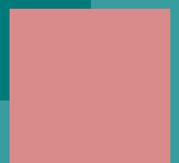
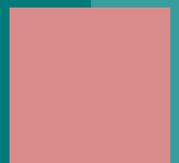
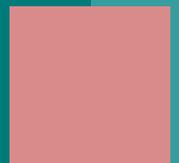
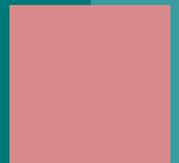




Guide on 'enlightened trust'

EnTrust: Enlightened Trust:
An Examination of Trust
and Distrust in Governance –
Conditions, Effects and
Remedies

Deliverable 8.10



Guide on 'enlightened trust'

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EnTrust: Enlightened Trust: An Examination of Trust and Distrust in Governance – Conditions, Effects and Remedies

WP8:

Dissemination, exploitation and communication of research

Work Package Leader:

USIEGEN

Due date:

30 April 2024

Submission date:

30 April 2024

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1. Introduction

Trust in governance is an intensively debated topic, particularly within democratic systems. It receives wide attention because the trust expressed by citizens is taken as an indicator for the level of public support and perceived legitimacy of elected politicians, state institutions and the political system. It is regarded as a condition of active citizens' engagement and an asset, without which democratic forms of governance could not exist. For this reason, considerable efforts have been made to collect and evaluate data on the state of public trust across time and space.

Survey data across the world demonstrate that levels of trust in governance have been decreasing since the 2000s,² thus suggesting that several crises (e.g., the Great Recession, the Covid-19 pandemic, war) are contributing to a sense of growing uncertainty and dissatisfaction with political institutions across countries. However, this observation comes with several caveats. The decline in trust does not affect all political institutions and countries at the same time or pace. Moreover, public trust in political institutions is subject to long-term fluctuations, suggesting that citizens respond to changing circumstances and institutional performance. Finally, the consequences and implications of fluctuating levels of trust are not self-evident, and therefore require careful consideration. All these qualifications highlight the complexity of the issue and the need for reliable knowledge about forms and levels of trust, their determinants, consequences, and implications.

This guide offers evidence and advice on the challenges that need to be addressed, the warning signs that need to be taken seriously, and the direction in which improvements should be made. For this purpose, it aims to provide a concise picture of the available knowledge that has been built up by scientific research over the last decade. It builds on the findings of the EU-funded EnTrust project, which is dedicated to the analysis of trust in governance from comparative and interdisciplinary perspectives.

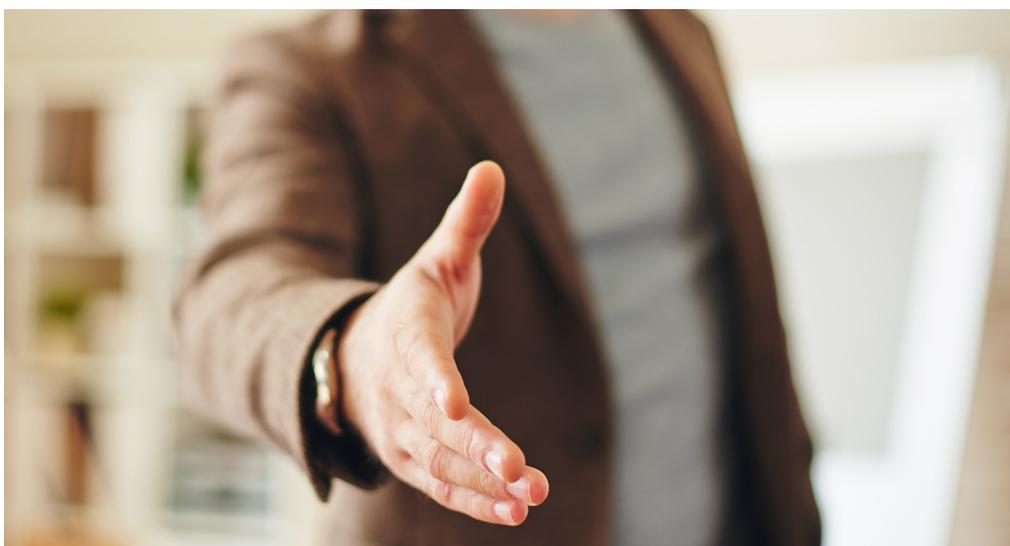
In particular, the guide will present findings from a systematic literature review and meta-analysis of relevant academic studies,³ as well as results that the original En-Trust fieldwork and data analysis contribute to this knowledge. The guide begins by describing forms and levels of trust and distrust in governance. It then moves on to identify the key determinants that influence the formation or erosion of trust and distrust, key events or circumstances that influence the development over time, and the consequences of lower or higher levels of trust and distrust. Against this background, a description of scenarios will be presented. Overall, the aim of this document is to provide orientation and guidance to those actors interested in promoting vibrant democratic governance.

2. Trust and distrust: meaning, forms and levels

Trust in governance is a multifaceted phenomenon that requires a brief exploration in two respects. What is meant by the concept of trust? How is trust in governance measured in terms of empirical data? And what do we know about the forms and levels of trust in governance across countries and over time?

How is trust conceptualised and measured?

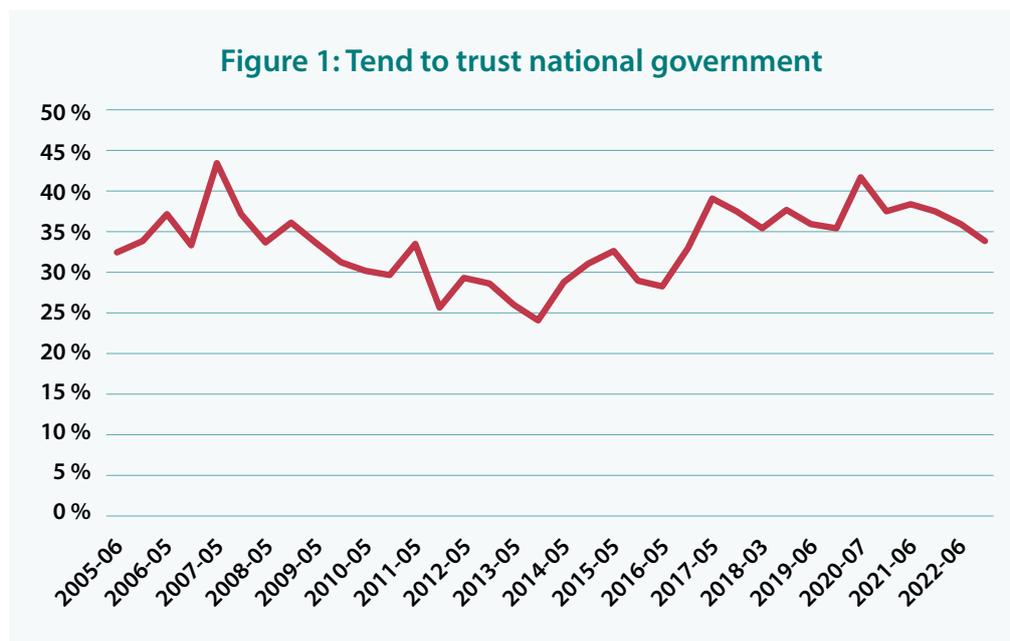
Trust has been the focus of attention in a wide range of scientific disciplines. Despite differences, there is agreement that trust is a behavioural rule that shapes our actions, as well as an attitude that expresses individual dispositions and expectations. Trust is commonly defined as the willingness to rely on a person, group or institution to fulfil a commitment. Distrust would express an expectation of unfulfilled commitments, deceptive or harmful actions by a trustee. In the case of political institutions, it can be added that these expectations refer to mandated commitments attributed to the institutions and their officeholders, either formally through constitutional obligations, or informally through political practice. In empirical research, it has become standard practice to measure these attitudes in terms of general inclinations. Respondents are asked whether they tend to trust a number of different trustees, ranging from 'most people' to specific institutions (e.g., governments, parliaments, politicians, courts, mass media, NGOs or companies) at different levels of governance (e.g., local, regional, national, European).



Response categories are either nominal choices (e.g., 'tend to trust', 'tend not to trust'), or continuous scales (e.g., 5-11-point scales ranging from 'not trust at all' to 'trust completely').

What does public trust in governance look like?

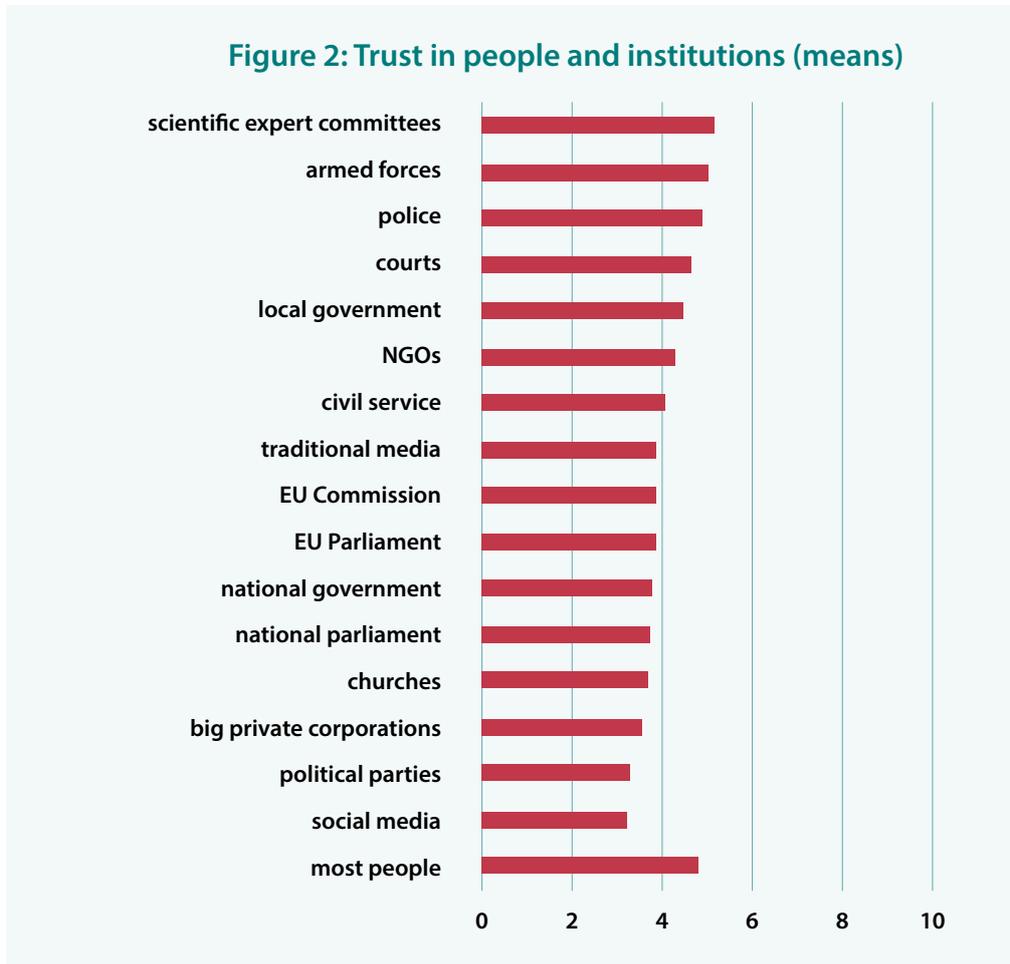
The advantage of this standard practice is that it has made it possible to collect survey data that are comparable over time and space. From the results of successive mass population surveys, three general lessons can be drawn about the extent and dynamics of trust in governance. As Figure 1 shows, trust in institutions – here: in national governments – tends to evolve dynamically, even when we look at a composite picture of trust levels across all EU Member States. Fluctuations are more pronounced when national specificities are considered. The data show that public trust is sensitive to changing realities. Witnessing a downturn during the 2009 and 2015 economic crises, it subsequently recovered, as demonstrated by the trend preceding the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Source: Eurobarometer 2005-2023 – all EU members states

The second lesson to draw is that the willingness to trust diverges considerably between institutions. The findings of the EnTrust survey confirm the observation of previous research that citizens express (on average) only moderate levels of trust in public institutions. Law enforcing and non-majoritarian institutions (police, courts, armed forces) are perceived as more trustworthy than majoritarian, executive and law-making institutions

(governments, parliaments, political parties). Scientific experts rank highly, NGOs and traditional media are located at an intermediate level, while private corporations and social media are not considered trustworthy.



Source: EnTrust survey, 2022

The third lesson highlights the impact of national disparities. Citizens from various countries and world regions show varying degrees of willingness to place confidence in public institutions. Referencing national governments illustrates this point, as findings indicated above show that trust in them is typically lower. Within Europe, people were more confident in Sweden (a mean of 2.5) and the least confident in Greece (1.7). Other countries, like Germany (2.3), Hungary (2.2) and France, Poland, and the UK (2.0), are placed at intermediate levels, on a 4-point scale. Differences are more apparent when moving outside Europe, with high confidence in Asian countries, and the lowest levels in Latin America, with strong divergences within Africa. It demonstrates that Western democracies are normally characterised as having lower levels of institutional trust.

Figure 3: Confidence in national governments (means)



Source: World Value Study (2017-2020)

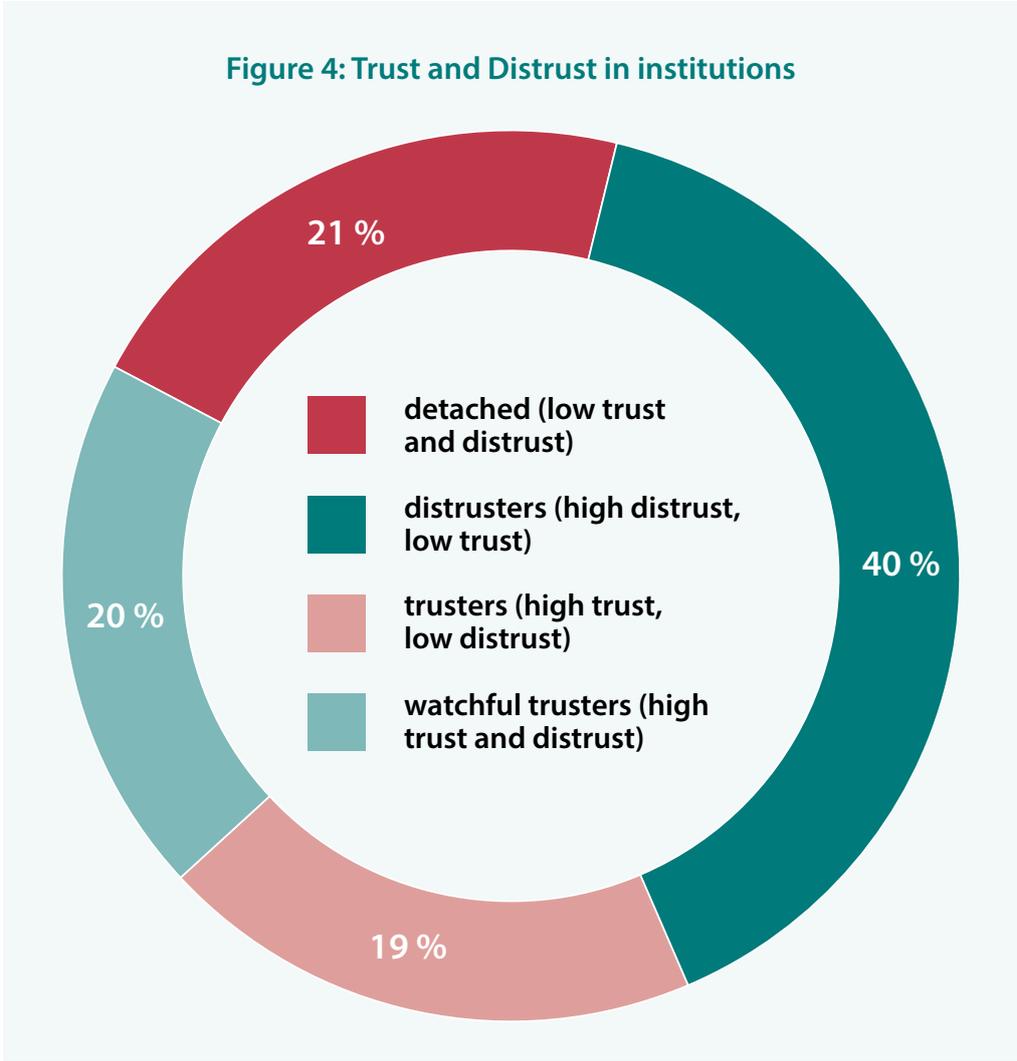
Why do we need to consider trust and distrust at the same time?

The considerable differences between countries suggests that standard measures of trust might overestimate differences because a generalised disposition to trust national governments does not exclude distrust, and vice versa. Conventional studies assume that trust and distrust are poles on a continuum, where the absence of trust implies distrust, and vice versa. However, the EnTrust project has demonstrated that trust and distrust indeed co-exist. Democratic systems of governance, in particular, build on a division of powers between the executive, legislative and judiciary, on independent mass media and organised civil society, thus providing room for the expression of distrust. And these arrangements and arenas for voicing and processing distrust are essential to ensuring public trust in democratic governance.

Citizens contribute to this nuanced landscape by blending trust and distrust towards political institutions in varying forms and intensities (see Figure 4). One in four respondents reports low levels of trust and distrust in political

institutions,⁴ thus representing a posture of detachment and disconnection from the political system and its institutions, which should raise concerns as it signals strong political alienation. The largest group is composed of those citizens who are more distrustful than trustful of institutions, believing that the system is flawed and needs to be treated with doubt. On the trusting side, a quarter of respondents display unconditional trust in political institutions, with little to no distrust. A further quarter express high levels of both trust and distrust. They express a general tendency to trust political institutions, but at the same time, they have their doubts and believe that the political system has flaws that signal untrustworthiness. They adopt an attitude of vigilant or enlightened trust.

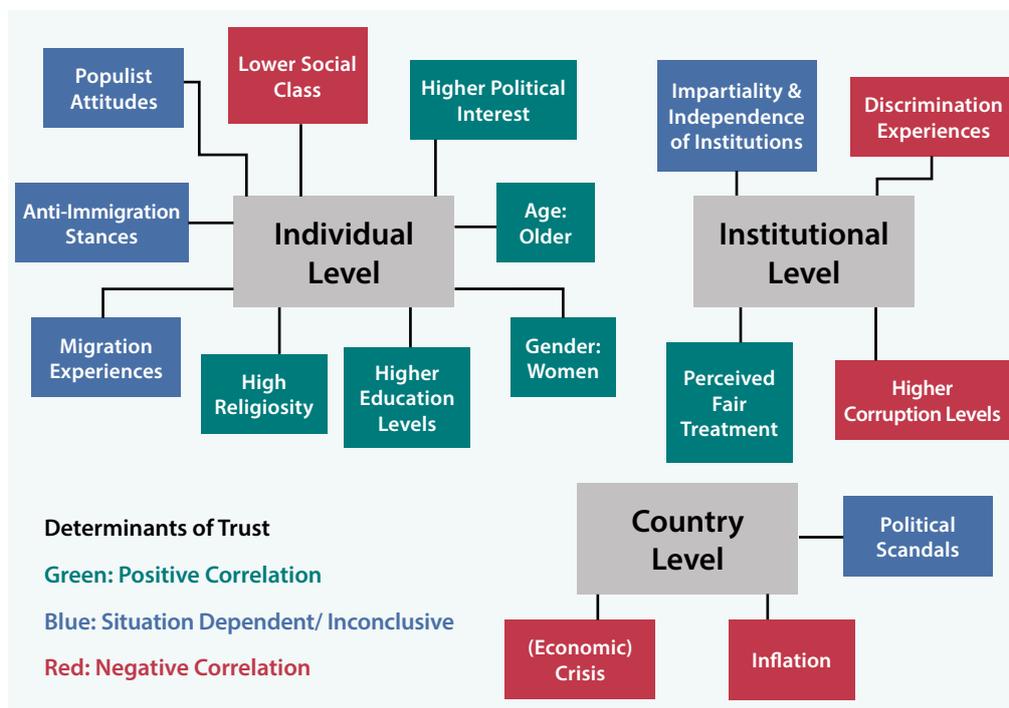
Figure 4: Trust and Distrust in institutions



Source: EnTrust survey, 2022

3. Determinants

The observations so far prompt important questions regarding why trust levels differ so markedly across various nations. But what are the contributing factors to the varied evolutions of trust within different national settings? And how is trust both established and preserved in the political domain? To address these questions, a meta-analysis of pertinent scholarly research² was conducted, which allowed us to identify a series of determinants. Critical factors comprise individual traits, institutional frameworks, and broader national conditions.



Source: EnTrust Literature Research²

Initially, an **archetype of a high-trust citizen** could be described as follows: An older, highly-educated woman, engaged in religious practices, with a keen interest in political news and affairs. She believes in the impartiality and fairness of institutions, and lives in a country with economic stability and low levels of corruption. The variety of determinants that give rise to this archetype can be listed as follows.

At the **individual level**, research identifies age, education, and gender as significant predictors of political trust. Women, those with higher education levels, and older adults, tend to have more faith in political institutions. This may be attributed to their extensive life experiences, which enhance their perception of the intricacies within political governance. At the same time, more education also seems to pay off, probably because it instils civic

engagement and critical examination of political systems from an early age. Education, therefore, seems to be an important asset in promoting trust and critical citizenship. Moreover, the link between religiosity and trust indicates that individuals engaged in religious communities often exhibit higher levels of trust, possibly due to the communal and ethical frameworks provided by such affiliation. While the literature review hints that most of these findings hold true across non-European contexts, it suggests that in the context of autocratic regimes, higher education levels might, in fact, lead to increased distrust in governance, requiring further investigation.

The complexity of trust dynamics is further illustrated by the varied impacts of personal migration experiences. For instance, non-EU migrants in certain contexts display higher political trust, appreciating an improved quality of life in their host country, yet they may also experience lower trust due to discrimination and stigmatisation. This implies a need for a two-pronged strategy: enhancing quality of life to foster positive experiences, while simultaneously combating discrimination and stigmatisation to build a more inclusive and trusting environment for all. Adding to these observations, socio-economic status, particularly income level, emerges as another crucial determinant of trust. Individuals from lower-income backgrounds tend to exhibit lower levels of trust in political institutions. This discrepancy can be linked to socio-economic disadvantages, which may limit their access to resources, opportunities, and positive interactions with political systems, underscoring the importance of addressing economic disparities to enhance trust across all societal segments.

Interest in politics and engagement with political news typically correlate with higher trust in institutions. The presence of trust frequently hinges on the congruence, or discord, between the political preferences or ideas of citizens and the actions of their governments: gaps between what governments do and what citizens believe lead to a reduction in trust. For instance, liberal immigration policies tend to reduce trust among those with anti-immigrant views, while the presence of a populist party in power can actually boost trust among individuals with populist inclinations. This indicates that trust and distrust, in themselves, are neither inherently beneficial nor detrimental. Indeed, substantial trust in populist governments may present challenges from a democratic perspective, potentially obstructing democratic practices and principles. This situation reveals that trust's significance is context-dependent, with varied implications for the health of democracy.

At the **institutional level**, how citizens perceive fairness plays a critical role in shaping trust in politics, where institutions that operate effectively cultivate a feeling of justice, subsequently boosting trust levels in European environments. However, the link between institutional impartiality and political trust is nuanced, influenced by socio-economic disparities. High impartiality does not always translate to trust; particularly, vulnerable

groups often trust less, pointing to a misalignment in benefits. Additionally, judicial independence, while mostly considered crucial for system integrity, fails to directly lift political trust. This indicates the importance of strategies that bridge trust gaps, such as enhancing judicial transparency, and making efforts to address the specific concerns of vulnerable communities. Simplifying judicial transparency and accessibility could counteract distrust by showcasing the real-world impact of judicial independence, ensuring fairness is both perceived and real.

Generally, on the **country level**, economic stability and low levels of corruption and crime are strongly associated with higher trust in political systems. Economic challenges and political scandals, such as post-pandemic inflation or corruption affairs, can significantly erode trust. For instance, post-Covid-19 pandemic inflation in the Netherlands led to decreased trust in the European Central Bank and the Dutch Central Bank, which, in turn, reduced political trust countrywide. These findings highlight the critical role of institutional performance, including effective economic management and anti-corruption measures, in sustaining public trust, aligning with key political science theories on the relationship between governance quality and trust levels.

Due to the dominant focus of scientific literature on institutional trust, there is little consolidated evidence on the determinants of **institutional distrust**. EnTrust findings, however, allow us to shed new light on this topic. On the one hand, the EnTrust survey was interested in mapping dispositions of doubtfulness and distrust, the latter measured in terms of perceived categorical institutional untrustworthiness. The results show that a significant proportion of respondents combine institutional trust, doubtfulness and distrust. This attitude of vigilant trust is particularly prevalent among older citizens, i.e., trust, doubtfulness and distrust all increase with age. At the same time, trust and distrust appear to be sensitive to different factors at varying degrees. For instance, higher education typically boosts trust and doubtfulness while diminishing distrust, a trend similarly observed with self-reported political interest. Belonging to lower social classes has a stronger effect on lowering levels of trust, while it only slightly increases doubtfulness and distrust. At the same time, distrust is more affected by perceptions of bribery in public services, whereas trust shows greater resilience under such conditions. On the other hand, the analyses demonstrate that dynamics of trust and distrust between citizens and political institutions are driven by different principles of trustworthiness and untrustworthiness. Distrust appears particularly sensitive to relational characteristics (e.g., lack of respect, reliability, and responsiveness) and institutional performance (e.g., past failures, experienced harm and discrimination), while trust seems to be particularly sensitive to procedural characteristics (e.g., voice, transparency, and predictability) and personal ethics (e.g., integrity, competence, empathy, benevolence).

4.

Events and Thresholds

This chapter explores the dynamic nature of trust in political institutions, emphasising how trust fluctuates in response to various factors and events. It highlights the complex interplay of influences that shape trust over time, illustrating its inherently fluid and evolving character. The literature review² utilised expanded research on key events from previous empirical studies, favouring longitudinal data to capture prolonged periods of stable trust, punctuated by significant shifts linked to these events.

The democratic process inherently generates **events** that significantly impact the development of trust. Specifically, elections cycles show influence on the development of political trust, whereby, in the course of election events, an increase in trust can often be observed across different national European contexts. However, the trust-building effect of elections is contingent on the procedural integrity and perceived fairness of the elections. Additionally, election outcomes are significantly shaped by individuals' political alignments, with "winner-loser"-effects influencing trust in politics. This dynamic, coupled with increasing polarisation, can exacerbate divisions, as election winners and losers perceive and react to outcomes differently, often leading to lower levels of political trust among the latter. This effect is particularly pronounced among populist party supporters, where electoral outcomes heavily impact their political trust, especially in democratically weaker systems.

Events beyond formal electoral activities, such as policy initiatives or crises, also play a crucial role in shaping public trust in governmental institutions.



Actions taken by the government, especially those related to redistributive policies, along with how effectively and fairly these policies are perceived to represent the public interest, significantly influence trust levels. Economic fluctuations and crises, including the Covid-19 pandemic, are pivotal in this regard. While such crises can initially prompt a "rallying effect" – a phenomenon where communities come together in solidarity to face a common threat – this unity is often temporary. Research underscores the role of societal context, and how the public perceives these events in determining their effect on political trust. Generally, however, trust tends to erode in the long run, especially after events like pandemics or economic downturns, when the adverse effects lead to a negative perception of the government's response.

Politicians can significantly influence political trust beyond their official roles, through personal appeal or scandals. Negative perceptions of individual politicians can reflect poorly on the institutions they represent, particularly if people are predisposed to distrusting politicians. Politicians are often judged collectively, with individual actions seen as reflective of broader political values, especially in cases of perceived hypocrisy, like violations of pandemic lockdown rules by politicians. In this context, research underscores the media's pivotal role in shaping political trust, emphasising the importance of how information is conveyed. Media coverage that brings issues to light can foster increased public awareness and constructive scepticism. This media scrutiny encourages citizens to question more, and demands greater transparency and integrity from political leaders and institutions. However, an overemphasis on scandalous content can amplify existing cynical views towards politics, resulting in deepening distrust.

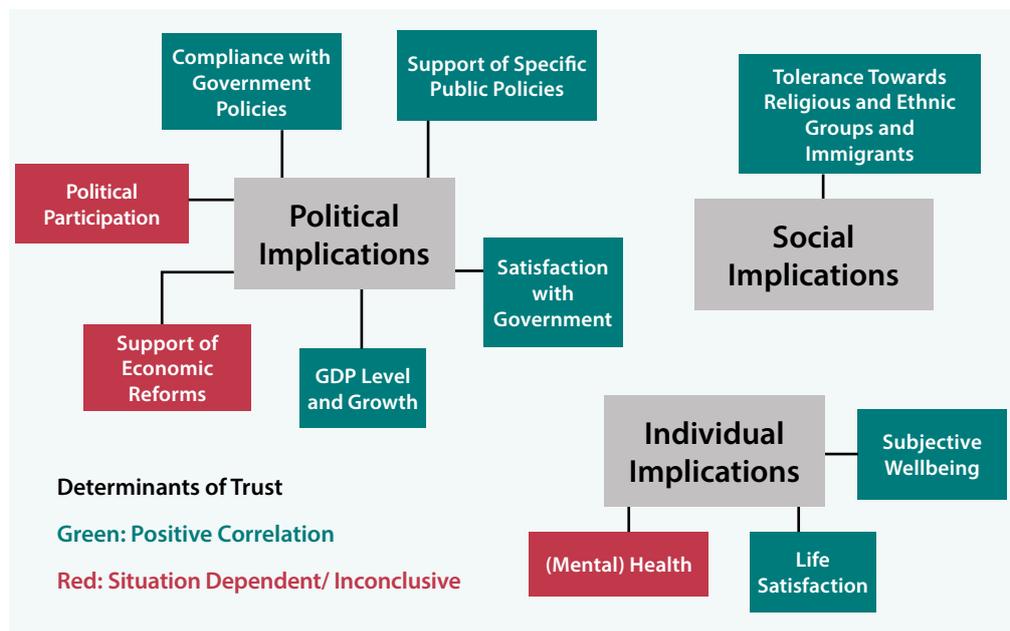
Compared to evidence on critical events, there is limited consolidated evidence regarding **thresholds** or tipping points. However, suggestions can be extrapolated from previous research and EnTrust findings. The results from longitudinal studies presented before indicate that levels of institutional trust fluctuate, reflecting contextual and circumstantial conditions. This suggests that political systems have the potential to restore or repair eroding trust, depending on how they respond to negative contextual challenges. In this respect, the quality of governance, and the performance of political institutions, are key. Beyond policy outcomes, the expression and processing of distrust plays a crucial role, as restoring institutional trust requires accepting distrust as a legitimate option available to citizens and state authorities. Liberal democracies possess this capability through a variety of legal, administrative, and political mechanisms that facilitate the direct (e.g., public access to information, judicial review, elections) and indirect (e.g., guarantees of free media, organised civil society, separation of powers) expression and processing of political distrust.



A critical threshold seems to be reached when generalised distrust outweighs trust. Such a situation is likely when three conditions converge: societal challenges, inadequate institutional performance, and failures of distrust-processing institutions. Under these conditions, a spread of generalised and categorical distrust can be expected, which could lead to self-reinforcing or self-fulfilling effects. In addition, spill-over effects are to be expected, as distrust in institutions may extend to mistrust in office holders by default, thereby reducing the capacity of institutional representatives to restore trust. Similar spill-over effects can be expected among political institutions, the mass media and organised civil society, further limiting the ability to express distrust and facilitate trust restoration. Under these conditions, generalised distrust is mobilised outside the realms of political institutions, the mass media and organised civil society, consequently undermining the possibilities for trust building. These explorations suggest that distrust exerts a faster and more immediate impact when thresholds are surpassed, while trust necessitates a more extended period for building. Therefore, in the context of thresholds and tipping points, distrust emerges as a more critical factor. However, the challenge does not lie in preventing expressions of distrust, but in identifying effective strategies to address them.

5. Consequences

Grasping the consequences of trust is crucial for addressing its profound impact on the fabric of society and the effectiveness of political systems. Exploring the ramifications of trust, the literature review² highlighted three key categories: political, social, and individual implications. Thereby, a complex interplay of trust and distrust relations needs to be considered in order to navigate the multifaceted challenges and opportunities that shape collective and personal experiences.



Source: EnTrust Literature Research²

In the realm of **politics and law**, trust encourages the public to adhere to laws, support government policies, and express satisfaction with governmental actions. High trust levels lead to greater compliance with legal duties, cooperation with authorities during crises (like the Covid-19 pandemic), fulfilment of tax obligations, and avoidance of illegal activities. Trust also underpins support for various public policies, especially in areas such as environmental protection and immigration, demonstrating its wide-reaching impact on political engagement and public opinion. In the **economic realm**, countries characterised by higher trust levels often enjoy better economic health, as trust promotes economic freedom and catalyses long-term growth. Beyond its political and economic ramifications, trust also significantly influences social dynamics and **individual well-being**. Higher levels of trust correlate with greater social tolerance and positive attitudes toward diversity, including immigration. On a personal level, trust is linked

to increased happiness and life satisfaction, underscoring its role in promoting social belonging and personal fulfilment.

However, the story does not end with trust. **Distrust** has its own set of **beneficial outcomes**, as evidenced by the findings of EnTrust, and corroborated by prior research. Distrust encourages active information seeking, critical questioning and vigilance of public authorities, serving as a preventative measure against exploitation and enhancing protection, particularly in contexts marked by social vulnerability and political pressures. Additionally, distrust stimulates political engagement beyond conventional, ritualistic forms of participation. It can act as a catalyst, encouraging individuals to seek alternative avenues to express their political opinions and influence change. This includes involvement in movements, associations, and various forms of civic engagement that fall outside traditional electoral politics.

Interestingly, while distrust may drive individuals towards these non-traditional forms of participation, it simultaneously fosters a new form of trust within these alternative structures. Engagement in movements and associations can cultivate a sense of trust and solidarity among participants, creating cohesive groups united by common goals and shared beliefs. Moreover, when institutions respond to these forms of engagement in a receptive and adaptive manner, trust in these institutions can be rebuilt or strengthened. This dynamic illustrates how trust and distrust can coexist and influence each other within the political landscape, contributing to a more vibrant and responsive democratic process.

Yet, it is crucial to acknowledge distrust's potential for leading to **less constructive outcomes**. As demonstrated by research, high levels of systemic distrust can fuel the rise of anti-democratic sentiments and the proliferation of conspiracy theories. Anti-establishment movements often thrive on widespread distrust in established political institutions and elites, appealing to a sense of disenfranchisement among the populace. Similarly, conspiracy theories gain traction in environments where distrust in official information and narratives is rampant. Both phenomena highlight the destructive potential of unchecked distrust, underscoring the importance of fostering an environment that encourages dialogue and critical evaluation. Such an institutional environment can build trust through transparent, accountable action, while maintaining opportunities for the expression and processing of distrust. This not only mitigates the negative impacts of distrust but also harnesses its potential to stimulate positive change and innovation within society.

6.

Scenarios

Drawing from the literature review,² it is possible to delineate hypothetical scenarios that encapsulate the complex landscape of trust relationships. Initially, the polar extremes of trust, termed "Trustopia" and "Distrustia", are explored before transitioning to the third scenario "Equilibria".⁵ The emphasis is not on the detailed institutional structures of these ideal types, but rather on understanding the wider implications of trust dynamics. In reality, actual societies exhibit features of these models to varying degrees, blending elements from each to form their unique trust landscapes.

Trustopia epitomises the essence of a high-trust society, which is characterised by a thriving community under the banner of a transparent and responsive governance. However, this utopian landscape is susceptible to a dystopian transformation as the bedrock of Trustopia's prosperity – unwavering trust in authority – begins to evolve. As soon as unconditional trust shifts towards blind obedience, Trustopia's governance model devolves from inclusive dialogue to an autocratic rule. Leaders, who are capitalising on this form of absolute trust, consolidate their power and suppress any form of dissent or debate. Policies, rather than being subjected to public scrutiny, are unquestioningly embraced, veiling the gradual erosion of freedoms. This authoritarian regime – underpinned by elements of traditional rule, a cult of personality, or the guise of benevolent authority – exploits trust by diminishing diversity and suppressing opposition, with the leader's ubiquitous presence feigning unity while also fostering a culture of uniformity and suppression.

While the social fabric of Trustopia was once rich with diverse and critical thought, it is now dominated by obedience, indicating a shift from a utopia of trust to a dystopian context. A protective blanket of security insidiously morphs into a shroud of obedience as the state recalibrates education and information flow, emphasising uniformity over critical analysis. Consequently, citizens, once vibrant participants of society, become a homogeneous entity, their compliance indicative not of trust, but of manipulation.

In contrast, **Distrustia** is a land marked by an omnipresent scepticism and its citizens' profound mistrust in the political landscape. Here, perceptions of corruption and economic mismanagement permeate society, eroding trust in the very fabric of political institutions. In Distrustia, the educated and economically secure find themselves increasingly disillusioned, their critical eyes casting shadows over the efficacy and integrity of governance. The political arena of Distrustia is a theatre of volatility, with electoral processes frequently undermined by instability and polarisation. Trust might peak momentarily around events such as elections, however, soon dispersing again into the ether of public discourse. The media, once viewed as a backbone of democ-

racy, now mainly serves as a battleground for competing narratives, further widening the gap between government and governed.

In Distrustia, historical grievances mingle with contemporary woes, crafting a societal tapestry woven with threads of pessimism and disillusionment. The legacy of past crises lingers, colouring perceptions and attitudes toward democracy and governance. Political engagement, though varied, often yields to a sense of futility among citizens, who view participation through a lens of scepticism. However, despite the overall environment of distrust, some communities or institutions have managed to maintain a level of credibility and trust. Nonetheless, these exceptions are isolated and not widespread enough to counteract the pervasive climate of distrust that characterises the situation.

The third ideal type, called **Equilibria**, represents a blend of trust and distrust within the societal fabric, standing in contrast to the polar extremes of Trustopia and Distrustia. Equilibria is characterised by a balanced approach to governance and social interactions, where trust in institutions is neither blind nor absent, but judiciously measured and contingent on the transparency, accountability, and performance of institutions. Education plays a crucial role, not just in fostering critical thinking skills, but in equipping citizens to navigate complex information landscapes, discerning fact from misinformation, and encouraging citizens to engage in constructive scepticism. This critical engagement ensures that trust is earned and maintained through continuous dialogue between state and citizens, which fosters a dynamic where trust can be questioned and verified, preventing a shift to blind obedience or cynical disengagement.

The governance model of Equilibria is inclusive and responsive, where authority figures are held accountable by those they govern. This accountability mechanism ensures that policies and decisions are subject to scrutiny, debate and revision, reflecting the collective will and benefitting the common good. The media in Equilibria serves as a critical intermediary, providing a platform for diverse voices and perspectives, while maintaining a commitment to factual reporting. In this context, trust is not seen as a finite resource, but as a renewable one, which is sustained by acts of integrity, responsiveness, and community engagement. Thus, the societal fabric of Equilibria can be defined as one of balanced optimism, where trust and distrust coexist concurrently, enabling individuals and communities to thrive in a state of constructive equilibrium.



7. Conclusions

Against the backdrop of the literature research, and the previously presented trust scenarios, a balanced approach that eschews the extremes of excessive trust and pervasive distrust is essential. At the same time, however, it is vital to acknowledge that both trust and distrust inhabit a central role within democratic contexts. While trust is an indispensable aspect in enabling effective governance, democracies create regular occasions for distrust, and institutional opportunities for its verbalisation. Thus, distrust does not need to be problematic in itself; rather, it is also an important trait of an active and critical citizenry.

The research findings presented in this guide have a number of implications for preventive and remedial action. As outlined in an integrated policy paper,⁶ the EnTrust project calls for action around four objectives. These are: strengthening the rule of law and fundamental rights, including greater transparency and accountability of political institutions and support for local democracy; enhancing media freedom and the fight against disinformation; empowering citizens' groups, social movements and civil society, and ensuring a participatory legal and institutional framework at all levels; and promoting inclusive education and media literacy, increasing youth political participation, and strengthening deliberative democracy mechanisms.

Paramount aspects are transparency and accountability, whereby institutions should operate openly, make decision-making processes visible as well as subject to public scrutiny in order to build predictable and justifiable trust relations. Simultaneously, fostering a critically-engaged citizenship through forms of education that promote critical thinking skills is crucial. In this way,



citizens can be empowered to discern facts from misinformation, while a healthy scepticism is recognised as a safeguard against blind trust or unwarranted distrust.

To cultivate a trust environment where diverse voices contribute to decision-making, responsive governance is crucial, policies should be the result of an inclusive dialogue among heterogeneous social groups and individuals. The expression of distrust, for example, through social movements or other non-traditional forms of participation, should be enabled, and their demands and contributions not rejected prematurely. Facilitating active involvement in local governance and initiatives in the long run strengthens social cohesion and fosters a sense of belonging, making individuals more likely to trust both local and broader institutional structures. Responsive government structures nurture trust by demonstrating attentiveness to the populace's concerns and aspirations.



Furthermore, media integrity and a diversity of perspectives are essential for maintaining an informed society. Adherence to factual reporting and ethical standards, coupled with promoting a plurality of voices, combats misinformation and bias, supporting an environment where trust is informed and reflective. In essence, a balanced approach to enlightened trust involves creating a blend of transparency, critical education, inclusive governance, active community engagement, and media integrity. Such an approach steers away from the extremes of blind obedience and cynical disengagement, towards a sustainable model of informed, dynamic, and continuously renegotiated trust.

8.

Research parameters & 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 findings and recommendations presented in this guide are based on desk research, ongoing discussions within the consortium and the results from an expert round table between the research team and the following experts: Julia Schulte-Cloos (University of Marburg), Gaëtane Ricard-Nihoul (European Commission, DG COMM), and Gilda Isernia (Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions). The literature review used a comprehensive database search with keywords related to "political trust", screening empirical studies focused on European countries from the past decade, systematically extracting data to analyse determinants, consequences, and threshold events influencing political trust at individual, institutional, and country levels.

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:

1. The Theoretical and Normative Underpinnings of Trust and Distrust
2. Trust and Distrust at the Street-level of Public Policy
3. The Role of Democratic Social Movements in the Formation of Trust and Distrust
4. The Role of the Media in Trust and Distrust Building: Information or Polarisation?
5. Developmental-psychological Insight into Trust and Distrust
6. Appraising Citizens' Trust and Distrust in Governance: Forms, Determinants, Effects and Remedies
7. Civilising Trust and Distrust: Role Models and Recommendations

Further work-packages are committed to the dissemination, exploitation and communication of research, management, and ethical issues.

Further information on the EnTrust project is available at:

www.entrust-project.eu



Consortium

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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.

End notes

1 We would like to express our gratitude to Tutku Zengin, Yannik Büdenbender, Rutu Gole and Maurice Rosenkranz for conducting the literature review and meta-analysis on which this Guide is partly based. The documentation is available as supplementary material via the EnTrust Website: <https://entrust-project.eu/outputs/>

2 See, for instance, Perry, J. (2021). Trust in public institutions: Trends and implications for economic security. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/08/PB_108.pdf

3 See EnTrust Literature Research on Determinants and Consequences of Trust. The supplementary material is available via the EnTrust Website: <https://entrust-project.eu/outputs/>

4 This figure is based on composite variables. In regard to trust, an index was built on the following question: “How much do you personally trust each of the institutions and actors listed below”. Four levels of governments (from local to European) and six further institutions were included (parliament, political parties, courts, the police, armed forces, civil service); scale had a high reliability (0.95). Distrust was built on the basis of two questions, measuring doubtfulness and perceived categorical untrustworthiness of institutions: “Regardless of whether political institutions are trustworthy or not, they should always be treated with doubt”, and “No matter what people do, political institutions can never become trustworthy because the entire political system is irredeemably flawed and untrustworthy”. The scale reliability was lower, but satisfactory (0.65).

5 A fourth scenario is conceivable on the basis of our findings and could be described as ‘Anomia’. It would be characterised by a strong alienation of people from political institutions and the whole system of governance, manifested in very low levels of trust and distrust. People would have lost all expectation of existing institutions and would refrain from passive support or active participation, either by falling into apathy, and frustration, or by taking refuge in private, semi-private or state-like forms of organisation. This scenario is not described here, however, as it represents a much more radical problem of nation-states. It is most likely to occur in so-called ‘failed states’ or ‘areas of limited statehood’, where the effective provision of collective good, and the corresponding control over territory are severely undermined.

6 The Integrated Policy Paper is available via the following website: <https://entrust-project.eu/outputs/policy-briefs/>

