

Enlightened trust (EnTrust)

An examination of trust and distrust in governance – conditions, effects and remedies

Main Findings

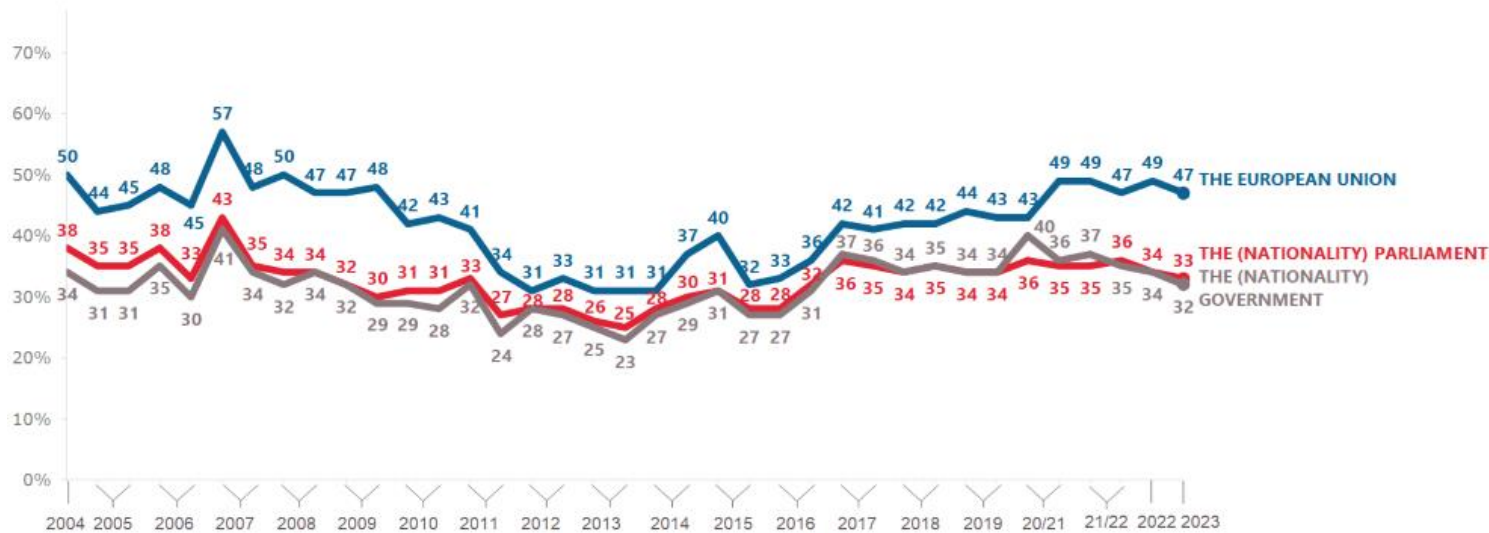
Presentation by Christian Lahusen
at the EnTrust Final Conference, 10 January 2024, European Parliament, Brussels



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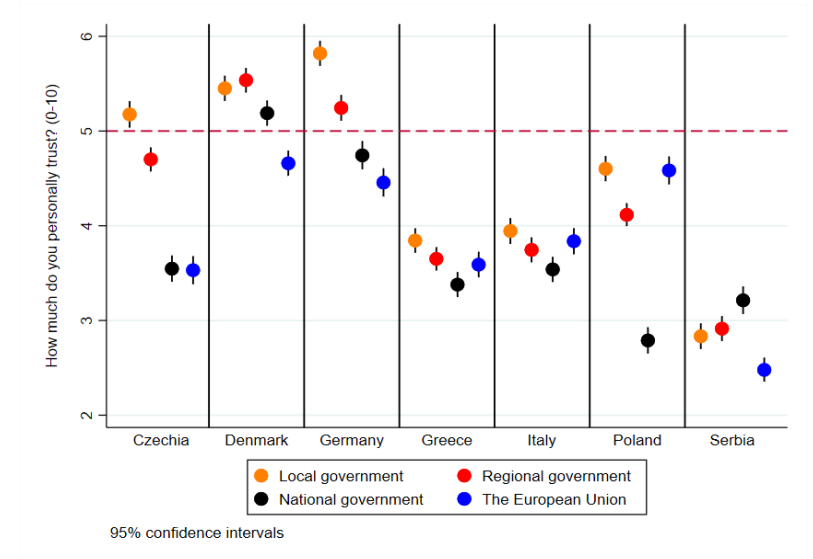
The context: trust in times of poly-crises

Citizens' responses: "tend to trust" (2004-2023)



Eurobarometer 98

Trust levels (means, 2023)



EnTrust survey (2023)

Objectives

descriptive

- to map trust / distrust patterns and relations
 - levels: individual (dis)trust formation, collective arenas of (dis)trust formation
 - countries: Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Serbia

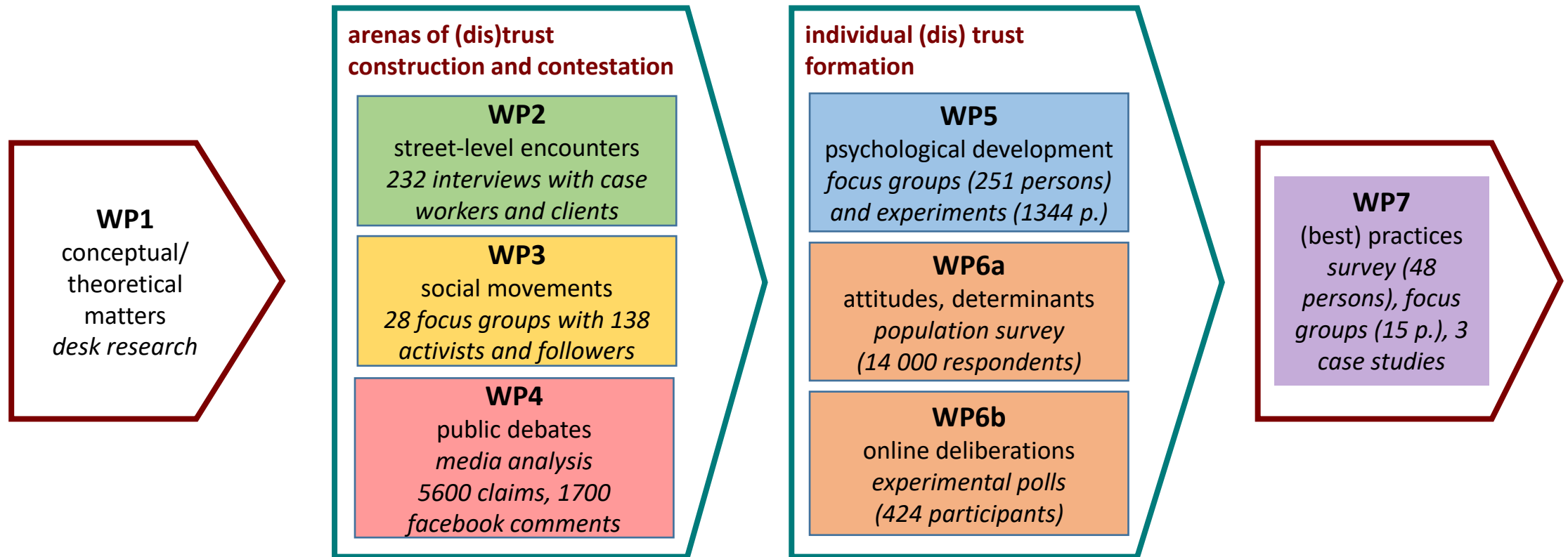
analytic

- to understand and explain
 - trust / distrust formation: individual determinants, processes
 - trust / distrust cultures: collective forms of trust and distrust

prescriptive

- to engage in
 - recommendations: good practices, policy recommendations
 - dissemination, communication and exploitation

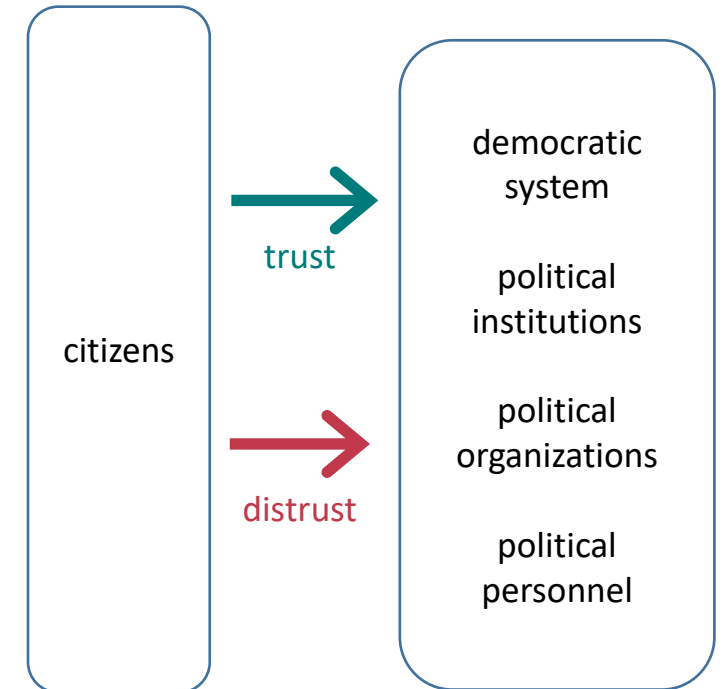
Workplan



Main Findings

1. Trust and distrust

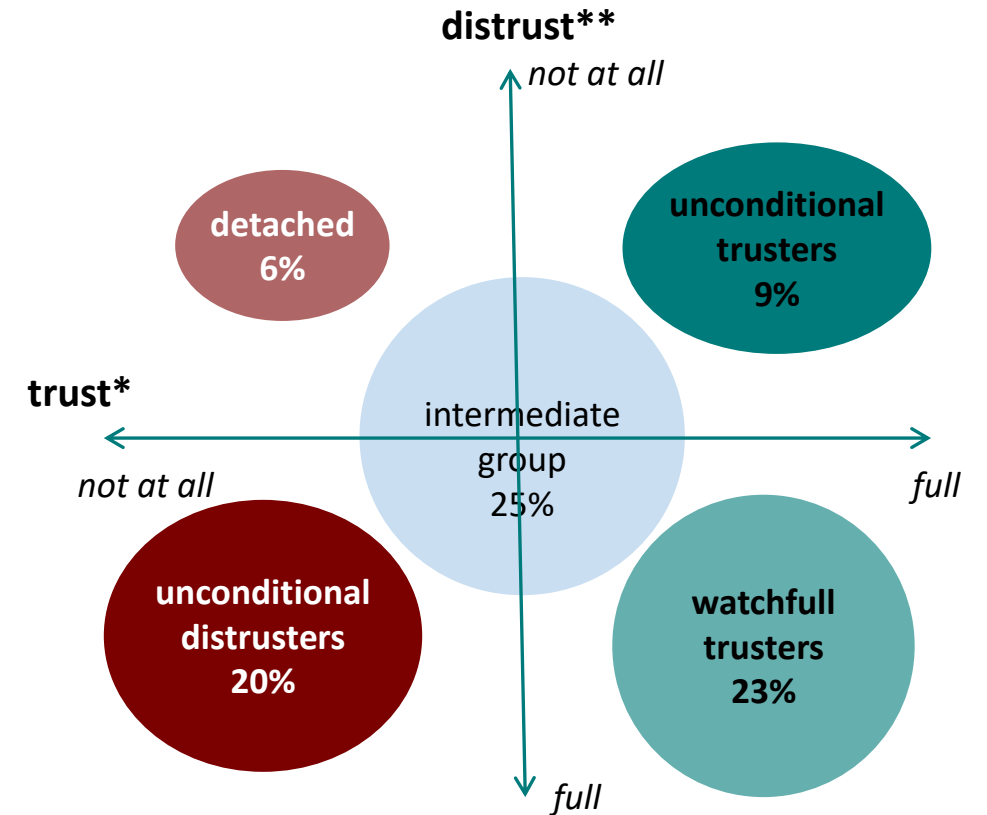
- research privileges trust: problem of missing variables
 - trust and distrust as distinct but interrelated concepts
 - at individual and collective level



Presence of trust and distrust

WP6: population survey

- most citizens have nuanced relations to political institutions, combining trust and distrust
- most diffused attitudes are marked by
 - either watchful, sceptic, vigilant, trust
 - or unconditional distrust



* trust in terms of expected performance (parliament, parties, court, police, army, civil service)

** political institutions should always be treated with doubt / can never become trustworthy

Prudent trust

WP5: developmental processes of trust formation

Citizens make the experience that blind or naïve trust is problematic:

- distrust as a learned ‘positive’ disposition
- distrust makes citizens less vulnerable, more attentive and independent

“Distrust also has benefits, because if you don't trust the person who seems to have more power than you 100%, you can always have your own opinion. If you are completely trusting, they may make a stupid decision and you may not even notice it because you trust them” (*Polish Focus Group, age 14-15*).

Spheres of institutionalised (dis)trust

WP4: critical journalism

- journalists see their mission in enabling critical citizenship
- their trustworthiness resides in being distrustful
- too much media consensus leads into generalized distrust

“One disinformation strategy is to attack established media and reputable media, and to portray them as untrustworthy, as faulty, as incomplete. [...]. And it is, of course, very, very difficult to convince them again and to give them the feeling and to show them that we are trustworthy” (*German Journalist*).

WP3: democratic social movements

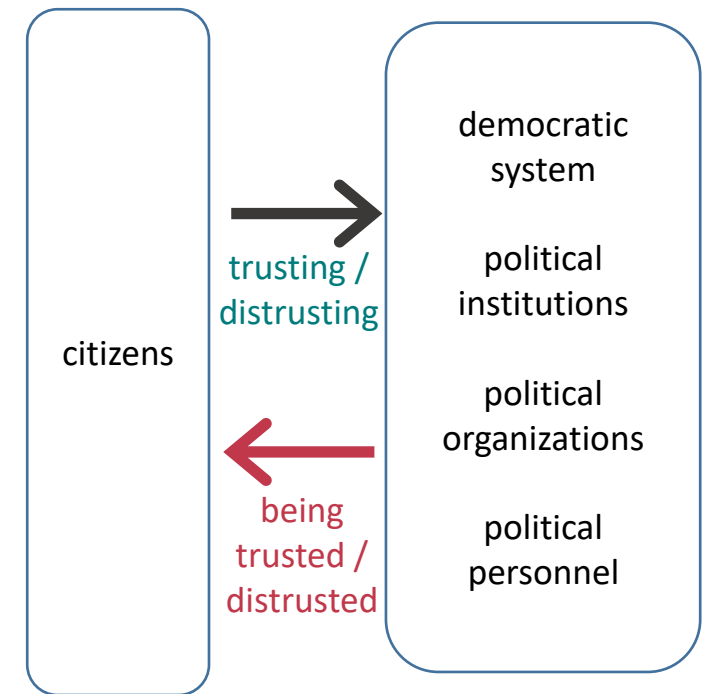
- blind or naïve trust is problematic, because it makes citizens more vulnerable, less critical
- but generalised distrust is problematic, too, because it leads to frustration and disengagement
- democratic social movements are schools of critical trust:
 - citizens develop trust in collective action, in political affairs
 - learn to channel their distrust productively

“Regarding distrust in society and whether it can be useful, I wouldn't use the word distrust, but rather the word skepticism, as a kind of counter-obedience, and, in that sense, it can be healthy, and I think ideas like Robin Hood should even be promoted” (*Serbian activist*).

“In my opinion, social movements are certainly capable of restoring trust in new institutions because they have the aim to reform and refound the institutions” (*Italian activist*).

2. A relational Approach

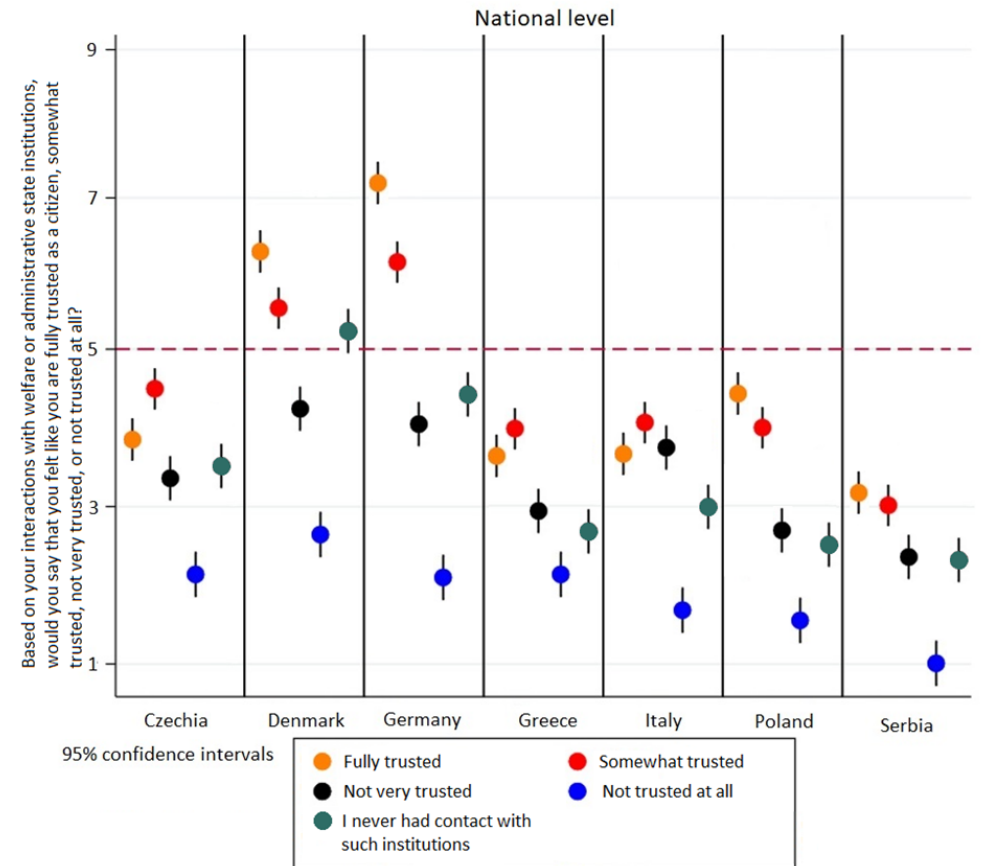
- research privileges focus on (unilateral) trust dispositions of citizens: problem of decontextualisation
 - trust and distrust are embedded in relations, mutual investments are needed



Experiencing trust

WP6: population survey

- levels of personal trust in political institutions correlate with perceptions of institutional trust
- clients of public administrations feeling “not being trusted at all” report lowest levels of trust



WP2: vulnerable families' encounters with social welfare authorities

- interviewees experience public authorities as being adverse: formalism, no transparency, fragmentation of the institutional system; unfairness, strict means-testing and controlling practices; lack of stability and reliability
- personalisation of trust as a compensatory resource
- institutional repair work between rule-abiding and rule-bending practices, but no spill-over

“They do not trust their people. [...] It is not necessary to say this. It is simply such an atmosphere that prevails there. Also, this snappish behavior [...] how they treat you” (*German respondent*).

“trust means a potential relationship” (*Italian case worker*).

3. Trust and Trustworthiness

- research privileges focus on questions about trust: problem of lacking specificity about institutional (un)trustworthiness
- trust and distrust depend on what people assess as being (un)trustworthy



WP5: psychological development

trust in authorities depends on personal and relational attributes:

competence, knowledgeability, expertise

transparency, predictability, and consistency

reciprocity, involvement and respect

less: performance and outcomes

WP7: EU NGOs

distrust in authorities depends on institutional and relational attributes, too:

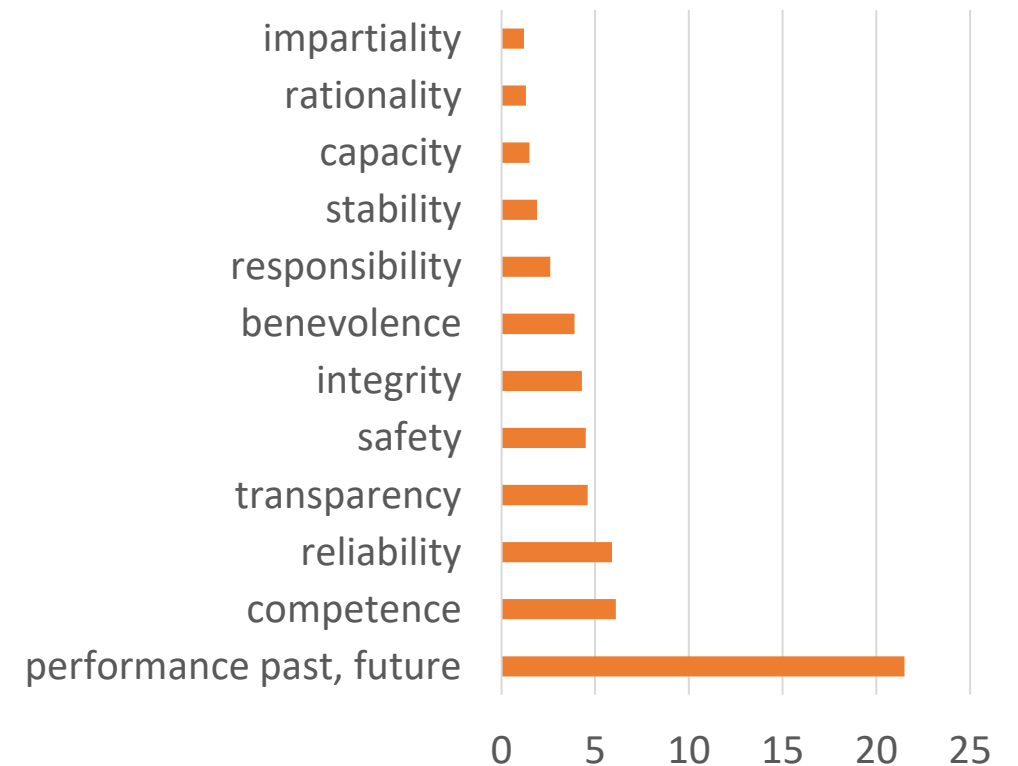
- incompetence: incapacity, clueless, lack of knowledge
- lack of transparency, certainty and predictability: unclear responsibilities and instructions, complexity, fake consultations
- inaccessibility: opaqueness, lack of participation, closed doors, lack of communication
- integrity: corruption, bribery, revolving doors

WP4: Public debates about the Covid19 pandemic

trust debates revolve around:

- similar actor constellations: citizens (trust givers), media (trust attributors), government (trust receivers)
- similar criteria of trustworthiness: but
 - *main focus: outcomes / performance*
 - only then attributes: competence, reliability and transparency
 - much less: relational dimension

Criteria of (un)trustworthiness
(in % of claims)



3. Practices and Recommendations

A participatory research process:

- field-work involving experts, practitioners, citizens
- reports presenting scientific evidence, core challenges, implications
- policy dialogues (lunch-time debates, roundtables) discussing implications and recommendations
- policy briefs, integrated policy paper, guides and manuals summarizing scientific and policy-relevant findings

A democratic framework based on the rule of law and the guarantee of fundamental rights (monitoring civic space, strengthened EU Rule of Law cycle, increase EU transparency, empower local democracy with support, European Pillar of Social Rights)

The role of information in building trust (e.g., Digital Services Act, EU AI Act, combat disinformation and follow a human rights' based approach, European Media Freedom Act and anti-SLAPP directive)

An enabling environment for citizens to engage (European cross-border associations, funding conditions for CSOs, Audiovisual Media Services Directive and monitoring the implementation of Council recommendation promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching)

A whole-societal involvement into the policy-making (youth political participation and youth perspective in policy-making, legal framework for meaningful civil dialogue, deliberative democracy mechanisms at all levels of government).

Thank you for your attention!

<https://entrust-project.eu>

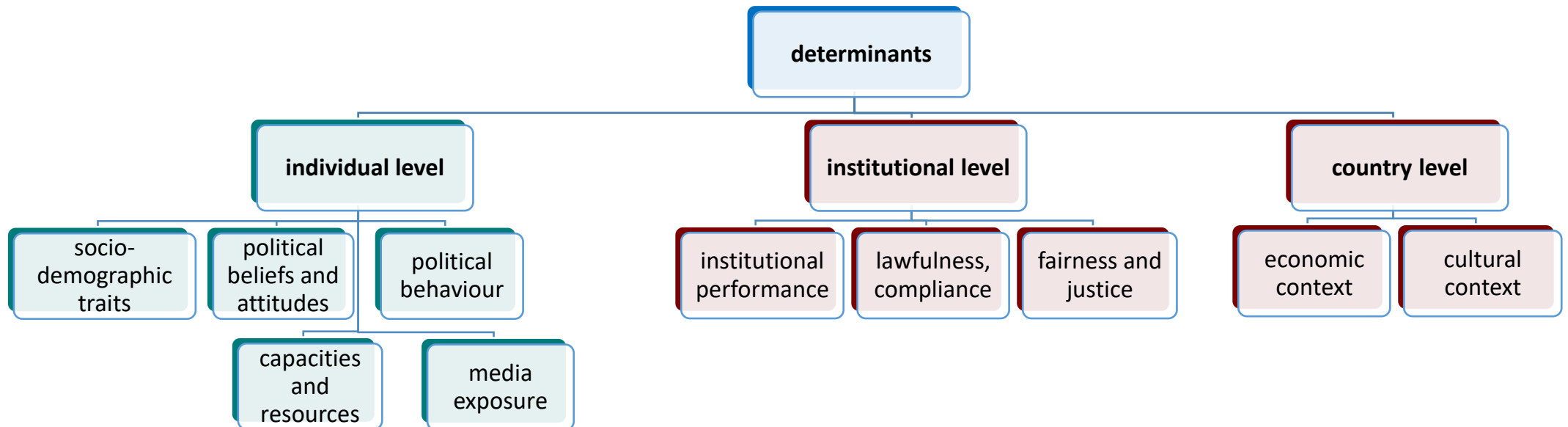
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Thank you for your attention!

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State of the art: factors affecting trust levels



Forces forming enlightened trust?

- prevalence of distrust not *per se* a warning sign, all to the contrary
 - but generalised distrust is!
- challenges to institutional trust should be solved by institutional measures
 - raise institutional trustworthiness, including its ability to channel distrustfulness

follow criteria of (un)trustworthiness:

- personal level: integrity, benevolence, competence
- institutional level: participation, rule-abidingness, transparency, accountability
- allocate distrust properly to enable trust

Examples of Dissemination Activities (1)

Measurements translating research findings into tangible and applicable instruments:

- 1) Policy Briefs
 - Providing policy implications and recommendations that can be used by governments, policymakers and civil society actors
- 2) Guide on “Enlightened Trust”
 - Role-model guide on dis/trust in governance for public authorities and civil society actors concerning risk analysis, management and prevention
- 3) Train-the-trainer module
 - Training tool for public authorities to engage in dialogue with civil society
- 4) Manual for evidence-based policymaking
 - Enable decisionmakers and civil society organisations to improve the exploitation of scientific expertise

Examples of Dissemination Activities (2)

Enhancing the quality of democracy across various stakeholders and end-users:

- 1) Wikisite
 - Open-access inventory about good and socially innovative forms of active citizenship and sustainable democratic practice
- 2) Documentary video on trust in governance
 - Vivid format from the perspective of practitioners and civil society initiatives dealing with dis/trust
- 3) Policy learning roundtables & lunch-time debates
 - Discussion of findings and recommendations with and among practitioners
- 4) Final conference in Brussels
 - Outputs and recommendations to be discussed with policymakers, public authorities and civil society actors