

Integrated Research Summary

The EnTrust project, funded by the EU's Horizon2020 Research and Innovation Programme, explores the dynamics of trust and distrust in governance across Europe, investigating their implications for democratic engagement and governance practices. By examining trust at various levels – from street-level bureaucracy to the influence of media and social movements – the project identifies key factors that shape trust dynamics and outlines strategies for enhancing governance accountability and public trust. This document offers a succinct overview of the EnTrust project, highlighting its main ambitions and findings across Work Packages One to Seven.

WP1: The Theoretical and Normative Underpinnings of Trust and Distrust

Research Background

The primary goal of Work Package 1 (WP1) was to collect and synthesise the current understanding of trust and distrust within the realm of governance, aiming to provide a thorough and interdisciplinary summary of their attributes, motivating factors, and consequences. Throughout its course, WP1 meticulously refined and broadened a conceptual and theoretical framework that was designed to both inform and reflect the investigations carried out in the subsequent phases of the project.

The conceptual and theoretical work was based on two pillars. On the one hand, desk research was conducted to review existing literature in the field of political science, sociology, psychology, media studies, and

philosophy. WP1 sought to summarise these key insights, highlight existing research gaps, and introduce a conceptual framework aimed at refining our knowledge and guiding future studies. On the other hand, a series of memos were written to summarise the main finding of the empirical research work, and extract the main conceptual and theoretical lessons. On the basis of both pillars, a nuanced approach to the study of trust and distrust was developed, which advocates for a comprehensive understanding that recognises the role of trust and distrust in enhancing accountability and transparency within governance structures.

Key Findings

The literature review highlighted that while past research enriched our understanding of trust in governance, it came with notable limitations. Firstly, the tendency to simplistically equate distrust with low trust misses the subtle differences between ignorance, apathy, or indifference. Moreover, the research has not adequately addressed the EU's unique governance framework, or the psychological foundations of trust, resulting in vague conclusions about the interplay between national and European governance and insufficient understanding of trust's development across diverse political and cultural landscapes. Secondly, there is an absence of a cohesive framework that merges rational-utilitarian and norm-based perspectives, with a notable gap in examining how trust and distrust function in an interdependent and institutionalised manner within governance. Lastly, normative discussions often reduce trust to a

fundamentally positive aspect and distrust to a negative one, simplifying their complex roles in democracy. This perspective overlooks the situational nature of trust and the value of critical citizenship, pointing towards the need for a more refined normative model that assesses trust and distrust's appropriateness across different personal and institutional scenarios.

Against this backdrop, a proposed conceptual framework is centred around three key propositions. Firstly, it views trust and distrust not as strict opposites, but as complementary phenomena that can coexist, each playing distinct roles within the political landscape. This perspective refutes seeing trust and distrust as merely opposite poles or functional equivalents, instead advocating a dualist view that highlights their unique characteristics and influences at various levels. It emphasises that trust and distrust coexist, shaped by distinct factors, and simultaneously influences citizens' perceptions of public institutions. Analysing both trust and distrust provides a deeper understanding of democratic governance, advocating for 'enlightened trust' where citizens simultaneously trust and scrutinise political figures and institutions, recognising that distrust can fuel democratic innovation by encouraging vigilant oversight of authority, whereas unconditional trust might undermine it by overemphasising loyalty and reciprocity. In this context, however, instances must be taken into account where neither trust nor distrust are present, due to people's disengagement or emphasis on formal rules over trust with political entities. Thereby, trust is distinct from mere reliance, as individuals often depend on people, technology, and systems for their functionality without pondering the underlying trust aspects in these interactions.

Secondly, the framework stresses the reciprocal nature of trust relations, underscoring the significance of interactions between citizens and various governance actors. This relational approach emphasises the complex interplay and mutual dependencies between citizens and governance actors, moving beyond mere attitudes to consider how these dynamics are shaped, and reflective of broader societal trust cultures. This perspective considers interdependencies between trust and being trusted, distrusting and being distrusted. It reveals that trust in governance involves reciprocal and institutionally-embedded relationships, offering a more nuanced understanding of how trust and distrust mutually influence each other within the societal context. Furthermore, one critique targets the common approach in empirical research that views (institutional) trust solely from the trustor's perspective, seeing it as a psychological trait, a cultural predisposition, or an individual judgement of institutional trustworthiness. The advocated approach emphasises the importance of considering all facets of institutional trust and distrust, including the trustor, the trustee, and the nature of the trust relationship itself.

Thirdly, trust and distrust are highly conditional, varying across different social groups, countries, and political systems, influenced by factors such as social inequalities, ideological polarisation, and institutional performance. Comprehensive research indicates that trust levels are not uniformly distributed, but are shaped by the socio-political context. Moreover, analysing trust and distrust in governance requires a broader perspective that includes political, economic, and expert actors at local, national, and European levels, acknowledging the complex interdependencies and potential spillover effects among these different spheres. This expanded focus allows for a more nuanced understanding of trust dynamics in multilevel governance systems,

highlighting the variability of trust across various institutional arrangements.

In research, employing a multidimensional and comparative approach is essential to grasp the intricate formation, sustenance, and decline of trust and distrust within governance, spanning micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. This approach acknowledges how individual experiences, group dynamics, and public discourse collectively shape perceptions of governance. It emphasises the importance of considering the direct interactions between citizens and governance representatives, the role of organisations and collective entities in political contention, and the influence of societal debates on public perceptions of trustworthiness. Furthermore, a comparative perspective highlights the significant variations in trust levels across different socio-political contexts, as seen in diverse European countries. This underscores the need for a comprehensive framework that accounts for the multifaceted nature of trust and distrust and their implications for democratic governance.

WP2: Trust and Distrust at the Street-level of Public Policy

Research Background

The EnTrust project's Work Package 2 (WP2) conducted a detailed analysis to explore the dynamics of trust and distrust, particularly focusing on disadvantaged families' interactions with street-level bureaucracy. This area of governance is pivotal, serving as the primary contact point between citizens and the administrative framework. The objective was to illuminate the various levels, forms, conditions, and mechanisms by which trust is established, maintained, or diminished in these essential interactions.

Guided by critical questions, the research probed the subjective interpretations of trust and distrust from both citizens and frontline workers. It investigated how factors across different countries impact these perceptions, the influence of welfare systems and policy design at a micro-level, the effects of national trust cultures, and the specific experiences of frontline workers and citizens that form the basis of trust dynamics.

WP2's methodology was grounded in qualitative research, primarily through interviews conducted between March 2020 and February 2021. The study encompassed diverse locations including the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Serbia, ranging from large cities to small locales. This approach ensured a comprehensive collection of experiences across various age groups, levels of work experience, and different departments, or sections, of welfare institutions and social services. A total of 115 interviews with frontline workers, and 117 with citizens receiving social welfare, compiled a rich dataset for analysis. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using inductive content analysis anchored in grounded theory principles.

Key Findings

The comprehensive analysis of interviews in the EnTrust project's Work Package 2 (WP2) revealed a complex landscape of trust and distrust relations in street-level bureaucracy, with notable variations across different countries. In the experiences of citizens and social workers from the countries involved, trust and distrust are conceptualised in terms of relationships, where trustworthiness emerges as a key component. This viewpoint recognises trust as a dynamic, evolving construct that is shaped by the reciprocal actions and responses of both parties involved. Interactions

between citizens and frontline workers in social assistance generally contained some level of trust, yet stood in contrast to a wider distrust towards the institutional system of social assistance. This dichotomy was evident across various countries, highlighting a significant gap between individual and systemic perceptions of trustworthiness. In these interactions, the reciprocal nature of trust and distrust becomes apparent, where a citizen's distrust can lead to a caseworker's scepticism, potentially spiralling into a cycle of mutual distrust that undermines the effectiveness of social welfare systems

In Denmark, the importance of communication was particularly emphasised, suggesting that improved communication is key to enhancing trust. The evolution of trust or distrust over time, and the mutuality of relations between citizens and frontline workers, were identified as crucial factors affecting trust dynamics. Trust was strongly associated with caseworkers being perceived as reliable and treating clients as individuals, thus ensuring a significant level of autonomy. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that an overabundance of trust might lead to complacency and insufficient critical engagement, potentially perpetuating inefficiencies.

Conversely, factors contributing to distrust varied across countries. In the Czech Republic, Serbia, and Poland, and to some extent in Germany, distrust was fuelled by a range of factors including non-adherence to professional standards, lack of respect, system formalities and fragmentation, perceived unfairness, low benefits, strict means-testing, controlling practices, and, in some cases, discrimination based on ethnicity. In Germany and Poland, citizens reported that their trust towards caseworkers was enhanced after receiving assistance, indicating that positive experiences

with individual caseworkers could influence overall trust levels.

Although the study revealed a high degree of similarity in regard to trust-building processes and the functions of trust across countries, country-specific systemic and contextual factors also played a role in shaping trust or distrust, too. These factors included the level of institutional fragmentation in social assistance, task specialisation, whether citizens' entry into the system was voluntary or non-voluntary, frontline workers' workload, understaffing, staff rotation, occupational burn-out, the stress of applying for welfare, and the quality of direct communication and cooperation between caseworkers and clients.

Trust and distrust proved to be dynamic, evolving based on the experiences of the involved parties. Trust in individual caseworkers did not necessarily translate to trust in the wider social assistance system, and there existed the potential for an escalation of distrust based on clients' emotions. Frontline workers often experienced simultaneous trust and distrust in their clients, adding another layer to the intricate nature of these relationships.

The impact of trust and distrust manifested in various ways. Trust enhanced cooperation between caseworkers and citizens, improving the efficiency and quality of services. For caseworkers, trust facilitated smoother case management, i.e., based on the readiness to decrease the level of formalities whenever possible, and for citizens, it led to opening up, revealing private problematic issues, following caseworkers' suggestions and provided a sense of security. Concurrently, distrust, typically regarded negatively, can act as a vital mechanism for accountability, spurring necessary system reforms and greater accountability. In a broader political context, although most citizens showed limited interest in politics, focusing instead on "everyday life", a

significant number expressed a positive trust towards the EU as a whole, appreciating the benefits of EU membership.

WP3: The Role of Democratic Social Movements in the Formation of Trust and Distrust

Research Background

The EnTrust project's Work Package 3 (WP3) set out to explore the role of new democratic social movements within contemporary governance structures. The research aimed to understand how these movements influence political participation and public trust amidst citizens' increasing disengagement from traditional political institutions. WP3 sought to delve into the internal democracy of these movements, their impact on trust towards governance, their interactions with the public and other social actors, and the effects of their strategies of engagement or confrontation with institutions on societal trust. The goal was to provide a detailed analysis of the dynamics within new democratic social movements and their implications for democratic engagement and trust in governance systems.

WP3 aspired to uncover how these movements act as alternative platforms for political participation, potentially reshaping the conventional fabric of trust in governance. From March to May 2021, the research engaged focus groups, with participants from social movements across the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Serbia. Each social movement was represented by a focus group of core members and another of movement followers, utilising snowball sampling for participant recruitment. This method allowed for a thorough exploration of the movements' views on internal democracy, trust in institutions, and their

strategies for cooperation with both governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The investigation delved into the intricate relationship between trust and distrust across various European societies, examining the internal operations of these movements, their engagement with citizens, and the broader implications for democratic engagement and institutional trust.

Key Findings

The study revealed that most social movements are characterised by decentralised structures, where organisation is based on merit and/or practice. These groups typically delegate tasks based on individual capabilities, preferences, and availability, with decision-making primarily in the hands of core groups. Membership is conditionally inclusive, as openness to new members is contingent upon shared values and a rejection of discrimination and social exclusion. Overall, these movements embrace internal decentralisation and horizontality, prioritising deliberative practices, and highlighting the importance of equality and inclusiveness.

The EnTrust project's findings shed light on the nuanced roles of trust and distrust within the dynamics of these movements and their interaction with governance structures. It was found that a general trust is considered essential for societal functioning, but extreme forms of dis/trust – such as 'blind' or 'naive' trust, as well as general distrust – are viewed negatively. The research highlights that a moderate level of distrust is deemed beneficial, as it fosters critical thinking and vigilance among citizens. This form of scepticism encourages individuals to question and scrutinise, thereby enhancing democratic engagement and preventing complacency. On the contrary, excessive forms of trust can

undermine societal cohesion by discouraging scrutiny and allowing unchecked power to go unchallenged.

Trust plays a central role in the mobilisation of citizens within social movements, as people tend to join movements they trust. These movements also recognise the role of trust in fostering social cohesion and facilitating joint actions. The study reveals varied perceptions of trust in institutions across countries, with notable distrust in political institutions in Serbia, Italy, Poland, Greece, and the Czech Republic. In contrast, in Denmark and Germany, there is a more conditional trust towards institutions.

The study observed that cooperation between social movements and governmental institutions (GIs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is selective and often deemed necessary, but can lead to disagreement between movement members. This cooperation is mostly local (as seen in Germany, Italy, and Poland) and is perceived to have unclear, or potentially negative, effects on citizen trust, with the exception of Denmark. Hereby, the study illuminates the reciprocal nature of trust and distrust in the context of social movements' cooperation with governmental and non-governmental organisations. Trust and distrust are not static but dynamic, influencing and being influenced by the actions and interactions of these movements with institutions. This reciprocity is evident in how movements' selective cooperation with institutions can either build or erode trust. For example, positive engagements, based on shared values with NGOs, tend to enhance citizens' trust. In contrast, necessary but cautious cooperation with governmental institutions, especially when perceived as polarising or as having unclear effects, can reflect and contribute to a reciprocal cycle of distrust between citizens and political institutions. This

intricate interplay underscores the critical role of social movements in mediating trust and distrust within the fabric of democratic society.

To rebuild or strengthen trust in societies, the study suggests that local and national institutions should be more open, transparent, accountable, and actively engage with citizens. Social movements stress the importance of dialogue, exchange, and discussion with citizens, but are less vocal about actions at the EU level, likely due to a perception of EU institutions being more detached from ordinary citizens. Despite this, there is a consensus that social movements can play a significant role in enhancing citizens' trust, though opinions vary on strategies of how this could be achieved.

Regarding democracy and engagement, the importance of voting as a form of political participation varies across countries and movements. Participants across Europe agree that various forms of participation are crucial for democratic life. Social movements advocate for a more participatory and direct democracy, and believe that institutions should engage more with citizens. Social movements are viewed almost unanimously as vital actors in making citizens more visible and powerful in the public and political spheres, suggesting that active participation in these movements could empower citizens to bring about societal change.

WP4: The Role of the Media in Trust and Distrust Building: Information or Polarisation?

Research Background

The research within Work Package 4 (WP4) of the EnTrust project explored the role of political journalism and the news media as the

principal mediator of trust relationships in democracy. The WP examined different levels of trust *in* the media and trust contestation *through* the media. More specifically, it analysed how trust in democratic government and science is contested in legacy and social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. By analysing how the media portray and justify the (un-)trustworthiness of governance and expert action, the research aimed to delineate the ways in which media coverage and news commenting contribute to informed opinion-making and criticism, or, on the contrary, the polarisation of political opinions, the mobilisation of extreme positions, and the spread of disinformation that targets the trustworthiness of scientists, government and political representatives. Moreover, turning from trust contestation to possibilities of trust-building, the research shed light on good practices to secure the quality of journalism and combat disinformation.

The methodology encompassed a multifaceted approach involving data collection across seven European countries: Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Serbia. Drawing on existing opinion surveys, WP4 initiated with the mapping and comparison of changing levels of trust *in* the media in three dimensions, namely across different countries, across different types of media outlets and journalism products and across time (2010-2020/21). Subsequently, WP4 engaged in the comparative analysis of news reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic across various media outlets, generating original data about trust *through* the media. It extended to scrutinising user interactions and comments on different newspapers' Facebook pages, providing insights into public sentiment and reactions. Additionally, comprehensive interviews were conducted with experts engaged in the battle against misinformation, including those involved in fact-checking and counter-

disinformation efforts. These varied strands of investigation culminated in the synthesis of findings, which were thoroughly examined and debated in a roundtable discussion among experts, enriching the research with diverse perspectives.

Key Findings

The comprehensive findings of WP4 elucidate a detailed perspective on how trust in governance and scientific experts is contested during the pandemic emergency across different media platforms. Mainstream newspapers are generally recognised as presenting a balanced viewpoint and not fostering extremist positions. In all the countries analysed, the pandemic gave high prominence to the executive, scientists, and experts as recipients of trust, rather than to the government opposition. Similarly, the anti-lockdown or anti-vax opposition was not given a voice. The contestation of trust did not fundamentally question state authority or scientific truth, but rather invited a nuanced debate about the role of governments and scientific experts in an emergency situation. Nevertheless, health policy, and in particular the safety and efficacy of vaccines, was one of the most hotly-debated issues in the newspapers. Content-wise, trust contestations are strongly shaped by rational reasoning, focusing on performance and expertise as key trustworthiness criteria, while value-based trustworthiness criteria barely play a role. This picture of a broadly informative and balanced debate in the newspapers was reversed when analysing the contestation of trust by social media news readers in response to selected news stories on Facebook. Social media often serve as a platform for users who typically express scepticism and distrust, favouring personal values over factual accuracy to bolster their arguments. This dynamic suggests that social media may not be

conducive to facilitating balanced and trustful discourse. Traditional media, with its commitment to critical reporting and thoughtful discussion, is credited with playing a more substantial role in nurturing an environment of enlightened or critical trust among its audience.

When it comes to trust in the media, public opinion differs considerably across different countries, pointing to the significance of regional and cultural factors in shaping the public's perception of media reliability and trustworthiness. In Denmark, high levels of trust in public institutions also include media and journalism, which are generally considered as very important for society and democracy. In the Czech Republic, Germany and Italy, trust in media and journalism is at a medium level, with higher levels of trust in public service media and scepticism in the high market shares and performance of commercial media. In Greece, Serbia and Poland, trust in media and journalism is notably low, mirroring broader social challenges and a media landscape dominated by government and a few magnates, leading to a crisis of trust.

The pandemic has exacerbated the issue of disinformation in all countries, highlighting the need for comprehensive education programmes to enhance resilience against disinformation. However, there is no decline of trust in news and journalism as a pandemic effect. On the contrary, levels of trust in legacy media has remained, overall, relatively stable over a 10-year observed period, and in various countries (especially in Germany and Italy), levels of trust in the news have even slightly increased during the first two years of the pandemic.

Beyond those country-specific findings, to effectively tackle the spread of disinformation, experts suggested a multi-faceted approach. This includes reinforcing the role of

professional journalists as crucial intermediaries of trust, advocating for the redesign of social media platforms to circumvent the preferential selection of misleading content by algorithms, and highlighting the importance of European Union involvement in the co-regulation of digital platforms to maintain an equilibrium between freedom of expression and necessary oversight. Furthermore, there is a call for comprehensive training in media and news literacy, as well as robust support for fact-checking initiatives to verify information accuracy. The safety of journalists also emerges as a paramount concern, with increasing instances of smear campaigns, hate speech, and both verbal and physical attacks, particularly by non-state actors during public demonstrations, or in the course of conducting interviews. In some scenarios, state actors have been reported as having misused their authority to intimidate journalists, underscoring an urgent need for enhanced protective measures for media professionals against such aggression.

WP5: Developmental-psychological Insight into Trust and Distrust

Research Background

The aim of Work Package 5 (WP5) within the EnTrust project was to thoroughly investigate the dynamics of trust and distrust in governance across critical life stages, spanning from early adolescence to adulthood, specifically targeting the age groups 11-12, 14-15, 18-19, and 30-50. This exploration was conducted within the context of seven European countries: the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Serbia. The primary focus was to dissect the conceptualisations, correlates, and antecedents of trust and distrust, particularly in light of the measures

implemented by public authorities and institutions to control the COVID-19 pandemic.

To achieve a comprehensive understanding, the project was structured around several research questions, divided into qualitative and quantitative categories. The qualitative research sought to uncover the meanings of dis/trust in public authorities and institutions among different age groups, specifically in relation to COVID-19 control measures. It also aimed to understand how these groups construct the sources of their dis/trust in these entities, as well as in interpersonal relationships. The quantitative research, on the other hand, focused on examining the relationship between the behaviour of authorities—specifically their voice, transparency in rationale, and predictability of actions—and the public's trust or distrust and willingness to accept their decisions. Furthermore, it investigated whether these effects were additive or conditional, and considered if a sense of being respected could mediate these effects.

To address these questions, a mixed-methods design was employed, combining qualitative focus groups with a large-scale experimental survey. The initial phase involved conducting 56 focus groups with a total of 251 participants across all seven participant countries, aiming to gather rich, qualitative insights into the complex nature of trust. These insights then informed the second phase, a survey-based experiment with 4,082 participants from four selected countries (the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, and Serbia). This approach allowed for an in-depth investigation into the nuanced perceptions and conceptualisations of trust and distrust at different stages of life and within various cultural contexts.

Key Findings

In exploring the multifaceted conceptualisations of (dis)trust, participants articulated a nuanced perspective that frames trust and distrust as distinct, yet potentially coexisting dimensions. The consensus leaned towards the valorisation of moderate trust as the ideal state; this form of trust emerges from a critical evaluation of available information, rather than an unquestioned acceptance or rejection. Participants flagged the extremities of trust and distrust as undesirable, linking them to the inherent risks associated with either blindly following or outrightly rejecting authorities without due consideration. Furthermore, a foundational level of general trust in others was underscored as indispensable for the sustenance of a well-functioning society, suggesting that the significance of dis/trust is heavily context-dependent, thereby underscoring its complex and situational nature.

In the examination of the roots of dis/trust, participants pinpointed knowledgeability and perceived competency of authorities as pivotal. The demand was for decisions and policies that are not only well-founded, but also cogently explained, supported by a diversity of arguments. However, a caveat was noted: An excess of information could lead to overload, fostering uncertainty and ultimately, distrust. This delicate balance highlights the importance of providing enough information to empower understanding without being overwhelming. The vigilance of participants towards signs of policymakers acting in self-interest, especially for financial gain, underscored a critical source of distrust. Such scepticism towards motives places a premium on the integrity and altruism of decision-makers.

Moreover, trust was seen to flourish under conditions of predictability, transparency, and consistency, while distrust thrived in environments marked by unpredictability, ambiguity,

and inconsistency. The fluctuating approach to anti-Covid measures, marked by frequent changes in guidelines and policies, was a significant trust eroder, revealing the fragile nature of public confidence in governance. Trust, as emerged from the discourse, was largely experiential, sculpted and recalibrated through direct interactions with people or authorities. Noteworthy is the impact of critical experiences that could profoundly alter one's inclination to trust or distrust, a phenomenon starkly evident during the pandemic's upheavals. Furthermore, the concept of reciprocity emerged as a cornerstone of trust, with a prevailing expectation for mutual trust, especially in interpersonal relationships. While this expectation diminished in formal relationships, perceived distrust from authorities could trigger a reciprocal distrust from citizens, highlighting a complex interplay between expectations, perceptions, and experiences in the landscape of dis/trust.

The study on procedural aspects of authorities' behaviour highlighted universally positive impacts of voice, transparency in rationale, and a predictable framework across all countries and contexts, significantly enhancing trust and acceptance while reducing distrust. This triangulation of voice, transparency, and predictability not only fostered a conducive environment for trust to flourish, but also indicated that the absence or presence of any single aspect could lead to substantial shifts in trust, distrust, and acceptance across varied countries, contexts, and outcome variables. A key psychological underpinning for these positive outcomes was identified as the sense of being respected. When authorities engaged in practices that involved consultation, transparency, or provided a predictable framework, individuals felt a heightened sense of respect, which in turn catalysed greater trust, willingness to

accept decisions, and diminished levels of distrust.

Interestingly, the impact of these procedural aspects varied with age, particularly noted in younger participants within specific countries, like the Czech Republic and Serbia. Younger individuals were less swayed by transparency in rationale, suggesting that the importance of transparency's impact on trust grows with age. Additionally, this demographic exhibited a weaker response to the absence of positive procedural aspects, implying that the cumulative effects of voice, transparency, and predictability in authorities' behaviour become more pronounced with age. However, these trends were not universally observed, hinting at potential country-specific factors. Despite these variations, the overarching psychological processes governing dis/trust in authorities showed remarkable consistency across different contexts, from national decision-making to everyday management. While contextual differences were acknowledged, the research underscored the pervasive influence of general procedural aspects in shaping dis/trust relationships with authorities, suggesting a broadly applicable framework for enhancing trust across diverse settings.

As individuals progress through life, their comprehension of the society-wide implications of dis/trust evolves, enhancing their capacity to engage with distrust in a more generalised context. With age, people increasingly appreciate and critically appraise information, leveraging their accumulated life experiences to inform their trust or distrust towards others, including authorities. This maturation process equips older individuals with a nuanced understanding, allowing them to discern and navigate the complex dynamics of dis/trust more effectively.

Among the youngest cohorts, those aged 11 to 15, confidentiality, particularly in the

context of keeping secrets, emerges as a critical component in the development of trust. This contrasts with adults, who place greater emphasis on shared values and worldviews as the foundation for trust. Furthermore, for these younger individuals, familial influence plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of trust and distrust towards authorities. The reliance on parents or other family members for cues on whom or what to trust indicates a developmental stage where external, familial input is crucial in forming their understanding and attitudes towards authority figures. This highlights the significant role of age and developmental stages in the modulation of trust dynamics, suggesting that trust-building strategies may need to be tailored to different age groups to effectively foster trust and understanding across society.

WP6: Appraising Citizens' Trust and Distrust in Governance: Forms, Determinants, Effects and Remedies

Research Background

Work Package 6 (WP6) of the EnTrust project divided its analysis into two main segments, A and B, to explore the foundations and consequences of political trust and distrust within the framework of institutional behaviour and the principles of deliberative democracy. Part A launched an innovative online survey in seven European nations (the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Serbia) between January and June 2023. This survey aimed to uncover the complex array of factors, from socio-demographic details to political culture and psychological attitudes, that shape political trust and distrust. It highlighted the importance of differentiating between trust based on institutions' intentions versus their performance, offering a detailed examination of trust dynamics across Europe.

Part B, on the other hand, experimented with online deliberative polls (ODPs) on climate change in Italy, Greece, Poland, and Denmark, exploring how deliberative democracy practices influence political trust. This innovative method recruited participants from the initial survey, using varied discussion prompts to study how participatory democracy affects trust and attitudes, thereby deepening insights into how democratic engagement can foster trust.

In its pursuit of understanding political trust and distrust, Part A employed cutting-edge methodologies to dissect the layered influences shaping trust on both personal and communal levels. It focused on a representative quota sample of residents aged 18 and older from each country, proficient in the national language, examining a broad spectrum of trust determinants in different governance settings. Part B's fresh approach tested the impact of deliberative democracy on political trust through a mix of qualitative and quantitative research. Participants engaged in in-depth discussions on relevant societal issues, with the study applying statistical methods to reveal how active involvement in democracy can sculpt perceptions of trust in political institutions, showcasing the transformative potential of deliberative processes in enhancing political trust.

Key Findings

The survey's comprehensive analysis across seven countries presented a complex landscape where trust levels varied significantly between sub-national, national, and European governance, with higher trust generally placed in non-politicised institutions such as the army, police, and courts, over politicised entities like parliaments and political parties. Notably, in Poland and Serbia, national governments were more trusted than local or

regional counterparts, whereas Denmark and Germany displayed a slightly more positive perspective towards politicians, highlighting the intricate dynamics of regional and national trust. The study also underscored the impact of sociodemographic factors on trust, revealing that lower religious practice was usually linked to lower national trust, except in Denmark, and that higher education and income levels tended to correlate with greater trust in European governance, with notable exceptions in countries like Serbia.

The role of individuals' experiences with state institutions, emphasising fair treatment, transparency, and perceptions of corruption, significantly influenced political trust. In Northern and Central European countries, fair treatment by welfare institutions correlated with higher national trust, while perceived corruption eroded trust across all surveyed countries. This section pointed to the importance of fair and transparent governance in building trust, with negative experiences and corruption perceptions leading to diminished trust levels.

Political culture elements, including political interest, efficacy, anti-establishment views, and conspiracism, along with partisanship and ideological preferences, played complex roles in shaping political trust. While political efficacy was positively correlated with European trust, anti-establishment sentiments and conspiracism negatively impacted trust in both national and European governance. The analysis also highlighted a "trust gap" between those aligned with governing parties, who showed higher domestic political trust, and those favouring opposition parties, with Euro-sceptic supporters displaying lower EU-level trust. This multifaceted relationship between political participation, subjective well-being, and political trust further illustrated the diverse influences on trust in governance,

pointing to the nuanced interplay of personal political attitudes, experiences, and broader societal trends in shaping public confidence in political institutions.

Regarding segment B of WP6, the analysis of the impact of online deliberative polls (ODPs) on self-reported trust in institutions revealed limited direct effects, suggesting that the asynchronous and less immersive nature of ODPs compared to offline deliberative processes might have contributed to the difficulty in achieving statistically significant impacts on trust. However, the experiment did significantly affect several other indicators, implying that self-reported trust might not have fully captured the nuances of trust dynamics. Notably, participants expressed a desire for a more active role from public institutions in addressing discussed topics, and showed increased appreciation for direct democratic mechanisms, suggesting an aspiration for greater involvement in political debates. The findings also indicated a rise in external political efficacy, aligning with literature that suggests deliberation can enhance perceptions of political responsiveness. Moreover, the experiment influenced participants' views on specific issues, such as economic growth versus environmental protection dilemma, suggesting deliberative processes can shift opinions on key political topics.

The study further explored how different types of interactions within the deliberative setting—namely, interactions with political representatives and scientific experts—affect participants' attitudes. Exclusive interactions with politicians led to an increased recognition of political representatives' roles, and a decrease in anti-political attitudes, highlighting the potential of direct engagement with politicians to enhance political efficacy and reduce cynicism towards politics. In contrast, interactions exclusively with experts fostered

more disillusioned attitudes towards political solutions and emphasised individual actions over political engagement, pointing to a 'technocratic' shift in participants' perspectives. These findings underscored the complexity of improving institutional trust through deliberative processes, suggesting that while direct engagement with political figures could positively impact views on political intervention and trust in institutions, exclusive expert interaction might encourage a retreat from political solutions. The research highlighted the importance of proximity relations in building trust, and suggested that deliberative processes, despite the challenges posed by digital platforms, can play a critical role in bridging the gap between citizens and institutions, offering insights into effective strategies for enhancing democratic engagement and trust in an era of declining mass party engagement.

WP7: Civilising Trust and Distrust: Role Models and Recommendations

Research Background

Work Package 7 (WP7) within the EnTrust project was designed to meticulously dissect the intricate dynamics of trust and distrust characterising the interplay between civil society organisations (CSOs) and EU governance. By undertaking a comprehensive analysis, WP7 aimed to map out the current landscape, delineate the role of trust in these interactions, and unearth potential avenues to enhance dialogue and cooperation.

Adopting a mixed-methods approach, WP7 embarked on a multi-faceted investigation that includes analysing the evolution of civil participation in EU governance, exploring the genesis and conditions fostering CSOs' trust in EU institutions, and evaluating the practices of civil dialogue that are deemed trustworthy at both EU and Member State levels. The

methodology encompasses a broad spectrum of data collection techniques, including desk research, surveys, focus groups, and interviews with representatives from various civil society organisations, thereby ensuring a rich and nuanced understanding of the factors influencing trust dynamics within the context of EU governance.

Key Findings

The study on the evolution of civil society engagement in EU governance did not conclusively determine if EU institutions' disregard for CSOs stems from a lack of trust. However, it highlighted that trust in the EU is fundamentally based on the principles and values enshrined in the EU Treaties, emphasising normative principles like 'good governance' detailed in the 2001 White Paper on Governance. This document signifies a shift in EU policy from merely disseminating information, as seen with the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997, to enhancing participation and formalising engagement with intermediary bodies. The 'Qatargate' scandal in 2022 marked a setback, diminishing CSO participation, but recent trends show a renewed effort to recognise and formalise CSOs' role in democratic governance at the EU level. The concept of good governance within the EU is understood to involve a balance of trust and a measure of distrust, as reflected in the European Parliament resolutions 2022/2075(INI) and 2023/2034(INI), showcasing elements of both trust and distrust.

In the context of the EU, distinguishing between institutional trust and interpersonal trust reveals that while both are anchored in the Union's foundational principles and values, their development paths diverge. Institutional trust arises within the legal and institutional frameworks that govern interactions

and expectations, highlighting the role of structured environments in fostering trust. However, the presence of legal frameworks alone does not guarantee trust at an individual level, indicating that interpersonal trust stems more directly from personal experiences and interactions.

Trust, both institutional and interpersonal, is deemed essential for the operation of civil CSOs within the EU, serving as a critical foundation for collaboration and facilitating access to EU institutions. This dynamic underscores the nuanced role of trust and distrust in the activities of CSOs, with trust facilitating engagement and distrust prompting caution and critical engagement. The importance of distrust, while acknowledged, varies among respondents, suggesting a complex interpretation of its role in CSO activities.

The bidirectional nature of trust between civil society organisations (CSOs) and EU institutions underscores a pivotal aspect of their interaction. While trust in the EU is crucial for CSOs' operations, being trusted by EU institutions emerges as equally significant. For political decision-making to transcend mere formalities and become genuinely effective and meaningful, CSOs must be trusted, recognised, and respected by these institutions, a condition that, regrettably, is not universally met. This dynamic highlights the critical role of trust in enabling substantive engagement and collaboration.

Over time, the perception of trust in the EU among respondents has shown a diverse trajectory, with roughly equal numbers reporting an increase and decrease in trust, while a significant portion observed no change. This variability points to the complex and evolving nature of trust relations within the EU context. Furthermore, the concept of mutual trust and respect was emphasised by respondents and focus group participants as essential for

effective collaboration. The notion that trust is reciprocal and must flow in both directions for constructive engagement was widely recognised. A key facilitator of this mutual trust was the shared perception of a joint mission, suggesting that alignment of objectives and values could significantly bolster the trust and alliances between CSOs and EU institutions, reinforcing the importance of mutual understanding and shared goals in fostering a cooperative and trusting environment.

Trustworthy civil dialogue on EU affairs is paramount for fostering trust in EU governance. Meaningful involvement of citizens and their organisations in decision-making processes enhances the likelihood that policies will be responsive to the needs of the community, thereby contributing positively to trust in governance. Establishing transparent processes, assigning clear responsibilities to designated individuals within institutions, and clarifying the roles of all stakeholders are essential steps towards building trust. However, the absence of civil dialogue, and the failure to meet expectations, can significantly erode trust in EU institutions. Trust is most effectively cultivated when democracy is seen to produce policies that benefit all constituents—humans, animals, and the environment alike. The participation of CSOs in the entirety of the decision-making process is crucial to achieving this aim. Despite a collective wish for consultations to be more transparent, democratic, and inclusive, the European Parliament and EU institutions currently lack a coherent strategy for civil dialogue, often favouring unidirectional communication with the public. While the recent 'citizen turn' at the EU level has been criticised for being merely tokenistic, there have been notably positive steps, such as the collaboration with the European Students' Union, indicating potential for more substantive engagement.

At the Member State level, effectively communicating EU affairs remains a challenge, sometimes breeding distrust. The practices surrounding civil dialogue significantly differ across Member States, with existing frameworks and mechanisms to involve civil society in shaping national positions on EU draft laws often falling short of ensuring consistent and meaningful engagement. Despite these efforts, CSOs across the EU are confronted with challenges that include new disadvantageous laws, restrictions on the right to protest, and attacks on activists, raising alarms over the shrinking space for civil society. These issues highlight the complex landscape of civil dialogue within the EU, underscoring the need for more concerted efforts to foster a truly inclusive, transparent, and trustworthy dialogue that can bridge the gap between EU institutions, Member States, and civil society.

Project Information

The EnTrust project is funded by the EU in the context of the Horizon2020 Research and Innovation Programme (Grant Agreement No. 870572). The EnTrust consortium consists of eight partner teams conducting research and dissemination activities in seven countries (the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Serbia) and at the EU-level. Its work-plan consists of seven work-packages devoted to the systematic analysis and reflection of different aspects of the topic.

Further information on the EnTrust project is available at www.entrust-project.eu

Consortium:

[Civil Society Europe](#) (Brussels, Belgium)

[Masaryk University](#) (Brno, Czech Republic)

[Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences](#) (Athens, Greece)

[University of Belgrade, Institute of Philosophy and Social Theory](#) (Serbia)

[University of Copenhagen](#) (Denmark)

[University of Siegen](#) (Germany)

[University of Siena](#) (Italy)

[University of Warsaw](#) (Poland)

Contact

Prof Dr Christian Lahusen
Project coordinator
University of Siegen
Department of Social Sciences
Adolf-Reichwein-Str. 2
57068 Siegen – Germany
e-mail: entrust@uni-siegen.de

Social Media Links



Project Information

Project Type: Collaborative Project
Call: H2020 SC6 GOVERNANCE-01-2019: Trust in Governance
Start date: February 2020
Duration: 48 months
Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Christian Lahusen, University of Siegen
Grant Agreement No: 870572
EU-funded Project Budget: € 2,978,151.25



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 870572. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Union.