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Enlightened Trust: A Conceptual Framework of Analysis for the Examination of Trust and Distrust in Governance

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1. Introduction

Both public and political debates increasingly express concern about the erosion of trust on the level of European citizenry, and that this development might threaten the foundations of a cooperative, stable, sustainable and solidary society. Falling levels of trust in established political parties, the domestic political system and the European Union, as well as the electoral success of populist, anti-establishment and Eurosceptic political parties on the far right and left of the political spectrum are just some examples of changing trust and distrust dynamics. Political movements and actors, as well as ordinary citizens, now openly question the legitimacy of established institutions and governments.

Trust in governance has been an issue of debate within the social sciences. Research in the areas of political science, sociology, psychology, media sciences, law or economics has generated a considerable body of knowledge, both in terms of empirical findings and theoretical reflections, which provide a better understanding of levels and forms, conditions and implications of trust in governance. This paper aims at providing an overview of the main available findings, spot unanswered questions and research lacunae, and propose a conceptual framework for analysis that promises to improve our knowledge and guide further research. The paper is part of an EU-funded project (Enlightened Trust, EnTrust) that will generate systematic data in regard to the conceptual and theoretical questions raised in the following sections. Moreover, it is committed to an interdisciplinary approach, given that trust in governance is a phenomenon patterned by socio-economic, political, cultural and psychological factors, all requiring specialised and transdisciplinary reflections. Finally, it aims to develop a framework for analysis that does justice to the institutional complexity of governance within Europe. Trust is not only conditional on different levels of governance (local, national, EU). It is to be expected that causes, dynamics and consequences of trust or distrust in governance will vary across national contexts. An accurate analysis needs to elucidate different constellations and trends, and identify critical junctures and varying scenarios.

2. Available Evidence: An Overview of a Vivid Research Field

Research on political and institutional trust is well developed and provides considerable knowledge, particularly because different disciplines have been interested in this field (i.e., political science, psychology, sociology, economics or philosophy). In particular, we

can highlight three main areas and topics that have received considerable attention: an empirical analysis of political trust and its determinants, an analytical and theoretical debate about trust in its internal rationale, and a normative discussion of trust and democratic governance.

First, previous research has provided ample empirical evidence on levels and forms of trust in political institutions. While trust in governance is a broader concept, since it refers to different actors, instruments and institutions of 'governing', empirical research has tended to measure trust in governance in terms of generalised or diffuse public support of political institutions (Easton 1975). Additionally, it has also been interested in the determinants of institutional trust. Studies have identified a great number of (social, economic, political, cultural) factors, and very often findings are inconclusive and/or contradictory. However, following the broad lines of research, we can identify a number of core observations. In the first instance, there are indications that political cultures influence levels and forms of trust. Countries sharing a 'civic culture' (Almond and Verba 1963) are said to develop high levels of institutional trust. The same applies to countries with higher levels of social capital, e.g., in terms of interpersonal and institutional trust, strong interpersonal networks and associational memberships among people with diverse backgrounds (Putnam 1993, 2000). Others argue that institutional trust is less determined by cultural orientations and rules, than by rational considerations and choices. Trust in political institutions is more diffused in countries that perform better economically (Campbell 2004).

In regard to political features, trust is higher in countries with lower levels of corruption (Van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2017), more diffused opportunities for participation and higher rates of political responsiveness (Putnam 1993). Political trust is also affected by certain traits of national party-systems, such as ideological cleavages and increasing polarisation of political debates and contentions within the political institutions and the public sphere (Uslaner 2015; Banda and Kirkland 2018). Higher rates of social inequalities decrease national rates of trust in governance (e.g., Delhey and Newton 2005), and the same applies to external shocks such as the Great Recession (Armingeon and Ceka 2014; Armingeon and Guthmann 2014). At the same time, dis-/misinformation circulated through online alternative and social media can erode trust in governments and in the established mainstream media itself (HLEG EU 2018). These factors also seem to impact on public trust in the EU (Dotti Sani and Magistro 2016). While distrust is coined as a potential expression of critical citizenship (Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Norris 1999 and 2011), it is mostly discussed in relation to the erosion of the long-standing permissive consensus of public opinion, the growth of public contestation of the EU and the increasing relevance of public opinion for the future of European governance (Hobolt and de Vries 2016).

The limitations of these empirical insights are obvious. In the first instance, the dominant survey design treats trust and distrust as two poles on the same scale (van de Walle and Six 2014), reducing the former to quite simple measures (e.g., the Eurobarometer's

distinction between ‘tend to trust’, ‘tend not to trust’, and ‘don’t know’). However, distrust cannot be equated with low or no trust, since the latter could also be a sign of ignorance, political agnosticism or mere indifference, and not necessarily one of informed and explicit distrust. Moreover, existing research on trust has dedicated only marginal attention to the unique governance context in the EU, with few exceptions (e.g., Cole et al. 2018). It has also generated inconclusive findings in regard to interdependencies between national and European governance, when there are indications of trust divergence (Muñoz, Torcal and Bonet 2011) and/or convergence between both levels (Armingeon and Ceka 2014: 104). Finally, these scholarly debates would have benefitted from research about the psychological and developmental underpinnings of trust (Marková and Gillespie 2008). Trust is not only related to cognition, but also to the emotions (Lewis and Weigert 1985; Mc Allister 1995; Mishler and Rose 2001) that are formed during childhood and adolescence. While it is known that both children and adults rely on perceived trustworthiness of others to guide their social interactions (Rotenberg, 2010), we still know very little about the impact of diverse political and cultural contexts on the way interpersonal trust transforms into different kinds of political and institutional trust over the life course (Macek and Marková 2004).

Second, research has been interested in theoretical discussions about the essence and rationale of trust in governance. In the first instance, this debate was interested in delimiting the research object, primarily by identifying what political trust is. In general terms, there is consensus within the social sciences that social and political trust are distinct but interrelated phenomena. While social trust is related to interpersonal relationships (Glaeser et al. 2000; Uslaner 2002, 2017; Fukuyama 1995; Yamagishi and Yamagishi 1994), political trust is clearly tied to institutions (Uslaner 2002, see also Offe 1999). Empirical studies (e.g., Schyns and Koop 2010; Zmerli and Newton 2008) show that social and political trust seem to correlate: Good government promotes higher levels of social trust in the population (e.g., van der Meer 2003), while social trust enables good government – a reciprocal relationship described as the ‘rainmaker effect’ (Newton, Stolle and Zmerli 2018: 49, see also Newton and Zmerli 2011). Additionally, both forms of trust seem to be exposed to similar processes of growth or erosion, when considering the negative effect of political or moral polarisation of party politics (Uslaner 2015) and public debates (Rapp 2016) on institutional and interpersonal trust.

Overall, research findings indicate that political trust is not an appendix of social trust, given that other factors seem to impact on it (see, e.g., Uslaner 2017; Wike and Holzwardt 2008). The relationship between social and political trust thus seems to be quite a complex one that is marked by interdependency and distinctiveness at the same time. Theoretical discussions still struggle with the conceptual and analytical challenges of specifying the inner structure and rationale of trust in political institutions. Additionally, theoretical debates have been centred either on a rational-utilitarian school of thought, which is inspired by political science, economy and psychology, or on a rational-norm-oriented school of thought, stronger in sociology (Hardin 1999, 2002). Trust in political

institutions is thus either a choice mirroring cost-benefit calculations and/or a statement of conformity to (implicit) rules and beliefs. So far, no integrated framework of analysis has been developed that takes the instrumental and normative dimensions into consideration. Moreover, we find limited consideration of the interdependent, reciprocal, interactive and even institutionalised rationale of trust and distrust relationships, which are essential for a study about trust and distrust in governance.

Third, previous research has also been committed to a normative discussion about political trust. Here, the literature follows a predominantly one-sided normative approach. In relation to governance, trust is often considered to be a necessary ingredient of well-functioning, democratic societies, while distrust is regarded as a negative and dysfunctional element. This normative standpoint also explains why the dominant survey design is disinterested in distrust, and conceives of trust and distrust as two poles on the same scale (van de Walle and Six 2014). In contrast to the literature inspired by the civic culture and social capital approach, other scholars are more sceptical about a positive link between political trust and democracy. Hardin, for instance, questions why people should trust their government at all. Following a rational-choice approach, he contends that trusting institutions is not a very rational choice for most people most of the time (Hardin 1999: 23). He relates declining trust to declining trustworthiness, emphasising that trust does not generally present a beneficial norm or value, as it should be in the individual's interest (Hardin 1999: 39). The opposite position is defended by Warren (1999), who argues that political trust is necessary for complex societies that rely on institutionalised relationships and cannot be built on face-to-face relationships. Modern societies require the riskier relation of (institutional) trust, as they cannot build on relations of familiarity and confidence alone (Luhmann 1979, 1988). This debate shows that normative judgements are inconclusive, given the multiplicity of conditions and circumstances to be reflected. In a situation of high uncertainty and lack of information, for instance, generalised political trust might be irrational in regard to a citizen's individual autonomy, while it might be institutionally required in regard to the functioning of political systems. A more promising normative argument is provided by studies that speak about the conditional nature of trust, and the importance of a 'critical citizenship' for the development of democracy. Norris (1999, 2011), for instance, argues that active involvement in social and political processes renders citizens more critical and reflective (also Klingemann and Fuchs 1995). A similar effect can be generated by online and social media, insofar as they can enable citizens to inform themselves more actively (e.g., Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal 2008; Mancini 2013). Following these indications, it seems necessary to overcome simplistic conceptualisations of trust and distrust. It thus seems necessary to identify normative criteria to assess the desirability of trust and/or distrust, and to develop a normative model that takes different individual and institutional 'needs' into consideration.

Our brief overview of the research field shows that previous studies have provided considerable knowledge about trust in governance. However, available knowledge is

marked by several limitations. First, previous research has centred on trust alone, following an implicit normative judgement that trust is a necessary ('good') ingredient of social order and political governance, while distrust represents its 'dark' side. This has led to a limited academic engagement with distrust and trust in theoretical and normative terms. Second, empirical studies have operationalised political trust in rather simplistic ways. In particular, research has privileged an atomistic analysis, assuming that trust is a disposition or attitudinal resource individuals have or lack. What is missing is a truly relational approach that centres on the interdependencies and reciprocities of trust and distrust between citizens and governance actors, and the way such relationships are institutionalised in specific social and cultural contexts. Third, research has been centred far too much on standardised surveys. What is needed is a multi-dimensional and mixed-methods approach. Findings from survey-based statistical analysis need to be validated by experimental research in order to identify causal effects. Additionally, qualitative and interpretative research tools are necessary in order to analyse the experiential foundations and the reciprocal element of trust and distrust relationships.

3. Towards an Improved Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of Analysis

Research about trust in governance must be anchored in a conceptual and theoretical framework that captures the complexity and dynamism of trust in times of substantial challenges, transformations and uncertainties. In this paper, we propose a framework that promises substantial progress beyond available knowledge by building on three conceptual specifications and related theoretical considerations. (1) We argue that the analysis of trust in governance has to take distrust seriously and thus engage in a nuanced analysis of trust and distrust, their forms, interrelations and complementarities. (2) We stress that the analysis of trust and the identification of remedial actions need to consider the reciprocal essence of trust and distrust, given that the (dis)trustfulness of citizens and governance actors are interrelated, and thus require co-responsible action. (3) We insist on broadening the focus of the analysis of trust in national and European governance, arguing that democratic governance is affected by trust and distrust in political institutions of representative democracy, bodies of economic and financial governance, and science and expert involvement, and their potential interrelations and spill-over effects.

3.1 Trust and Distrust in Governance

The analysis of trust in governance is mutilated when decoupled from the inquiry into distrust. Conceptually speaking, one might assume that both concepts are inversely interrelated, meaning that trust implies the absence of distrust, and distrust implies the absence of trust. This supposition is echoed by most survey-based studies using one-

dimensional scales of trust and distrust. However, actual relationships between citizens and governance actors are not shaped by either trust or distrust, but by both of them at the same time. Citizens, for instance, might trust a politician's intentions, but not their abilities (and vice versa), but citizens might also have mixed feelings in regard to a politician's intentions and capacities when weighing various criteria defining truthfulness (e.g., honesty, fairness, impartiality, accountability). Additionally, the dominant focus on trust is supported by an implicit normative consensus that trust is a 'good' ingredient of social order and political governance, and distrust, its 'dark' side.

A conceptual extension – the analysis of both trust *and* distrust – promises a much more in-depth analysis and evaluation, given that democratic governance requires trust and distrust, and thus a specific form of trust, which we call 'enlightened trust'. In democratic systems, citizens are even called to trust and distrust politicians and political institutions at the same time, when considering that democratic systems are institutionally built in order to regulate and control power. Distrust is an important source of democratic progress and renewal in that it promotes innovative forms of scrutiny, monitoring and controlling the established authorities (Warren 1999: 310; Patterson 1999). Distrust can thus have positive effects, if productively used, while trust on its part might have detrimental implications for democratic governance, for instance, when it unconditionally stresses the importance of reciprocity and loyalty between politicians and constituencies (i.e., clientelism and particularism) (Hardin 2002). In empirical, analytical and normative terms, it is thus indispensable to treat trust and distrust as essential aspects of democratic governance. It is necessary to decipher the productive relations and balances between trust and distrust, and to assess the contribution of 'enlightened trust' to the stability, efficacy and legitimacy of democratic governance. The analysis of trust and distrust might thus allow us to identify different subtypes, ranging from cautious distrust that involves a liberal understanding of healthy scepticism towards political power, to a more deep-seated political distrust associated with negative preconceived notions and expectations of established forms of governance, with ingrained form of trust in anti-systemic theories, counter-experts and leaders.

In order to more closely examine trust and distrust relationships between citizens and governance actors, we additionally need to differentiate between instrumental and normative dimensions. In instrumental terms, trust and distrust are based on expectations about future returns, and due to this common orientation, they are mutually interrelated. Following rational and instrumental judgements, 'trust' and 'distrust' are built on the expectations that the intentions and actions of others are favourable and beneficial, or unfavourable and harmful for oneself (Lewicki, McAllister and Bies 1998). This rational and utilitarian approach is accurate for the study of social trust, but limited in regard to political trust and distrust in governance (e.g., Hardin 2002). Trust and distrust are not only a relationship of exchange between citizens and governance actors, where the players expect positive or negative returns, but they are institutionally and culturally em-

bedded relationships. Citizens trust or distrust politicians not only based on their qualities as individuals, but as carriers of predefined roles and as representatives of institutions, which implies normative judgements (Offe 1999).

This normative element is particularly evident when acknowledging that trust and distrust relationships depend on the assumed trustworthiness – and consequently on the untrustworthiness – of governance actors (Sztompka 1998). The analysis of (un)trustworthiness is crucial because it allows identifying the reference criteria or the evaluative standards from which trust and distrust emerge. It is particularly crucial for restoring and improving trust in governance if we consider that trust is beneficial only when placed in trustworthy targets, but detrimental if misplaced in untrustworthy targets (see also O'Neill 2018). In fact, trustworthiness is associated with expected reliability, and is thus intricately linked to the perception of indicators such as appearance, performance or reputation of the targeted actors (Castelfranchi and Falcone 2010: 3; Hardin 2002; Sztompka 1999: chap. 4). It is linked to a set of institutionalised values and norms that are considered to be legitimate, adequate or acceptable, such as truthfulness (including honesty, authenticity, promise-keeping), justice (including fairness, impartiality, neutrality and solidarity), democratic accountability (including responsiveness, accessibility, transparency and law abidingness) and the like (Offe 1999: 73-75; Sztompka 1998).

While previous research has indicated some sources of trustworthiness, little systematic evidence is available, particularly in comparative terms. Additionally, it is to be expected that trust and distrust mirror normative expectations emerging from different (socio-economic, political, cultural) contexts (e.g., Sztompka 1996). This also means that citizens and governance actors in different countries will have a specific tendency to trust and distrust each other. Empirical research has to find ways of systematically measuring and mapping levels of trust and distrust, and empirically spotting and categorising the evaluative criteria underlying trust and distrust relations.

3.2 Trust and Distrust in Governance as Reciprocal Relations

An accurate analysis of trust and distrust has to build on a relational approach that stresses interdependencies and reciprocities. Trust in governance is not only an attitude or disposition shared by citizens, thus limiting the study to the analysis of unilateral and dyadic relationships between citizens (on the 'sending' side) and governance actors (on the 'receiving' side). Taking the relational approach seriously means accepting that trust and distrust between both sides are highly interdependent, reciprocal and to a certain degree also institutionally codified and fixed.

It is to be assumed, for instance, that citizens applying for public services or social benefits might be distrustful of the responsiveness of the state if they experience that the social welfare system is itself built on distrust, e.g., along institutionalised policies that define eligibility criteria, control mechanisms, incentives and sanctions. Citizens might

disengage from active political participation (e.g., through street protest, voluntary engagement, online media communication) or radicalise their political views and practices when perceiving that established politics mistrusts the citizens' intentions and activities, when exhibiting disinterest and low responsiveness. Studies have provided some empirical indications for this reciprocity. Countries with a public policy approach that is more trustful of their 'clients', for instance, tend to be those countries with higher levels of civic trust within the population, while the inverse seems to be the case for countries with public policies that more overtly stress the conditionality of public service eligibility (Rothstein 2011; see also Delhey and Newton 2005).

A relational approach promises a much deeper understanding of trust and distrust in governance, because it highlights that the (un)trustfulness of citizens and governance actors might be interdependent and possibly reciprocal. The extent to which citizens trust governance actors not only depends on the degree of the addressees' trustworthiness (as explained above), but also on the extent to which governance actors trust citizens. The relational approach thus sensitises for the fact that trust and distrust are not merely private, but tied back to wider societal cultures of trust or distrust that guide and compel citizens and governance actors to adapt (Sztompka 1996: 42). We thus expect that citizens and governance actors from different countries will have a specific tendency to trust and distrust each other, depending on the visions and expectations they have about the bright side of power (i.e., the constructive, acceptable and legitimate rules and norms), and what they perceive as the 'dark' side of power (i.e., the destructive and illegitimate rules).

3.3 Trust and Distrust in Complex Systems of Governance

To the relational aspect of trust and distrust, we have to add the observation that these relationships are highly conditional and thus dependent on constellations and contexts. The level of trust and distrust depends on which citizens are asked, and which governance actor they are speaking about. In regard to citizens as 'trust and distrust givers', we can rely on comprehensive research findings which show that trust is unequally distributed across social groups, countries and political systems. This unequal distribution is patterned by a series of factors. In particular, we know that trust in governance is lower in social and political contexts shaped by higher degrees of social inequalities, ideological polarisations, political cleavages and conflicts, and by an institutional performance marked by low effectivity, transparency and unlawfulness (e.g., corruption) (e.g., Catterberg and Moreno 2005, Delhey and Newton 2005; Urslaner 2015; Rapp 2016). Research on determinants and mediators of trust and distrust is important because it enables us to ascertain critical thresholds, scenarios and potential warning instruments.

Additionally, trust and distrust are also conditional because they depend on the specific governance actors involved. Citizens' trust depends on which 'target' is addressed, e.g., when comparing political personnel, political institutions and political systems, and

when comparing different governance levels, such as local, national and European. Research has already dealt with this issue by listing many potential targets of trust and distrust, and analysing rankings and constellations. This approach, however, is particularly challenging in regard to the European Union because of the multiplicity of potential references, both individual and institutional. Within the EU, political deliberation, decision-making and implementation is determined by a complex system spanning multiple levels (e.g., local, national, EU), but is also characterised by the involvement of civil society, experts and scientists, and economic and financial actors (Tortola 2017; European Commission 2001). Multi-level and multi-sectoral governance not only pose a challenge to hierarchical and state-centred forms of government (Caponio and Jones-Correa 2018: 1999); they also complicate the relationship between citizens and political institutions. In fact, citizens' trust in governance becomes conditional on citizens' trust in the various types of (public and private) actors involved in policymaking and implementation.

For this reason, an accurate analysis of trust and distrust in governance need to adopt a wider focus. It needs to include at least three types of actors involved in national and European governance: political actors of representative democracy, economic and financial actors, experts and scientists. The merit of this wider focus is the more comprehensive analysis of trust and distrust it ensures. In particular, it enables us to understand potential interdependencies and spill-over effects between trust in political institutions, economic governance actors, and experts and scientists. New research on trust in multilevel governance systems already indicates that citizens' trust is not homogenous, but varies between local, national and European levels depending on the specific institutional arrangement of political decision-making (e.g., Cole et al., 2018). It is to be assumed, for instance, that national governments and EU institutions suffer from increasing rates of distrust once trust in markets, the Euro and instruments of economic governance decreases, as experienced by the financial and economic crisis affecting many European countries since 2008. Additionally, trust and distrust in governance might also be harmed by decreasing rates of trust in experts and scientists, for instance, when criticism about their inability to deliver transparent, sound and balanced advice arises, as evidenced by the Covid-19 pandemic. Inversely, trust in governments might remain stable in cases where trust in markets and trust in experts and sciences prevails. Interdependencies and feedback will probably also run across levels, for instance, when national governments suffer from decreasing trust in European markets or institutions.

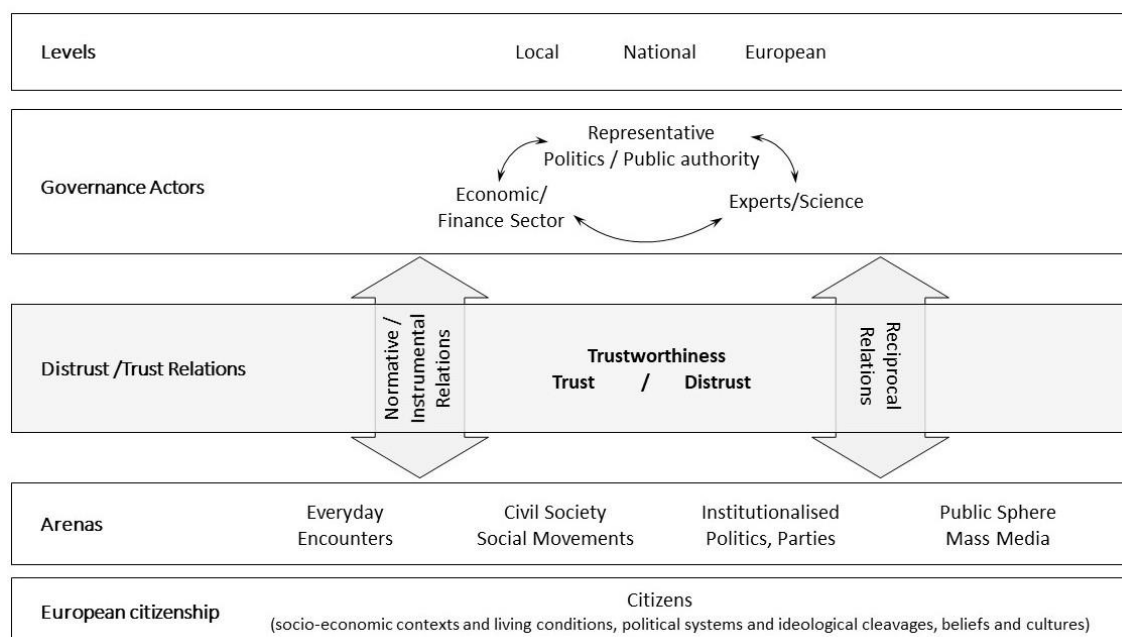
The conceptualisation of governance along these three targets (political representatives, economic and financial governance actors, experts and scientists) will enable a more refined and accurate understanding of trust and distrust. In the first instance, it allows us to measure differential rates of trust and distrust, and to validate the evaluative standards defining trustworthiness for each type of actor (e.g., legitimacy in regard to political institutions, truthfulness in regard to science, efficiency in regard to economic governance). At the same time, it allows us to identify potential spill-over effects and the factors mediating between these various actors and areas of governance. These

insights might provide important knowledge in order to identify the actor-specific responsibilities for low rates of trust, and formulate target-specific recommendations addressed to political institutions, economic actors, and experts or scientists.

4. Translating Concepts into Research

The conceptual framework presented so far is summarised in visual terms in Figure 1. On its basis, it is possible to identify the questions and assumptions that might guide a more systematic and in-depth empirical research of trust and distrust in governance.

Figure 1: Conceptual model for the analysis of trust and distrust in governance



4.1 Analysing Conditionality

The analysis of trust and distrust in governance has to answer a number of descriptive questions that relate to forms and levels of trust and distrust. Are there substantial differences in regard to trust in different targets (e.g., political governance actors, economic and financial governance actors, experts and scientists) and governance levels (e.g., the local, national and European)? On which traits are the trustworthiness and untrustworthiness of these governance actors and levels based in people's views? How important are instrumental and normative assessment criteria? Are there substantial differences between countries, and are we able to speak of country-specific cultures of trust and distrust? Beyond these descriptive questions, however, research determinants and correlates of trust and distrust need to be identified in order to decipher the conditionality of trust and distrust. What helps to explain different levels and forms of trust and distrust, when considering the different addressees stated above? Are there spill-

over effects between trust in political and economic governance, and what role do (international and national) economic actors play? Are there similar spill-over effects stemming from trust and distrust in science and expertise? Can we identify contextual factors affecting different levels and forms of trust in the various countries? Are we able to highlight those (socio-economic, political, cultural) forces impacting on the diffusion of trust and distrust across the European citizenry? To what extent are trust and distrust a reciprocated relationship between populations and political institutions, and to what degree are these reciprocal relations consolidated and/or institutionalised? How are trust and distrust constructed, deconstructed, re-enacted or reproduced within the various countries and across governance levels?

Following available studies of institutional trust, we can identify a number of determinants and correlates that seem to play a particularly important role. First, the socio-economic context has an important structuring impact on levels and forms of trust and distrust in governance. In particular, social inequalities exert a strong influence on three levels. On the macro-level, the various 'shocks' associated with the European crises (e.g., the Great Recession, the so-called refugee crisis, the Covid-19 crisis and the subsequent economic recession) have impacted on the degree to which citizens trust in the problem-solving capacity of political actors and institutions, particularly in those countries most affected by these various crises. At the meso-level, we expect that countries with higher rates of spatial and social inequalities among their citizens are also those with lower degrees of trust in governance. At the individual level, we expect that citizens confronted with social deprivation and vulnerabilities will be less trustful and more distrustful.

Additionally, the institutional structure of governance systems has an effect on levels and forms of trust and distrust, and can even attenuate effects of the crises. Evidence suggests that limited institutional performance (e.g., low accountability and transparency, low effectivity, corruption) will harm trust, while political systems and institutions guaranteeing political and social rights (e.g., 'generous' democratic systems and welfare states) institutionalise and promote trust more proactively. Limited institutional performance should also increase the probability of spill-over effects from low trust in economic governance and expert involvement in political distrust. At the same time, elements of democratic accountability and participation should encourage the empowerment of citizens, propel trust and make productive use of 'enlightened trust', while political cleavages and conflicts within the political arena, for instance in regard to ideological polarisations and radicalisations within the party-system, might affect trust levels, as they might contribute to a generalised mistrust in political institutions, markets and science, and a generalised alienation of established governance structures.

Finally, we assume that trust and distrust are constructed and contested in different arenas. Due to the interdependence and reciprocity of trust relations, it is to be expected that citizens will develop levels and forms of trust and distrust that mirror the experiences with public authorities in their more immediate surroundings. Moreover, these

relationships of trust and distrust depend on the ways in which citizens experience political participation within the contentious field of party politics and social movements. Additionally, they will be influenced by public discourses within the public sphere in terms of mass media and online media participation. In this regard, a comparative approach is essential, because reciprocal relationships of trust and distrust between citizens and governance actors are structured by the political realities within each country in different ways, even though it is to be expected that current challenges and crises provide junctures and opportunities for the transformation of established cultures of trust and distrust, depending on the specific interactions, discourses and contentions between citizens and governance actors.

4.2 The Multidimensional and Comparative Analysis

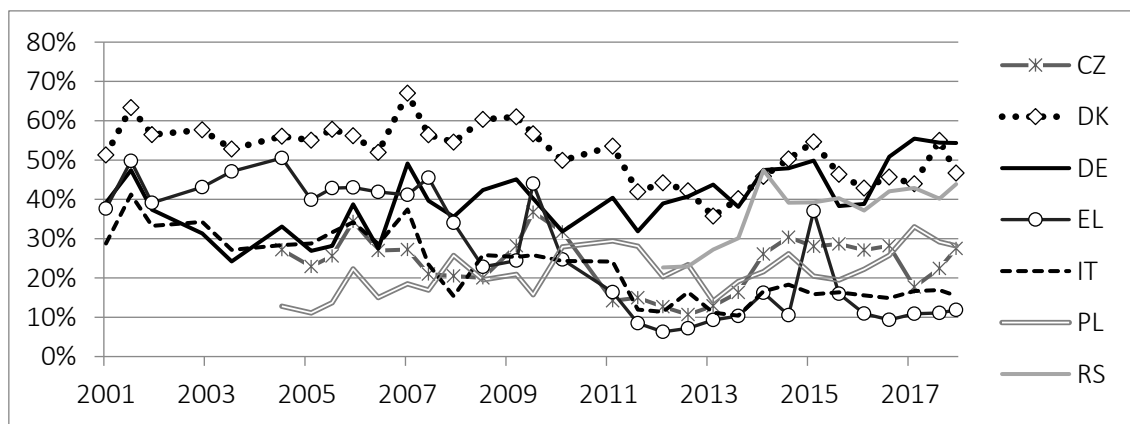
The particular challenge of an analysis of trust and distrust in governance emanates from the conditionality of these relationships, as indicated above. Levels and forms of trust and distrust will depend and diverge between different actor constellations and socio-political contexts. In this sense, a multidimensional and a comparative approach is indispensable.

On the one hand, it is necessary to address the various levels at which trust and distrust in governance are constructed, reproduced and/or eroded: the micro-, meso- and macro levels. At the micro-level, citizens' trust and distrust in governance are influenced by the ways in which individual citizens have direct experiences with governance representatives, how they enter into interaction with them and how they perceive how they are trusted or distrusted by public authorities. At the same time, politicians or public servants' perceptions of trust and distrust will be influenced by the experiences they have with their clients and voters. At the meso-level, trust and distrust in governance are also shaped through the experiences citizens and governance representatives make in political contentions. In fact, citizens and politicians or public servants do not only interact as individuals, but more often than not as representatives of groups and organisations, e.g., civil society initiatives or protest organisations on the one hand, and representatives of political institutions and political parties on the other. On this organisational level, they interrelate as representatives of groups and collectivities, meaning that trust and distrust relations are generated, reproduced or eroded more explicitly in their institutional dimensions and the instrumental and normative claims they involve. At the macro-level, trust and distrust in governance are also generated, reproduced or shattered within the public sphere. Within this arena, individual and organisational actors engage in public debates and contentions, which verbalise trust and distrust as well as criteria of trustworthiness and untrustworthiness, and thus contribute to the definition of what trust and distrust means, and to the justification of whether governance actors should be trusted and distrusted and under which circumstances. Public contentions also allow us to detect the way crucial events impact on public discussions and trust contestations. They also help us to understand under which conditions such contentions

also extend to the construction of trust or distrust in the mass media and other forms public deliberation.

On the other hand, it is necessary to address the different socio-political contexts within which trust and distrust relations evolve. In this sense, a comparative approach is crucial in order to develop evidence that claims to be generally valid. In the European context, for instance, it is obvious that levels of trust diverge considerably according to the various countries under analysis. Figure 2 provides illustrative data for a number of disparate countries (the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Greece, Poland and Serbia as an EU candidate country). Based on Interactive Eurobarometer data from 2001 to 2017, we see that in spite of temporal fluctuations across time, trust in the national government is consistently higher in Denmark and Germany, and lowest in Greece and Italy, while the Eastern European countries (Poland, Serbia and the Czech Republic) are at an intermediate level. Developments across time show that trust levels in Germany and Denmark converge from different points of departure; Greece and Italy have been experiencing a strong decrease of trust since 2007, even though volatility is higher in Greece: the two spikes overlap with parliamentary elections on October 4th, 2009 (centre-left, PASOK) and on January 25th, 2015 (left, Syriza).

Figure 2: Tend to trust the national government over time; data from Interactive Eurobarometer



These developments suggest that contextual factors play a crucial role in explaining levels of trust. Countries affected by the various crises impacting on Europe since 2007 have experienced a decline in trust levels, thus corroborating other studies arguing that levels of institutional trust follow more immediate external or contextual events or 'shocks' (e.g., Bovens and Wille 2011; Tormos 2019). Moreover, political and institutional contexts matter, in particular in regard to levels of corruption, according to research findings testifying that corruption impacts negatively on trust in governance (e.g., Rothstein 2011). The various levels of institutional trust seem to mirror institutional performance, for instance, when considering that some countries rank highly on the transparency ranking (e.g., Denmark, Germany), while others (Poland, Czech Republic, Italy)

take intermediate positions, and still others (Greece, Serbia) take a low ranking (Transparency International, 2018). Political cleavages within the party-system and the polarisation of ideological conflicts seem to affect institutional trust in our countries to a varying degree, as well (Uslaner 2015; Rapp 2016). Finally, the diverging levels of trust might also be associated with an institutional context's abilities to interfere and/or correct for social inequalities and cleavages within societies. Welfare systems might have an impact on levels of trust, as has been corroborated with reference to the 'Nordic exceptionalism' (Delhey and Newton 2005). In this sense, higher levels of trust might be related to universalist (Denmark) and/or corporatist (Germany) welfare systems with higher levels of redistribution in support of low-income households, while residual welfare systems (Italy and Greece) with a low level of redistribution in regard to poor households, and transitory welfare systems (Poland, Czech Republic and Serbia) with an incomplete and intermediate redistribution impact on low income households, might be less successful in guaranteeing high rates of trust (e.g., Sainsbury 2012; World Bank Group, 2019: 37-39).

5. Conclusions

Research on institutional trust has contributed to considerable knowledge about forms, causes and consequences of this specific form of public support in political institutions. However, as this paper has argued, there is still a long road ahead in order to grasp the complexity of trust and distrust in governance, in particular if we wish to engage in a theoretical and empirical analysis of European multi-level governance in all its complexity and specificity. In this paper, we have highlighted a number of aims and ambitions for consideration. First, research has to devote itself to a fresh and unprejudiced analysis of distrust and trust. Research has to step back from existing normative approaches and consider trust and distrust as distinct and equally important phenomena. Second, research has to adopt a relational approach that takes reciprocal relationships between citizens and governance actors seriously. While previous research treats trust as a resource held (or not) by individual actors, we need a better understanding of trust and distrust as social relations citizens and governance actors that are co-responsible for the construction, reproduction or erosion of trust in governance. Third, research has to find ways of addressing the different forms, levels and targets of trust/distrust relations. An accurate empirical analysis has to broaden the focus to include a variety of governance levels (local, national and European) and actors (political actors and institutions, economic governance actors, experts and scientists) in the analysis. Additionally, it is necessary to inquire into the mediating role of civil society and social media in arousing trust and distrust between citizens and governance actors. Fourth, the analysis has to be comparative in order to address the contextual condition patterning trust and distrust in a variety of governance actors, and the interdependencies and spill-over effects between them. Finally, scholars should use interdisciplinary research designs more proactively in

order to make systematic use of the expertise of relevant academic disciplines (e.g., political science, psychology, sociology, media sciences and social theory). Accurate research has to assimilate the theoretical approaches, methodological instruments and empirical findings associated with these disciplines in order to engage in a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis, to generate a richer set of empirical data and findings, and to develop a more inclusive, integrated and accurate understanding of trust in governance, its determinants and consequences.

6. References

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