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FROM THE RIGHT

DeVore: Why Texans trust state government

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BY CHUCK DEVORE - SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR

Gallup has been asking Americans since 1972 about the level of trust they place in government, with trust in state government consistently outpolling the federal government. But, Gallup has never completed a separate state-by-state poll on trust – [until now](#).

Some of the large states that aren't well trusted are Pennsylvania (fourth-least trusted), California (sixth), and North Carolina (ninth), leading Gallup to note, "In general, trust is lower in more populous states than in less populous states."

Texas bucks the trend, coming in as the sixth-most trusted state.

Why does trust vary so much from state to state? Gallup suggests that, in addition to size, the state of the economy also affects trust.

However, a rigorous analysis of more than 30 public policy and demographic factors and their correlation to trust suggests the reasons people trust or distrust state governments go beyond Gallup's simple explanations.

Of the data examined, many showed no connection at all to state trust, but 23 factors or combination of factors deserve to be mentioned. Some because they show no link to trust when the opposite might be expected, others because they show a strong correlation to trust. Mere correlation does not prove causation.

The following show little to no correlation to trust: the percentage of college graduates in a state; a state's rate of volunteering for the military; its rate of incarceration; public school teacher-to-student ratio; percentage of its minority population; frequency of church attendance; and percentage of people on welfare.

The next factors indicate a slight correlation to trust, explaining from 6 percent to 9 percent of the difference between the states: the population of the state and economic growth as well as the its percentage of foreign born residents, with more trust seen with fewer foreign born; percentage of state and local taxes as a share of income factored with the public school teacher-to-student ratio, with more trust seen with less taxes and more teachers; and campaign finance limits, with more trust seen with larger donation limits or no limits.

Then factors that appear to explain from 13 percent to 30 percent of the differences in trust among the states: rate of union membership, with more trust in states with lower union membership; state's level of [soft tyranny](#), a measure of the power of state government over its people; percentage of state and local taxes as a share of income, with lower taxes leading to more trust; the right to keep and bear arms, with citizens trusting a government that trusts them to defend themselves; a business-friendly lawsuit climate; the days the legislature is in session, with less trust as the legislature approaches full-time; and the average commute time, with less time spent in traffic leading to more trust.

Lastly, a combination of from two to four of the previous factors correlates to 34 to 41 percent of the trust in each state with a mix of four: taxes, gun rights, lawsuit reform and commute time, showing the highest link to trust. Comparatively speaking, Texas lawmakers have done well in these four areas of public policy.

When building trust in state government, enacting liberty-minded legislation is a good place to start.

DeVore is the vice president of policy at the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

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