



STEIN RINGEN

Trust and Good Government

The ability of democratic governments to deliver depends on a range of conditions. It is customary to put 'trust' high up on the list of those conditions. It is also customary to assume that there is a problem of trust, or even a crisis of trust, in contemporary democracy. But what is the association between trust and good government? What is the importance of trust up against other conditions? How is trust created and maintained, and how is it lost? What is the direction of causality, it is 'trust begets good government' or 'good government begets trust'? If it is the latter, trust is not at all a condition but a consequence, and does not enter as an independent variable in the equation of good government. And is it true that there is a decline of trust in governance throughout the democratic world? Governance grows out of an antagonistic confrontation between governors, who want things done, and sundry others, who must comply if that is to happen but are generally reluctant to do so. Good government depends on this game being resolved in a settlement of order in which governors give others what they need and others what the governors need. To the

degree that trust enters into it, it works both ways. Others need to be able to trust the governors, and governors need to be able to trust others. It is a matter of settlement, not of one side trusting the other.