reduces the need for formal controls, while regulation compensates for distrust. Recent scholarship, however, suggests a more complex relationship, encompassing substitution, mutual undermining, complementarity and reinforcement (Rangoni, Levi-Faur and Verhoest, 2026). This panel invites contributions that move beyond the simple opposition between trust and control to examine how trust and regulation interact, how regulatory institutions shape trustworthiness, and how trust and distrust are institutionally organized and politically contested.

We particularly welcome papers addressing the following research questions:

1. Institutional relationships: Under what conditions do trust and regulation substitute for, complement, or reinforce one another? How do these relationships vary across regulatory regimes, policy sectors and political systems?
2. Institutional design: How do regulatory instruments, organizational arrangements and enforcement practices shape trust, distrust, trustworthiness and justified reliance?
3. Actors and power: How is trust distributed among governments, regulatory agencies, regulated actors, intermediaries and citizens? Who defines, verifies and challenges trustworthiness?
4. Dynamics and change: How do regulatory reforms, crises, technological transformations and institutional failures reshape trust relationships? How are trust and trustworthiness restored following regulatory failures?
5. Governance consequences: How do different configurations of trust and regulation affect compliance, legitimacy, accountability, cooperation and policy effectiveness?

The panel welcomes theoretical, conceptual and empirical contributions using qualitative, quantitative, experimental, historical or comparative approaches. Research across policy domains—including finance, environmental governance, digital technologies, public services, health and transnational regulation—is particularly encouraged. Our ambition is to advance a comparative and cumulative research agenda that treats trust and regulation not merely as competing governance mechanisms, but as interdependent elements of institutional and political order.