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When and how politicians' disrespect affects voters' trust in the political system: The roles of social judgments and category prototypicality

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Abstract

We propose that one politician's disrespectful behavior can spill over to voters' generalized judgments of politicians and thereby affect trust in the political system. We delineate the spillover effect along the basic dimensions of social judgment, communion, and agency. Moreover, we argue that any spillover effect is contingent on the focal politicians' category prototypicality, that is, their representativeness of politicians as such. Conducting an experiment ($N = 392$) and a field study ($N = 273$), we found that politicians' respect only affected trust through generalized communion ratings. This spillover only occurred if the observed politician was perceived as prototypical. Our findings provide new insights on when and how individual politicians may be able to undermine voters' trust in the political system.

1 | INTRODUCTION

A society's stability centrally rests on its citizens' trust in their political system (Easton, 1965). Alarmingly, many established democracies are facing all-time lows in terms of voters' political trust (Catterberg & Moreno, 2005), while politicians worldwide are counted among the least trusted professionals (Kirchner, 2014). Searching for the cause, scholars frequently point toward voters' disappointment with politicians' integrity (Levi & Stoker, 2000), which can be linked to the disrespectful tone that dominates the political arena (Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). Nonetheless, most political practitioners believe that disrespectful attacks on the opponent can help them win elections (Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2002). Recently, this conviction was ultimately proven right by Donald Trump, who was elected president of the United States after he had practically attacked everyone in his campaign: his opponents, the media, and even parts of the voters. For example, he called his opponent Hillary Clinton "crooked," "lying," "a disaster," or "a loose cannon" (see Lee & Quealy, 2016 for an impressive collection of Trump's insults).

Granted, even though Trump carried disrespectful attacks to extremes, he was neither the first nor the only candidate to engage in mudslinging. When behaving like this, it seems that politicians turn a blind eye to the potential collateral damage on voters' system-supporting attitudes. In this paper, we seek to better understand the process whereby one politician's displayed disrespect translates into an enervated belief in the political system. We propose that observed disrespect affects voters' group stereotype of politicians and, subsequently, spills over to trust in the political system. For this purpose, we turn to social judgment research, which has revealed two dimensions that constitute impressions of people and groups (Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005), and of perceived trustworthiness (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007): an interpersonal dimension called communion (or warmth) and a self-related dimension called agency (or competence; Abele, Cuddy, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2008; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Judd et al., 2005). Drawing on this research, we conceptualize judgments of all politicians' communion and agency as mediators in the relationship between a politician's disrespectful communication and voters' trust in the political system. Additionally, we suggest that this mediation is contingent on how prototypical the observed politician is considered for the category of politicians—which we will refer to as *category prototypicality* (Hewstone, 1994; Hewstone, Hopkins, & Routh, 1992; Richards & Hewstone, 2001) in the following.

In this way, we extend previous research on disrespectful political communication, which has largely focused on micro-level effects, such as being (re)elected (Lau et al., 2007). We introduce the generalized social judgment of politicians as a bridge between a politician's disrespectful communication and voters' trust in the political system as a macro-level outcome variable. Furthermore, by investigating category prototypicality as a critical boundary condition for generalization, we shed further light on the cognitive process underlying the (potential)

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spillover. From a practical perspective, we aim to sensitize politicians to the large-scale consequences of their behavior as they develop and implement their communication strategies.

1.1 | Trust in the political system and how it depends on politicians

Trust in the political system is a core ingredient of political stability (Easton, 1965): It ties voters to political institutions, providing the latter with legitimacy and effectiveness (Mishler & Rose, 2001). Distrust toward the political system is linked to the potential for radicalization (Doosje, Loseman, & Bos, 2013), political violence (Muller, 1972), anti-system behavior (Muller, Jukam, & Seligson, 1982), and protest and riot (Paige, 1971; van Stekelenburg, 2013). Trust, in contrast, is positively related to well-being, democratic attitudes, political interest, and external efficacy (Catterberg & Moreno, 2005). Governments in democratic societies especially depend on their voters' trust: They cannot use coercion or force to put their ideas into action, but rather need popular support for their decisions (Gamson, 1968). In psychology, trust is defined as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p. 395). However, this definition only encompasses the concrete interactions of individuals; political systems, being abstract entities incapable of direct interaction, are presumably excluded. Approaching this definition problem, Offe (1999) suggests that trust in institutions is based on trust in the actors within these institutions. The values and norms that are embodied by those institutions are supposed to be shared by their central actors. In the case of the political system, those actors are politicians. Through the process of election, voters empower politicians to make decisions that influence their lives, thereby rendering themselves vulnerable. In turn, they expect that politicians will handle this power responsibly, deciding, and acting in a way that meets the voters' interests and needs. Thus, as representatives of the political system, politicians and their actions are a basis for voters' trust in the system (Levi & Stoker, 2000).

1.2 | Social judgment and trustworthiness

Trust situations always imply that "the interest of one party cannot be achieved without reliance on another" (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). To determine whether someone is reliable in this sense, that is, trustworthy, a person must evaluate (a) the supposed *commitment* of the trustee to act in the trustor's interest, and (b) the *ability* to act in the trustor's interest (Colquitt et al., 2007; Levi & Stoker, 2000). Thus, to be perceived as trustworthy, a person has to be judged as both willing and able to fulfill the trustor's needs. Accordingly, research revealed that trustworthiness is mainly based on both perceived interpersonal qualities (benevolence, integrity) and ability (skills, competence; Butler & Cantrell, 1984; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Schindler & Thomas, 1993).

Parallel to this, research has identified two similar dimensions that generally underlie people's social judgments of other persons and groups: communion and agency (Abele et al., 2008; Cuddy et al., 2008; Judd et al., 2005). Communion captures interpersonal qualities such as kindness, understanding, and helpfulness, while agency refers to self-related qualities such as assertiveness, independence, self-confidence, and competitiveness (Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Ward, Thorn, Clements, Dixon, & Sanford, 2006). Voters rely on both communion and agency judgments to evaluate politicians (Bertolotti, Catellani, Douglas, & Sutton, 2013; Castelli, Carraro, Ghitti, & Pastore, 2009; Kinder, Peters, Abelson, & Fiske, 1980), making inferences on politicians' (good) intentions and their ability to strive for their goals. Thereby, combining both lines of research, communion and agency also serve as a basis for judgments of trustworthiness. Importantly, these judgment dimensions apply to groups as well as individuals (Cuddy et al., 2008), with group stereotypes arising from ratings of communion and agency. For this reason, we propose that voters' generalized communion and agency ratings of politicians play an important part in how a focal politician's disrespectful behavior impacts voters' trust in the political system.

1.3 | Generalized social judgments linking disrespect and trust in the political system

One of politicians' most public actions is their communication in the political arena and, by extension, how respectfully they behave toward their political opponents. Disrespect is characterized by the humiliation and belittling of a person (Lalljee, Tam, Hewstone, Laham, & Lee, 2009). In contrast, respect entails the recognition of a person as equal in worth and dignity, and the willingness to consider the other person's perspective (Kant, 1785/2012; Simon, 2007; Van Quaquebeke, Henrich, & Eckloff, 2007). So far, most research has focused on the personal (micro-level) consequences of politicians' disrespectful behavior for themselves. However, disrespectful communication can potentially cause collateral damage on voters' attitude toward the political system. Indeed, some (though still few; Lau et al., 2007) studies have shown that disrespectful communication decreased voters' trust in political institutions (Brooks & Geer, 2007; Mutz & Reeves, 2005) and increases their political cynicism (Leshner & Thorson, 2000). However, as other scholars did not find any such relationship (e.g., Pinkleton et al., 2002), the overall effect of disrespect on political trust in a respective meta-analysis was rather small (Lau et al., 2007). Lau and colleagues (2007) assert that disrespect poses potential risks to the stability of political systems, and that this relationship needs further exploration.

We suggest that generalized judgments of politicians function as a link between a focal politician's disrespect and trust in the political system. As we already pointed out, politicians are visible and personalized representatives of the political system, capable of shaping voters' attitudes toward the system (Levi & Stoker, 2000). Therefore, we propose that voters' trust in the political system will be high if they perceive politicians as highly trustworthy in terms of communion and agency.

Drawing on according research on the micro-level, we propose that the effects of a single politician's disrespect on voters' generalized judgments of politicians are parallel to the said effects on voters' judgments of the single politician himself or herself. Therefore, we expect a

politician's disrespect to affect voters' communion and agency perceptions in different ways. On the one hand, disrespect should decrease voters' communion ratings of politicians, as it violates social norms and promotes a lack of interpersonal qualities. Accordingly, disrespect aligns with a decreased likeability of and affect toward politicians (Carraro & Castelli, 2010; Haddock & Zanna, 1997; Kahn & Geer, 1994; Lau et al., 2007). Thus, for the first mediational path, we propose that a focal politician's disrespect should lower voters' trust in the political system through lowered generalized communion ratings. On the other hand, disrespect could have rather positive effects on the agency dimension. There is some first evidence in the literature that disrespectful behavior is able to promote the notions of assertiveness and strength, for example, in terms of violent school boys being seen as "cool" (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006), or voters showing more conformity toward disrespectful politicians (Carraro & Castelli, 2010). Similarly, Abrams and colleagues (Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Marques, & Hutchison, 2008) showed that transgressions of (future) leaders are somewhat excused as they are expected to contribute in terms of innovation, which possibly also points to an agentic notion of norm-violating behavior in terms of assertiveness and independence. In line with such previous research, we propose that a candidate's disrespectful behavior might thus increase voters' generalized agency ratings, insofar as it promotes the ability of pushing things forward and getting them done. Thus, for the second mediational path, we suggest that a politician's disrespect can increase voters' trust in the political system through increased generalized agency ratings.

However, processes of generalization need to occur in order for voters to convert the observations of a focal politician to judgments about politicians as a whole (e.g., Schwarz & Bless, 1992). Indeed, Ranganath and Nosek (2008) showed that group stereotypes develop with each encounter that individuals have with specific exemplars of the respective group. In line with this, Mutz and Reeves (2005) found that a focal politician's disrespectful communication decreases voters' trust in politicians in general. Similarly, Schwarz and Bless (1992) showed that voters perceived all politicians as less trustworthy after recalling instances of actual political scandals in which only single politicians were involved.

Yet, voters' group stereotype of politicians will only be affected by a politician's disrespect if the respective politician is seen as representative of politicians in general.

1.4 | Does one stand for all? Category prototypicality

Being unable to properly process all available information, people rely on cognitive categories to deal effectively with their surrounding and make sense of the things they observe (e.g., Lord & Maher, 1991). One example of such categories are group stereotypes, that is, "beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups" (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996, p. 240). These categorical structures are defined and mentally represented by a category prototype, that is, an average exemplar which embodies the characteristics common to the category members (e.g., Barsalou, 1985; Hains, Hogg, & Duck, 1997; Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984; Van Quaquebeke, Graf, & Eckloff, 2014). As Lord and colleagues (Lord, Gatti, & Chui, 2016) put it, "a prototype is an abstraction of typical features of category members that defines a category for perceivers" (p. 121). Thus, a politician who is prototypical of the category of politicians incorporates the politician stereotype. Those prototypes also encompass demographics such as race and gender (e.g., Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001; Van Quaquebeke & Schmerling, 2010). For example, people's category prototype of a political leader is more masculine than feminine (Gaffney & Blaylock, 2010).

As group stereotypes are relatively stable and hard to change, observing an exemplar of a group will only affect the according group stereotype if no alternative strategies are available (Manis, Nelson, & Shedler, 1988; Richards & Hewstone, 2001). This is given if the focal group member is seen as prototypical of the category, that is, as representative and exemplary of the group or system in question (Hewstone, 1994; Hewstone et al., 1992; Richards & Hewstone, 2001). In this sense, observing a focal politician will only affect the according group stereotype if he or she is perceived as prototypical of the category of politicians. Therefore, we suppose that category prototypicality will determine whether generalization effects to all politicians and, thus, to the political system as such take place.

Importantly, taking this approach, our use of "category prototypicality" differs from "in-group prototypicality" as used in social identity or self-categorization theorizing (e.g., Hogg, Hains, & Mason, 1998). The latter refers to how much a leader is perceived as representative of the in-group, that is, the group the perceiver is part of or identifies with. Instead, we investigate whether a politician's behavior is perceived as exemplary of the group of politicians, that is, whether s/he is prototypical for that group (also sometimes referred to as "stereotypicality").

Through the mechanisms outlined so far, we hypothesize that the observed disrespect of a focal politician will indirectly affect voters' trust in the political system through communion and agency ratings of politicians in general if the focal politician is perceived as category prototypical. In a nutshell, we conceptualize trust in the political system as a result of social inference processes that start with the disrespect of individual politicians.

> **Hypothesis 1.** *The more voters consider a politician as prototypical of the category of politicians, the more his/her disrespectful behavior will lead to decreased generalized communion ratings for the category of politicians and, by extension, decrease voters' trust in the political system.*

> **Hypothesis 2.** *The more voters consider a politician as prototypical of the category of politicians, the more his/her disrespectful behavior will lead to increased generalized agency ratings for the category of politicians and, by extension, increase voters' trust in the political system.*

To test these hypotheses, we conducted two studies: In Study 1, we used fictitious politicians to experimentally investigate the effects of different levels of respect and category prototypicality on generalized communion and agency ratings. In this way, we established a

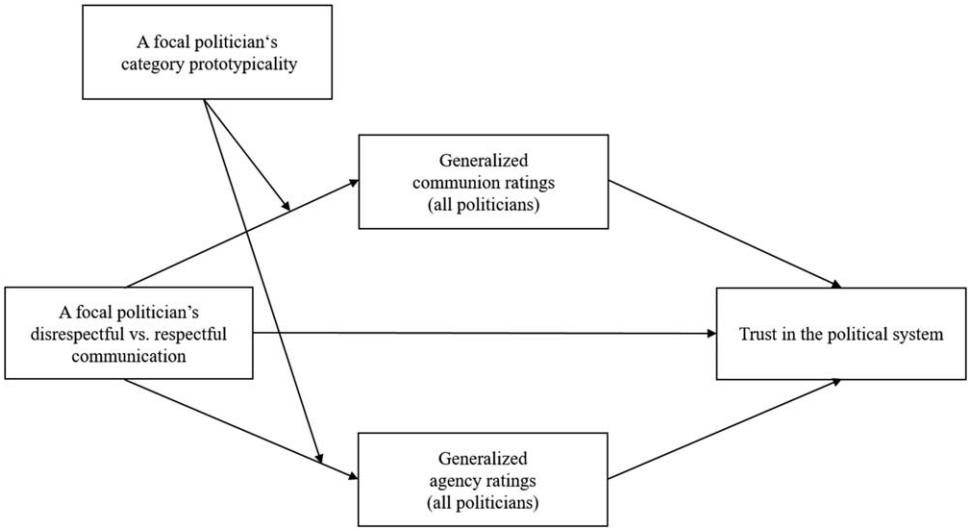


FIGURE 1 The hypothesized relationships

causal relationship between disrespect and trust in the political system, while controlling for confounding environmental influences. In Study 2, we tested the external validity of our findings via a survey at two points of time, that is, before and after the 2013 German parliament elections. The hypothesized relationships are summarized in Figure 1.

2 | STUDY 1

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Sample

The study was conducted online. Participants were recruited via a professional German online panel (*meineumfrage.de*), for which they registered voluntarily. Successfully completing the questionnaire enabled participants to partake in a lottery for money prizes. Such online panels can provide reliable data from diverse samples (e.g., Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012). We requested a sample of German participants older than 18 years (and thus entitled to vote), seeking a near-equal distribution of men and women. The welcome page of the study was seen by 576 participants, and of those, 434 finished. We removed 29 participants who wrongly answered our instruction manipulation checks ("Please select the middle option"; Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009), nine participants who did not permit the use of their data, three participants who did not indicate their gender, and one who self-reported to always have chosen the middle option. In the end, 392 participants entered into the analysis. Participants were between 20 and 81 years old ($M = 44.86$, $SD = 15.02$) and 55% were male. When asked for the party they usually supported, 16% indicated the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), 17% the Social Democratic Party (SPD), 22% the Green Party, 9% the Liberals, 7% the Left Party, 7% other parties, and 22% reported no support for any specific party.

2.1.2 | Procedure

The experiment followed a 2 (prototypicality/non-prototypicality) × 2 (disrespect/respect) between-subjects design. We randomly distributed participants across the conditions.

Participants read a short introduction to a fictitious politician (see Appendix). To manipulate *category prototypicality*, we varied the politician's age (28 vs. 55 years) and gender (male vs. female). Actual distributions in the German parliament (status quo August, 2014) show that 52% of the representatives are aged between 49 and 63 years, while a minority (5%) is aged between 27 and 32 years. Meanwhile, women only represent 36% of parliament members (Bundestag, 2015). For the analysis, we thus contrasted male and 55-year-old politicians to all other combinations of age and gender.

As a manipulation check, the politicians' perceived category prototypicality was measured with seven items, six of which were adapted from the scale by Platow and van Knippenberg (2001; see Appendix). This measure, that originally has its background in the Social Identity approach to leadership, was adapted to better fit in with Lord and colleagues' (1984) definition of prototypicality by adding a seventh item that literally tapped politicians' typicality (see Appendix), increasing Cronbach's alpha (from $\alpha = .89$ to .91). Answers were given on 5-point Likert scales (from 1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*).

We manipulated *respect vs. disrespect* by providing eight statements that the politician had allegedly used when confronting an opponent in a political talk-show (see Appendix). These statements were taken verbatim from previous studies, in which they had served as an effective manipulation (reference blinded for review reasons). As a manipulation check, we prompted participants to rate the politician on three items from a respect scale we had constructed according to the definition provided above ($\alpha = .85$; see Appendix).

The politicians' *party affiliation* (CDU vs. SPD) was randomly varied to create a more tangible and realistic evaluation context.

Participants assessed generalized communion (6 items, $\alpha = .88$) and agency of all politicians (7 items, $\alpha = .75$) using Ward and

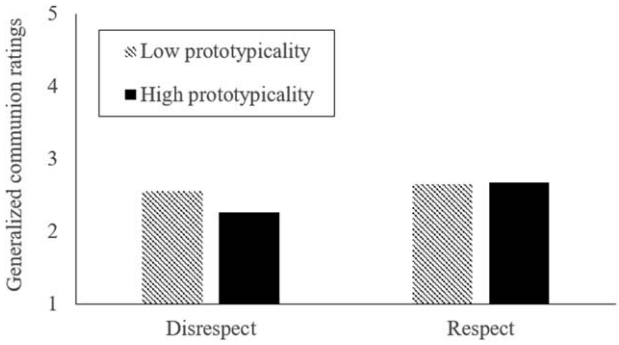


FIGURE 2 Means of generalized communion ratings dependent on manipulated respect and prototypicality in Study 1

colleagues' (2006) revision of the Personality Attributes Questionnaire (Spence & Helmreich, 1978), which employs a 5-point scale anchored by the very positive and very negative occurrence of an attribute (see Appendix). Meanwhile, we measured voters' trust in the political system with four items taken from the National Election Survey (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990) and a fifth item added by Mutz and Reeves (2005) in their respective study ($\alpha = .83$; see Appendix). Answers were given on 5-point scales (1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*). Following this, participants indicated how much they identified with the two presented parties, CDU and SPD, on two Venn diagrams which graphically measure the overlap between the self and a group (Schubert & Otten, 2002). Last, we asked for participants' age, gender, the party they usually supported, the permission to use their data, and thanked and debriefed them.

2.1.3 | Analysis

The analysis was conducted in SPSS, using analysis of variance to perform manipulation checks and test interaction effects. For the analysis of conditional indirect effects, we used Hayes' (2013) regression-based macro PROCESS. In doing so, we employed respect as independent variable (0 = disrespectful; 1 = respectful), manipulated category prototypicality as moderator (0 = male/55 years; 1 = all other age-gender combinations), generalized communion and agency as simultaneous mediators (lower values indicate lower perceived communion and agency), and trust in the political system as dependent variable (lower values indicate less trust). We report unstandardized coefficients for the dichotomous independent variable (Hayes, 2013).

2.2 | Results

2.2.1 | Manipulation checks and correlations with demographic variables

Politicians in the disrespect condition were rated as significantly less respectful ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 0.80$) than politicians in the respect condition ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.90$; $F(1,393) = 282.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .42$). Respect ratings in the manipulation check were not influenced by politicians' party ($p = .88$), gender ($p = .27$), or age ($p = .38$). Male and 55-year-old politicians were perceived as significantly more prototypical ($M = 3.52$; $SD = 0.68$) than all other politicians ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.79$; $F(1,390) = 5.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.13$). Therefore, in the following, we refer to the male, 55-year-old politician when we speak of the highly prototypical politician.

2.2.2 | Conditional indirect effects

Generalized communion and agency ratings were moderately correlated ($r = .46^{**}$). This correlation is accounted for by entering both generalized communion and agency into the analysis as mediators simultaneously. The politicians' displayed respect and category prototypicality interacted in predicting generalized communion ratings ($F(1, 387) = 6.41$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$): For politicians high in category prototypicality, displayed disrespect decreased ratings of generalized communion ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 0.78$) compared to displayed respect ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.82$); for politicians low in category prototypicality, generalized communion ratings did not differ between disrespect and respect ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.70$ vs. $M = 2.65$, $SD = 0.65$; see Figure 2). Meanwhile, the overall interaction effect of disrespect and category prototypicality on generalized agency failed to be significant ($p = .07$).

Voters' trust in the political system was predicted by both their generalized communion ($\beta = .35$, $t(388) = 6.81$, $p < .001$) and, to a lesser extent, generalized agency ratings ($\beta = .15$, $t(388) = 2.97$, $p < .01$). The focal politician's respect had a conditional indirect effect on participants' trust in the political system: In line with Hypothesis 1, displayed disrespect led to lower generalized communion ratings (compared to displayed respect) for a highly prototypical focal politician and, through that, decreased trust in the political system (Table 1). In contrast, the degree of respect did not affect trust in the political system through generalized agency (Table 1), offering no support for

TABLE 1 Conditional indirect effects of the manipulated politician's (dis-)respect[a] on trust in the political system through generalized social judgment moderated by manipulated prototypicality in Study 1 ($N = 392$)

	Dependent variable: Trust in the political system					
	Mediator: Generalized communion			Mediator: Generalized agency		
Prototypicality	Effect	Boot *SE*	95% CI	Effect	Boot *SE*	95% CI
Low (−1 *SD*)	.04	.03	[−.02, .12]	.02	.02	[−.003, .07]
High (+1 *SD*)	.18	.08	[.04, .35]	−.001	.03	[−.07, .06]

Note. Number of bootstrap samples = 20.000.
[a]0 = disrespect, 1 = respect.
CI = limits of the confidence interval for the indirect effect.

TABLE 2 Means, standard deviations, inter-correlations, and internal consistencies in Study 2 ($N = 273$; Cronbach's alpha in brackets)

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Perceived respect	3.47	0.83	(.87)							
2. Generalized communion	2.78	0.77	.00	(.92)						
3. Generalized agency	3.39	0.68	.21**	.50**	(.83)					
4. Trust in the political system	3.38	0.80	.11	.23**	.20**	(.85)				
5. Prototypicality	3.38	0.73	.22**	.02	.10	−.05	(.88)			
6. Participants' age	44.42	14.24	−.11	−.04	−.08	.02	.00	(n.a.)		
7. Participants' gender[a]	0.47	.50	.09	.02	.24**	−.06	.12*	−.13*	(n.a.)	
8. Dummy candidate variable[b]	1.55	0.50	.33**	−.10	.03	−.01*	.20**	−.08	.06	(n.a.)

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.
[a]0 = male, 1 = female. [b]1 = Peer Steinbrück, 2 = Angela Merkel.
n.a. = not applicable.

Hypothesis 2. All reported results also held when we controlled for participants' age and gender.

2.3 | Discussion

As predicted, displayed disrespect diminished trust in the political system through decreased generalized communion ratings if the presented politician was prototypical of the category of politicians. Opposed to Hypothesis 2, agency did not link displayed disrespect and trust in the political system. Overall, both generalized communion and agency had an independent effect on trust, which was congruent with conceptualizations of trust involving ability-based and communion-based components (Colquitt et al., 2007). Thus, the effect of disrespect on trust in the political system is partly dependent on the focal judgment dimension.

We manipulated category prototypicality by varying age and gender, drawing on actual descriptive statistics of politicians in the German Bundestag. Our approach was validated by the manipulation check of perceived prototypicality. However, these very obvious demographics are only two surface aspects of the characteristics that may constitute a category prototype of politicians. Furthermore, prototypes are dynamic in that they depend on the perceived as well as the perceiver (e.g., Lord et al., 1984, 2001). In Study 2, we aim to replicate our results with a measure of perceived prototypicality which may better take into account those dynamics.

Our additional variation of the politician's party affiliation was meant to create a more realistic impression of the politician. Granted, at the same time, we triggered evaluation effects that may rather be linked to a social identity approach than be in line with our prototype approach to leadership. This means that in-group or out-group biases could likely have affected the participants' responses. However, all our results also occurred when we controlled for the participants' amount of identification with the respective party.

In sum, our results provide first support for the notion that trust in the political system is a process of generalized social inference, with social judgments and category prototypicality influencing the degree of trust. For external validity reasons, we aimed at replicating these relationships in the field using real political candidates.

3 | STUDY 2

3.1 | Method

3.1.1 | Sample

As in Study 1, we utilized a professional, German online panel (*Research Now*) to obtain our participants, specifically seeking German participants older than 18 years and a near-equal distribution of men and women. We surveyed participants about 1 week prior to and 1 week after the 2013 German parliament elections. The welcome page of the first part of the study was visited by 475 participants. Of those, 387 finished the questionnaire. We removed 16 participants who did not permit the use of their data and 32 more who did not pass the instruction manipulation checks (*Please select the middle option*; *Please select "completely disagree"*). Of the remaining 339 participants, 278 also took part at T2. After removing five participants who did not indicate their gender, 273 participants were left for the final analysis. They were between 19 and 81 years old ($M = 44.45$, $SD = 14.08$) and 53% were male. When asked for the party they usually supported, 25% indicated the Christian Democrats, 19% the Social Democrats, 10% the Green Party, 2% the Liberals, 10% the Left Party, 4% the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland), 10% other parties, and 20% reported no support for any specific party.

3.1.2 | Procedure

At T1, participants were randomly assigned one of the two top candidates for chancellorship, Angela Merkel or Peer Steinbrück, and rated the candidate in terms of her/his respect toward the political opponent. We measured perceived respect toward the political opponent using six items (see Appendix; $\alpha = .87$). Participants then rated the candidate's category prototypicality on the measure we used for the manipulation check in Study 1 (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001; see Appendix). Afterwards, also in line with Study 1, they evaluated the communion and agency of politicians in general. Finally, participants indicated their age, gender, and the party they usually supported. At T2, participants reported their trust in the political system (see Table 2 for correlations and internal consistencies).

TABLE 3 Regression-based moderations and moderated mediation in Study 2 ($N = 273$)

	Generalized communion		Generalized agency		Trust in the political system	
Predictor	***b***	***SE***	***b***	***SE***	***b***	***SE***
Dummy candidate variable[a]	−.25	.13	−.13	.13	−.02	.09
Perceived respect	.08	.06	.24***	.06	.10	.05
Prototypicality	.07	.06	.09	.06	–	–
Respect × Prototypicality	.22***	.05	.13*	.05	–	–
Generalized communion					.25***	.05
Generalized agency					.04	.05

Note. Full models reported.
[a]1 = Peer Steinbrück, 2 = Angela Merkel.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

3.1.3 | Analysis

Again, we used Hayes' (2013) macro PROCESS for conducting the analysis. We employed perceived respect as independent variable (with lower values indicating lower perceived respect), perceived category prototypicality as moderator (with lower values indicating lower perceived prototypicality), generalized communion and agency as mediators (with lower values indicating lower perceived communion or agency), and trust in the political system rated at T2 as dependent variable (with lower values indicating lower trust). In line with Study 1, both mediators generalized communion and agency were simultaneously entered into the analysis.

3.2 | Results

We included a dichotomous dummy candidate variable into our analyses to control for effects that were tied to the specific candidate. For example, as Table 3 shows, chancellor Merkel was perceived as more respectful and more category prototypical than challenger Steinbrück.

While the rated politician's respect toward the opponent was not directly related to generalized communion ratings, respect and prototypicality interacted in predicting generalized communion ratings (Table 3; see Figure 3).

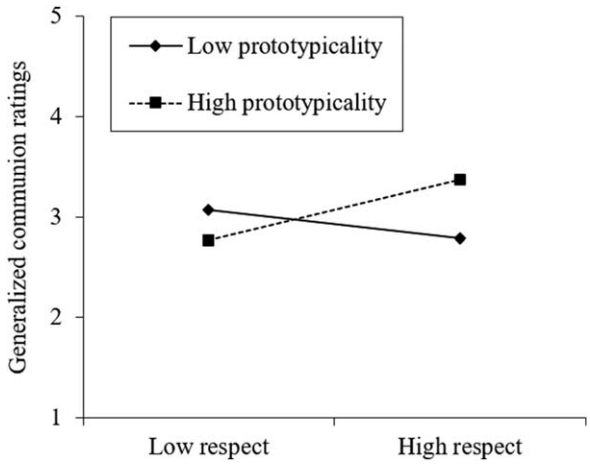


FIGURE 3 Interaction effect of perceived respect and perceived prototypicality on generalized communion ratings in Study 2

Respect was positively related to generalized agency ratings, and the interaction effect between respect and prototypicality on generalized agency was significant (Table 3).

Trust in the political system was related to generalized communion ($b = .18$, $t(269) = 2.55$, $p < .02$, $R^2 = .05$) and generalized agency ($b = .17$, $t(267) = 2.00$, $p < .05$). Our analysis revealed a conditional indirect effect of respect on trust only through generalized communion: If voters perceived the politician as highly category prototypical, higher perceived respect increased their trust in the political system through increased generalized communion ratings (Table 4). No such effect occurred through generalized agency ratings as a mediator (Table 4).

All results on interaction effects also emerged when we included the interaction of candidate and prototypicality (Yzerbyt, Muller, & Judd, 2004) and participants' age and gender as control variable.

3.3 | Discussion

Study 2 supports the finding from Study 1 that a single politician's respect toward the opponent is related to voters' trust in the political system via generalized communion ratings. Thus, a politician's disrespectful communication may do harm to the professional group he or she represents and, moreover, to the whole system they stand for. Furthermore, in line with Study 1, we only found this effect if the politician was perceived as prototypical of the category of politicians. Agency ratings did again not function as a link between respect and trust, even though agency itself expectedly predicted trust.

In contrast to Study 1 and our theorizing, more perceived respect was positively related to higher generalized agency ratings. Seemingly, participants considered respect rather than disrespect to transport assertiveness and strength. Due to the correlational design, we suspect that a positive valence of both respect and agency could be responsible for this positive relationship (Suitner & Maass, 2008). Moreover, Study 2 only revealed correlations rather than causal relationships. However, we aimed to reduce common source bias—correlations between constructs that are due to the circumstances of measurement (Podsakoff,

TABLE 4 Conditional indirect effects of respect on trust in the political system through generalized social judgment moderated by prototypicality in Study 2 ($N = 273$)

	Dependent variable: Trust in the political system					
	Mediator: Generalized communion			Mediator: Generalized agency		
Prototypicality	Effect	Boot *SE*	95% CI	Effect	Boot *SE*	95% CI
Low (−1 *SD*)	−.03	.02	[−.08, .00]	.00	.01	[−.01, .03]
High (+1 *SD*)	.08	.03	[.03, .14]	.01	.02	[−.02, .06]

Note. Number of bootstrap samples = 20,000.
CI = limits of the confidence interval for the indirect effect.

MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003)—by collecting data at two time points.

By including two candidates into our design, we were able to control for candidate specific effects. However, this still only represents an excerpt of the actual German multiparty system. We chose Merkel and Steinbrück because they were most popular and most present in the media. Additionally, these two candidates were also at the two extremes of their displayed respect toward the opponent (even though, as a side remark, Steinbrück never even got close to Trump's dimensions of disrespect). Granted, a less known candidate might have helped us to reach a higher variance in prototypicality, but that would have meant to risk that our participants were not really familiar with them. For the future, it might still be wise to include candidates who differ even more in terms of perceived prototypicality.

4 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Through this study, we established that a politician's displayed disrespect potentially harms the political system; we also shed light on the mechanisms driving this effect. Specifically, we found support for a relationship between a perceived politician's disrespect and voters' trust in the political system which was mediated through generalized communion ratings for politicians as a group and dependent on the focal politician's perceived prototypicality. In sum, we linked trust in the political system to cognitive processes of social judgment, and generalization of political candidates' behavior as well as categorization of the politician as typical or atypical. Our results show that voters do not blindly generalize on the basis of every single politician's behavior; instead, they assess whether the focal politician can be considered a typical representative of his/her group.

However, our hypotheses were only partly met, as we could not establish generalized agency ratings as a potentially positive link between observed disrespect and trust in the political system (under condition of category prototypicality). Instead, we only found support for harm for the political system through disrespectful attacks as translated through decreased communion ratings (under condition of category prototypicality). Notably though, in line with previous research (Butler & Cantrell, 1984; Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004; Mayer et al., 1995; Schindler & Thomas, 1993), both the generalized communion and agency ratings had independent effects on trust. Our results thus suggest that, under condition of category prototypicality, a politician's respect vs. disrespect toward the opponent mainly triggers a general inference about politicians' trustworthiness in terms of their interpersonal qualities rather than in terms of their skills and ability.

This finding might also provide a cue on how to explain the mixed results attained so far: While displayed disrespect may diminish trust due to decreased generalized communion ratings, increased generalized agency ratings may work as a buffering mechanism. Further research on the antecedents of political trust could work to unravel when the different dimensions of trustworthiness are affected by politicians' behavior. For example, the agency-based aspect of trustworthiness could be impacted when voters compare the promises and actual achievements of politicians and their respective parties, while the communion-based aspect might be more influenced by personal (moral) failure—be it on a smaller scale, such as disrespectful communication, or on a larger scale, such as fraud, corruption, etc.

In this sense, it might also be interesting to compare the effects of different levels of disrespect on trust in the political system. In their studies, Abrams and colleagues (Abrams, Travaglino, Randsley de Moura, & May, 2014) found, for instance, that study participants did not accept racism, neither from in-group nor from out-group leaders. With Trump as a president, who himself does not hesitate to attack Hispanics or Muslims in very disrespectful ways, there will be many interesting research occasions in the future to replicate this finding in a real-world setting.

Furthermore, future research could also further unravel our findings with regard to challengers and incumbents. Different research by Abrams and colleagues (2008) showed that subsequent to transgressions, future leaders are less rejected than established leaders. They seem to be given more leeway to adopt innovative or different positions from established group norms and thereby to be somewhat excused for their deviance. Abrams and colleagues suppose that group members may attribute deviance displayed by new leaders to situational rather than dispositional factors. As such, disrespect is likely more accepted from challengers than from incumbents (see also Graf, Schuh, Van Quaquebeke, & van Dick, 2012). Research in the political context did not reveal such an effect so far (Lau et al., 2007), but most of these studies only focused on communion-related outcomes (liking, feeling thermometer, etc.). For more agentic qualities as, for example, ability to innovate, this picture might change. At this point, we can only speculate that, being not yet representative of the political system, challengers who act disrespectfully will less affect trust in the political system than incumbents do.

Similarly, future studies could investigate whether the strength of the relation between trust in the political system and generalized communion vs. agency ratings varies with different environmental conditions. For example, economic crises and uncertainty could make voters more forgiving of communion-related transgressions and more concerned about agency variables. In sum, we believe that it is important to take both dimensions of social judgment into account when investigating the factors impacting trust in the political system, as we could corroborate that both dimensions affect trust.

Methodologically, the first study allows for causal conclusions in a controlled environment, while the second can only provide insights into potentially reciprocal relationships. It is very likely that both paths intermingle: the encounter with a single (prototypical) politician affects stereotypes of politicians in general, while general stereotypes provide a basis for judging single politicians. An important limitation of our study is that we only provide a momentary "snap-shot" of trust in the political system, while system trust is built (or damaged) rather by a series of experiences with its actors and their actions. From our approach, we cannot draw conclusions concerning long-term consequences of disrespectful behavior. To fill this gap, our results should be validated by a longitudinal design. For example, data on the perceived respect of the most prominent candidates in an electoral race and on political trust could be collected at several points of time during the respective race to test how both are related over time. If our results hold true, higher levels of respect should coincide with higher levels of trust. Additionally, researchers might consider data sources beyond voters' candidate ratings. For instance, future studies might follow the Fridkin and Kenney's (2011) procedure and conduct a content analysis of campaign messages and news coverage in terms of candidates' disrespect, and then link that analysis to voters' self-reported political trust, thus preventing common source bias. However, we believe that our approach, especially the experimental study, underline that a politician's disrespectful behavior is able to decrease system trust at least temporarily. Thus, it is most likely that repeated exposure to disrespectful behavior will have a lasting negative effect on trust in the political system—and, possibly, related variables as political cynicism and public mood (Leshner & Thorson, 2000).

Our Studies 1 and 2 produced seemingly paradox findings concerning category prototypicality and gender. In Study 1, we found that male, middle-aged politicians were perceived as more prototypical than other politicians, while in Study 2, Merkel was perceived as more prototypical than Steinbrück. We see two potential explanations here. First, this discrepancy can be explained by the level of abstraction: In Study 1, we used a fictitious politician to blend out prior attitudes and experiences. Thus, the participants have to partly rely on their stereotypes when evaluating the politician. As even today, most politicians (as well as most leaders) are male, participants' mental representation of politicians is most likely also male, leading to higher perceived prototypicality of male politicians if individuating information is not provided. In Study 2, in contrast, participants judged two existing persons of whom they had a lot more information. Merkel now has been a party leader for more than 15 years and Germany's chancellor for more than 10 years. She is very present in the media, and her diplomatic way of governing has received a lot of approval or, at least, acknowledgement in and beyond Germany. Such diplomacy is one of the core virtues of politicians which Steinbrück potentially fell short of, attacking his colleagues and opponents disrespectfully. This is also reflected in our finding that perceived respect and perceived prototypicality were positively correlated. Therefore, it may not be surprising that Merkel as an individual outplayed Steinbrück in perceived category prototypicality, even though the overall stereotype of politicians may still be male. This nicely illustrates the finding that women in leadership positions can indeed change the male leader prototype (e.g., Van Quaquebeke & Schmerling, 2010), but there is still a long way ahead (see Gipson, Pfaff, Mendelsohn, Catenacci, & Burke, 2017).

Second, the discrepancy between Studies 1 and 2 may be connected to two different kinds of category prototypes (Barsalou, 1985; Junker & Van Dick, 2014; Van Quaquebeke et al., 2014): one is a measure of central tendency and as such captures the average of a group, the other is a measure of ideal and as such captures the ideal state of a group. Both can be influential in their own ways. In this regard, it may be that while our experiment "only" manipulated surface category prototypicality (that mainly feeds into a central tendency perception), the survey study captures more of the ideal category prototype, which Merkel, "even though" she is a woman and thus does not represent the population average, seems to incorporate. Again, this may be connected to her talent of (re)acting diplomatically, staying calm even in challenging situations, and building stable relationships with all kinds of partners. However, we can only speculate here. For future research, it might be interesting to explicitly separate central tendency prototype from ideal prototype in a similar design as ours. Extending our current study, it may also prove to be interesting to investigate how candidates may be able to change the standards for judgment: We would, for instance, speculate that observing an "ideal" category prototypical candidate who is behaving respectfully would be able to shift the standards for politicians' behavior upwards and, thus, also lead to more critical evaluations of politicians who are acting disrespectfully.

Our study highlights that politicians should be mindful of how they represent their profession by recognizing the far-reaching consequences of their behavior. Indeed, as our results suggest, treating others disrespectfully in a debate not only undermines voters' communion judgments of politicians in general, but it also undermines their trust in the broader political system. The above is particularly true for those politicians who are seen as prototypical of the political caste, whether due to age or gender. For those politicians who somehow differ from the category prototype, the display of disrespect seems to incur fewer generalized consequences.

Being a business man and a media star, Trump is not prototypical of the political system at all. He used disrespect to present himself as an agentic, courageous, straightforward hardliner who would go unconventional ways to "make America great again," making his disrespectful and politically most incorrect behavior his trade mark. Doing so, he managed to stand out from all his Republican and Democrat opponents, creating a contrast between him and the political establishment.

As such, because he does not represent the political establishment, we have no reason to expect a spillover effect of his disrespectful communication behavior on voters' overall (dis-)trust in the political system. From another angle (and outside the scope of our research), Trump may have decreased trust in the political establishment straight away through his plain attacks aiming at them.

Granted, another facet of trust in the political system may for sure have suffered in the course of all this, at least in the eyes of all voters who wanted to prevent a President Trump: trust in the voting system itself, and trust in the rationality and common sense of voters in a democracy. It will take the world a while to understand how such disrespectful insults toward opponents and parts of the voters can actually lead to success.

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APPENDIX : MANIPULATION AND MEASURES

Measure/manipulation	Text/items
Candidate description	Johann(a) Schulz is 28 (55) years old and has been a member of the Christian Democrats (Social Democrats) for 10 years. For 5 years, he (she) has been a member of a German federal state parliament. He (she) is married and has two kids. Being an expert on economic issues, Johann(a) Schulz is frequently invited to public discussions. To discuss the state of the German economy, Johann(a) Schulz is a guest of a political talk-show. He/she confronts his/her political opponents with the following statements.
Prototypicality (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001)	The focal politician. . . (1) is representative of politicians; (2) is very similar to most politicians; (3) represents what is characteristic about politicians; (4) is a good example of politicians; (5) stands for what politicians have in common; (6) is not representative of politicians (reverse); and (7) is typical of politicians (added)
Statements in the disrespect condition	(1) You haven't the faintest idea of what you're doing. (2) If you knew your stuff a little better, you would not talk in such a stupid way. (3) This is nothing but hypocrisy. There's no other name for that. (4) Don't you lie to the people. (5) This sounds just like another chapter of your book 'How to trick the people'. (6) At this point, you failed miserably. (7) You'll never ever have the backbone to accomplish that. (8) Prior to blaming others, you should get your own homework done first.
Statements in the respect condition	(1) I can see your point, but still I disagree. (2) I don't completely understand your point of view. (3) I need some more information to be really able to follow you. (4) I would just like to draw your attention to the risks, for we will all have to bear the consequences. (5) I do not doubt that your intentions are good. But I think it is important to consider all possible consequences. (6) Please briefly give your reasons for this, so I can understand you better. (7) Of course, it is quite tempting to approach this topic in this way. But I do not want to disregard some objections. (8) I listened to your point, and now I ask you to listen to mine.
Generalized communion (Ward et al., 2006; anchored 5-point scales)	In general, politicians are. . . (1) not at all—able to devote themselves to others; (2) not at all—very aware of others' feeling; (3) very cold—very warm in relations to others; (4) not at all—very kind; (5) not at all—very understanding; and (6) not at all—very helpful.
Generalized agency (Ward et al., 2006; anchored 5-point scales)	In general, politicians. . . (1) are very passive—very active; (2) go to pieces—stand up well under pressure; (3) are not at all—very competitive; (4) are not at all—very self-confident; (5) feel very inferior—superior; (6) give up easily—never give up easily; and (7) are not at all—very independent.
Trust in the political system (Mutz & Reeves, 2005)	(1) At present, I feel very critical of our political system; (2) I would rather live under our form of government than any other I can think of; (3) Whatever its faults may be, the German form of government is still the best for us. (4) There is not much about our form of government to be proud of.

(Continues)

APPENDIX (Continued)

Measure/manipulation	Text/items
	(5) It may be necessary to make some major changes in our form of government to solve the problems facing our country.
Respect toward the political opponent	(1) He/she recognizes his/her political opponent as equal in worth; (2) He/she attacks his/her political opponent issue-based and not personally; (3) His/her arguments sometimes aim below the belt (r); (4) He/she treats his/her political opponent with respect; (5) He/she does not try to enhance his/her status at the expense of others; and (6) In debates, he/she uses an appropriate tone.

Note. In the original material, items were translated into and presented in German; unless otherwise noted, responses were given on 5-point scales (1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*).