Enlightened trust in governance

EnTrust

Publishable synthesis of project's main findings

Deliverable 8.12

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: 26 April 2024

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.

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Introduction: Paths and Challenges in the Study of Trust and Distrust in Governance

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1. Introduction

Public debates increasingly express concern about the erosion of public trust in political institutions. Falling levels of trust in politicians, political parties, the domestic political system, and the European Union, as well as the electoral success of populist groupings with an anti-establishment, partly even anti-democratic orientation, are just some examples underlining the erosion of public trust. Available survey data indicate that this trend seems to apply across countries and world regions (Perry 2021), thus suggesting that citizens are similarly affected by a feeling of growing disappointment in the performance of political institutions (Ahrendt et al. 2022) as a reaction to shared experiences of crises (e.g., economic recession and inflation, the Covid-19 pandemic, wars, and migration).

The magnitude of these developments and the implications they might have on democratic governance are not easy to assess. This pertains to the variability of public expressions of trust. Falling rates of trust do not affect all countries and institutions at the same time and in the same form. Additionally, trust follows long-term fluctuations that respond to changing circumstances and institutional responses. This is why research has invested considerable energy into identifying the determinants that seem to be responsible for the erosion and/or recovery of trust. The analyses suggest that trust is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, which implies that high levels of public trust are rather an exception within democratic systems of governance. Moreover, scholars even disagree about the implications of falling or increasing levels of public trust for democracies. Some voices are concerned about the risks of falling rates of trust for democracy (Dogan 1997), while others question that eroding trust is automatically an indicator of a crisis of democracy (e.g., Dalton 1999; van der Meer 2017). Liberal democracies do not only tolerate lower levels of trust, but they also openly rally for critical or sceptical citizens (Bufacchi 2001; Norris 1999 and 2022). In part, they even institutionalise distrust as a functional element of the political institutions' trustworthiness (Sztompka 1998; Warren 1999; Bertsou 2019) when considering the division of powers between the executive, the legislative and the judiciary, the alternation of governments through elections, and the constitutional role of independent mass media and an organised civil society.

This volume aims to contribute to these research debates and their attempts to disentangle the contingencies and complexities of public trust in political institutions. It focuses on three gaps that tend to limit our understanding of the topic. First, we argue that research has privileged for too long the role of public trust, disregarding the relevance of political distrust.

Research studies assume that falling rates of political trust are indicative of rising rates of institutional distrust, but this assumption might be inaccurate, given that trust and distrust are interrelated but separate phenomena that variate independently. Trust may coincide with distrust, representing forms of watchful, critical or enlightened trust, but low trust may also coincide with low distrust, reflecting a position of disenchantment, disengagement and alienation. Ignoring distrust as a proper variable thus entails the risk of painting a picture that is empirically incomplete, or even incorrect.

Second, we contend that research has not paid sufficient attention to the relation between institutional trust and trustworthiness. Citizens may have good reasons to distrust untrustworthy institutions, and to trust trustworthy institutions, which highlights the need to understand the principles and criteria that shape public perceptions of (un)trustworthiness. Furthermore, trust and trustworthiness can also maintain complex relationships that require consideration. The trustworthiness of political institutions may include elements of institutionalised distrust, when the trustworthiness of political institutions is dependent on their ability to distrust untrustworthy citizens, stakeholders, officeholders and/or decision-makers. Understanding expressions of public trust and distrust thus requires a better knowledge of public conceptions of 'trusthworthiness' and 'distrustworthiness'.

Third, research has favoured an analysis of public trust as unilateral attitudes and predispositions of citizens, thus ignoring the institutional relations into which these attitudes are embedded. Citizens may not necessarily interact with politicians or institutions on a regular and direct basis, but they do have experiences with institutions and officeholders, and these experiences influence their perceptions of institutional trustworthiness. For this reason, it is important to analyse the experiential background of trust and distrust dispositions. It is necessary to understand how these experiences are shaped by the direct and indirect relationships that citizens maintain with political institutions, and by the ways in which these relationships are institutionally embedded in terms of constitutional, legal and administrative structures and/or personal interactions. The relational approach adopted in this book helps to understand the reciprocal logic of trust and distrust relationships. We argue that trust and distrust are relational attributes, meaning that, for example, citizens' trust is influenced by the experience of being trusted by institutions and their officeholders, while distrust is fostered by experiences of institutional distrust.

This volume wishes to bridge these research gaps on an empirical and theoretical level by relying on insights and findings from the EnTrust project. The project was carried out by an international consortium funded by the European Union's Horizon2020 research and innovation programme. Research was conducted in seven countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Serbia) following a strictly comparative approach that allowed us to consider the realities within variable contexts. Moreover, our research built on an interdisciplinary endeavour, involving media studies, psychology, sociology, and political sciences, which enabled us to consider individual, societal, institutional, and media-related factors in the formation and expression of public trust and distrust in governance.

The purpose of this introduction is to provide an outline of this research endeavour. Step One will give an overview of available knowledge at the crossroads of those disciplines that have

contributed considerable insights into the study of trust in governance. The aim is to paint a picture of available evidence on which the EnTrust work builds. In the next step, the conceptual and theoretical framework of our joint research work will be outlined, following the three gaps identified before: We will briefly discuss the implications of conceptualising a co-presence of trust and distrust, elucidate the intersections between trust and trustworthiness, and develop the relational approach building our research. In the third step, we will provide a brief outline of the book and its chapters, highlighting the specific dimension of the topic that is at the centre of attention, and the main research aims.

2. Points of departure: An Overview of a Vivid Research Field

Research on political and institutional trust is well developed and provides considerable knowledge, particularly because a wide range of disciplines has been interested in this field, among them political science, psychology, sociology, economics, media studies, and philosophy. Among these disciplines, the extent to which trust in political institutions has been studied varies. However, a broader review of research across disciplinary fields seems advisable, given that topics, assumptions, and findings provide diverse, and in part compatible, insights into the topic, thus opening doors for advances. We can highlight three main areas and topics that have received considerable attention: a conceptual debate about trust in its internal rationale, a theoretical discussion about adequate explanatory approaches, and an empirical analysis of political trust and its determinants.

The first area of scientific concern is related to the essence and rationale of trust. Much of this debate is based on a definition of trust that focuses on a person's willingness to rely on another party to fulfil a commitment (Hawley 2012: 1). Trust thus implies the readiness to make oneself dependent and vulnerable to the actions of another party, without being able to monitor or control its actions (Mayer et al. 1995: 712; Luhmann 1979 and 1988). Definitions thus revolve around the trustor when identifying the rationale of trust: trust is a disposition of a trustor to invest in interactions with others and/or a behavioural rule guiding his or her conduct towards others. Conceptual debates have placed less emphasis on the trustee, although this element of analysis has helped to explain trust-related variance: Trustors might be inclined to be trustful or distrustful as a default, but they will most probably differentiate when trusting different kinds of trustees, be they different types of people, officeholders, political organisations, and/or institutions. The trustee has moved to the fore, particularly when issues of trustworthiness have become a matter of concern (Hardin 2002; O'Neill 2018). This focus on trustworthiness has helped to brand trust as a rational conduct (Hardin 1999; Castelfranchi and Falcone 2010) because there are good reasons to trust trustworthy institutions and distrust untrustworthy ones. But the focus has also helped to better understand the normative underpinnings of institutional trustworthiness and trust (Sztompka 1998; Hardin 2002; Offe 1999) because institutional trustworthiness is related to several political values and moral principles, such as competence, transparency, truthfulness, integrity, accountability and/or benevolence.

The second area of concern refers to the theoretical approaches proposed by researchers to explain institutional trust. A multiplicity of determinants and correlates have been identified,

as will be discussed throughout this volume, but the underlying theoretical frameworks and explanatory strategies can be condensed into four approaches, which tend to focus either on the trustor or the trustee (see also Lahusen 2024). The first approach defines trust as an anthropological feature and/or a personality trait of individuals developed during their life-course (e.g., Baier 1986; Jones 1999; Hardin 2002; Rotenberg 2010), privileging the study of trust as a general inclination and stable disposition. The second approach shares a focus on the trustor, but moves to the societal and cultural contexts within which individuals develop their attitudes, arguing that countries and their political cultures diverge in the propensity of their citizens to trust or distrust (Inglehart 1988; Kaasa and Andriani 2022). Two further approaches move the focus of attention to the trustee, claiming that political institutions have political mandates and responsibilities that provide a reference point for citizens to assess institutional trustworthiness. Performance theory belongs to this group, constituting the third approach under examination, as it explains diverging rates of public trust with reference to the way political institutions meet public expectations, both in terms of objective outputs and/or subjective evaluations (Bouckaert et al. 2002; Mishler and Rose 2001; Norris 2022). The final approach moves beyond the output dimension and stresses the formative role of institutions in the constitution of public trust. Democratic and constitutional theory underlines the role of formal structures of the political system in identifying the mandates of institutions and the principles necessary to assess their work (Sztompka 1998; Warren 2018), and sociological institutionalism adds that practices and rules at the operational level of political institutions generate an experiential basis for citizens to assess the manner in which they adhere to established and/or practical norms of institutional trustworthiness (March and Olsen 1984; Möllering 2006: 61-71).

The third area of concern has been devoted to the establishment of adequate measurement tools in order to map levels of trust across space and time. The dominant focus is on survey research, and in this context, measures of generalised dispositions, or propensities to trust, have become standard practice. Most commonly, respondents are asked: “To what extent do you trust the following institutions?”, providing them with binary answers (“tend to trust” and “tend not to trust”), or ordinal Likert scales ranging from “do not trust at all” to “completely trust” (e.g., OECD 2017: 186-196; Marien 2013). The analyses follow the assumption that "not trusting" implies "distrusting", and that the scales should therefore be understood as a continuum from trust to distrust (e.g., OECD 2017: 102, 158, 193; Davies et al. 2021; Schneider 2017: 965, 968). The validity of these scales has been widely tested and proven. They have the great advantage of making comparisons across time and space possible. However, empirical analyses have limited themselves to these measurements, thus marginalising the study of political trustworthiness in its ramifications, and of distrust as a proper topic and concept. Only in more recent times has research become more interested in these aspects (e.g., Rose et al. 2004; Sanford and Clifton 2022; Jennings et al. 2021; Bunting et al. 2021).

Against the backdrop of these conceptual, theoretical, and methodological debates, a rich field of empirical research has emerged that has contributed to a better understanding of the levels and forms of trust, as well as its determinants and correlates. Many studies have corroborated the relevance of distinguishing between social and political trust. While social trust is related to interpersonal relationships (Glaeser et al. 2000; Uslaner 2002, 2017; Fukuyama

1995; Yamagishi and Yamagishi 1994), political trust is tied to institutions and their representatives (Uslaner 2002, see also Offe 1999). Findings show that social and political trust correlate (e.g., Schyns and Koop 2010; Zmerli and Newton 2008). People who tend to trust fellow citizens will also be predisposed to trust institutions, and the inverse holds true for distrust. Both forms of trust also feed into each other: Good governments promote higher levels of social trust in the population (e.g., van der Meer 2003), while social trust enables good government – a reciprocal relationship described as the 'rainmaker effect' (Newton et al. 2018: 49, see also Newton and Zmerli 2011). But social and political trust are distinct entities, and this is corroborated by the fact that citizens draw a difference when assessing institutional trustees. Findings have consistently demonstrated a pattern that applies across countries: Citizens are less likely to trust partisan, majoritarian and/or rule-making institutions (e.g., political parties, parliaments, governments), in comparison to impartial, non-majoritarian and/or rule applying institutions (e.g., courts, police, armed forces) (Marien 2013; Rothstein and Stolle 2008).

Empirical research has also invested considerable effort into identifying factors that impact institutional trust at individual and country levels, distinguishing between cultural, political, and social determinants. Countries sharing a 'civic culture' (Almond and Verba 1963) are said to develop high levels of institutional trust, and the same holds true for countries with higher levels of social capital, when considering interpersonal trust, informal networks, and associational memberships (Putnam 1993, 2000). With regard to political features, trust is higher in countries with lower levels of corruption (van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2017; You 2017), greater participatory opportunities, and institutional responsiveness (Putnam 1993). But institutional trust is also affected by national party systems, ideological cleavages and increasing polarisation of political debates (Uslaner 2015; Rapp 2016; Banda and Kirkland 2018). In terms of social determinants, social inequalities, economic performance (Campbell 2004), and external shocks, such as the Great Recession (Armingeon and Ceka 2014; Armingeon and Guthmann 2014), are highly relevant factors determining institutional trust. Concurrently, dis-/misinformation, circulated through online alternative and social media, can erode trust in governments, as well as in the established mainstream media itself (HLEG EU 2018).

Towards an Improved Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The research of the EnTrust project contributes to the advancement of scientific debates and available knowledge in at least three dimensions. It shows the advantages of an analysis of trust and distrust, their forms, interrelations and complementarities; it evidences the strengths of considering principles of (un)trustworthiness that guide expressions of public trust and distrust; and it demonstrates the relevance of a relational approach that puts the trust/distrust relationship between citizens and political institutions, their interdependencies and reciprocities, at centre stage.

Trust and Distrust in Governance:

Our results show that the analysis of trust in governance is distorted when it is separated from the analysis of distrust. Previous research has established that both concepts are inversely interrelated, meaning that trust implies the absence of distrust, and distrust, the absence of

trust. This supposition is echoed by most survey-based studies using one-dimensional scales of trust and distrust (OECD 2017). Our own findings demonstrate the limited adequacy of these metrics because the relationships between citizens and political institutions and their representatives are simultaneously shaped by trust and distrust. This insight builds on research reviews and conceptual papers (Sitkin and Roth 1993; Lewicki et al. 1998 and 2006; Marková and Gillespie 2008; van de Walle and Six 2014; Guo et al. 2017; Sitkin and Bijlsma-Frankema 2018), but also on an incipient research strand within organisational studies, public administration, workplace and e-commerce studies (Patent 2014; Guo et al. 2017; Min and Zickar 2023; Lewicka and Zakrzewska-Bielawska 2022; Cho 2006; Ou and Sia 2010; Chang and Fang 2013). All these studies have demonstrated that trust and distrust are separate phenomena that variate independently of each other (McKnight et al. 2003; Lewicka and Zakrzewska-Bielawska 2022; Min and Zickar 2023). They have different determinants (Sitkin and Roth 1993; Dunn and Schweitzer 2005; Liu and Wang 2010; Chang and Fang 2013), and consequences (Lewicki et al. 1998; McKnight et al. 2003; Liu and Wang 2010; Bies et al. 2018).

The analysis of both trust *and* distrust is particularly relevant when focusing on democratic governance because democracies are characterised by constitutional, institutional and operational arrangements that institutionalise both trust and distrust. Political theories of democracy have emphasised that public trust in democratic systems also resides in the institutionalisation of distrust, when considering, for instance, the rule of law, the separation of powers, the alternation of governments, independent media and organised civil society (Offe 1999: 73-5; Sztompka 1998). Citizens should be enabled to distrust state authorities, and vice versa, meaning that distrust is part of the trustworthiness of political institutions (Braithwaite 1998; Warren 2018). Also, distrust is a source of democratic renewal in that it promotes open forms of scrutiny, monitoring and control of the established authorities (Warren 1999: 310; Patterson 1999). Trust might thus be irrational when related to untrustworthy institutions, while distrust can be the more reasonable posture when untrustworthy institutions are at stake (Hardin 2002). Citizens have internalised this complementarity between trust and distrust, as other studies and our findings show. The majority of citizens express an attitude of conditional, vigilant or watchful trust that combines elements of trust and distrust (also Bertsou 2019; Norris 2002; Maggetti et al. 2023). However, the synthetic concepts introduced by scholarly writing (e.g., scepticism, watchfulness or cynicism) oversimplify the empirically observable manifestations of trust/distrust configurations and the complex interrelations that trust and distrust maintain within democratic systems of governance. Against this backdrop, we urge for the need to analyse and decipher the relations between trust and distrust with greater care, particularly with regard to the different constellations that range from blind or credulous trust, to bounded trust (including watchfulness, scepticism or vigilance) and to suspiciousness, mistrust, distrust and cynicism.

Institutional (un)trustworthiness

The analysis of institutional trust has rightly unveiled that the relationships between citizens and political institutions are patterned by instrumental and normative rationales. In instrumental terms, these relations are based on expectations about future returns, meaning that

trust and distrust are determined by the expectations that the intentions and actions of political institutions and their representatives will be either favourable and beneficial, or unfavourable and harmful for the individual (Lewicki et al. 1998; Hardin 2002). Trust and distrust are thus closely related to institutional performance. Political trust and distrust, however, also imply normative judgements (Offe 1999) because political institutions and office holders are tied to formal and informal mandates, responsibilities and procedures that provide a reference point for assessing their trustworthiness (Sztompka 1998). The analysis of (un)trustworthiness is crucial because it allows us to identify the reference criteria and evaluative standards from which trust and distrust emerge (O'Neill 2018). Social and political trust share a reference to normative principles of trustworthiness like competence, integrity, reliability, and benevolence (Bacharach and Gambetta 2001; Schoorman et al. 2007; Castelfranchi and Falcone 2010), but institutional trust and distrust add a considerably ramified layer of norms, which refer to law abidingness and transparency, fairness and impartiality, accountability and responsiveness, among others (Offe 1999: 73-75; Sztompka 1998; Jennings et al. 2021). Institutions are considered to be untrustworthy not only when they violate these norms, but also when they conform to proper notions of 'distrustworthiness', such as corruption (e.g., Uslaner 2017), favouritism (Im and Chen 2020), insolence, incivility or ostentation (Daloz 2003).

The EnTrust project contributes to this debate from the perspective of a comparative research design that is able to ascertain similarities and differences between arenas and countries. Previous studies have indicated that the analysis of trustworthiness can improve our understanding of public trust and distrust, but little systematic evidence is available, particularly in comparative terms. Available data has consistently demonstrated that levels of trust diverge considerably between countries, and several determinants have been made responsible for this variation. However, a better understanding of institutional trustworthiness is essential to unravel the rationales and mechanisms behind these variations. Various levels of public trust could be determined by national institutions performing differently in relation to similar principles of trustworthiness, but also by distinct norms and principles guiding the assessment of institutional trustworthiness.

Trust and distrust as relational attributes

Our analyses assume that public trust and distrust in governance are only properly understood when considered as relational concepts. Previous research has conceived trust as a personal trait or attribute, particularly in the context of survey-based research on public opinion and civic attitudes. This corresponds to a theoretical approach that explains trust with reference to the trustor. EnTrust aims to move beyond this one-sided perspective by paying more attention to the role of trustees, and the trust relationship between citizens and political institutions. Citizens may maintain rather distant, indirect or mediated relations with political institutions, but the relationships are highly institutionalised in terms of rights and roles (e.g., citizens as voters, applicants, clients, plaintiffs, etc.). Constitutional and institutional arrangements involve rules and norms that provide reference points for assessing these relationships. In addition, citizens have direct and indirect experiences with political institutions and their representatives that will impact on their disposition to trust or distrust. Taking this relational

element seriously means accepting that trust and distrust between citizens and political institutions are interdependent and reciprocal. For example, it is reasonable to assume that citizens who apply for public services may also be distrustful of state authorities because they experience public administrations as distrustful of them in terms of eligibility criteria, control mechanisms, incentives and sanctions. Citizens may also opt to radicalise their political views and practices, and engage more actively in extra-institutional and confrontational political arenas (e.g., through street protests and demonstrations) if they perceive that political institutions and their representatives are suspicious of citizens' intentions and activities, or if they are unresponsive to their demands.

The EnTrust project subscribes to a relational approach that understands citizens' dispositions as part of institutionalised relationships. This approach promises a deeper understanding of trust and distrust in governance because it helps to identify the extent to which citizens' and institutions' trust is interrelated and interdependent. It also helps to recognise that relations of trust and distrust oscillate between mutualism and complementarity. On the one hand, research has shown that relations of trust and distrust are governed by elements of mutuality. Countries with a public policy approach that is more trusting towards their clients have been shown to generate higher levels of civic trust among the population, while the opposite seems to be the case for countries with public policies that more overtly emphasise the conditionality of eligibility for public services (Rothstein 2011; Delhey and Newton 2005; Hänninen et al. 2019). On the other hand, research has convincingly argued that the reciprocity of trust and distrust follows elements of complementarity. Democratic systems institutionalise distrust to ensure institutional trustworthiness and public trust (Strompka 1988, Warren 2018). A relational approach thus has the advantage of disentangling the relationships between citizens and political institutions, and the implicit interdependencies between trust and distrust that they entail.

3. Researching trust and distrust in governance

The findings and reflections presented in this volume are the culmination of four years of collaborative research within the EnTrust consortium. The research design was interdisciplinary, comparative, and based on mixed-methods. Interdisciplinarity was ensured to garner the necessary expertise to analyse the psychological, sociological, political and media-related dimensions of the topic. A work programme has been developed and implemented that addresses all these dimensions by establishing a series of separate, but interrelated, work packages with specific objectives and tasks. From a cross-sectoral perspective, we were interested in understanding the development of trust and distrust dispositions from early adolescence to adulthood through focus group discussions and survey experiments (WP5, Chapter 2), and in mapping and analysing individual trust attitudes of European citizens and their determinants through a mass population survey (WP6, Chapter 3). From a relational perspective, we analysed the formation of trust and distrust within different arenas located at the micro, meso and macro levels. To this end, we undertook an analysis of encounters and relationships between vulnerable families and welfare authorities, based on in-depth interviews with parents and street-level bureaucrats (WP2, Chapter 4). We explored relations of trust and distrust

within arenas of contentious politics through a series of focus group discussions with "active citizens" - activists and supporters of local pro-democratic social movements (WP3, Chapter 5). We also examined the relevance and role of trust and distrust in public debates through a content analysis of news coverage within the print media and related social media commentary (WP 4, Chapter 6). With regard to political dynamics, we were interested in better understanding the role that political consultation practices and processes can have on political trust by conducting a survey and a series of interviews with representatives of European civil society organisations (WP7, Chapter 7), and experimental deliberative forums with citizens, politicians and experts (WP6, Chapter 8).

Research was undertaken in seven countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Serbia) across five of the work packages, with one dedicated to trust and distrust in the area of EU institutions and policies. The comparative research design required considerable effort, as research instruments (questionnaires, guidelines, conceptual schemes, etc.) had to be developed, implemented, and supervised across countries, involving WP-specific task forces, training, continuous monitoring and quality assurance of data outputs and reports. The strictly comparative and collaborative nature of the research was challenging, but paid off in terms of quality, as it allowed the consortium's interdisciplinary skills to be harnessed, concepts, theories, and methodologies to be adapted to the specificities of the different countries involved, and analyses to be produced that capitalised on the country and EU-specific expertise of the different teams.

The four-year research process was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic and the various closure measures, thus inciting us to adapt the research work. Methodologically, digital media and video-conferencing platforms became key to organising fieldwork and conducting interviews and focus groups with research participants (e.g., citizens, activists, organisational representatives, experts). The fieldwork remained in the hands of the consortium members; only the implementation of the mass survey and the deliberative forums was outsourced to a professional polling institute. In terms of content, we included the Covid-19 pandemic, the lockdown measures, and their impact as a matter of concern in the questionnaires, interview guidelines or coding books, in order to reflect the specific impact of the current circumstances on public trust in governance. For these reasons, the findings and reflections of this volume are clearly shaped by the highly dynamic developments of this time period, although they also testify to structural and long-standing patterns of trust across and within the countries analysed.

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Building Trust in Welfare Institutions

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1. Introduction

Existing literature on trust in public welfare institutions points to an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, numerous studies show why trust in interpersonal relations between citizens and frontline workers is beneficial for the provision of welfare. Establishing trust with clients has been proven necessary for the effective delivery of social services and the stable functioning of welfare institutions (Fersch 2016; Stensöta and Bendz 2020). Its importance as an asset in social work has been shown (Smith 2001), in particular with regard to successful interventions, as it builds rapport with users (Rautio 2013), enables clients to participate meaningfully (Smith et al. 2012), and aids in the disclosure of information about abuse (Cossar et al. 2013).

On the other hand, achieving trust within the realm of social welfare can be very challenging. Welfare institutions, tasked with delivering benefits and services contingent on stringent eligibility tests, inadvertently contribute to the formation of distrust. Strict administrative procedures, reporting to third parties, and the authority of welfare institutions to remove children from families further complicate the establishment of trust. Moreover, vulnerable citizens, particularly those reliant on social assistance, often exhibit markedly low levels of political trust and harbour a general distrust in the welfare system. When it comes to developing trust at the individual level, the spheres of social assistance and family services bear similarities to other social services, including those addressing domestic abuse (Robbins and Cook 2018), mental health services (Brown and Calnan 2012), and integration policies for immigrants (Fersch 2016).

Relying on the existing literature and empirical data about welfare users and welfare institutions' frontline workers, we know that the system of social assistance is generally the context in which establishing clients' trust is challenging. Various streams of research already show what specifically contributes to (dis)trust in such adverse institutional contexts, as in the case of social welfare. These works point to two types of issues – the organisational ones, such as services outsourcing or New Public Management solutions, and to various features of frontline workers, including their age, experience, and an understanding of their professional role.

This chapter advances beyond the current state of the art by focusing on how frontline workers in social assistance institutions employ practices to build users' trust. To accomplish this, it utilises unique data comprising 247 interviews from seven European countries – Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Serbia – in which both frontline workers

and welfare users reflected on their (dis)trust in relationships with counterparties within welfare offices. In order to analyse the "practice" used by frontline workers as the unit of analysis, we followed their reflections on professional action focused on establishing clients' trust. Thus, the practice is foremost value- or goal-oriented repetitive action of a frontline worker. We further contextualise those practices, adding the insights of the citizens who experience and reflect on frontline workers' actions. As argued further, our practice-focused perspective aims to go beyond the state of the art that regards frontline workers' style of work as rather fixed. Contrary to those insights, we argue that trust-oriented practices are rather case- and situation-specific.

2. Trust in adverse organisational circumstances: research state of the art

Two relevant discussions in the scientific literature on trust in welfare institutions are relevant for our analysis. The first one helps to clarify why trust level in this setting is low, whereas the latter provides knowledge on trust-building mechanisms.

Research has revealed the adverse impact of numerous factors on trust in welfare institutions. Among these factors, the fundamental structure of social assistance, characterised by discretionary, means-tested solutions, adds to the challenge of fostering trust between frontline workers and citizens, as well as among citizens themselves.

Rothstein (2001) proves that universalistic, citizenship-based social policy contributes to a higher level of generalised trust and trust between frontline workers and citizens, compared to those residual welfare states that adhere to means-testing principles. In the latter case, citizens' eligibility is scrutinised, and welfare fraud is sought, undermining trust in the relations between frontline workers and benefit recipients. The former model also contributes to spillover effects between a high level of generalised trust and trust in the relations between frontline workers and citizens (Fersch 2016:10). The negative impact of means-testing on trust is widely recognised. For instance, Jewell (2007) shows that, contrary to flat-grant welfare programmes, policies based on individual assessments are detrimental to trust relations between citizens and frontline workers.

Other organisational obstacles to trust development in social assistance is revealed by scholarly writers like Lipsky (2010) and his followers, who demonstrate the negative impact of high caseload levels and insufficient amounts of money and time typical in social assistance institutions. The negative impact of overburdened frontline workers on trust is channelled through fractured contacts with clients, less time for casework and schematism in handling the cases. Existing studies also show that managerial control leads to specific practices when granting clients access to public services. Numerous studies prove that insufficient time for interaction, a low likelihood of clients regularly interacting with the same frontline worker, and a strong asymmetry of information between parties, including not sharing information and not explaining the process of applying for benefits by frontline workers, make the attainment of mutual trust even more elusive (Senghaas et al. 2019; Brown and Calnan 2013; Brodkin 2011).

Social work literature emphasises the role of negative experiences of welfare users on trust development, and covers the insufficient quality of services, divergence of how users and caseworkers understand need (Buckley et al. 2011), user stress (Wilson et al. 2020), and the negative impact of surveillance mechanisms for welfare users (Tembo et al. 2020).

The second mentioned stream of literature about trust in welfare institutions sheds light on specific mechanisms which might contribute to trust-building in adverse contexts. On the one hand, they are helpful in clarifying the role of specific types of frontline workers' action. On the other hand, though, the perspective they take is focused on treating trust as a verification of trustworthiness criteria, and does not sufficiently acknowledge the fact that trust is also a highly situation-specific feature of a mutual relationship.

First, scholarship on frontline workers' styles shows that frontline workers' agency may be oriented towards sustaining mentioned administrative pressures, as in the case of "enforcer'' or "indifferent" worker (Zacka 2017), "state agent" (Maynard-Moody and Muscheno 2000), or "state person" (Møller and Stensöta 2019). However, it may also seek to resist those pressures, which is a strategy typical of a "caregiver" (Zacka 2017), a "citizen agent" (Maynard-Moody and Muscheno 2000), or a "professional" (Møller and Stensöta 2019) who would develop and use their discretion to meet specific needs of clients and allow a trusting relation with them to thrive. However, as we argue further, action towards establishing trust between frontline workers and welfare users might be an aspect of a public officer's style of work, but various practices of 'investing in clients' trust' are rather client and situation-specific than attributed to a fixed style of work.

Second, some studies, such as the one by Senghaas and her colleagues (2019) on frontline workers responsible for activation policy in employment agencies in Germany, prove that trust-building is an essential strategy for effective implementation of the policy at the street level. Thus, Senghaas finds, for instance, that that improved communication with clients is more apt to result in a trusting relationship with them. In order to achieve this, agencies' frontline workers in Germany employed strategies that included: creating a positive atmosphere at the beginning of the interview with a client, addressing clients in a personal, individual way, giving clients time to express their concerns, as well as making them feel comfortable, whenever possible, and reducing their anxiety (Senghaas 2019: 622). The communication-focused actions of frontline workers were confirmed, e.g., by Smith (2001: 299), who underlined that, in child protection work, family members strongly dislike social workers who appear not to listen, who fail to express warmth, and who do things by the book. Also, Legido-Quigley's team (2014: 1254), in their research on British pensioners living in Spain, emphasised that trust is "fostered through interpersonal elements, such as communication of reciprocity, respect, and often embodied empathy." Thus, they argue that interrelational skills seem more important than clinical competence for clinicians to earn trust. Although mentioned works provide relevant insights into how users' trust can be improved, their focus lies rather on actions focused on frontline workers' proving their own trustworthiness and communication skills.

The third stream of research shows how moral features and behaviours of frontline workers are a path to clients' trust (Fersch 2016). This scholarly work emphasises the role of treating

clients with respect and avoiding the overuse of power asymmetry in relationships with clients as a part of social workers' ethical conduct. For example, in a study on immigrants' contacts with social welfare, Fersch (2016) shows that the role of the "morality of professionals", as perceived by the clients, is of the utmost importance in establishing a trusting relationship. This entails clients' assumptions that caseworkers do not cheat and favour clients' welfare, which, in medical professions, meant that they are prone to granting clients costly check-up procedures or treatments, even though they might put financial a strain on their institution. Clients not undergoing excessive control and surveillance, perceived as an expression of power relations, was also found to contribute to their trust (Tembo et al. 2020). Other scholars (Robbins and Cook 2018) put this feature in a more general manner, and speak of "trustworthy behaviour of the professional" as a pathway to client trust. Overall, the stances underlying the role of frontline workers as being moral, that is, not applying favouritism or bias, showing respect, and avoiding the abuse of power, are rather helpful in clarifying which features and practices of frontline workers are trust beneficial, rather than how they make specific choices about which trust-building action to take.

All three referred approaches to the analysis of trust-oriented practice unveil the limitations in our knowledge on frontline workers' "investing in trust" and operational difficulties in the analysis of trust. They view trust-building as a matter of frontline workers' specific style of action, a skill, or acting in a moral way. They also provide us with a little knowledge about how caseworkers' 'work on trust' in practice takes place in relationships with clients. As underlined in the subsequent section, our goal is to add to these notions by showing specific trust-oriented practices that can be flexibly applied depending on a client and the situation.

3. Research Methodology

The findings presented in this chapter pertain to institutions of social assistance, including the provision of in-kind benefits and services (Bahle and Wendt 2021: 624), as well as social work within family services where face-to-face interactions between citizens and frontline workers occur. We analysed frontline work in these institutions across seven European countries: Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Serbia. Due to significant differences in institutional logics and the organisation of social assistance in these countries, including varying levels of institutional fragmentation and different foci on activation, our aim was to identify functional equivalents of social assistance institutions in the researched countries. Specifically, we selected institutions or institutional units that provide welfare benefits or services targeted at vulnerable families with children.

We conducted a total of 115 individual in-depth interviews with frontline workers, from selected institutions, who met our major criteria of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 2010). These criteria included: having a say in granting benefits or services that are important for users, having face-to-face relations with beneficiaries, and having discretion in handling cases. Consequently, some important social assistance institutions that provide benefits to citizens, but do so without meeting the three above-mentioned criteria (e.g., processing applications submitted online and lacking discretion in issuing decisions), were not included in our sample. We also conducted 117 interviews with welfare users, namely parents in vulnerable families

who have contact with frontline workers at local public welfare institutions. In most cases, the research participants were people living in poverty and/or those for whom the use of family services is involuntary. For both groups, approximately 60-90-minute-long interviews were conducted, touching on interviewees' experiences with granting and receiving welfare benefits and services, as well as trust.

The transcripts of both groups of interviews were analysed in an inductive fashion. The first cycle of open coding was done on transcript samples by each country team. Exchange and discussion on the codes led us to the development of broader categories for the second cycle of coding and the construction of a shared coding scheme that was subsequently used for each country's data. This procedure helped us to develop country reports which were both inductive in approach, as well as systematic and comparative.

This chapter is based on a meta-analysis of those country reports. We re-analysed those parts in which frontline workers reflected on their own practices and actions toward building trust with clients. Originally, these reflections were based on parts of the interviews coded, among others, as "trust building" and "factors contributing to trust". In cognitive and methodological terms, the added value of this chapter lies in juxtaposing the perspective of frontline workers and the users on the frontline workers' actions and practices aimed at trust building. Thus, for the former group, we selected only for analysis those narrated actions that were deliberate actions to establish users' trust, whereas for the latter group, we analysed reflections on how described actions or behaviours are perceived.

4. Research Findings

Both groups of our interviewees, frontline workers, and welfare users, converged on the stance that there are practices in social assistance employed by frontline workers that can promote citizens' trust. These practices were contrasted by interviewees with caseworkers' attitudes described as either neutral or unfavourable towards their clients. The unfavourable modus operandi was often referred to as simply "following the procedures" by a frontline worker, "just ticking the boxes on the forms," or "doing nothing more than minimum." On the contrary, a common feature of practice perceived as trust-focused was the idea of "doing more than the minimum" by a frontline worker, or deliberate engagement when working with a client.

In the narratives of some frontline workers, this approach was present in the way they try to gain clients' trust, either in general or with certain clients. Those for whom trust-based relationships had already been an important issue in their work provided detailed examples of how to develop that trust. In the narratives of welfare users, though, the distinction was often made between different "types" of frontline workers, and an "ideal" of a frontline worker was constructed in those reflections, as well. The common thread of "doing something extra" can be unveiled into four specific themes, reconstructed on the criterion of "what" is the major tool of building trust. They are: 1) time-focused practices, 2) information and communication-focused practices, 3) alleviating clients' anxiety and defining subjects of trust, 4) accompanying and advocating for the clients in various institutions.

Practice 1: bonding and increasing confidence through more time with clients

Frontline workers in social assistance often emphasised that time is a major route for them to establish a trusting relationship with families. This practice involved an approach focused on long-term, patient contact without insisting on rapid opening up by the client. A social worker in Denmark described it as follows:

> *"Hm, I give them time … I give them time. I am not pressuring them; I am not making a decision if they are not ready to trust me. If they do not want to tell me what the problem is, or if they are not open about their challenges to start with, then I give them time. Then I have more conversations and take on more home visits (…) Sometimes, it is a good way of creating a better and trustworthy relationship; that the parents can hear it from their children, that it is not so bad" (DK FW8).*

The idea of "giving time" to welfare users is presented here as leading to a broader strategy that involves more home visits, talking to children, and exercising no pressure at the beginning of the cooperation. Frontline workers we talked to applied the need to "give time" also to themselves, and that was, in many instances, an aspect of their reflexive strategy. A caseworker in the Czech Republic emphasised that she is already aware of the fact that her first impressions of the client may be misleading, so only long-term cooperation can lead to establishing mutual trust:

> *"I used to trust the people of whom I had thought that yes (i.e., that they are trustworthy), but I found out that no (i.e., she has found out they were not trustworthy). And those of whom I had thought that no, then yes. (…) as time goes by, we, like, are building it (trust), them towards me, me towards them. But during the first meeting, I don't even try to analyse it (trustworthiness of a client), because it's not possible" (CZ FW7).*

Citizens also emphasised that organising the relationship between frontline workers in social assistance and citizens in a fashion that allows for long-term cooperation is necessary to establish trust. Welfare users often highlighted that the lack of one assigned frontline worker, or frequent changes, prohibit beneficiaries from trusting welfare institutions and increase uncertainty:

> *"Well, I think that trust would increase if everyone had an assigned worker, alright? With whom one'd be for some time…years or months until he (the worker) can really help one (…) Not that you are being thrown from one door to another, to another door, to another door. And then you're frightened who you'll get: "Jesus, I got a bad witch." Alright? And now I have someone good, and who will it be next?" (CZ CIT 14).*

Apart from the focus on maintaining long-term relationships with welfare users, a practice of devoting "extra time" to beneficiaries or families with whom building a trust-based relationship is a challenge was discussed. For instance, a caseworker in Greece emphasised how she decides on whether more frequent contact with clients is necessary:

"When I see something, that the person has more needs than he realises, maybe I will have more frequent communication so I can give some instructions and mobilise him to do more things on his own" (GR FW5).

In a similar fashion, "more time" invested to gain trust involved, for example, meeting clients not only during office hours or in rapid respond, but also in direct communication. This was emphasised by citizens in Denmark as highly trust-promoting practice. As revealed by a citizen interviewee about their relationship with the mentor:

"We see each other in private … we talk; we are bonded… I also have had something private with some of my home helpers" (DK CIT4).

Not only devoting more time to a client, but also arranging that time in a fashion that allows building some intimacy with clients was discussed as a deliberate trust-building strategy of frontline workers. A social assistant from Poland emphasised that whenever she can, she assists her clients during trips to distant municipal institutions. She chooses public transport for those trips which enable her to sit at length on a bus with the client and have a more relaxed conversation about the client's issues. She perceives that practice as a very good way to strengthen trust-based relationships with clients.

Practice 2: decreasing client's uncertainty through better communication

The practice focused on providing very thorough and exhaustive information about the procedures in social assistance, possible help options, and detailed information about "where to go" is perceived, in particular by clients, as a major pathway to establishing a trust-based relationship with a frontline worker. From the citizens' perspective, the ideal social worker is someone willing to explain complex issues, acts as a "guide," and prioritises problem-solving. Interviewees speak of such social workers in a very positive way, and say they are a significant help in the system. The interviewees declare that social workers help them with the whole process of applying for benefits – giving advice, explaining what interviewees are entitled to, printing forms, filling out forms, calling offices, if needed. One interviewee described the importance of the help provided by her social worker as follows:

"… she's an excellent woman; she finds out all the information for me. She really helps me. Otherwise, I'd know nothing" (CZ CIT 7).

A trust-building strategy, based on the use of information, not only refers to this information being thorough and exhaustive, as in the aforementioned examples. In many instances, both frontline workers and citizens emphasise that what establishes trust is providing the information in a clear and straightforward way. This involves refraining from using legal jargon, ensuring clarity, and presenting the chances and consequences of both positive and negative outcomes of the processes for the client. For instance, in Germany, a Youth Welfare office worker stressed that being authentic in what she says is essential to build trust with clients:

"I think I am perceived as trustworthy and I also know that [...] they appreciate the fact that I am very clear in what I say. So, I'm not wishy-washy. Exactly. Because I know that they know exactly how things stand. This is very

important to me. And I don't inspire hope if there isn't any. That also has something to do with respect and appreciation" (DE FW 21).

In a similar fashion, a frontline worker from Serbia emphasises how being authentic helps her to establish a trust-based relationship with clients:

"I think it depends a lot on how you treat them (users) during first contact, but in principle, if you are authentic and they really recognise it, then trust is not an issue" (RS FW1).

In terms of communication strategy, mutual respect and appreciation are repeatedly mentioned in the interviews as further important elements of trust:

"So, for me it has something that you somehow also feel and know the person takes you, well, takes you seriously, doesn't judge you" (DE FW5).

Many interviewed citizens also find it important to be treated with respect, acceptance, and appreciation. When they feel that a frontline worker accepts and respects their opinions and life choices, deals with them as equals, and appreciates what they have achieved, then they can trust them more easily. Yet, if their counterpart appears to be judgemental and prejudiced, looks down on them, and lacks respect and understanding, trusting becomes more difficult and unlikely, while some also take this as a reason to distrust a frontline worker and to protect their privacy as much as possible. One interviewee reports a positive example in the following way:

"I felt comfortable with her/in the meeting with her. And this was the most important thing. […] She was very human in her dealings with me. That means, she did not behave as if she were 'I am everything, you are nothing'. […] And I found this very pleasant because it is important that when you are supposed to work with each other, then this should happen on an equal footing. Not that one thinks 'I am the Croesus and you are…/ Come, crawl at my feet!' or so. Then I do not trust and am not willing to talk, really not" (DE CIT 18).

One of the family advisers calls building up trust, "…a work of translation" (DK FW12) emphasising the challenge of judgement-free informing about the issues which are emotionally difficult for clients. She explained that trust is to translate the help-giving in such a way that the intention of help is not misunderstood by the parents - if a parent is reported for beating their child, the family adviser must find a balanced way of informing the parent. The mentioned interviewee underlined that it is their job to tell the parents that it is forbidden to beat a child, however, she must accomplish this without adopting a condemnatory tone

Practice 3: decreasing client's anxiety through sensitive information handling

Frontline workers in social assistance acknowledge the importance of addressing and alleviating the anxieties of families who seek their support. One of the major fears, brought about in all researched countries, is welfare users' fear that their children might be put in foster

care, due to family financial or pedagogical problems. Our interviews showed that frontline workers are fully aware of that fear, as expressed by a family assistant in Denmark:

> *"At the outset, some citizens express concerns that I may 'take their children' to foster care... So, I reassure them about the assistance I can offer, emphasising that my aim isn't to remove their children, but to help them navigate their challenges. Trust gradually builds as they reach out to me for assistance. This two-way interaction demonstrates their growing trust in me" (DK SLB 8).*

In this situation, the social worker builds trustworthiness by offering reassurance that her main goal is to help the family "navigate their challenges", which in turn negates the need to address her client's greatest fear directly.

Another related issue that sparked anxiety in welfare users is the revelation of sensitive information to social assistance workers in other institutions. Police and family courts were among the institutions that our interviewees referred to most often. Also, in this case, frontline users do not convince users that no information about clients can be transferred to other institutions. Rather, they try to show clients that that information will not be used against them. Once again, this was underlined by a Danish interviewee:

> *"Trust is something that evolves over time, built through continuous interactions. Citizens come to rely on me and eventually feel comfortable sharing personal details, trusting that I won't misuse their information, or hold it against them. This mutual honesty strengthens our bond" (DK SLB12).*

In a similar fashion, a frontline worker in Serbia shares how she convinces beneficiaries that their trust is actually a prerequisite for efficient help, and thus being over-anxious is counter-effective:

> *"Some families are remarkably candid, acknowledging, 'Perhaps I shouldn't disclose this; it might be used against me.' I reassure them, emphasising that their honesty aids our understanding and ability to assist effectively" (RS SLB 8).*

A relevant reflection about achieving trust in adverse situations was made by a Polish frontline worker. She emphasises that in her contacts with welfare users, she explicitly names the spheres and issues within which trust is welcome. However, she also points to those which have nothing to do with trust, explaining that her clients are aware that she has to protect people from domestic violence, and would not hesitate to report abuse to the police.

Practice 4: proving 'to be on the same side' of the system with a client by accompanying and advocating for the client in various institutions

Frontline workers emphasised that in some instances, they do "something extraordinary" to show support to their clients. This sometimes involves "being less demanding" when requesting additional documents needed for administrative purposes. One of our interviewees directly pointed this out:

> *"When it comes to the required documents, one person will 'hammer' the requests to bring them (...), the other (...) wants to help and one phrase in a statement is sufficient" (PL SLB10).*

Frontline workers also provided examples of bending rules for the client's welfare, such as lending their own money, giving out personal mobile phone numbers, or driving clients in their private cars. Such actions were also recognised by welfare users and often appreciated as particularly trust-building.

As one Polish interviewee put it:

> *"Some people, like this guy [a frontline worker], seem like a normal fellow who knows life. (…) It may be strange for someone (…) [that the caseworker] comes and lends him money. It was so human for me. Normal" (PL CIT 13).*

Assisting clients in their contacts with third parties was also discussed by frontline workers and citizens as a trust-building strategy:

> *"Well, trust means that you can trust someone, and you know the person well. (…) She supports me in many ways. When I must go to a meeting, she picks me up because otherwise, I would cancel the meeting; and she helps me when I am having a meeting with a job consultant. She cares about me" (DK CIT14).*

However, since accompanying clients during their visits to other institutions may be recognised as a standard example of social work practice, what seemed particularly trust-inducing was standing up, advocating, and "fighting" for the client in various institutions. Numerous frontline workers provided us with examples of their disagreements with social assistance managers as they "fought" for favourable solutions and often, more financial support for their clients. Welfare beneficiaries highly appreciated that attitude, and whenever they were positively surprised by frontline workers' actions of that type, their trust increased. This is present in the experience recalled by a Polish homeless welfare beneficiary:

> *"I went to therapy because I had an issue with drugs. And then I told her [social worker] I don't use anymore. She was happy and told me I'm eligible for a flat. So, I said 'so many people in (city) are waiting for social housing, how come I'm eligible for a flat.' So, she said 'everyone is eligible for a flat!' (…) So, we started going to the mayor's office (…) and looking for a flat. So, I started to volunteer as a street worker. All this was really cool" (PL CIT 8).*

5. Conclusions

The presented analysis is based on a large dataset of interviews from seven European countries: Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Serbia. The research problem aimed to address the character of social assistance frontline workers' professional activities focused on establishing users' trust. We analysed frontline workers' reflections on

how they conduct ‘work on trust’ with their clients, and contextualised our analysis by including citizens’ assessments of those actions. The starting point was the assumption that three main stances present in social welfare literature on trust do not fully capture the meaning of trust and the specificity of trust-focused practices, although those insights are helpful in clarifying how trust between frontline workers and citizens can be reached in adverse social welfare contexts. As stated, current literature tends to perceive individual trust in frontline welfare delivery as either a matter of fixed frontline workers’ work styles, communication skills, and/or ethical features.

Our analysis partially validates these stances. The described practice of granting welfare users "extra time" to build trust-based relationships, or frontline workers’ practice of standing up and advocating for clients, or "fighting" with managers for more generous solutions to clients’ problems, align well with the styles of a "caregiver" (Zacka 2017), a "citizen agent" (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000), or a "professional" (Møller and Stensöta 2019). Interviewed citizens often emphasised that few experiences build their trust more than frontline workers standing up for them against the bureaucratic system.

Additionally, Senghaas (2019) showed that users’ trust is elevated when clients are given time to express their concerns, feel comfortable and reduce their anxiety levels, a finding our analysis supports. Practices based on providing very thorough information to clients, making them aware of potential wrongdoings in their cases, and refraining from speaking from a position of power were salient themes in our study.

However, the practices we have reconstructed reveal the specificity and vernacularity of frontline work concerning trust. They demonstrate the meaning of trust-focused practices in frontline work that extend beyond the approaches presented in the literature. These meanings can be categorised as follows.

First, both frontline workers' and citizens' reflections show how trust-building is a relational process. Developing trust involves continuous mutual relations based on recurring interactions. The common thread and the explicit expression used by our interviewees of "doing more by a frontline worker than the formal minimum requires" as a premise to build clients' trust points to the perspective of symbolic interactionism (Behnia 2008). An interpretation of the presented data from that perspective suggests that "doing more than the minimum" by a frontline worker, followed by a client's trust in that frontline worker, operates within an "economy of gratitude" (Hochschild, 1989), in which potentially costly gestures are exchanged. Frontline workers’ ‘costs’ involve time, additional strain, and potentially standing up to managers. For welfare clients, they involve accepting their own vulnerability when giving caseworkers their trust. Such symbolic interaction seems to provide the overarching context for trust development, and in our data, it appears primary in detailed judgements of frontline workers' trustworthiness features. The relational aspect of "work on trust" performed by frontline workers also means adjusting the practice to the client and the specific situation. For instance, the presented theme of alleviating clients' anxiety demonstrates the underlying assumption of frontline workers that in the case of some clients, trust is particularly difficult to reach and thus requires such "tailored" solutions, such as establishing a relationship with children first, then attempting to work more closely with parents.

Second, reconstructed themes show that frontline workers' trust-building practices involve potentially helping clients to accept the vulnerability of a trustor, and strengthening the emotional dimension of emerging trust. Creating bonds and confidence, decreasing clients' anxiety in their relationship with social welfare officers, and reassuring clients that frontline workers are "on the same side," working together to increase clients' wellbeing, are examples of the psychological work necessary to make trust relationships flourish.

Finally, the presented practices allow frontline workers to prove their trustworthiness. Although, as stated, the mentioned symbolic exchange of actions-as-gifts between frontline workers and clients structures their relations, trust would not develop without the reassurance of frontline workers being indeed trustworthy. Numerous examples from citizen interviewees in our study demonstrate the importance of frontline workers' competence, fairness, and respectfulness in building trust in social assistance. Frontline workers seem very aware of the significance of their own trustworthiness verification by clients. However, they also understand that clients' trust-building is far from merely checking off a list of potential caseworkers' desired attitudes and behaviours and thus, even meeting trustworthiness criteria does not automatically translate into trust. The mentioned relational aspects also suggest that frontline workers reflect on their dual role as providers and recipients of trust, and experience challenges trusting others. Themes of "devoting time" include reflections that frontline workers themselves need time to build trust in clients, too. The theme referring to communication skills shows that "being yourself" as a frontline worker – thus being ready to uncover one's own traits – is essential in building that mutual relationship.

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Navigating Trust and Distrust in Governance: Understanding Democratic Social Movements' (Non)Cooperation with Institutions

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1. Introduction

Social movements are collective actors making contentious claims and challenging the political status quo, which is why they typically distrust institutional politics. In general, mobilisations based on "organised distrust" towards institutions could be of various kinds and could lead to different outcomes: from the radical rejection of existing political institutions and revolutionary demands, to mobilisations demanding democratic reforms. Whatever their nature, organised forms of political distrust inevitably imply social movements, political and social group agents making contentious claims, sometimes engaged in prefigurative politics (Törnberg 2021; Yates 2015), challenging the political status quo.

However, while social movements typically distrust institutional politics, studies indicate a positive association between interpersonal trust (ingroup and outgroup trust) and extra-institutional mobilisation and participation in collective actions (Benson and Rochon 2004; Hyungjun and Reynolds-Stenson 2018). The issue of trust, therefore, plays a double role in the formation and agency of social movements: while they often emerge as a collective expression of distrust in governance, they build on trust among citizens. Thus, social movements are ideal sites for examining the mutual interplay between political distrust (in representatives, government, or markets) and interpersonal trust. Additionally, democratic social movements often serve as "schools of democracy", politically socialising citizens and building their democratic competencies, thus renewing their trust in collective political action.

All this raises awareness of the importance of trust-building processes and the dynamic of trust and distrust of social movements in governance. How do social movements perceive the political system and representative democracy? How do social movements describe and assess (dis)trust in institutions and governance? How do social movements perceive trust and distrust and their significance for social and political life, particularly considering that their mobilisation often hinges on distrust? Most importantly, does mobilisation based on distrust in institutions, as an inherent characteristic of social movements, lead to complete refusal of cooperation with them? If not, what are the factors and practices that can enhance or diminish movements' trust in institutions and their willingness to cooperate with them?

Our chapter delves into these questions by analysing the data obtained from twenty-eight focus groups and fourteen interviews, encompassing fourteen democratic social movements

from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Serbia, between March and May 2021. The sample includes active, grassroots, democratic social movements acting within the fields marked by contemporary global crises – environmental issues, socio-economic degradation, migration, and gender violence and discrimination. All details regarding the sample (name of the social movement with abbreviations, issues they focus on, number of participants of focus groups) are reported in Table 1. Our focus is on the movements that have emerged as a response to issues relevant to understanding the present-day global demise of trust in governance, and the sample includes democratic social movements as they are typically described in the literature as distrusting institutional politics, but developing 'critical trust' through alternative conceptions of democracy and democratic spaces.

Table 1: Focus group sample

	Case 1	**issue**	**Core**	**Followers**	**Case 2**	**issue**	**Core**	**Followers**
Poland	Polish Smog Alert (PL PAS)	environment	5	5	All-Poland Women's Strike (PL OSK)	Women's rights (abortion law)	4	5
Denmark	NOAH (DK NOAH)	environment	6	6	the Friendly Neighbours (DK VbF)	solidarity with the refugees (migrants)	5	4
Greece	Anti-gold mining movement in Chalkidiki (GR AM)	environment	5	4	Colour Youth – LGBTQ Youth Community of Athens (GR CY)	personal autonomy, sexual orientation	6	6
Germany	Fridays for Future (DE FFF)	environment	4	5	Housing Movement (DE HM)	housing issues	3	2
Czechia	Extinction Rebellion Czech Republic (CZ XR)	environment	5	6	Million Moments for Democracy (CZ MM)	the quality of institutions	7	6
Italy	Extinction Rebellion Italy (IT XR)	environment	4	4	Non una di meno (IT NM)	Women's rights (the issue of male violence)	5	4
Serbia	Defend the rivers of the mountain of Stara Planina (RS ORSP)	environment	6	6	Joint action Roof over your Head (RS ZA)	prevention of evictions, legal right to home	5	5

In the second part of the chapter, we will focus on the movements' perception of the relevance of trust and distrust, in general. In the third, the focus will be on their self-proclaimed orientation along the anti-system/reformist axis. In the fourth part, we will analyse the attitudes of social movements regarding trust in institutions and institutional actors, while the fifth part will analyse social movements' cooperation with institutions. In the conclusion, we will try to summarise our answers to the question: does mobilisation based on distrust in institutions, as an inherent characteristic of social movements, lead to complete refusal to cooperate with them? Our findings suggest that (dis)trust in institutions and the social movements' willingness to cooperate with them depend on the complex interplay between the movements' ideological disposition, national contexts and concrete past experiences.

2. Perception of the relevance of general trust and distrust

In all the cases of the social movements we analyse (also in those we call anti-systemic), trust is seen as a positive category and necessary to fostering a well-functioning society. When the activists talk about trust or distrust, they do not make clear distinctions between social and political trust but, in their words, those two dimensions are often overlapping and connected: they usually reflect on their own experience of trust as necessary for mobilisation and collective action, and from that perspective, they observe the relevance of trust for society:

> *It is considered 'the basis of all human coexistence'* (DE FFF C)

> *(…) society stands and falls with it (trust). If people don't trust each other, society no longer exists. Afterward, everyone's alone and afraid of what the others are planning against them* (CZ MM C).

Yet, all activists of the social movements caution against blind or naive trust, and consider it detrimental.

Regarding the perception of distrust, we observed that while general distrust is typically viewed negatively and as disruptive to societies, some degree of distrust (especially focused on specific actors or policies) is deemed beneficial, catalysing critical perspectives. Distrust has inherent mobilisation potential:

> *If you have the energy to take an interest in a subject, and I have experienced that many people have, then distrust may activate them. I can also see that people get engaged and arrange demonstrations and meetings and seek information, and such. Distrust has pushed them to act [on the Syrian refugee situation] and now with the insecurity [they are about to be sent out of Denmark] … It must be stopped … Now, it is purely political. We must act in relation to getting the decisions changed. So, I also think there is someone who can work with distrust*" (DK VbF F).

However, when distrust pervades all spheres of society, it is not seen as beneficial, as it tends to breed frustration, lower the sense of political efficacy, and lead to disengagement. This is true in the ZA Serbian social movement, which could be considered an anti-system.

Namely, the members of the ZA movement relate to both general distrust, as well as distrust in institutions, to several positive functions of distrust, namely to distrust as a corrective factor in society, one that leads to alertness. Thus, they also claim that the role of social movements is to nurture distrust. However, they also consider "complete cynicism" (RS ZA C) in society as something unproductive because citizens then tend to believe in conspiracy theories and cannot trust anyone:

> *Well, probably like all other things, there is an extent to which it is useful to question things, nothing is a holy cow, the extent to which it [distrust] facilitates questioning and the development of institutions and the like, but it appears to me that, somehow, the ground is moving now, that there is nothing solid for people to hold onto, and that it is very hard for them to find their way in all that* (RS ZA F).

Overall, respondents from all focus groups mostly perceive distrust as negative when it is too general and leads to feelings of resignation, and positive when it is put into action and serves to question the institutions. It seems that the logic that stands behind the understanding of trust from the perspective of social movements is the following: distrust mobilises people as it makes them question and critically observe (but it must be focused and not dispersed to the whole system), while trust is necessary for mobilisation and involvement in collective action.

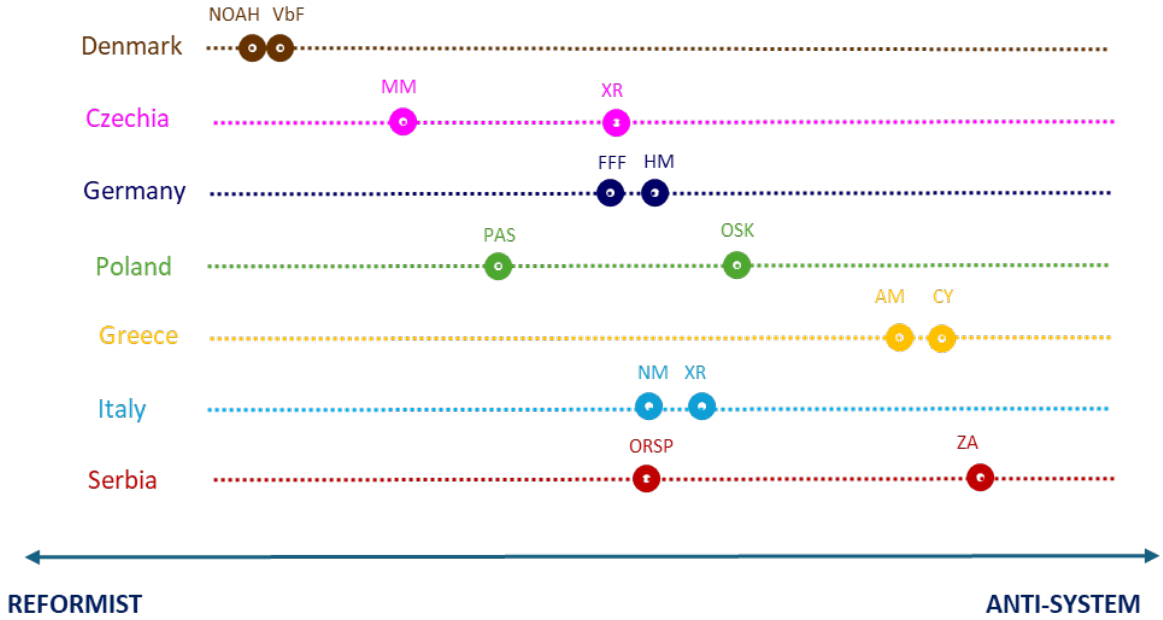
The social movements' prevailing attitude regarding general trust and distrust can be summarised as follows. Trust is considered a necessary, key element in society, enabling its functioning and cohesion. However, distrust is not merely the opposite of trust; it is seen as conditionally positive, as it encourages critical thinking, vigilance, and political awareness. It can mobilise and unite citizens to take action. Even when such mobilisations fail to achieve proclaimed goals – with a probable consequence of inciting further distrust in governing institutions – collective organising as such can strengthen intra-movement trust, trust in fellow activists and joint commitment. Such was the case with the anti-gold mining movement in Greece, after they failed to realise their goals by cooperating with the governing party:

> *Nothing can break this bond. If you pass through difficulties, then this bond within us cannot break. For anyone who is currently on the road and fighting, yes, I am by his side and in solidarity. I cannot say that I trust anyone other than the movement and the person who fights* (GR AM C).

Similarly, where trust and distrust cannot be explained as a zero-sum game, social movements perceive their role in society as agents capable of restoring trust and, simultaneously, further nurturing (critical) distrust (in governance). For example, social movement activists from the Czech Republic, while stating that restoring or increasing trust in society is not their primary role, see themselves as contributing to it, as their activities reportedly indirectly boost citizens' trust. Core members of the ZA movement from Serbia maintain that their primary aim is to nurture distrust toward institutions, while working towards improving them. Followers of NUDM from Italy believe that they contribute to societal trust by cooperating with other movements and building trust relations with other collective actors.

3. Social movement orientations along the anti-system/reformist axis

In order to understand the social movements' stances on the anti-system/reform spectrum, we analysed the discussion that focused on attitudes toward democracy and trust in institutions and political actors. Our research shows that narratives that allow us to place social movements on the anti-system/reform spectrum emerge sporadically and indirectly within discussions. It is important to emphasise that many movements believe in the need for serious system reform, but we would not straightforwardly classify them as anti-systemic. This may be attributed to their attitudes and the various actions they employ showing a degree of trust in *some* of the institutions (local institutions, organisations, etc). The chart below illustrates the provisional positioning of the movements on the anti-system/reformist axis as it is difficult to set clear mapping without further research that would directly question the relations to the system and its elements.



Anti-systemic movements, characterised by a fundamental distrust of representative institutions and prevailing socio-political structures, demonstrate scepticism towards capitalist systems, profit-driven mechanisms, and neoliberal policies. For instance, the anti-housing movement (HM) in Germany and LGBTQI movement (CY) in Greece articulate profound distrust towards capitalist mechanisms and state institutions, attributing it to institutional violence and perceived injustices.

Extending beyond distrust, some movements reject the representative democracy system altogether, targeting political parties and governmental institutions. Extinction Rebellion (XR) activists in Italy denounce representative democracy, emphasising distrust towards political parties and governmental structures. Similarly, movements in Serbia (ZA and ORSP) exhibit high levels of distrust towards governmental institutions, however only part of ZA movement

grounds this distrust on ideological principles and on a belief in a revolutionary systemic change to rectify systemic damages.

The complexity deepens as some movements express a degree of trust in the system while advocating for significant reforms to restore faith in institutions. These movements highlight the importance of preserving the democratic framework while acknowledging its imperfections and advocating for improvements. We want to point out that social movements exhibit varying degrees of distrust towards political systems, situated along the anti-system versus reformist axis. While some advocate for radical transformation and revolutionary change, others pragmatically engage in policy reform, reflecting nuanced responses to perceived injustices and systemic flaws. At the same time, some movements directly express their trust in the political system (CZ MM, DK VbF), while elaborating on distrust in political representatives. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for contextualising the motivations, strategies, and trajectories of social movements in contemporary socio-political landscapes.

4. Trust in institutions and institutional actors

When explicitly asked about the amount of trust in institutions and institutional actors, social movements express varied levels of trust across countries. National differences are the dominant factor in this case. Those differences mirror the general differences between trust levels in analysed countries, the differences in public support of political institutions, and the differences in institutional performance.

Social movements from Serbia, Italy, Poland, and Greece share distrust towards political institutions due to enduring negative experiences. They perceive that these institutions also mistrust or overlook citizens, diminishing their sense of importance. Similarly, in the Czech Republic, Germany, and Denmark, social movements predominantly distrust political institutions. Still, social movements in these countries consider trust in state institutions crucial for functioning democracies, viewing it as the foundation for political participation in representative democracies. Many social movement representatives emphasise how untrustworthy individuals within political institutions undermine overall trust in those institutions. It seems that there is a consensus that widespread distrust in institutions is detrimental, as it fosters citizen apathy and reluctance to engage in societal and political affairs:

> *I assume that the absolute majority of this country has no trust in Miloš Zeman (the current Czech President) and, at the same time, I strongly wish it didn't mean that people wouldn't trust the institution of the president (…), and this is an issue we're dealing with a lot; it's problematic to say: 'the government does something wrong' because a number of people have no idea what it means, and who represents it (the government), and that (…) different people might represent it differently in the future* (CZ MM C).

Also in Denmark, the predominant attitude is a critical and conditional trust and distrust targeted at the politicians and political parties in Denmark, both at the local and national levels.

They show distrust of political parties because of their stances on refugees (DK VbF), or because they do not keep electoral promises (DK NOAH C). They are also critical of the citizens' lack of distrust in political authorities:

> *Sometimes, citizens are even too trustful: Then I think, there is too much trust in those who have the power in Denmark. And that's one of the main reasons why we cannot motivate people to act …to defend their democratic rights* (DK NOAH C).

> *If you distrust someone (political authority), then you question them. And that, well, that is also very democratic. To not just believe everything, but also to think twice for yourself, or to form your own opinion on something* (DE FFF C).

5. Social movements' cooperation with institutions

When looking at how social movement activists assess the relationship between trust and distrust, instead of a sharp opposition, we more often find nuanced approaches, where certain types of trust (in a collective agency, or fellow citizens and activists) go hand in hand with certain kinds of distrust ('healthy,' critical, etc.). While the previous segments of the chapter looked at the movements' positionalities and general attitudes on (dis)trust – often referring to their local and national contexts – this final segment will focus on the social movements' *cooperation* with institutions. In this regard, we were primarily interested in questions of when social movements trust (enough) institutions to cooperate with them, how the movements assess the institutions' trustworthiness, and mostly, how the experiences of such cooperation shape (dis)trust of social movements.

Regarding cooperation with governmental institutions (ministries, police, government, etc.), as expected for contentious actors, social movements are reluctant to engage in it. When it takes place, it is described in *instrumental* terms, as regretful but necessary (for instance, cooperation with police is unavoidable when organising protests). According to XR's core members from Italy, the movement has cooperated only with the regional institution in Tuscany. Although they have not held principled opposition to institutional cooperation, they have strongly underlined the instrumental view towards this cooperation:

> *In my opinion, this institutional contact was merely instrumental to a strategy… we had this contact and the institutions also gave us their word of approval… and when they break their word... we will have something to reproach them for ... (this contact) is very instrumental and (it is) not a real hope for collaborating with the institutions unless it really does something to implement our proposals, (it is) partially symbolic and above all, strategic (IT XR C).*

Such cooperation was reported to incite deep polarisation within movements, thus potentially weakening in-group trust relations – especially among movements principally oriented toward non-cooperation with governmental structures. When asked to assess the effects of such cooperation on trust (among activists and citizens' trust), activists usually reported adverse or unclear impacts. Partial exemptions to this are movements oriented toward very concrete policy changes (most notably, *Polish Smog Alert, PAS*), since such movements tend

to cooperate with institutions, as per the definition of their raison d'etre. However, policy-oriented movements with broader ideological missions, or movements closer to the anti-system end of the axis (like ORSP and AM), have a much more complicated and mostly negative experience with building trust through cooperation with institutions. The total exemption to this is social movements from Denmark, as they have a history of cooperation and trust-based relations with diverse governmental institutions.

Three further specific insights emerged from our findings. First, as already hinted at above, the inclination to cooperate and trust institutions is related to the type of movement. Positioning on the anti-system-reformist axis plays a role here. Social movements ostensibly defined by their ideological position – anti-capitalist movements or movements acting against some systemic problems – will be more cautious regarding cooperation of any kind, as it might potentially compromise their strong value orientation. Moreover, movements with a high focus on policy change (change or adoption of concrete law) are, in principle, oriented toward cooperation because it is one of their key strategies to achieve the desired goal. The best example of this is PAS from Poland. Cooperation is not something to be debated for them; it is, from the outset, inscribed in the movement's defining agenda. In this respect, we might talk about *pragmatic* and *programmatic* social movements. Pragmatic movements are oriented toward concrete, specifiable goals, while programmatic are more committed to systemic societal changes and ideological principles. This characterisation is provisional and introduced here only for the purposes of better understanding the movements' inclination to cooperate with and trust institutions. Also, this distinction largely overlaps with the reformist-anti-system one, although it focuses more on movements' programmes and activities than on their ideological stances.

Environmental movements, for example, are somewhere in between, as they are, by definition, pro-policy-change, but they also usually have a developed ideological framework. Environmental movements focused on more narrow or concrete goals – like PAS, with a unique focus on air pollution – would exhibit traits of a pragmatic movement. In contrast, environmental movements with a more complex anti-systemic agenda, like AM or ORSP, will retain characteristics of both pragmatic and programmatic movements. Movements that could be described as anti-systemic, like ZA from Serbia or HM from Germany, display strong traits of programmatic movements – making complex debates about every potential cooperation. This especially applies to cooperation with governmental institutions, as they are not trusted by default.

The second insight shows, however, that besides ideology and programmatic orientation, concrete experiences also play an important role. Namely, specific, often local, concrete past experiences with certain institutions and organisations can "colour" the principled view on (dis)trusting them, but also on forming general attitudes towards (dis)trust in institutions. An example of this comes from AM movement from Greece. AM was hoping to cooperate with SYRIZA, as the left party supported AM mobilisation prior to coming to power. However, due to the SYRIZA government's failure to implement an environmentally friendly policy for anti-gold mining, old promises were broken and trust was shattered:

> *The state and the political forces manage to break the trust of the people and the movements … So it is, at the moment, more difficult to manage, both individually and collectively, the feeling that no matter what we do and give, we will lose* (GR AM C).

Past experiences thus can play an even greater role than the ideological stance in social movement assessments of other institutions' trustworthiness.

FInally, another interesting insight describes a phenomenon that we term the *personalisation of institutions*. This implies assessing the trustworthiness of an institution – and hence, readiness to cooperate with it – based on the trustworthiness of concrete individuals working in or representing the institution. Namely, social movements could be, in principle, against cooperation with governmental institutions (and position themselves closer to the anti-system end), but because of concrete acquaintances associated with significant levels of trust, they would opt to cooperate regardless. The personalisation of institutions was mentioned by activists from Poland and Serbia, and this finding could potentially be connected to institutional capture and low responsiveness, found in both countries (Innes, 2014; Keil, 2018), where institutional channels of cooperation are often compromised. Some activists described this as not institutional cooperation, but as cooperation "ad hoc and by contact" (RS ZA C). However, this means that principled distrust in institutions and personal trust in individuals, only when taken together, can explain the movements' overall (dis)trust in institutions and their willingness to cooperate with them.

6. Concluding remarks

The prevailing attitude of social movements towards general trust and distrust can be succinctly summarised as follows: Trust is viewed as an indispensable and fundamental component of society, crucial for its functioning and unity. Conversely, distrust is not merely regarded as the antithesis of trust; it is perceived as potentially beneficial, as it fosters critical thinking, vigilance, and political consciousness. Distrust has the capacity to mobilise and unite citizens, prompting them to take collective action. Even in instances where such mobilisation falls short of achieving its stated objectives, often resulting in heightened distrust towards governing institutions, the act of collective organisation itself can bolster trust within the movement, fostering solidarity among activists and shared commitment. Upon examining how activists within social movements evaluate the interplay between trust and distrust, rather than encountering a stark dichotomy, we frequently encounter nuanced perspectives. These perspectives acknowledge that certain forms of trust, such as trust in collective agency, or in fellow citizens and activists, coexist alongside specific types of distrust, characterised as 'healthy' or critical.

Social movements predominantly distrust political parties and governmental institutions. Interviewees mentioned only particular politicians or officials (especially those known personally, or with whom they have worked) as trustworthy. So, personal relations are sometimes more important than a principled stance on institutions - especially in societies characterised by institutional capture, like Poland and Serbia, where most of the institutions function under a strong political grip.

We can thus observe a complex interplay of factors impacting social movements' (dis)trust in institutions. The most important elements are ideological orientation, national context and the role played by concrete experiences of cooperation. Movements with anti-systemic ideologies tend to default to distrust, and do not easily cooperate with institutions. On the other hand, movements oriented toward policy changes (for instance, environmental movements) find cooperation fundamental for achieving their goals and, hence, are more trustful by default. However, this differentiation along the axis of reformist vs. anti-system movements (complemented by a conditional differentiation between programmatic and pragmatic movements) has to be considered together with the role played by the national contexts and concrete past experiences (of cooperation) the movements have had. Regarding the movements' general attitudes about trust in institutions and institutional actors, national contexts play a pivotal role. For instance, social movements from Serbia, Italy, Poland, and Greece share distrust towards political institutions due to enduring negative experiences. Finally, it is interesting to see how ideological dispositions, and national contexts intersect with concrete experiences of cooperation with institutions (which, of course, are inseparably intertangled with national context) and concrete individuals. Only taken together can all these aspects contribute to our better understanding of social movements developing (dis)trust relations towards formal institutions of governance.

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The news media as an arena of trust contestation during the pandemic

Hans-Joerg Trenz, Ulrike Zschache

1. Introduction: The role of public mediators of trust

In democracy, the news media play a crucial role in providing the knowledge and information that citizens need to assess the trustworthiness of government and their political representatives. Through news making, we can observe how judgements about trust and distrust, together with the criteria of trustworthiness that are applied to make such judgements, are given selective salience and are framed in a way that (in)forms public opinion. In democratic political theory, the emphasis has mostly been on the normative criteria on which democratic citizens base their judgements to trust or distrust their government (Offe 2000; Warren 1999). Stable democracies facilitate 'enlightened trust' through balanced opinions and reasoned scepticism in light of evidence of government's performance and adherence to shared normative principles.

In accounting for the changing role of the media in political trust building in the digital age, the more recent literature has focused on how some of the current developments in media performance have accelerated the global crisis of democracy by systematically enhancing public cynicism, polarisation and radicalisation of opinion (Bennett and Pfetsch 2018; Esser and Neuberger 2019). Counter-democratic mobilisation was further propelled by a series of crises, of which the global health crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, was just one episode. The symptoms of post-democracy, conducive to the erosion of trust in democratic government and in political parties, are also increasingly paired with the more recent trends of post-truth politics, fundamentally challenging the authority of science and experts (Conrad et al. 2022). The latter, together with uncertainty, the enhanced contingency of knowledge and susceptibility to revision in facing global challenges become a breeding ground for generalised, or even cynical distrust. In the following, we therefore chose the Covid-19 pandemic as a test case of media-driven contestation of trust in democratic government and science.

The enlightened trust scenario of journalism in democracy would thus be challenged by the disruptive scenario of generalised, fundamental distrust, as manifested in excessive criticism of journalism and overall negativity bias of judgements of trust in the news. In addition to the scenario of generalised distrust, we can also conceive of another disruptive scenario of credulous trust. This is the case when journalism, in facing uncertainty, would only trust in the problem-solving capacities of government and science, foregoing the process of verification (Norris 2022: 8). An optimistic bias of trust judgements in the news can result from corruption and propaganda, while in the extreme case, it can also be imposed by authoritarian governments. When applied to the Covid-19 pandemic we ask: a) whether the news

media amplify generalised, or even cynical distrust as manifested in the polarisation of political opinions, the mobilisation of extreme positions and the spread of fake news that targets the trustworthiness of scientists, government and political representatives; or b) whether media coverage during the pandemic support enlightened (dis)trust, enabling informed opinion-making and criticism; or finally, c) whether news media, as was claimed by some oppositional forces during the pandemic, were turned into the government's mouthpiece to propagate uninformed and acclamatory trust in science and government.

2. News media and social media as arenas of trust contestation during the pandemic

In our comparative research design, covering Denmark, Germany, Italy, Greece, Poland, Czech Republic and Serbia, we are able to systematically put to the test these assumptions of media news selection and framing during crisis, leading to either generalised distrust, enlightened trust or uninformed trust. The mass media arena of political contestation, as constituted by professional journalism, continues to be the principal forum of debate to judge the trustworthiness of political representatives and scientific experts. The main opponents in the debate are expected to appear in this arena and be given voice by the journalists in a way that shapes public opinion. In the existing literature, the emphasis is put on differences between countries, thematised in terms of cultures of trust, with Scandinavian countries (in our case selection, Denmark) and partly also Germany as a high trust culture distinguished by a relatively unitary media system, the professionalisation of journalism and a strong role of public broadcasting; Mediterranean countries (in our case, Italy and Greece), instead, are low trust countries with weakly institutionalised and semi-independent journalism, resulting in generally low levels of news consumption (Hallin and Mancini 2004). In the newer member states and in Eastern Europe, where independent journalism developed only after 1990, this picture is more mixed. Recent studies point to generally low levels of trust in government, paired with low levels of trust in the media that is clearly connected to governments' performance, and especially the authoritarian interventions into the independence of the media sphere (in our case, Serbia, Poland and, somewhat less pronounced, Czechia) (Kalogeropoulos et al. 2019; Pjesivac 2017).

While accounting for country differences in our study, we also focus on differences in trust contestation between different media outlets (Trenz and Zschache 2021). A cross-media research design gains relevance in light of recent trends in the fragmentation and platformisation of the public sphere, with audiences increasingly closed in particular information worlds and opinion bubbles served by specific media (Fletcher and Nielsen 2017; Nelson and Lei 2018). To measure such possible fragmentation effects, we cover three professional newspapers in each country, which provide a wide reach and, by including both pro-governmental and oppositional newspapers, a diversity of opinion (cross-media comparison). Our analysis further includes user comments on Facebook with the purpose of comparing trust contestation in the news with trust contestation on Facebook in response to the news (cross-platform comparison). We would thus expect differences between high and low trust countries in dynamics of trust contestation in response to the pandemic, as well as cross-media and cross-

platform differences in the way the Covid-19 pandemic is discussed controversially in different arenas.

For the newspaper analysis, we used digital archives to identify relevant articles from print and/or online news sites through search words, namely 'Covid' or 'Corona' or 'pandemic' and 'trust' with all its semantic varieties in the respective country language (e.g., including 'distrust', 'mistrust', 'trustful', trustworthy', etc.). Sampling covered four pre-defined periods: March 2020 – April 2020, September 2020 – October 2020, December 2020 – January 2021, March 2021 – April 2021. In each country, we coded 800 statements of trust contestations as our unit of analysis (200 randomly selected from each of the four periods).[1] For the Facebook analysis, we searched for 'Trust'- and 'Covid'-related news articles that were posted on the newspapers' Facebook pages, and then selected those posts with the highest amount of trust contestation statements in the user commenting section.[2] Depending on the intensity of debates, for each country we selected a minimum of 250 news posts, and for each of these news posts, a maximum of 25 user comments (only main comments, not replies to comments).

3. Trust contestation in the news during the Covid-19 pandemic: comparative findings from seven European countries

The news media are a representative arena of trust contestation. It relies on the work of journalists to represent the political field and make visible the complex and ever-changing trust relationships among political actors, institutions, stakeholders and constituencies for bystanding audiences. In most cases, such trust relationships are attributed to the journalists or other actors who are directly or indirectly quoted in the news, for instance, when it is concluded from available evidence that people no longer trust the government. Even in the few instances that direct voice is given to political or social actors in the form of quotations that contest trust in their political opponents ('we, as the oppositional party, can no longer trust the government'), this voice is pre-selected by journalists. From media and communication studies, we know that such visibility biases favour government and political elites over oppositional voices from civil society, or other actors of minor prominence (van Dalen 2012; Eberl et al. 2017). As our own analysis of news coverage during the Covid-19 pandemic corroborates, the current government is especially in focus when the question of trust is raised in a situation of emergency, and the plural dimensions of political trust are reduced to the main and urgent question of how the government masters the crisis (Figure 1).

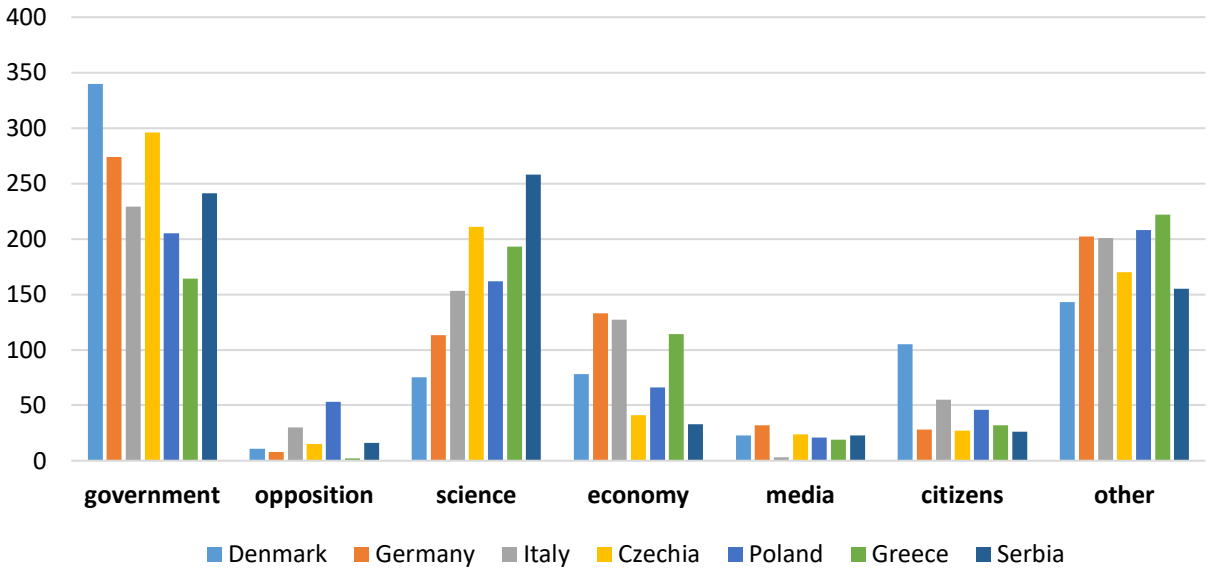
Trust through the media is thus mediated in the double sense that journalists chose which actors to make selectively salient, and also attribute trusting or distrusting attitudes based on selected evidence. This is in line with the professional ethos of journalism to 'objectify' trust

[1] The unit of analysis in this approach is trust contestation. Trust contestation is the reconstructed answer to the question: "Who expresses trust/mistrust in another actor/system for doing/not doing what, and based on what criteria of trustworthiness." The trust contestation can continue over one or several sentences, sometimes also throughout an entire text. Later statements by the same trust attributor/giver belong to the same trust contestation, as long as the trust receiver is also the same.

[2] Article selection was conducted through CrowdTangle searches on newspaper public Facebook profiles.

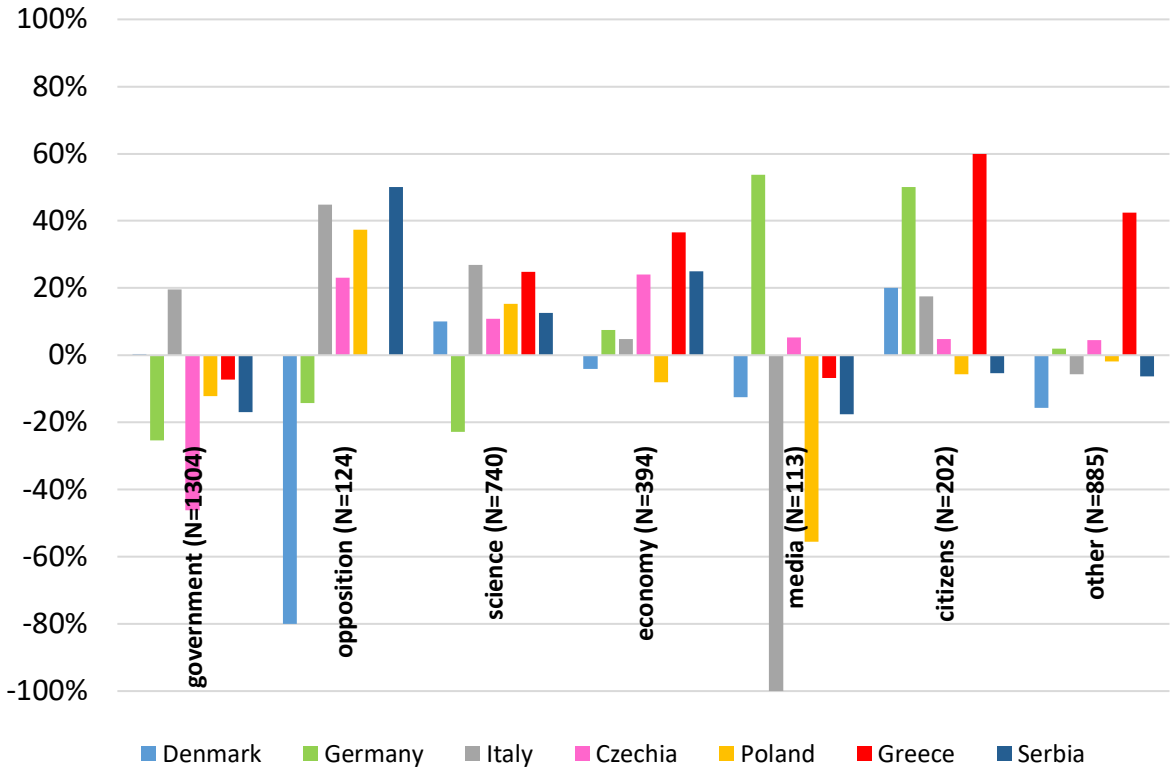
relationships. A journal article will not write 'we, the people, no longer trust government', but will try to provide evidence for increasing or decreasing levels of trust in the population, for instance by relating to a survey: 'Recent opinion polls show a decline of trust in government.' In addition to the expected executive bias that gives high visibility to government as a target of trust contestation, across countries we also find a trend to target scientific experts as trustworthy objects in Covid-19 debates (Figure 1 and 2). This suggests a highly technocratic character of the Covid-19 debate as opposed to a politicised debate that would highlight oppositional voices to government. Politicisation of trust relationship, in terms of government-opposition divides, is almost absent in Covid-19 debates across countries, and also citizens and a broad category of alternative actors are only occasionally targeted as objects of trust or distrust (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Trust receivers in newspaper coverage across countries



This technocratic character of the debate runs against established criteria of newsworthiness, such as conflict and contentiousness that would typically attract attention to opposing viewpoints. Instead, in times of executive-led crisis-management, priority is given to relevance, influence and success as journalistic criteria of newsworthiness (Eilders 2023). In other words, conflict accentuation and sensationalism do not pay off as a strategy of media agenda-setting in debates about trust during the crisis, when journalists prefer to focus the attention on government executives and scientific experts. This objectifying tendency might also explain that debates overall are rather balanced, tending slightly towards critical distrust when targeting government (except in Italy) and towards trust, when targeting science (Figure 2). In comparison, oppositional actors, or critical actors, are not found newsworthy. Media coverage in times of crisis is not about political alternatives, but mainly executive and expertise-informed crisis-management.

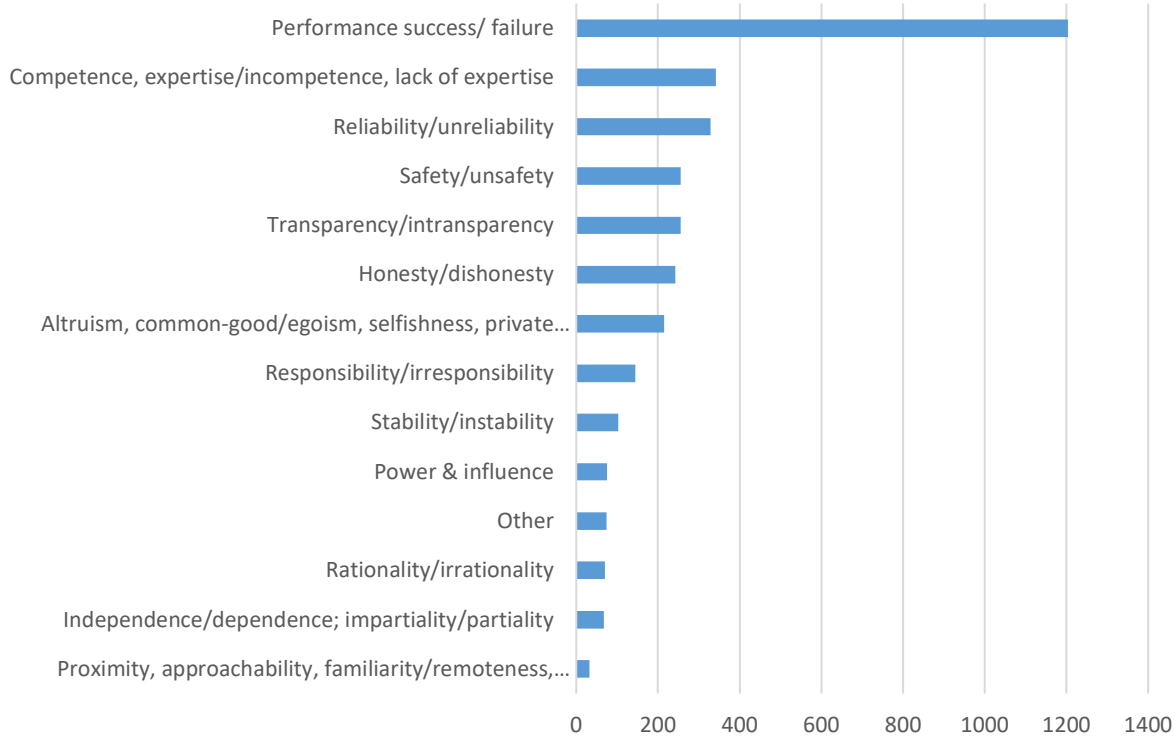
Figure 2: Net trust balance per trust receiver in each country



An important aspect of mediated trust contestations are the reasons displayed by journalists, or selected actors quoted in the media, for why targeted actors are found trustworthy or not. When amplified through the media, a statement of trust or distrust by a political representative becomes an appeal for others to follow the same reasoning for trust or distrust. In our comparative content analysis, we address this aspect by considering the criteria of trustworthiness, as has been done in other sections of this volume. In this context, we distinguish between performance-based arguments (such as being efficient in problem-solving), compliance with normative expectations (such as being inclusive or fair), and personal traits of the trusted targets (such as being honest) (Figure 3).

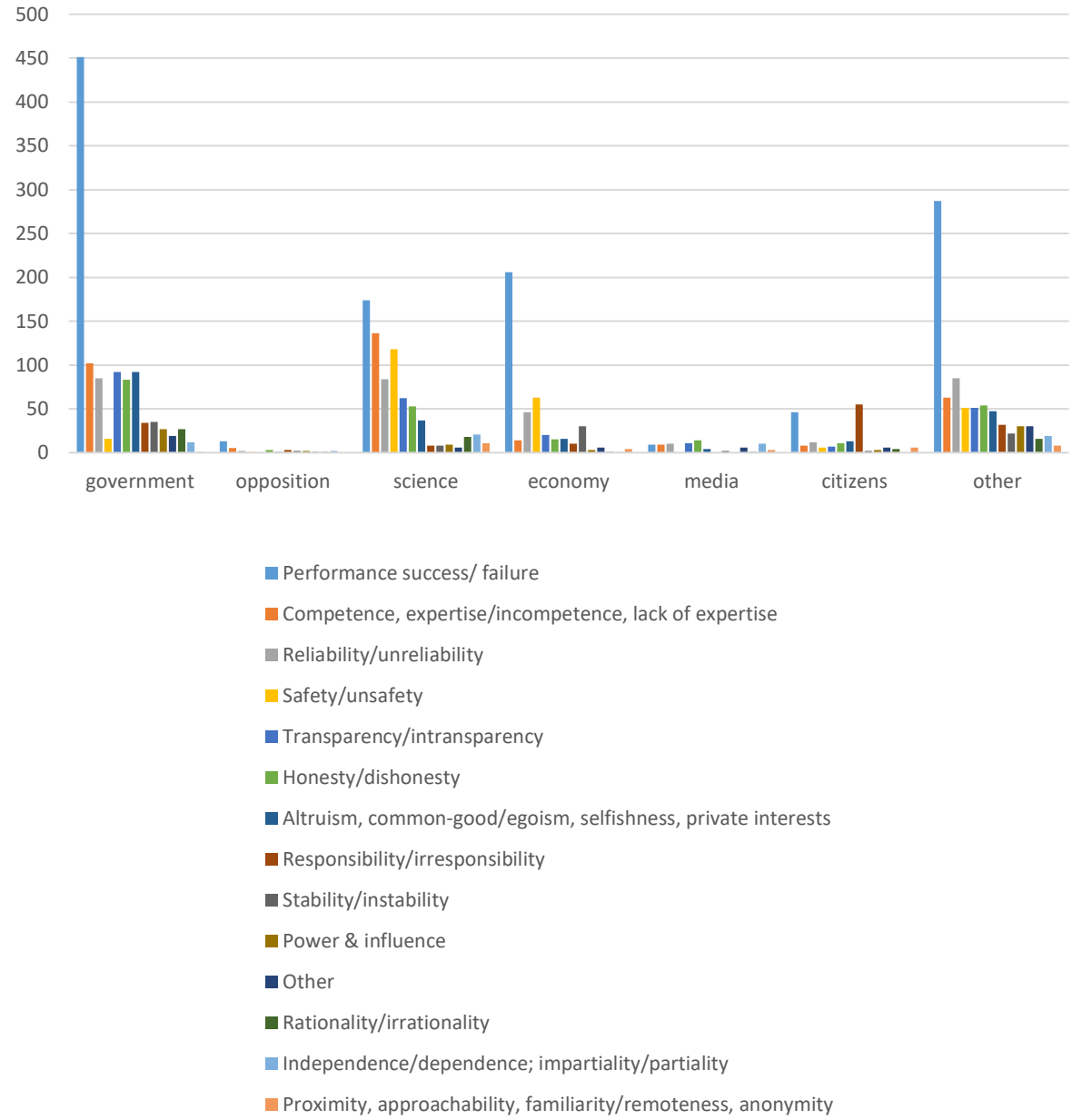
The emphasis on expertise-informed crisis-management in mediated trust contestations makes us anticipate that justifications of trustworthiness are mainly performance related and not, as would be the case in a highly politicised debate, on personal traits or normative expectations in political representatives. As can be seen in Figure 4, this is indeed confirmed when looking at the main actor categories: government is dominantly trusted or distrusted based on performance, and scientific experts, based on both performance and competence in terms of problem-solving. Normative concerns in terms of compliance/non-compliance with rules of democratic procedures only play a minor role. There may be disagreement in the evaluation of trustworthiness criteria (Figure 5), but there are not two distinct worlds of reasoning. These findings inform us further about the low degree of polarisation of Covid-19 related trust contestation, with no fundamental disagreement about the criteria that are applied to assess the trustworthiness of particular actors.

Figure 3: Salience of 1st criteria of un/trustworthiness



Note: Criteria expressed in trust contestations in COVID-19 news coverage across seven countries, N=3411, un/trustworthiness criteria are aggregated to override semantic categories

Figure 4: 1st criteria of un/trustworthiness, according to different trust receivers



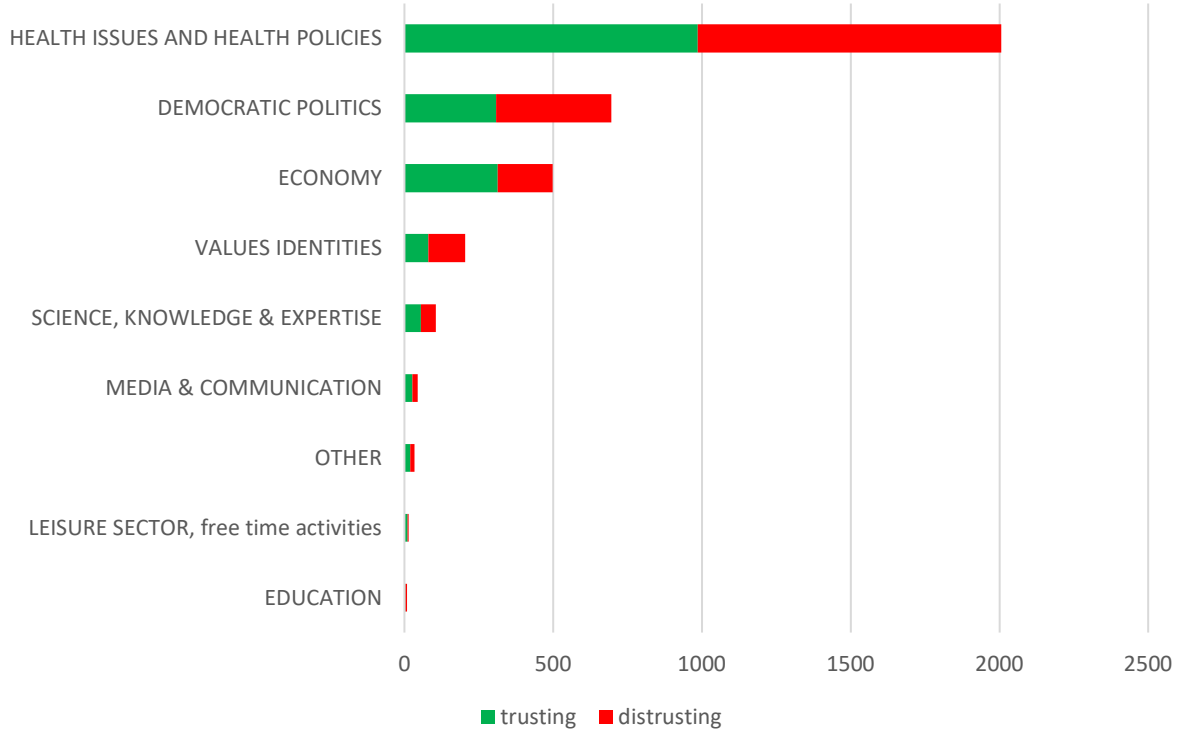
Note: Criteria expressed in trust contestations in COVID-19 news coverage across seven countries, N=3345

Figure 5: 1st criteria of un/trustworthiness in trust contestations across newspapers

Note: Criteria from seven countries and their usage for clear trust or distrust positions (subsample of trust dichotomy), N=2274

To measure potential polarising effects of trust contestation during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is not sufficient to focus solely on actors; it is also necessary to explore whether debates on trust and distrust have different thematic focuses, i.e., if distrusting contributions express different concerns than those who trust. It is, for instance, possible that trusting statements mainly express satisfaction with the performative aspects of the pandemic, while distrusting statements raise concerns about democratic procedures. In Figure 6, we can see that this is not the case, and that trusting and distrusting contributions tend to keep a balance with regard to the same issues of common concern being considered. Our findings about the news media, as a forum of critical but not polarised debate about trustworthiness, are particularly relevant to re-evaluate the debate on the role of distrust in democracy: As regards mass-mediated and journalistically-framed debates, expressions of distrust do not take place in a separate discursive space, but draw on the same agenda of issues of concern for the political community, and to a large extent, also on the same trustworthiness criteria. Distrust is thus not detached from trust, but connected to it through critical discourse that focuses on issues of common concern and shared evaluation criteria.

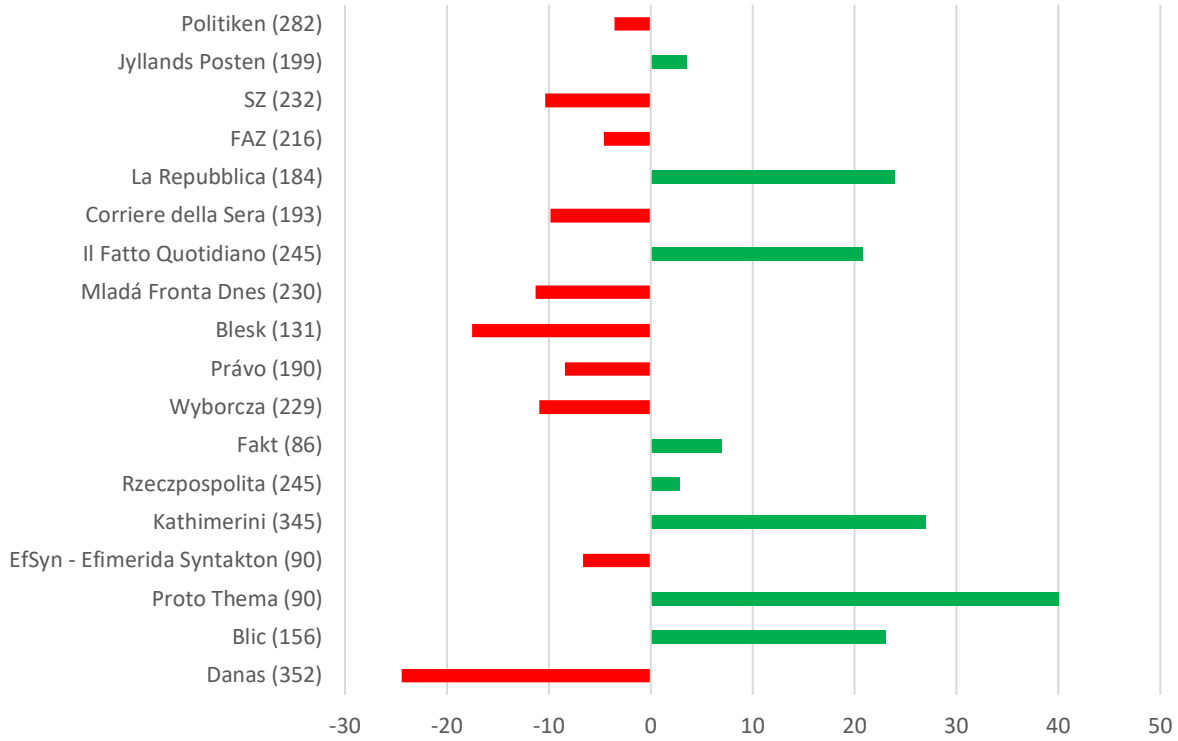
Figure 6: Main issues of trust contestations across newspapers



Note: Main issue from seven countries and their usage for clear trust or distrust positions (subsample of trust dichotomy), N=3610

Finally, we were also interested in possible polarisation effects in trust contestations across newspapers. While we would expect that newspapers with different ideological stances take different positions in critical debates, we would call the news landscape polarised if newspapers take opposing views on trust and distrust. This would be the case if, for example, one newspaper expresses full support with governmental Covid-19 measures and promotes credulous trust, and another newspaper expresses fundamental opposition through generalised, categorical distrust in government. As we can see in Figure 7, the media landscapes made up by professional journalism in the seven countries analysed do not show these strong signs of polarisation. In most countries, differences between the newspapers analysed remain within the range of critical debate of a plural public sphere (trust/distrust imbalance of less than 25%). Even in Serbia and Greece, where journalism is traditionally more partisan, newspapers are found to be only somewhat more polarised in the trust-related coverage of the pandemic. We did not find any newspaper that was dominantly distrustful, or even mobilising categorical or cynical distrust, during the pandemic.

Figure 7: trust-distrust balance of trust contestations across the different newspapers in %



Note: Subsample trust distrust dichotomy, clear dis/trust expressions, Total N=3819, varying N for different newspapers). Newspapers with a very low number of trust contestations were disregarded here in order to provide a more consolidated picture (BT (N=42), Bild (N=12), Niezależna (N=17), Kurir (N=46)

4. Trust contestation in response to news on Facebook

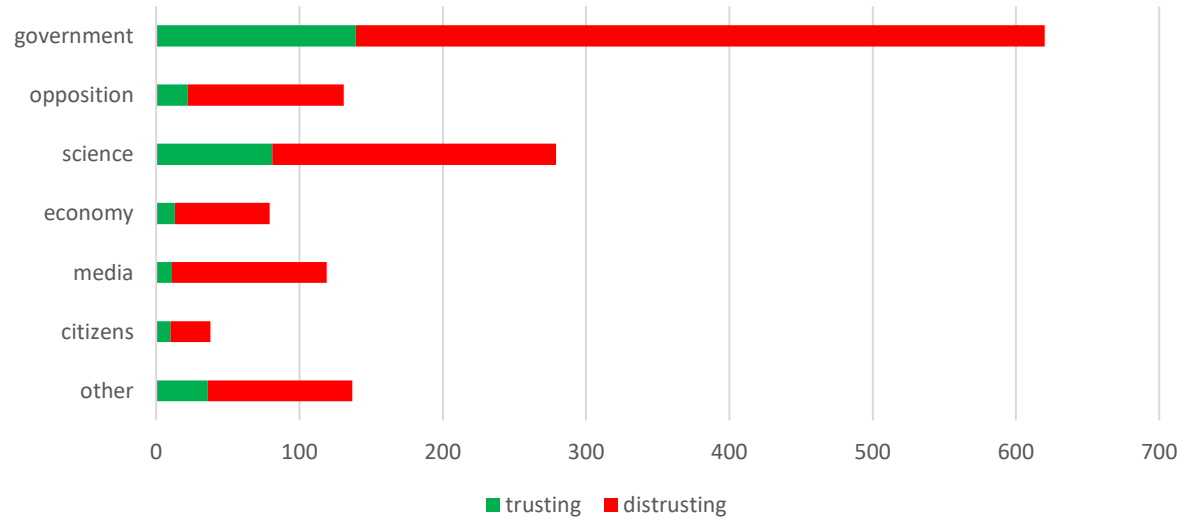
Professional journalism provides information that citizens may take up to form their own critical opinion about the trustworthiness of political representatives and other socially relevant actors. However, only little is known about how precisely news readers express trust or distrust in response to news. In traditional print media formats, only selected readers' responses to news were available in the form of letters to the editor. This changed with the advent of digital media, when news articles could be posted online, inviting readers to give their feedback in commenting sections. As news is increasingly read online, such users' feedback in the form of online comments has become a valuable source for reception studies.

In the available literature, social media commenting in response to news is often made responsible for the radicalisation of opinion, the spread of conspiracies and expressions of hate speech (Chen and Lu 2017; Gonçalves 2018). Existing research also suggests that users with low trust in news media and established elites are not only more inclined to consume social media as alternative news sources, but are also more likely to comment on online news than more trustful readers (e.g., Fletcher and Park 2017). This leads us to the expectation that ideologically-driven, and in particular, distrusting voices are selectively amplified in the social media reception of news. Even if published online news is relatively neutral, user-driven dynamics of news commenting may still be biased in the way that they either trust or distrust

particular categories of actors, or express either credulous trust or generalised, categorical distrust towards the functioning of the political system and science. By judging the trustworthiness of government and science in biased ways, user commenting can then contribute to a polarisation and radicalisation of political views online.

To test this assumption, we compare trust contestation in news articles with Facebook trust contestation in response to news. As we can see in Figure 8, there is a clear predominance of distrustful positions in user-driven debates on Facebook, even though expressions of trust are not completely absent. In the justification of distrust, performance-based argumentation prevails in user comments (Table 1). Yet, in contrast to the news articles posted on Facebook, user comments in response to news have a strong emphasis on the perceived failure of performance of targeted actors during the pandemic (Figure 9). There is thus some continuity in the user-driven debate targeting the same actors as in the posted news (government and science), and assessing their performance, yet, arriving at a negative judgement that reflects deeply-rooted distrust. The lack of awareness of successful performance, among substantial parts of the commenting users, points in the direction of political alienation and deeply-ingrained distrust.

Figure 8: Trust receivers in user comments on Facebook and related trust/distrust positions



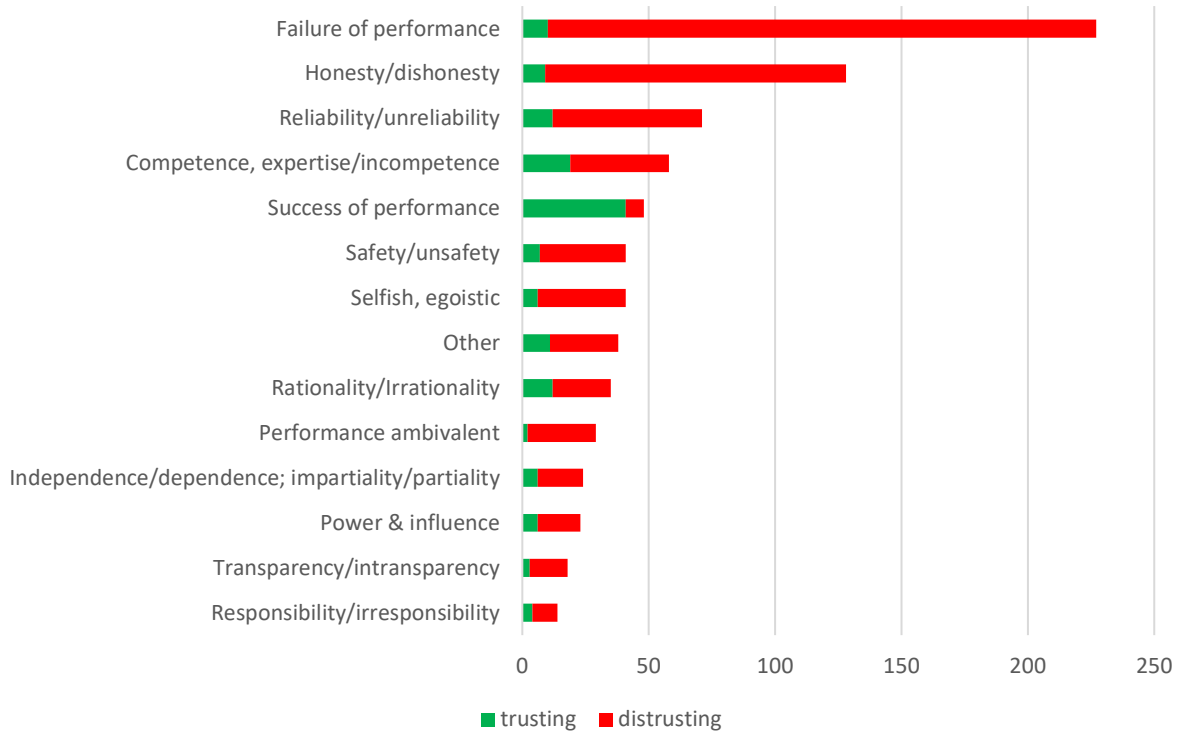
Note: Subsample trust degree dichotomy, only clear dis-/trust statements, excluding appeals or conditional-prognostic statements, N=1403

Table 1: Salience of 1st un-/trustworthiness criteria, differentiated for posted news articles

1st trustworthiness criteria FB	**Criteria in posted articles on FB**	**Criteria in user comments on FB**
success of performance	27,1	6,7
failure of performance	21,3	26,5
Honesty/dishonesty	11,2	15,1
Reliability/unreliability	8,5	8,6
Transparency/intransparency	7,1	2,2
Competence, expertise/incompetence, lack of expertise	6,4	8,8
DIAGN - Ambivalent	4,5	1,4
Safety/unsafety	4,1	4,3
PROG - Ambivalent	2,1	2,9
Responsibility/irresponsibility	1,9	2
Power & influence	1,6	3
Altruistic, care, support, common good	1,6	0,3
Independence/dependence; impartiality/partiality	1,2	3
Selfish, egoistic, private interests	1,1	5
Rationality/irrationality	0	4,1
other	0,5	5,9
Total (N)	**1024**	**993**

Note: Criteria on newspapers' Facebook pages (N= 1024) and related user comments (N=993)

Figure 9: 1st criteria of un/trustworthiness across Facebook user comments



Note: All 7 countries and their usage for clear trust or distrust positions (subsample of trust dichotomy), N=795

The observation that Facebook users make judgemental statements raises the question about the style of the debate within the comment sections. In this regard, it has been noticed that user commenting and interaction barely meets the quality standards of deliberation (Naab, Ruess, and Küchler 2023). Reciprocity and rational exchange of arguments are impeded by the limited platform design and comment section structure. Many commenters are also provocative, disrespectful and confrontational, treating users with different opinions as enemies, and not as equal interlocutors (Northrup et al. 2022). In order to analyse the style of user commenting, we further distinguished whether the coded trust contestations followed a factual/informative style (e.g., bringing in new data, referring to (historical facts), an opinionated style (expressing personal opinion, referring to beliefs, values, normative or aesthetic judgements), hate speech (being disrespectful or hostile towards others) and parody/sarcasm (using ironic statements against others in a derogatory way) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Style/language per Country in FB user comments

Style	Denmark	Germany	Italy	Czechia	Poland	Greece	Serbia	Total
factual/informative	21.6%	5.3%	7.6%	5.2%	8.1%	18.0%	7.6%	**10.4%**
opinionated	68.0%	79.5%	50.4%	72.1%	54.6%	22.8%	72.5%	**60.2%**
hate speech	0.8%	0.4%	1.6%	4.1%	2.3%	10.8%	2.0%	**3.1%**
parody/sarcasm	9.6%	14.8%	14.4%	7.4%	23.8%	46.8%	16.3%	**18.9%**
other	0.0%	0.0%	26.0%	11.2%	11.2%	1.6%	1.6%	**7.4%**
Total (N)	**250**	**263**	**250**	**269**	**260**	**250**	**251**	**1793**

While it is not surprising that Facebook user comments are dominantly used to express opinions through personal judgements and emotions, it also needs to be noticed that Facebook commenters overall tend to pay little attention to the more fact-based argumentation provided by the journalists in their exchanges. Facebook users thus often tend to ignore the content provided in the news articles to which they respond, where factual information played a key role to assess the performance and competence of government and scientific experts to deal with the pandemic emergency. Expressing strong opinion and emotions is a way for commenters to position themselves in debates about (dis-)trust, without this necessarily leading to an argumentative exchange about the trustworthiness of their targets. As we can see in Table 2, a considerable part of the users also employs parody and sarcasm in their comments. Since opinionated and sarcastic comments are widespread with regard to both trusting and distrusting statements (Table 3), our findings suggest a notable tendency of polarisation in the analysed user comments. What is more, there is a significant share of clearly distrustful-sarcastic trust contestations (15.8% of all coded trust contestations) indicating that user comments may indeed become a breeding ground for cynical distrust among the most disenchanted user groups.

Table 3: Style/language and related trust/distrust positions (trust dichotomy, N=1453)

language style/trust dichotomy	trusting	distrusting	Total
factual/informative	13.6%	9.4%	**10.3%**
argumentative	64.2%	59.3%	**60.4%**
hate speech	2.8%	3.3%	**3.2%**
parody/sarcasm	14.2%	20.1%	**18.9%**
other	5.1%	7.8%	**7.2%**
Total (N)	**316**	**1137**	**1453**

5. Conclusions: Towards enlightened trust in the news media?

Mediated trust contestation during the pandemic put to the test the trustworthiness of government and science, focusing strongly on the problem-solving capacities of political representatives and experts. Science was portrayed predominantly as trustworthy in the analysed legacy newspapers, while government action has been subject to relatively balanced assessment and healthy criticism in line with the watchdog-role of professional journalism. Excessive distrust was neither expressed towards science nor towards government. In the established news media, we find little evidence for a scenario of generalised or even cynical distrust, which is the dystopian vision of a post-democracy where trust is constantly undermined through uninformed opinion or deep anger and hate of disillusioned publics (van Dyk 2022). We also cannot confirm that government or science during the pandemic profited from credulous trust by the unconditional support of assenting bystanders. Despite the high salience of governmental executives and scientists as targets of trust in the news, expressions of trust and distrust towards them were relatively balanced across countries and newspapers.

Does this mean that the type of trust contestation that was mediated by professional journalism approached a scenario of enlightened trust? We are careful with such a conclusion. Professional journalism remains overall largely balanced with regard to trust and distrust judgements, but ultimately, this is also the minimum professional standards we can expect from journalism in democracy. The high visibility of scientists might be taken as an indicator for factual debates, but could also point to the technocratic character of the debate in mainstream media. The presence of scientists alone should therefore not be misread as a sufficient condition of the discursive quality of the debate. The overall balanced picture is further tarnished by the limited pluralism of debate, the marginalisation of the opposition and the strong executive bias in the news. Due to the strong technocratic focus on government actors and experts, performance- and expertise-based reasoning and the low politicisation, legacy news media provided little room for substantively critical discourse and a variety of voices and concerns.

In principle, technocratic newspaper debates and a low level of plurality can encourage dissenting views and more fundamental criticism to shift to social media as an alternative arena

of enlightened trust building. In this regard, however, our findings of the Facebook commenting analysis are rather sobering. Social media dynamics of opinion-making during the pandemic deviate from the ideal of enlightened trust in important ways. Facebook commenting tends towards generalised, if not cynical distrust, where fact-based arguments count little, emotion-driven, and partly radical opinions, are given expression and government, and science and journalists or the mainstream news sources are predominantly distrusted and met with suspicion and disrespect.

This points to a new cleavage in trust contestation which is not between countries or between newspapers with a different ideological stance, but between mediated debates in the news and user-driven debates on social media. In debates mediated by professional journalism, the pandemic news sphere overall responded to the high demand of reliable information, and reasoned judgement and criticism of government and expert action delivered by trustworthy news sources, in times of uncertainty. This means that central criteria of newsworthiness, such as conflict and contentiousness, do not necessarily coincide with criteria of trustworthiness in times of acute crisis. In response to the pandemic emergency, strongly confrontational, scandalising and radical voices, which under normal circumstances would be found newsworthy, remained marginalised. Instead, the focus was on the executive and technocratic elites with direct access to pandemic crisis-management. To some extent, this can certainly be attributed to a "rally-round-the flag" effect that fosters support of government and reduces dissenting voices in the face of acute crisis and high uncertainty (Kritzinger et al. 2021). At the same time, professional journalism remained open to critical voice, and no country fell into the opposite trap of credulous trust.

Contrary to the assumption of a disruptive public sphere that accounts for the crisis of trust in democracy, we can therefore conclude that the traditional news media and professional journalism cannot be held accountable for rising levels of scepticism and generalised distrust in democratic government and science during the pandemic. The expectation that a negative bias would apply to the selection and framing of pandemic news, putting scepticism and distrust in science and government at the forefront, cannot be confirmed. Instead, a balanced, but still critical opinion towards government and a trusting attitude towards science prevailed. The news media were thus neither the amplifier of generalised distrust nor the mouthpiece of government, but by and large upheld a culture of critical trust during the pandemic, in which the trustworthiness of government and science were critically scrutinised based on criteria of competence and performance. The very trustworthiness of the media and professional journalism might reside precisely in this ability to express and channel both trust and distrust in the promotion of critical debate. On Facebook, however, user-driven debates tended towards reverting the culture of critical trust into a culture of categorical, and partly cynical distrust. To some extent, this finding is probably linked to self-selection processes of discontent, distrusting or partly even already radicalised social media users with a strong motivation to engage with online news (see Fletcher and Park 2017). In the absence of journalistic mediation, the selected users' responses certainly also reflect fear and uncertainty. The dominance of distrust can therefore, in part, be interpreted as a pandemic effect of debates driven by a highly selective and not representative group of users on social media, but not necessarily as a bubble effect of cynical citizens who became distrustful of democracy.

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Mapping the Foundations of Institutional Trust and Distrust from Adolescents to Adults in the Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis: A Qualitative Meta-Synthesis Perspective

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1. Introduction

In this chapter, we take a developmental perspective to retrospectively explore the experiences of early to late adolescents and adults with institutional decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of these experiences on (dis)trust. Based on the theory, we expect a causal link between a priori (dis)trustworthiness expectations, evaluations of institutional decision-making, and the generalised (dis)trust in institutions (Dinesen and Bekkers 2017; Thielmann and Hilbig 2015, 2023).

There are two major reasons for investigating the experiential foundations of generalised institutional (dis)trust from the developmental perspective. First, as proposed by Landrum et al. (2015), one must first 'learn to trust' to gain the benefits of trusting. Institutional (dis)trust is connected to many benefits, such as enhanced cooperation and compliance with authorities, improved knowledge acquisition from those who are trusted, or higher participation in political actions (such as voting), which are needed for the basic functioning of democratic institutions (Balliet and Van Lange 2013; Landrum et al. 2015; Lenard 2008; Levi and Laura 2000). These benefits are particularly important in times of crises (Siegrist and Zingg 2014). Second, developmental research on the foundations of (dis)trust has typically focused more on social (or interpersonal) (dis)trust, and there is limited evidence on the foundations of (dis)trust in institutions and public authorities (Dinesen and Bekkers 2017; Schoon and Cheng 2011; Šerek et al. 2022; Thielmann and Hilbig 2015; Van Lange 2015; Tyler and Trinkner 2018).

Considering both dispositional and experiential approaches to (dis)trust, it can be assumed that generalised (dis)trust in institutions and public authorities is not only shaped by education, home environment, and culture, but also by direct experiences with institutional decision-making (Dinesen and Bekkers 2017; Kaasa and Andriani 2022; Schoon and Cheng 2011; Thielmann and Hilbig 2015). The generalised (dis)trust functions, to some extent, as the source of a priori trustworthiness expectations, which form the baseline (input) for concrete trustworthiness evaluations. The (dis)trustworthiness evaluations of institutions could be thus explained as the outcome of the interaction of the a priori trustworthiness expectation and concrete experience with institutional decision-making (Dinesen and Bekkers 2017; Thielmann and Hilbig 2015). Furthermore, experiences with institutional decision-making and their

evaluations can then retroactively shape the overall (dis)trustworthiness expectations and finally, to some extent, also the generalised institutional (dis)trust (Dinesen and Bekkers 2017; Thielmann and Hilbig 2015). To our knowledge, these experiences and their evaluations have not been altogether investigated in detail from the developmental perspective. Therefore, this chapter investigates a) the experiential foundations of institutional (dis)trust, respective empirically observable evaluations of institutions' decision-making (trustworthiness criteria) and, b) how (and if) these foundations vary from early adolescence to adulthood.

We build on a meta-analytical qualitative synthesis (Levitt 2018) of seven primary qualitative studies that used the same methodology and were conducted in seven European countries. The studies altogether encompass 251 respondents across four age groups: 11-12, 14-15, 18-19, and 30-50 years old. By focusing on experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic in multiple countries, we build on the heterogeneity in pandemic progression and institutional reactions to enrich our understanding of (dis)trust's experiential bases, aiming to encompass even less common experiential foundations. At the same time, our primary goal is not to explore and explain cultural or cross-country differences, which would exceed the scope of this chapter.

Foundations of Generalised institutional (Dis)trust in adolescence

Currently, there are two prominent approaches to (dis)trust development: dispositional and experiential (Dinesen and Bekkers 2017). The dispositional approach states that trust is formed early in life, and remains relatively stable thereafter (Bowlby 1969; Dinesen and Bekkers 2017; Erikson 1963). In contrast, the experiential approach posits that individuals continuously adjust their generalised (dis)trust based on positive and negative experiences throughout their lives (Dinesen and Bekkers 2017). Importantly, these approaches could be seen as not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary when explaining different forms of dis(trust). While social trust (i.e., trust in strangers) becomes relatively stable during one's life (consistent with the dispositional approach), institutional (dis)trust seems to be more closely related to continual evaluations of public authorities and institutional decision-making (Bekkers 2012; Sønderskov and Dinesen 2016). Thus, this form of (dis)trust is considered to be more changeable by the environment and experiences with the institutions (Dinesen and Bekkers 2017; Fine et al. 2019; Schoon and Cheng 2011; Sønderskov and Dinesen 2016).

From a developmental perspective, both forms of (dis)trust are influenced by overall cognitive development. The cognitive developmental model (CDM; the neo-Piagetian approach) highlights several developmental changes during adolescence affecting (dis)trust in authorities (Blakemore 2017; Kohlberg 1963; Vollebergh et al. 2001). Most notable changes are enhancement in abstract reasoning and the ability to integrate diverse perspectives (Blakemore 2017; Blakemore and Mills 2014). This development empowers adolescents to better assess and question the limits and effectiveness of adult authority (Cohn et al. 2010). Furthermore, as they progress towards maturity, adolescents increasingly become capable of evaluating their own perspectives within the broader context of society, thereby gaining a more sophisticated understanding of the intricate realities of social dynamics (Blakemore 2017). Concurrently, this period is characterised by the formation and refinement of beliefs pertaining to a broad

spectrum of moral and social issues, reflecting cognitive and ethical growth during adolescence (Smetana and Villalobos 2009). Altogether, the ability to evaluate the (dis)trustworthiness of various authorities in different contexts becomes more effective and autonomous during adolescence. The evaluations made by older adolescents are more complex and grounded in acquired social, moral, and ethical norms (Blakemore 2017; Cohn et al. 2010; Smetana and Villalobos 2009).

The existing developmental research has primarily focused on general factors influencing trust or distrust in authorities. For example, culture, home environment, socioeconomical family status, or education have been found to predict young people's (dis)trust (Kaasa and Andriani 2022; Schoon and Cheng 2011). However, it has not extensively explored how these factors manifest through direct experiences with authority decision-making and evaluations of their (dis)trustworthiness (Dinesen and Bekkers 2017; Kaasa and Andriani 2022; Schoon and Cheng 2011; Tyler and Trinkner 2018; Van Lange 2015). In other words, what remains to be described are the types of experience and concrete evaluations of institutional decision-making that underlie perceived (dis)trustworthiness and that might translate into generalised institutional (dis)trust. The aim of this chapter is to address this research gap.

For analytical purposes, we divide the decisions by public authorities into three interconnected phases: inputs, throughputs, and outputs of the decisions. According to Schmidt (2020), adequate input implies that political figures and experts are perceived as legitimate and trustworthy by citizens. The (dis)trustworthiness of public authorities can also be influenced by the decision-making process itself, including the throughput or the ability to translate the inputs of decisions into their outputs (outcomes). Even if the initial inputs are deemed sufficient for a decision to appear trustworthy, the way decisions are executed can undermine trustworthiness in both the decision and the authorities, ultimately eroding trust in the institutions they represent (Schmidt and Wood 2019). Equally important are the anticipated outcomes of decisions, particularly the expectation that the decision-making will be managed effectively. Scholars highlight the critical importance of outcomes, arguing that authorities and their decisions cannot be viewed as trustworthy over the long term if they consistently disadvantage citizens, or if citizens lose faith in the decision-making process leading to inadequate outcomes (Esaiasson et al. 2019; Walster and Walster 1975).

2. Method

To investigate the foundations of trust and distrust during the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted a qualitative meta-analysis (Levitt 2018) of seven primary studies from the EnTrust project (Kafe et al. 2023; Brus 2023; Ćeriman et al. 2023; Fikrlová et al. 2023; Möbert and Masling 2023; Padoan and Marangoni 2023; Sosnowski et al. 2023; Šerek et al. 2023). These studies focused on citizens' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. All the examined studies shared the same focus group methodology and were analysed by an inductive reflexive thematic analysis with realist epistemology (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019), which ensured a high methodological integrity in our overall synthesis (Levitt 2018). The primary studies explored experiences related to trust or distrust building in seven European countries (Denmark,

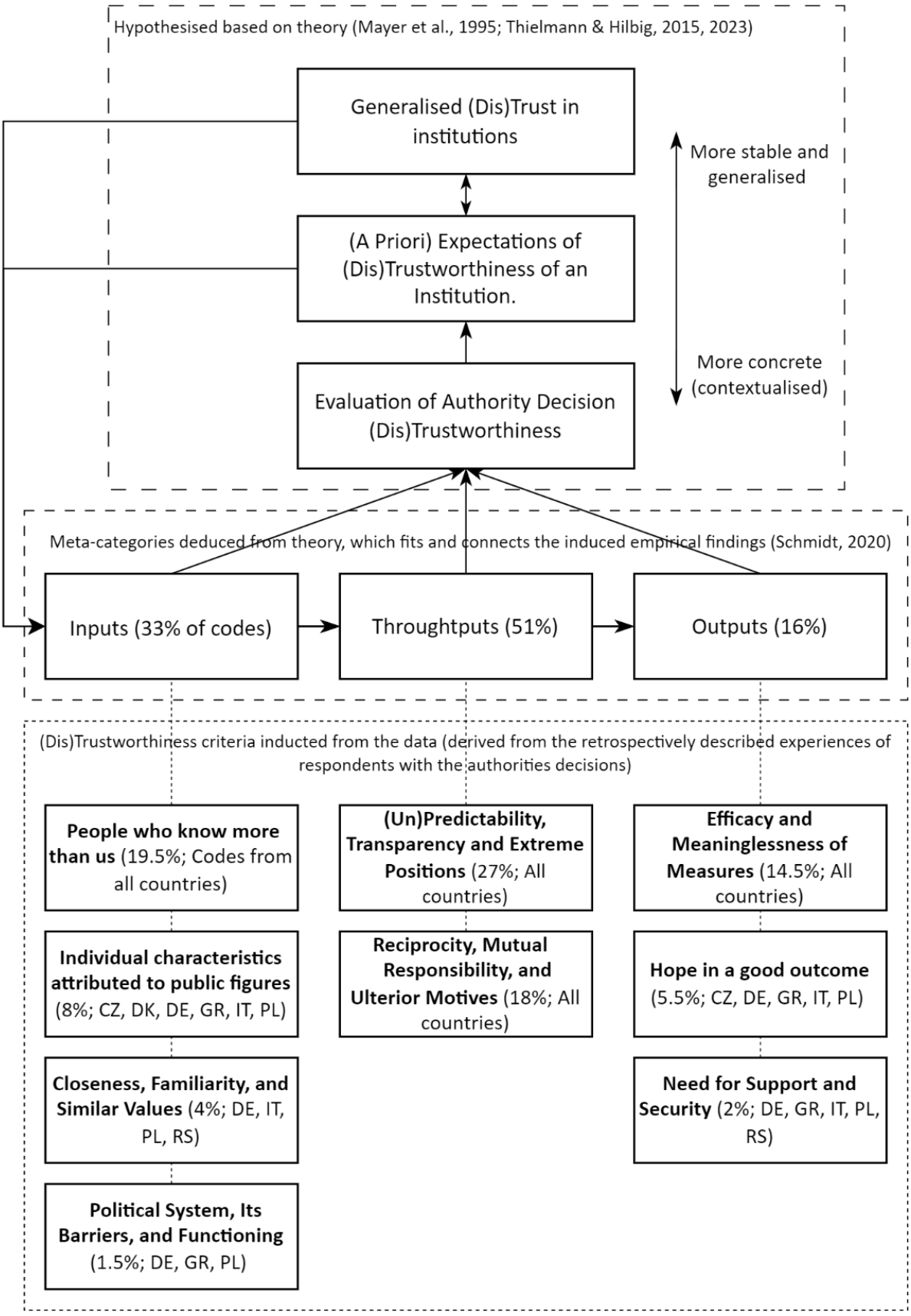
Poland, Germany, Italy, Czechia, Serbia, and Greece), and included data from 251 respondents across four age groups (11-12, 14-15, 18-19, and 30-50 years old).

Focus groups of primary studies were conducted online, adhering to specific criteria ensuring effective participation, such as prior online communication experience, absence of hindering medical or psychological conditions, proficient language skills, and lack of close personal relationships among participants. These groups, diverse in gender and sociodemographic background, were interviewed followed detailed guidelines with about 20 questions and were supported by standardised texts, all translated by local research teams and pretested for clarity across age groups. A dual-moderator approach was used, enhancing the focus group's effectiveness and inclusivity (Krueger and Casey 2000). For more details on recruitment, distribution, and methodologies of primary studies, see Fikrolvá (2023).

3. Results

Our results are divided into three main interconnected meta-categories, which connect the individual empirical findings: inputs (33% of codes), throughputs (51%), and outputs (16%). The hierarchically lowest categories in Figure 1. are the main empirical findings in this chapter. These categories reflect citizens' expectations in regard to different phases of the decision-making process of public authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how meeting or violating these expectations affects (dis)trustworthiness in them. In other words, these categories represent the criteria of public authorities (dis)trustworthiness that respondents expect the authorities to adhere to.

Figure 1: Scheme of formation of institutional (dis)trust resulting from the decision-making process by public authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic



3.1. Developmental variations

All of the broader (dis)trustworthiness criteria were mentioned at least once in at least one study across all age groups. From this perspective, it is not possible to argue that certain (dis)trustworthiness criteria (experiential foundations of trust or distrust) are completely unimportant to any group. However, some criteria were emphasised more by certain age groups. This occurred if a topic was repeated more frequently by respondents from specific age groups across the studies, or if respondents of particular age groups explicitly stated that such a criteria was "especially important," "crucial," or "critical" to them when evaluating the (dis)trustworthiness of authorities' decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Developmental specifications are elaborated in more detail for each (dis)trustworthiness criteria.

3.2. Inputs

Input refers to the expected characteristics that, according to respondents, should be included at the beginning of the decision-making process to enhance the initial trustworthiness of the decision-making process.

3.2.1 People who know more than us

The core of respondents' discussions about competences, expertise, facts, and knowledge is the belief that, in specific contexts, there exist authorities who "know more than us" (GR 14-15), are "better informed than us" (PL 11-12), and "should know what to do" (RS 18-19). This applies to the youngest adolescents, as well as to the older adult respondents. For younger adolescents, this group is perceived as larger, and when deciding on more abstract topics, such as the pandemic, the group of competent people is broader, including not just experts but also other significant figures (parents, teachers, etc.). Adult respondents (30-50 years old) define the knowledgeable group more narrowly as individuals who possess expertise, adequate experience, or competence in a specific topic.

Additionally, the match between areas of expertise and the areas of decisions was seen as a key aspect. This was especially true for the older adolescent group (18-19 years old), as well as for adult respondents (30-50 years old). For younger adolescents, the competent, trustworthy group of authorities who should be deciding was broader and also more strongly connected to familiarity and closeness, as parents and teachers were also seen as very trustworthy and more competent authorities that influenced their perception of public situations:

> *If there were some talks about official information from people who work in this area, this discipline of science. Virologists, people who have the qualifications to speak on this subject. It was more trustworthy than people who are in the government. People in the government know as much about the virus as I do (PL 18-19).*

3.2.2. Individual characteristics attributed to public figures

Furthermore, respondents placed their trust in public authorities that seemed credible, sincere, authentic, dedicated, and empathetic. In contrast, they distrusted politicians who were

inconsistent (frequently changing their opinions), arrogant, and unable to apologise for their mistakes.

Respondents also distrusted public authorities with a "bad reputation" (IT 14-15), or those they had "reasons to dislike" (CZ 30+) even before any pandemic decisions were made. Conversely, they trusted authorities they believed had "good intentions" (GR 18-19) towards them.

This highlights the importance of personal qualities in public authorities being seen as trustworthy from the start of the decision-making process. Respondents described that an early negative view of public authorities sometimes remains, even if reasonable decisions are made later. However, older respondents (18-19 and 30-50 years old) typically can separate the trustworthiness of decisions from that of the authorities making those decisions. In contrast, younger respondents (11-12 and 14-15 years old) more readily extend their distrust of authorities to the entire institution.

3.2.3. Closeness, Familiarity, and Similar Values

Furthermore, respondents viewed it as important whether public authorities shared similar worldviews, values, ideologies, or if they could identify with the authority or its ideas. This sense of similarity, reflected in closeness and familiarity with the authorities, made them appear more trustworthy. The emphasis on values and identification primarily comes from the expectations of the older adolescents (18-19 years old) and adults (30-50 years old). It may be more difficult for younger adolescents (11-12 and 14-15 years old) to align their still-developing values and worldviews with those of public authorities. In turn, younger respondents emphasise closeness and familiarity with public figures as key to building greater trust in them.

Respondents described familiarity and closeness towards public figures as important for trust-building. They often highlighted closeness and familiarity with these figures as key to viewing them as trustworthy. Such closeness typically arises when public authorities are also close family members or friends. For instance, a politician who is a family member could gain additional trust through this personal connection. Furthermore, a sense of familiarity is frequently based on shared values and worldviews, allowing even politically-distant figures to be seen as familiar when they establish an understanding relationship with citizens. In contrast, authorities favouring a citizen based on close connections and familiarity were seen as highly untrustworthy by respondents (undue advantageous personnel preference):

> *Conte at that time... I was never interested in politics, and then I was at high school, I was thinking about other things, but Conte was a bit of a lifeline, I relied on him. Especially for the things that came out on the internet, the memes, the jokes, I identified myself with his figure (IT 18-19).*

3.2.4. Political System, Its Barriers, and Functioning

Lastly, respondents described the political system's attributes as a basis for their trust or distrust in institutions. They particularly criticised the system's lethargy to diverse opinions and its "bureaucratic obstacles for citizens" (DE 30-50). The value placed on a range of opinions,

and the call for government to consider these in decision-making, were highlighted as crucial democratic principles. Violating these principles, as noted by respondents, fosters increased distrust in the political system. These aspects primarily described the older adolescents (18-19 years old) and adults (30-50 years old). Additionally, the effectiveness of pandemic restrictions was linked to these system-wide issues. The inclusion of experts from various fields was seen as crucial for informed decision-making and effective pandemic management:

> *I think one important thing in democracy is that you don't just accept everything that the government says, because we live in a democracy, where you are allowed to say your opinion... to have a healthy opinion against it and especially to have an opinion against the government is not bad, from my point of view (DE 18-19).*

3.3. Throughputs (transferability)

The throughput meta-category addresses the trustworthiness of decision-making processes within political institutions and public authorities. It covers how the inputs of decisions are transformed into outcomes, and links the foundations of trust or distrust, from the inputs through the decision-making process, to the decisions' outcomes.

3.3.1. (Un)Predictability, Transparency and Extreme Positions

This subcategory highlights the importance of predictability versus chaos in the implementation of measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also emphasises the expectation of providing transparent and clear information to citizens, responsiveness to their needs, and the problematic nature of adopting extreme positions while implementing measures.

(Un)Predictability and Confusion

Respondents consistently stressed the importance of understanding "what to expect," (CZ 18-19) "what is going to happen", (DK 11-12) and "what to do" (IT 30-50) in response to government policies in pandemic. They described four key aspects of predictability: stability (reliability), plannability, logicality (understandability), and consensus among public authorities. While all age groups discussed the stability and logicality of measures, older adolescents (14-15 and 18-19 years old) and adults (30-50 years old) more frequently mentioned the importance of action plannability and the need for authority consensus:

> *And then, of course, you looked, especially when it came to school, what is changing again now. And when something really did change on a daily basis, the government really got to the point where you no longer knew what was actually going to happen the next day (DE 18-19 A).*

Transparency in Explanations, Information, Policies and Data

This section summarises respondents' expectations for public authorities to provide clear, accurate, and scientifically-based information. It also outlines two levels of transparency identified by respondents: the transparency of information, policies, and data, and the transpar-

ency of explanations. Both aspects were considered important, by all age groups, for establishing trust or distrust in the authorities. However, the need for transparent explanations of public authorities' actions was more often mentioned by older adolescents (18-19 years old) and adults (30-50 years old):

> *But I never had the impression that any information was withheld from me, so I always had a very trusting relationship with the state and federal governments (DE 30-50).*

Transparency alone was not sufficient, particularly for older respondents; the clarity and comprehensibility of presented facts were deemed crucial. Therefore, respondents classified, not just transparency, but also clear and understandable explanations of information and actions as essential:

> *It was not explained. They gave us an explanation for the [cancelled] Christmas markets – we don't want you to travel to the city, and so on. Therefore, I understood that. However, there was an array of totally stupid measures that literally did not make sense. That was what one could not handle. It was not explained, which was a problem (CZ 30+).*

Extreme Positions: Strictness, Overconfidence, and Trivialisation

Respondents across all age groups cited extreme positions and the extremes of restrictions by public authorities as reasons for distrust, alongside cases where the authorities or media minimised, or showed excessive confidence in, the pandemic's progress or the effectiveness of measures. Respondents associated these extreme stances with the communication strategies of public authorities, with one of the younger respondents noting the government's messaging as "excessively scary" (IT 11-12). Distrust also grew when restrictions intensified over time without perceived effectiveness, or were unnecessarily prolonged. Also, authorities making unfulfillable promises, or displaying undue confidence in their actions, led to distrust. Some respondents noted that certain governments behaved as though COVID-19 "did not exist at all" (RS 18-19), further undermining trust in those authorities:

> *The real problem of the pandemic management was not the mistakes that were made. It was the fact that the government flaunted confidence when data did not justify such overconfident attitudes (IT 30-50).*

3.3.2. Reciprocity, Mutual Responsibility, and Ulterior Motives

This section explores the relational dynamics of building or eroding trust with public authorities. Respondents detailed the expectations of their relationship with public authorities, and how their beliefs about the authorities' perceptions of them influenced (dis)trustworthiness of those authorities.

Reciprocity and Mutual Responsibility

Respondents expected reciprocity from the government in two main ways. Firstly, they felt distrust towards the authorities when initial government actions, perceived as overly strict or

unfair, seemed to show distrust towards citizens. This led to reciprocal distrust from the respondents:

> *That is, the measures they were putting in place, "We Stay Home" and all that, it shows that the politicians did not trust us either, because they were basically locking us up to basically tell us "We do not trust you, because if we put some measures out, you would not comply with them". And it is a chain, so they do not trust us, so we do not trust them (GR 18-19).*

Furthermore, respondents expected uniform application of rules, with public officials violating their own policies seen as hypocrisies and a particularly crucial breach of trust. These relational elements were considered important across all age groups, but were most frequently discussed by the older adolescents (18-19 years old):

> *(…) They didn't adhere to some of the measures themselves. So, if they were supposed to be knowledgeable, and they were giving us instructions what to do, but they didn't abide by them themselves, why should I? That's when I was completely losing trust in the government (CZ 18-19).*

Ulterior Motives, Conflicts of Interest, and Manipulation

Respondents identified ulterior motives, conflicts of interest, and direct manipulation by public authorities as causes for distrust. They frequently mentioned two main types of ulterior motives. The first is the financial or material benefits those public authorities obtained during the pandemic crisis. The second involves political interests, with some authorities reportedly exploiting the crisis as a political tool to benefit themselves or their parties. One of the younger respondents summarised this behaviour as "taking advantage during hard times" (CZ 11-12).

Additionally, respondents viewed manipulation and increased political favouritism with distrust. They distrusted authorities perceived as attempting to influence the public and gain popularity by exploiting difficult times. Moreover, when respondents saw restrictions as a political tool to manipulate citizens, it was considered a reason to distrust those decisions and authorities.

3.4. Outputs

Outputs relate to the expected outcomes of decisions. Respondents expect that meeting the trust foundations outlined in previous sections should lead authorities to make well-informed and trustworthy decisions.

3.4.1. Managing the Pandemic (In)Efficiently

Respondents from all age groups frequently addressed the effectiveness and meaningfulness of pandemic measures and policies. They emphasised the importance of these measures functioning as intended, or not falling short of expectations. Concerns arose when the effectiveness of measures varied over time. Some respondents interpreted this variability as a "trial and error" (IT 30-50) approach by public authorities experimenting with different measures.

Others viewed it as a “failure of the policies” (PL 14-15), noting that often, these measures excessively disrupt citizens' daily lives without the consequence of handling the pandemic in an effective manner. Additionally, respondents highlighted the lack of enforcement of measures by public authorities and citizen compliance, which reduced their effectiveness.

Furthermore, respondents criticised the restrictions for being unclear, pointless, flawed, or meaningless. Older adolescents (14-15 and 18-19 years old) and adults (30-50 years old) particularly valued understanding the rationale behind decisions. Hastily implemented decisions and restrictions were also mentioned as causes for distrust in public authorities.

The older adolescents (18-19 years old) and adults (30-50 years old) also noted that they compared the effectiveness of their country's measures with those in other countries. A lower effectiveness, when compared to others, was described as a reason for distrust in the authorities and their policies.

3.4.2. Hope for a good outcome

This section centres on the expectation of a favourable resolution to the pandemic. Respondents emphasised the importance of believing or hoping that “it will turn out well” (IT 14-15), where the pandemic is effectively managed, and normalcy is restored. Overall, and prolonged failure to meet this expectation undermines all other trust foundations previously discussed:

> *I lost courage and thought when does this situation ends. When will we go back to normal? (DK 14-15).*

Two aspects particularly eroded this hope. Firstly, the prolonged disappointment, unmet expectations, or broken promises by authorities. Secondly, government inaction, the absence of an exit strategy, and a lack of political will to address the pandemic. These factors diminished the overall hope for effective management, further depleting trust in public authorities and their decisions. All age groups, except the youngest adolescents (11-12), expressed hope for a positive outcome as a crucial basis for trust in the authorities and their decisions.

3.4.3. Need for Support and Security

Respondents from all age groups highlighted the need for support, certainty, and security from public authorities. They expected authorities to be proactive, offer guidance, and support the citizens during the pandemic. Conversely, perceived neglect or insufficient support from the government was described as being left alone or “feeling deserted” (DE 30-50). Support from the government is essential for fostering a sense of security and stability, especially during the pandemic, when citizens face excessive disruptions to their daily lives. Thus, offering support, addressing shared concerns, and creating a sense of safety, and expecting authorities to protect citizens in the first place, were described as fundamental to building trust in authorities and their decisions. As one of the younger respondents stated “Of course, I trust them because they are doing all this for us, for our protection” (GR 11-12).

4. Discussion

This chapter focuses on the experiential foundations of institutional trust and distrust, building on evaluations of (dis)trustworthiness (criteria) in the decision-making of public authorities by adolescents and adults (Dinesen and Bekkers 2017; Thielmann and Hilbig 2015). These evaluations are based on their experiences with the decision-making of authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results indicated that our respondents of various ages considered as essential the decision-making process (throughputs). This finding aligns with the research of Schmidt and Wood (2019) and the procedural justice approach (Blader and Tyler 2003, 2009; Tyler and Blader 2000, 2003), which underscore a sometimes overlooked, yet crucial, aspect of decision-making, and its impact on legitimacy and trust. It is also in line with empirical findings on trust in public administration, which indicate that the process of service delivery is in some cases more important than the outcomes of government actions (Van de Walle and Migchelbrink 2022). Our study expands previous knowledge by showing that the emphasis on the decision-making process applies not only to adults, but also to adolescents of various ages, who frequently mentioned decision-making processes in the context of handling the pandemic and the (dis)trustworthiness of the responsible public authorities.

At the same time, our results show that all parts of the decision-making process are important—adequate inputs, throughputs, and outputs (Schmidt 2020). These parts play different roles in shaping the evaluation of the (un)trustworthiness of the decisions, expectations towards the institutions, and ultimately in contributing to the generalised (dis)trust toward the institutions (Thielmann and Hilbig 2015, 2023). Ensuring adequate inputs for decisions, reducing barriers to system plurality, and supporting the participation of those perceived as competent are indeed crucial. These inputs are viewed by respondents as guarantees of quality decisions. Nevertheless, when trustworthy politicians and experts conduct the decision-making process inappropriately, unpredictably, with ulterior motives, or place too much burden on citizens, they can lose their trustworthiness in the process. Therefore, while all phases of the authorities' decision-making are important for evaluating the (dis)trustworthiness of decisions, and eventually fostering trust or distrust in institutions, all phases are interconnected with the outcomes. When the appropriate outcomes of decisions are not secured over a longer period, it could lead to more generalised and pervasive distrust towards the authorities (Dinesen and Bekkers 2017; Esaiasson et al. 2019; Thielmann and Hilbig 2023).

Regarding developmental specifics, respondents of younger ages more often described their reliance on other significant adults while forming their own evaluations of the (dis)trustworthiness of public authorities. For example, younger respondents considered a broader group of people, including teachers and parents, as those who should know what to do, rather than experts and scientists, as is more common among adults. Furthermore, for younger respondents, the factor of closeness with the authorities was more crucial. When they had direct contact with an authority, it appeared more trustworthy, more often. This aligns with the mediation model of the pandemic's negative effects through family for younger people (Prime et

al. 2020). While adults experience the effects of the pandemic more directly, for younger people, they are more often mediated through the family environment and other adults, who mitigate these negative effects, and thus act as a resilient factor (Prime et al. 2020). In addition to the mitigation of negative effects, younger respondents could also adopt the perspective of parents, or other important adults, who are closer to them and on whom they are more dependent within the family environment (Prime et al. 2020; Ojeda and Hatemi 2015).

Furthermore, younger respondents did not report sharing similar worldviews and values with the authorities. In contrast, older respondents more frequently described forming their opinions independently and valuing diversity. In addition to valuing closeness, the older respondents appreciated a sense of familiarity with authorities, primarily driven by shared values and worldviews. This is in line with research that suggests autonomy and moral judgement significantly develop during adolescence (Blakemore 2017; Cohn et al. 2010; Smetana 2017). Adolescents gradually begin to assert their autonomy by developing and more strongly emphasising their opinions, as well as participating in discussions about topics that affect them (Blakemore 2017; Smetana 2017). Furthermore, adolescents gradually form their own moral norms, worldviews, and judgements toward authorities (Cohn et al. 2010). Adolescence is a critical period for the emergence, consolidation, and development of political viewpoints, potentially leading them to more frequently identify with certain public authorities (Eckstein et al. 2012; Gleason et al. 2017). A specific observation is the heightened importance of reciprocity for the 18-19 age group. This group, on the cusp of adulthood, may be particularly sensitive to reciprocal behaviour from authorities. Older adolescents and adults also expressed a greater expectation for explanations and understanding of the actions of authorities. This difference could indicate a higher level of autonomous thinking in older groups. Additionally, it might reflect more direct experiences with the consequences of authorities' actions, and the development of political views through which they can evaluate the (dis)trustworthiness of authorities' explanations (Eckstein et al. 2012; Thielmann and Hilbig 2015).

Overall, for younger individuals, it could be difficult to distinguish decisions that are more abstract and have consequences for their lives that are more distant, or mediated through other adults, and with which they have less experience (Prime et al. 2020; Smetana 2017; Smetana and Villalobos 2009).

Additionally, we propose two possible ways in which generalised (dis)trust in institutions could be formed based on experiences with institutional decision-making: a) additively, through time, through many sequential experiences with different institutions, or, b) through critical experiences. This experience can be defined by drawing from the definition of trust as 'willingness to be vulnerable' (Mayer et al. 1995). We propose that during highly uncertain times, such as during a pandemic, some negative experiences with institutions are expected by citizens and may represent the normal functioning of democratic institutions. Such experiences could give rise to relatively softer forms of liberal distrust or mistrust with institutional decision-making (Bertsou 2019; Lenard 2008). However, decisions that more directly impact and threaten citizens, especially when repeated multiple times, may be considered more critical in fostering a more severe form of cynical or highly sceptical distrust (Dinesen and Bekkers 2017; Thielmann and Hilbig 2023). Furthermore, based on the definition by Thielmann and

Hilbig (2015), who define trust behaviour as a 'risky choice of making oneself dependent on the actions of another in a situation of uncertainty, based upon some expectation of whether the other will act in a benevolent fashion despite an opportunity to betray,' we conceptualise a second component of critical experience as a perceived betrayal by the public authority.

Based on our results, we propose two critical experiences that could particularly found distrust in institutions among younger people: a) the hypocrisy of public authorities and, b) the false hope that the pandemic is already managed, only for the opposite to eventually prove true. Both of these experiences breach several (dis)trustworthiness criteria described by our respondents. First, the hypocrisy of authority, for example, not adhering to their own rules, can signify both betrayal and a breach of expectations of mutual responsibility and reciprocity from the authority. It implies the opposite of the pandemic being managed through joint efforts, and that the authority respects the citizens and an implicit promise to them to adhere to their own rules. Second, respondents described situations during the pandemic when authorities' overconfidence led them to state that the pandemic was already managed. Later, the same authorities had to react to the worsening situation with a rapid tightening of measures. This scenario breaches the original promise, adds to the extreme position of an authority's overconfidence, and is especially damaging for citizens of various ages who already harboured false hope that the situation was being managed.

Lastly, regarding the generalisability and limitations of our findings, it is particularly important to note that our findings are embedded in the context of handling the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Maxwell 2021). Thus, based on this fact, our findings are more relevant when applied to the management of future crises by authorities. Furthermore, we argue in this chapter that the primary context of interest is developmental, using data from different countries to broaden the (dis)trustworthiness criteria, as much as possible. However, when applying our findings to individual countries, one should consider the current political situation (our findings stem from democratic European countries) and the context (the topic) of decision-making. Additionally, all of the primary studies focused on respondents from the general populations of various age cohorts. Respondents with potentially extreme levels of institutional trust or distrust were not specifically targeted. Therefore, the findings presented in this study primarily describe the (dis)trustworthiness criteria, and thus expectations and evaluations, of public authorities' decision-making by the general population.

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Exploring the Different Faces of Political Trust and Distrust: A Comparative Analysis of Survey Data

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1. Introduction

Political trust (and distrust) has been the object of an ever-increasing number of studies in recent years. Rising political distrust has been identified as the source or epiphenomenon of wider negative trends in contemporary democracies, from the decline in electoral participation, to the rise in extremist challenger parties, to political polarisation, alienation and the decline in democratic and liberal values. The academic debate is vigorous and multifaceted, raging as to whether such effects are significant or exaggerated, or even as to whether political distrust carries positive or negative effects for modern democracies. Often in the literature, one can identify implicit arguments concerning a dual nature of political distrust, one that reflects a healthy scepticism towards the political system, and one that reflects a more insidious cynicism. However, empirical studies have hitherto neglected to distinguish between different varieties of political trust and distrust, and have resigned to treat political (dis)trust as an undifferentiated phenomenon. Utilising new survey data from seven European countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Serbia), this chapter aims to tackle this lacuna in the empirical literature, and present a trust profile typology by integrating empirical evidence to capture (dis)trust's multidimensional variations.

2. The different faces of political trust and distrust

In the past decades, both public discourse and academic inquiry have been dominated by discussions addressing declining levels of trust in politics in new and established democracies alike. The rapid spread of democracy since 1989 was accompanied by a "democratic paradox" (Dahl 2000): while there was a strengthening of democratic ideals and support for the democratic system, this period also saw dissatisfaction with specific aspects of democratic performance that weakened citizens' trust in political institutions, procedures and authorities. This has raised concerns over the legitimisation of representative democracies and the stability of democratic regimes, leading to constant speculation, or even explicit declarations of "crises of democracy" (e.g., Crozier et al. 1975).

Conversely, political scientists have observed that low levels of political trust can coexist with democratic values (Norris 1999; Dalton 2004), implying that distrust "can play critical roles in protecting norms of democratic practice" (Lenard 2015: 359). Citrin and Stoker (2018: 51) differentiate between political mistrust and distrust: the former leads citizens to be sceptical and question the trustworthiness of politicians (or institutions), whereas the latter means that

politicians/institutions are assumed untrustworthy in advance. Bertsou (2019) goes a step further, arguing – in contrast to the "critical citizen" hypothesis (Norris 1999) - that political distrust should be distinguished from the democratic scepticism and vigilance of Madisonian 'liberal distrust'. However, questions persist: do they reflect profound ("destructive") cynicism or disaffection with democratic politics, or should they be interpreted as mere healthy scepticism or "creative cynicism" (Cook and Gronke 2005: 786; Demertzis 2006; Miller 1974)?

Most empirical studies operationalise political trust by measuring the degree of individuals' self-reported levels of trust, or "confidence", in a variety of political institutions, even though the choices are seldom justified (Schneider 2017: 966). The most well-known items that were designed to tap political trust were first introduced in the American National Election Study (ANES) in the 1950s, and were later known as the "trust-in-government" questions. These questions, initially designed to capture feelings of political apathy and disaffection, exclusively measured trust in the federal government, and did not really focus on other institutions. Measures of trust have been criticised for their exclusive focus on trust in the national government, broadly perceived to include trust in political institutions, or narrowly focused on trust in the party or governing elite, usually discounting the horizontal and vertical devolution of power in contemporary multilevel systems of governance (Muñoz 2017). Most empirical studies of trust in quantitative large-scale surveys also rely on the fundamental distinction between social trust (also known as horizontal or interpersonal trust) and political trust. When not directed towards any particular group of people, the former is known as generalised trust.

It can be argued that both trust and distrust – either as opposite ends of a continuum, or distinct entities in more than one variant ("diffuse", "generalised", "interpersonal", "healthy", "institutionalised" distrust, etc.) (Marková et al. 2008; Castiglione 2018)– are essential for democracy and democratic governance. Building trust with citizens can positively affect popular support of governmental policy-making and implementation, and therefore it might be critical to government success. Low levels of political trust are linked either to concerns about or with criticism of democracy: although alarmingly low levels of political trust may signal a critical attitude (Norris 1999) and a source of pressure that functions as a corrective for democracy, regime institutions and government performance. The other side of the same coin is the perception of trust as "credulous" (Norris 2022), wherein citizens are seen as vulnerable to manipulation and demagoguery. In the framework of credulous trust, "citizens believe agents blindly" (Norris 2022: 24). However, it is not all black and white; blind trust also carries risks, while low trust does not necessarily equate to a threat to democracy.

3. Towards a new typology of political (dis)trust

Political (dis)trust has been linked to various attitudinal and behavioural phenomena, such as voting for populist parties, participation in social mobilisations, and other forms of unconventional political actions or harbouring anti-establishment attitudes (Fieschi and Heywood 2004; Geurkink et al. 2020; Rooduijn 2018). However, the empirical examination of political (dis)trust has predominantly treated it as a homogeneous phenomenon. As a result, there

remains ambiguity regarding the relationship, for example, between political distrust and support for democracy (Norris 1999; 2011). Some scholars have argued that political distrust may have different components, or even constitute a completely separate dimension from political trust (Bertsou 2019), with different behavioural and attitudinal correlates. Pippa Norris has famously linked political distrust to the healthy scepticism of committed democrats towards their governing institutions, and the officials of the day that occupy positions of political authority (Norris 2022). However, the literature has done little so far to distinguish empirically between such "healthy" forms of "sceptical" political distrust and more pernicious forms of distrust associated with more cynical attitudes towards the political system.

Common measures not only fail to distinguish between low trust and distrust, but also overlook the complexity of the interplay between trust and distrust. Scholars argue that trust and distrust coexist in real-life situations, challenging both the notion that distrust is a simple negation of trust (Ullmann-Margalit 2004); similarly, the "monist" perspective views trust and distrust as opposite ends of a single continuum (Lahusen 2024). Recognising the interdependence and partially autonomous, contextual dynamics of the trust-distrust relationship, operationalisations of trust and distrust should be able to capture this distinction. This is crucial for understanding the coexistence of trust and distrust, both in general and in terms of individual-level dispositions towards political institutions (Lahusen 2024; Lewicki et al. 1998). Martinez and Greene (2022), building on the notion that trust and distrust are not merely opposite ends of a single spectrum, propose a dual-process model in which trust and distrust operate as separate, coexisting constructs. They argue that individuals can simultaneously hold trust and distrust towards different aspects of the same political entity, complicating the traditional view of political trust. This model suggests that efforts to increase political trust must also address the sources of distrust to be effective.

To illustrate the complexity of the trust-distrust interplay, we examine the role of social trust, understood as the general trustworthiness that people in a society attribute to each other. Social trust is thought to lay the foundation for political trust, which pertains to the confidence in governmental institutions and their ability to govern effectively and justly (Putnam 2000; Uslaner 2002). Theoretical and empirical works suggest that societies characterised by high levels of social trust tend to exhibit stronger political trust, as the foundational belief in the goodwill and reliability of fellow citizens extends to institutions that represent collective interests (Newton 2007; Rothstein and Uslaner 2005). This relationship is supported by the argument that social trust generates a supportive community environment conducive to positive interactions with state institutions, thereby fostering a reciprocal trust in political mechanisms (Putnam 2000). However, this connection is nuanced and mediated by various factors, including perceptions of institutional performance, transparency, and the extent to which citizens feel represented (Rothstein and Stolle 2008; Zmerli and Newton 2008).

An important mediating factor of the interplay between social and political trust is anti-establishment attitudes; reflecting scepticism or outright rejection of traditional political institutions and elites can serve as a mediator between social and political trust, as well as a catalyst for rebuilding trust in politics and governance systems. Individuals with strong social bonds and trust in their community may still harbour distrust towards political institutions if they

perceive these institutions as unresponsive, corrupt, or not representative of their values (Hooghe and Zmerli 2011). This dichotomy suggests that while social trust might foster a supportive environment for collective action and civic engagement, it does not necessarily translate into trust in political institutions. Instead, anti-establishment sentiments may emerge from the disconnect between a community's values and the actions of political elites, thereby influencing the overall landscape of political trust (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Offe 1999). Such dynamics underscore the importance of examining both the pathways through which social trust influences political trust, and the role of anti-establishment attitudes in shaping individuals' trust in their political system.

4. Data and Methods

The evidence provided in this chapter rests on a novel online comparative survey conducted in seven European countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Serbia) from January to May 2023. The survey included a series of questions on political and social trust, along with other items designed to capture basic ideological and psychological dispositions of individuals towards politics. The survey employed a sampling strategy based on demographic quotas (gender, age, region and interlocking age/education quotas), resulting in a total sample size of n=14,000 completed questionnaires for all countries combined

In order to develop our trust profile typology, we perform a k-means cluster analysis to identify the groups that emerge from our data by using the three dimensions (political trust, social/generalised trust, anti-establishment orientations), which form the basis of our categorisation of different trust and distrust profiles. The components and descriptives of the three variables are presented in Table 1. The basic idea behind this method is to divide the dataset into different clusters that do not overlap each other, by minimising the variance within each cluster. We use the standard Hartigan-Wong algorithm (Hartigan and Wong 1979), which defines the total within-cluster variation as the sum of the Euclidean distances between each observation's feature values and the corresponding centroid:

$$W(C_k) = \sum_{x_i \in C_k} (x_i - \mu_k)^2$$

where x_i is an observation belonging to the cluster C_k and μ_k is the mean value of the points assigned to the cluster C_k. Each observation (x_i) is assigned to a given cluster such that the sum of squared (SS) distances of each observation to their assigned cluster centres (μ_k) is minimised (Boehmke and Greenwell 2019). When using k-means clustering one of the challenges is to specify the number of clusters that will be generated. The algorithm k-means algorithm starts by randomly selecting *k* observations from the data set to serve as the initial centres for the clusters (i.e., centroids). Next, each of the remaining observations are assigned to its closest centroid, where closest is defined using the distance between the object and the cluster mean.

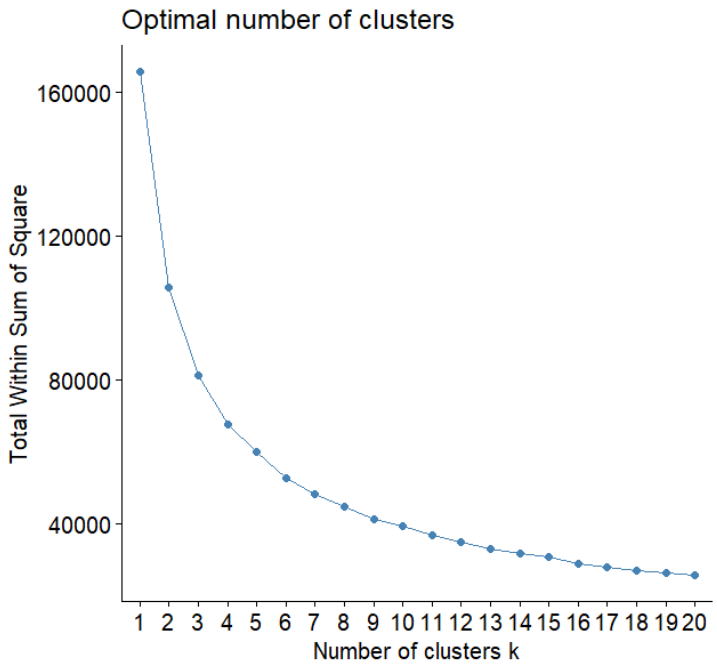
Table 1: Variables' descriptive statistics for creation of trust profile clusters

Variables	Obs.	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max	Cronbach's alpha
Political Trust Scale items: *"On a scale of 0-10, how much do you personally trust each of the institutions and actors listed below?"* (0=Do not trust at all / 10=Fully Trust) a. National government b. The parliament c. Political parties	11648	3.53	2.59	0	10	0.90
Social Trust Scale items (standardized): a. *"Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?"* 0= You need to be very careful / 10= Most people can be trusted b. *"Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair?"* 0= Most people try to take advantage of me / 10= Most people try to be fair	11180	4.77	2.33	0	10	0.76
Anti-establishment attitudes Scale items: *"Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements."* 1=Strongly disagree / 5=Strongly agree a. What people call 'compromise' in politics is really just selling out on one's principles b. Elections make no difference regardless of the result c. No matter what people do, political institutions can never become trustworthy because the entire political system is irredeemably flawed and untrustworthy	10878	5.56	2.20	0	10	0.64

5. Evidence based typology of trust profiles

Before performing the k-means clustering on our data, the first decision is to specify the number of clusters. One of the most common methods for determining the natural groups that exist in the data when there is no predetermined number of clusters is the "elbow method". The goal of k-means clustering is to create clusters that minimise within-cluster variation, and the total within-cluster sum of squares is a good measure of the compactness of the clusters. When plotting the total within-cluster sum of squares by the number of different clusters, the location of the bend, or "elbow", in the plot is generally considered as an indicator of the appropriate number of clusters. In the case of our data, the "elbow" is not perfectly clear, but appears to be located at k=4 or k=5. Given the fact that the total WSS is not greatly reduced by moving from four to five clusters, we choose the more parsimonious solution, and perform the k-means cluster analysis for k=4.

Figure 1: Elbow method for determining optimal number of clusters



In Table 2, we observe the mean values on each of the three main variables/dimensions from the four clusters that emerge from our data. The mean values allow us to identify the substantive content of each group in terms of the interaction between political trust, social/generalized trust and anti-establishment orientations. It should be noted that the three variables display moderate to weak correlations between each other[3], meaning that no two dimensions display evidence for the presence of collinearity. The first group that emerges (Cluster 1) comprises the most middle-of-the-road group of respondents. The mean values for each of the

[3] Pearson's *r* coefficient for the correlation between *political trust* and *social trust* is 0.41, between *political trust* and *anti-establishment* orientations is -0.42, and between *social trust* and *anti-establishment orientations* is -0.23 (all significant at p<0.05)

three variables from this group is close to the centre of the distributions of the three variables for the entire sample. It comprises individuals that simultaneously display medium levels of political trust, generalised/social trust, and anti-establishment orientations, and for this reason, we label the members of this group as individuals with a "moderate" trust profile.

Table 2: Mean dimension values by trust profile cluster

	(Cluster 1)	(Cluster 2)	(Cluster 3)	(Cluster 4)	Total
	Moderate profile	Civic profile	Cynical profile	Sceptical profile	
Political trust	4.53	6.67	1.13	1.87	3.55
Social Trust	3.98	7.01	2.02	6.20	4.58
Anti-establishment orientations	4.69	4.19	7.07	6.34	5.66
N	2758	2480	2520	2601	10359

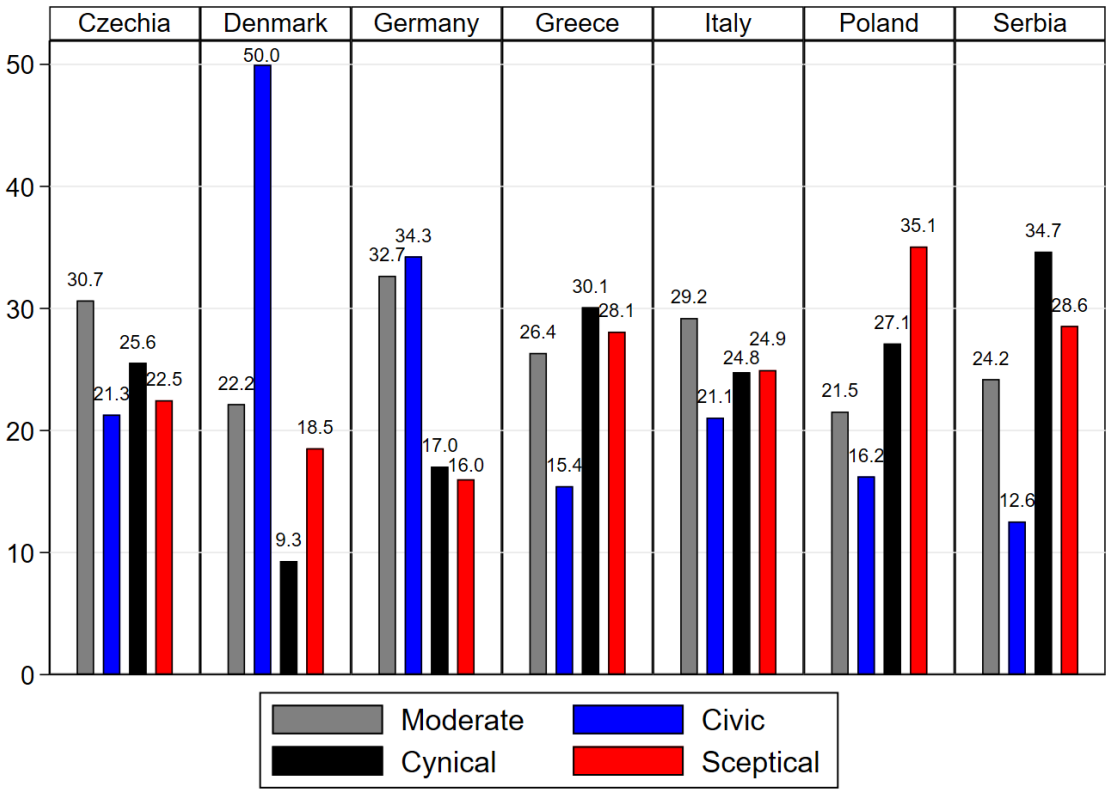
The members of the second group (Cluster 2) display simultaneously medium to high levels of political trust, medium to high levels of social/generalised trust, and medium to low levels of anti-establishment orientations. We label those that exhibit a conventional level of trust as individuals with a "civic" trust profile. The members of the third group (Cluster 3) display low levels of political trust, as well as of social/generalised trust, together with high levels of anti-establishment orientations. For this reason, we label those individuals as possessing a "cynical" trust profile, indicative of a pervasive distrust towards the social and political system as a whole. Finally, the fourth group resembles the "cynical" profile with the difference of displaying medium to high levels of social/generalised trust, meaning that political distrust appears to be independent from more general low trust dispositions. The summary of the three profiles is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Typology of trust profiles

	Moderate profile	Civic profile	Cynical profile	Sceptical profile
Political trust	Medium	Medium-High	Low	Low
Social Trust	Medium	Medium-High	Low	Medium-High
Anti-establishment orientations	Medium	Medium-Low	High	Medium-High

Figure 2 shows the distribution of trust profiles by country. Three groups of countries are detected in the graph. The first group includes the Czech Republic and Italy, which show significant convergences in the distribution of trust types. In both cases, the moderates are in first place, followed by the cynics and sceptics, with the civics in last place. The second group is that of Denmark and Germany, where the civic type dominates and the moderates come second, indicating a stronger tendency towards a more rational view of trust. Greece and Serbia are in the third group. Cynical types of trust are in first place, while sceptical types are in the second. While the moderates in both cases are not far from the sceptics, the percentage of civics is very low. Finally, Poland is the only country with the highest proportion of sceptics and the second highest proportion of cynics. Its low level of civic type brings Poland closer to Greece and Serbia.

Figure 2: Distribution of trust profiles by country



6. Correlates of trust profiles

As prefaced in previous sections, apart from presenting our typology, a goal of the chapter is to explore potential attitudinal and behavioural correlates of the various trust profiles. We begin by examining the types and levels of political engagement linked with the different trust profiles (Table 4). The descriptive analysis of the data indicates that in terms of interest in

politics, political orientation,4 and party identification,5 the civic and cynical profiles emerge as the most extreme/polarised of the four. Only 11 percent of "civic" respondents display little or no interest in politics, whereas about 30 percent of "cynical" respondents are not interested in politics. Only 6.8 percent of "civic" respondents declared that they have no political orientation contrasted with 27.1 percent of "cynical" respondents that chose the same answer. Finally, over half of the "cynical" respondents answer "no" to the question of whether they feel close to a political party. The corresponding share of "civic" respondents that answered negatively was about half of the "cynics". The other two groups/profiles ("moderate" and "sceptical") fall somewhere in between the two aforementioned groups.

Table 4: Disengagement from politics by trust profile (%)

	Trust profiles				
	Moderate	Civic	Cynical	Sceptical	Total
Not very/not interested at all in politics	22.3	10.9	30.2	26.2	22.7
No political orientation	12.9	6.8	27.1	19.8	16.6
No party identification	38.1	27.2	53.3	48.0	41.2

The relationship between trust profiles and political participation,[6] follows a fairly similar pattern (Table 5). With the exception of voting in elections, where there is no significant variation between the different types of trust, "civic" respondents are the most likely to donate or volunteer to NGOs or in local communities. Individuals belonging to the "cynical" trust group are the least likely to participate actively in civic life. When it comes to less conventional forms of political participation, such as attending public demonstrations or expressing political opinions on social media, individuals with a "cynical" or "sceptical" trust profile are more likely to participate.

[4] The wording of the questionnaire item is: "What political orientation best describes you?". The available answers are: Social Democrat; Liberal; Radical right; Radical Left; Conservative; Green; Christian Democrat; Communist; Other; None; Don't know; Prefer not to say.

[5] The wording of the questionnaire item is: "Do you generally think of yourself as a little closer to one of the parties than the others?". The available answers are: Yes; No; Don't know; Prefer not to say.

[6] The questionnaire items to measure political participation use the following question wording: "There are different ways of trying to improve things or help prevent things from going wrong. During the past five years, have you done any of the following?"

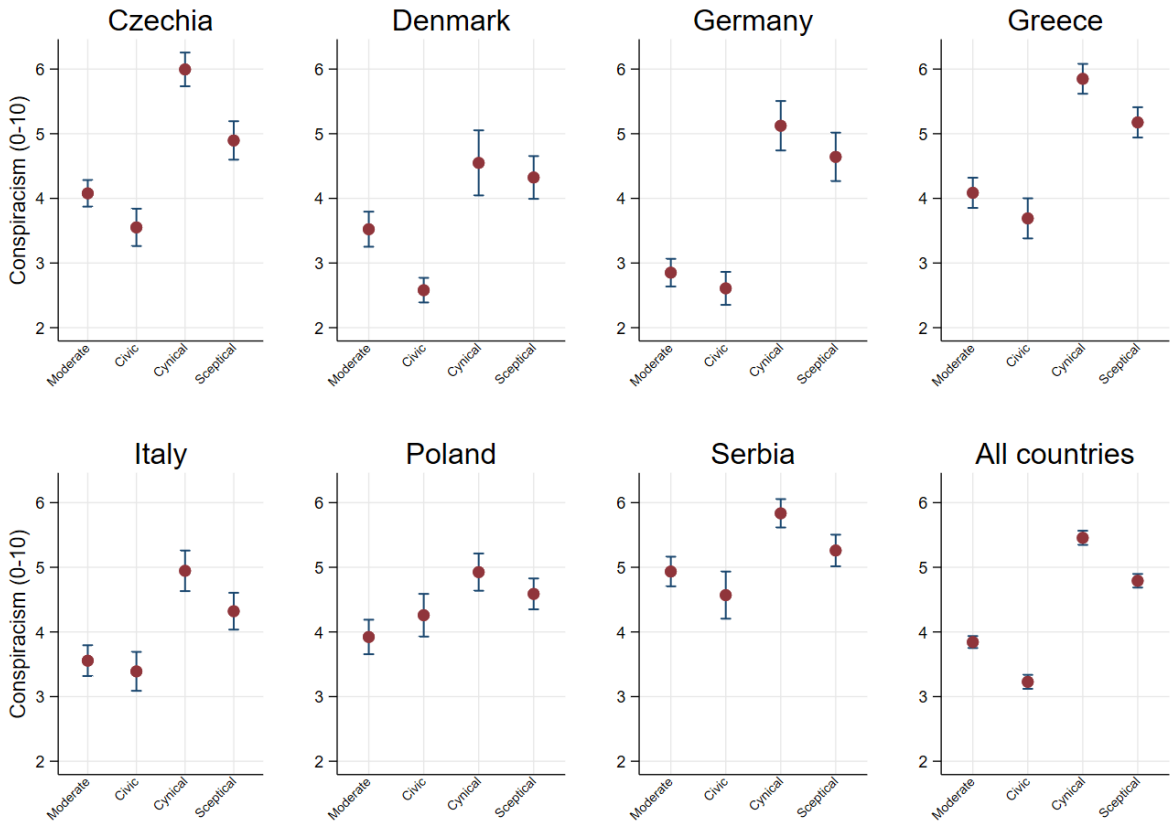
Table 5: Political/civic participation by trust profile (%)

	Trust profiles				
	Moderate	Civic	Cynical	Sceptical	Total
Voted in elections	81.8	83.7	80.9	76.5	80.7
Worked in an election campaign	9.8	13.7	7.4	11.0	10.5
Donated to an NGO	40.3	49.9	35.1	39.5	41.1
Volunteered in an NGO	13.1	22.3	13.7	16.6	16.3
Volunteered in local community	24.5	33.1	22.7	26.9	26.8
Participated in public demonstration	18.2	18.1	23.9	25.6	21.4
Expressed political opinion on social media	31.8	33.7	40.2	39.5	36.2

Another area explored is the association between trust profiles and conspiratorial thinking. The link between belief in conspiracies and trust is not new, but usually centred exclusively on social/generalised trust (Mari et al. 2022: 279; Abalakina-Paap et al. 2020). Studies that focus on the relationship between conspiratorial thinking and political trust have been scarce (Jolley et al. 2020). Other studies focus on certain behavioural consequences of conspiratorial beliefs at the individual level, such as political disengagement or a decline in voting intentions following exposure to certain conspiracy theories (Jolley and Douglas 2014). However, here again, the link between conspiracy beliefs and political distrust fails to differentiate between different types of political distrust. Our evidence shows that there is a clear positive association between "cynical" forms of distrust and conspiratorial thinking (Figure 3). In every country of our sample, the cynical trust profile is linked to high average values on our conspiracism index,[7] and in most countries, civic trust profile is linked to lower average values.

[7] The composite conspiracism index was created by using six questionnaire items. The items were statements with which the respondents had to state their agreement or disagreement on a 5-point Likert scale. The six statements were: 1) "Regardless of who is officially in charge of governments and other organisations, there is a single group of people who secretly control events and rule the world together." 2) "Climate change is a hoax perpetrated by corrupt scientists and politicians." 3) "The dangers of 5G cellphone technology are being covered up." 4) "The Covid-19 virus was artificially produced in a Chinese lab." 5) "The dangers of vaccines are being hidden by the medical establishment." 6) "Vaccines are unsafe." Cronbach's alpha: 0.9

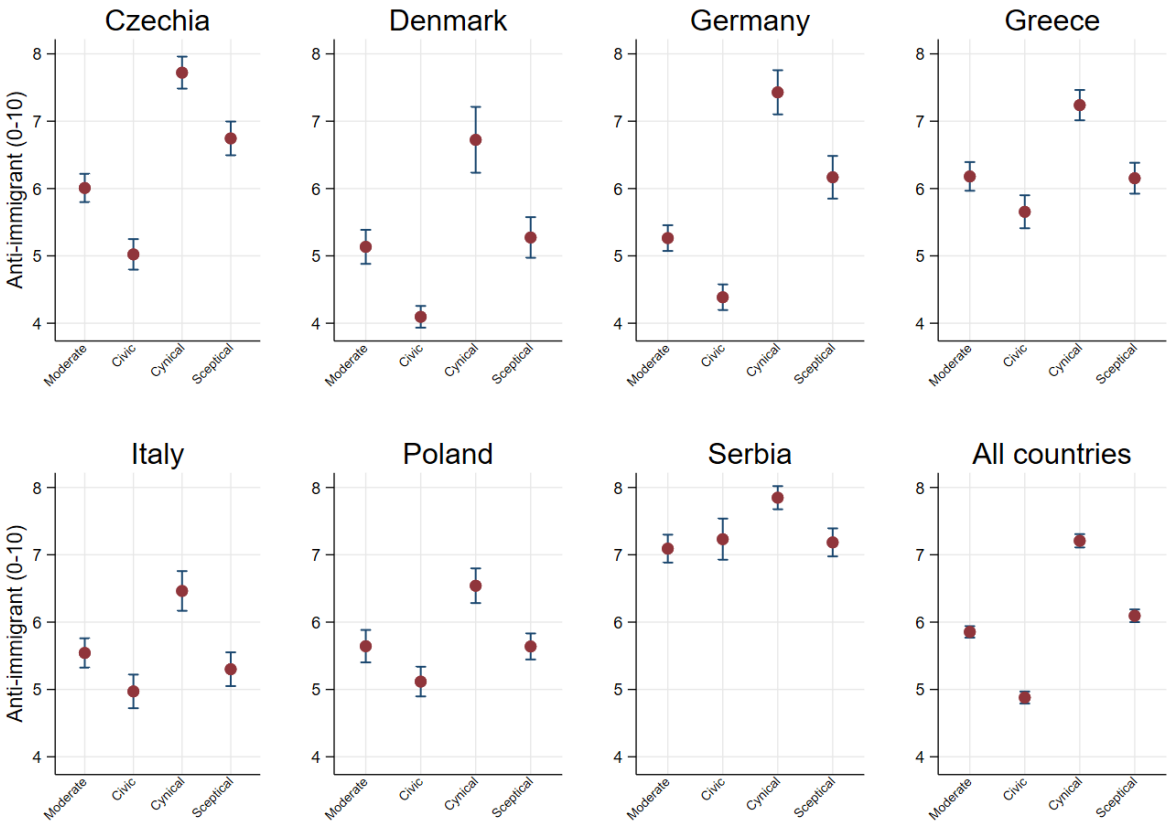
Figure 3: Conspiracism by trust profile and by country



Note: The circles and the capped lines represent mean values and 95% confidence intervals, respectively.

A further area of research is linking trust profiles to anti-immigrant attitudes. Research suggests that individuals with low trust in political institutions might be more likely to hold negative views vis-a-vis immigrants, whereas high levels of trust between individuals in a society is often associated with greater openness and tolerance among members of diverse ethnic groups (Mitchell 2021; Pellegrini et al. 2021). Our findings affirm that individuals characterised by a trustful disposition, specifically the civics and moderates, demonstrate greater acceptance across all surveyed countries, with Serbia as the exception. Those who exhibit trust in both institutions and fellow citizens, albeit with moderate doubt for the establishment, tend to harbour fewer negative views on immigration.

Figure 4: Anti-immigrant attitudes by trust profile and by country



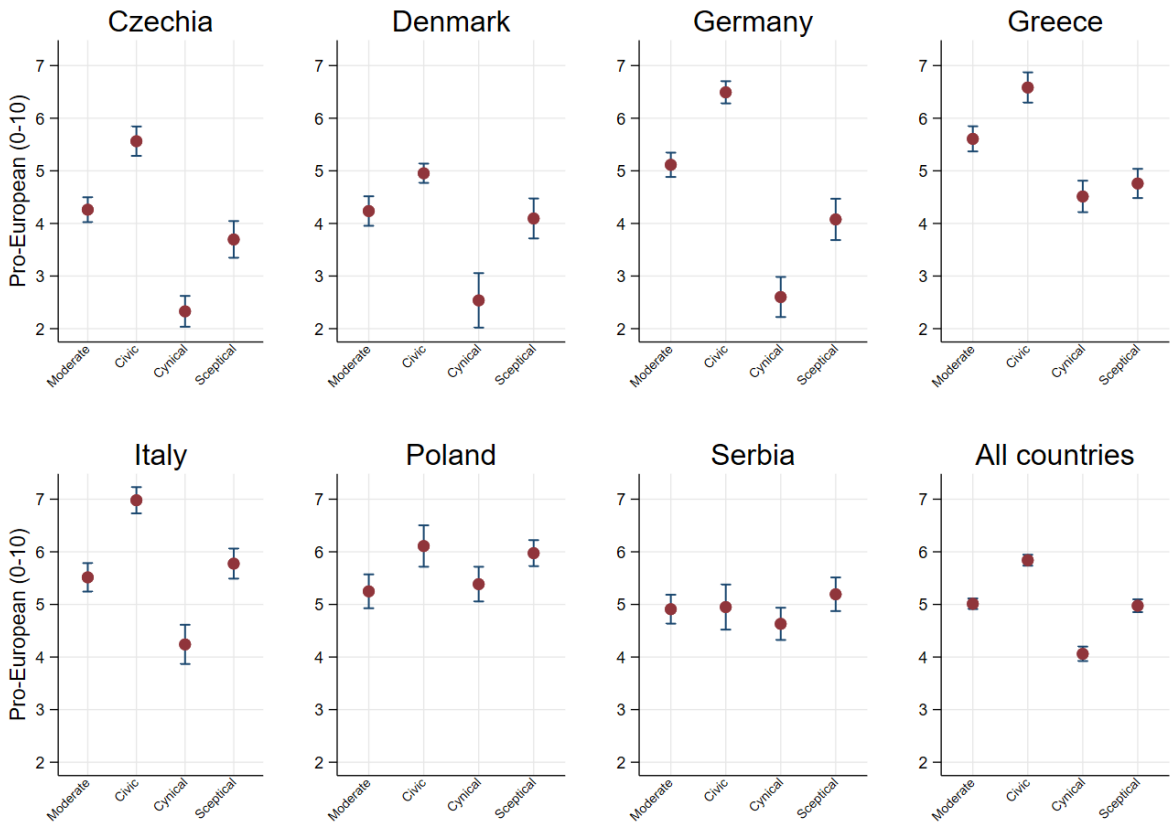
Note: The circles and the capped lines represent mean values and 95% confidence intervals, respectively. The 11-point anti-immigrant attitude scale was created by combining two questionnaire items. The wording of the questionnaire items are: 1) "Some people think that [COUNTRY] natives should be given priority in employment over immigrants, while others believe that they should not be given priority. Please select your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means that [COUNTRY] natives should be given no priority in employment whatsoever and 10 means [COUNTRY] natives should absolutely be given priority." 2) "Some people think that immigrants make [COUNTRY] a worse place to live, whereas some think that immigrants make [COUNTRY] a better place to live. Please select your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means immigrants make [COUNTRY] a much worse place to live and 10 means that immigrants make [COUNTRY] a much better place to live."

Finally, we explored the attitudes of the four different trusting profiles, with regard to European integration, in each of the countries of our sample. Scholarly research suggests that recent global crises have accelerated a decline in EU support and trust in all member states, thus blaming the European governance for the limited handling of the crises (DeLuca 2023; Roth et al. 2022). Moreover, while a growing body of literature examines EU politics as an independent factor, several studies suggest that public opinion often relates national politics with EU politics and disaffection with national politics is mirrored in the EU, as well (DeLuca 2023; Hobolt and De Vries 2016).

The study's exploration into trust profiles and pro-European attitudes unveils nuanced relationships between individuals' dispositions towards national political systems and their views

on European integration. Individuals with a civic trust profile, who exhibit high levels of political and social trust, are likely to possess more favourable attitudes towards the EU, seeing it as a natural extension of their trust in national governance. Conversely, those with a cynical profile, characterised by deep-seated mistrust/suspicion and low trust in political institutions, may view further European integration with suspicion, perceiving the EU as yet another layer of distant and undemocratic governance. Sceptical profiles, despite a higher level of social trust, approach the EU with caution, weighing the institution's benefits against its perceived shortcomings in effectiveness and democratic accountability. Moderates, with balanced levels of trust and anti-establishment sentiments, adopt a pragmatic stance, supporting the EU based on a careful assessment of its impacts on sovereignty, democracy, and national identity. The pattern between countries and different trust profiles is very similar, with the exception of Serbia, the only non-EU country that holds a more moderate stance against the EU among all trust profiles.

Figure 5: Pro-European attitudes by trust profile and by country



Note: The circles and the capped lines represent mean values and 95% confidence intervals, respectively. The 11-point pro-European attitude scale was based on a single questionnaire item. The wording of the questionnaire item is: “Some people think that European integration has already gone too far. Others feel that European integration should be pushed further towards a common federal government. What is your personal view on European integration? Please select your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means that you think that European integration has gone too far and 10 means that you think that European integration should be pushed further.”

7. Conclusions

This study embarked on the ambitious task of untangling the complex web of political trust and distrust, arguing against the traditional binary approach. By leveraging novel empirical evidence from seven European countries, it presented a nuanced typology of political trust profiles. This typology is rooted in the interplay between political trust, fundamental dispositions towards politics and society, and generalised social trust. The study's innovative approach illustrates the multifaceted nature of political (dis)trust, emphasising the coexistence of diverse (dis)trust subcultures within societies.

Based on the assumption that societal attitudes and anti-establishment orientations are closely related to citizen's trust in political institutions, we introduced a novel typology of trust profiles. The typology reveals four distinct trust profiles: moderate, civic, cynical, and sceptical. Although there is evidence in the literature that those who are socially trusting are also politically trusting, the links between these types of trust are not always direct. In the proposed typology, general social and political trust exhibit positive associations in moderate and civic profiles, negative associations in cynical profiles, and incompatibility in sceptical profiles. Thus, there is not only a close and positive relationship between political and social trust, especially when other variables, such as anti-establishment orientations, intervene in this relationship. This subtle differentiation between different types of trust profiles raises the more specific question of what sorts of political attributes they express. The analysis of the profiles suggests that the civic and cynical profiles emerge as the most polarised of the four types in terms of interest in politics, political orientation and party identification, and that the same pattern is also used in terms of political participation. 'Cynical' and 'sceptical' trust profiles are more likely to engage in less conventional forms of political participation, such as attending public demonstrations or expressing political opinions on social media. We also find that there is a clear positive association between 'cynical' types, characterised by deep scepticism and low trust in political institutions, and conspiratorial thinking and suspicion of the EU, while sceptical profiles, despite higher levels of social trust, approach the EU with caution.

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Deliberative Democracy, Trust and the Role of Politicians and Experts in Deliberative Settings: Insights from an Experimental Study

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1. Introduction

This chapter wishes to deepen our knowledge on the effects of participation in deliberative democracy activities on institutional trust by addressing some dimensions that have received relatively little attention in previous studies. In particular, it aims, through original deliberative experiments, to evidence how the eventual participation of politicians (presenting their different opinions) and policy experts (available for answering specific questions and clarifying doubts) in the deliberative process may have an impact on institutional trust and opinions on democratic systems.

The deliberative experiments were part of the EnTrust research project, and aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the forms and conditions of trust and distrust in democratic governance. The analysis makes use of twelve online deliberative polls. The deliberations focused on two topics touching on environmental issues (plastic pollution and sustainable mobility). They were conducted in four countries (Italy, Greece, Poland and Denmark) in order to control for eventual context-related factors. The deliberations amounted to a total of 180 participants, who were allocated to three different treatment groups and asked to answer a pre- and a post-deliberative survey. Our study offers important insights into how the possibility of interacting with politicians and/or experts, and how the deliberative experience has been perceived as satisfactory by participants, affect trust in political institutions.

2. Deliberative Democracy, Trust and Preferences on Democratic Systems

Deliberative polls aim to validate the positive impact of Deliberative Democracy (DD), which according to Habermasian theory of communicative action (1981) rely on five definitional attributes: DD must be inclusive, open (i.e., non-manipulative), equal (in terms of power relationship), argumentative and transformative (transforming raw opinions into enriched collective understanding) (see Hendriks, 2019). Curato et al. (2017) argue that deliberation is “essential to democracy” because it contributes to restricting available options and to structuring preferences of participants into a single-peaked distributed dimension. Research also argues that DD sets the possibility of a plural, more than consensual, democracy (contra Steiner et al., 2005). According to Fishkin’s equality-participation-deliberation dilemma (2009), DD can

assure the last of these three goals, while in any case assuring some representativeness in the decision-making process.

However, a common critique against DD is that it tends to focus on 'big arguments' and to be less equipped to develop pragmatic discussions. For this reason, a further dimension has been introduced, following Hendriks (2018) evaluation of the pros and cons of different democratic forms. This further dimension is practical concretisation, i.e., "democratic practices that serve to accomplish practical, down-to-earth interventions and improvements in the public domain". A similar alert is advanced by Felicetti et al. (2015), who highlight how 'broad arguments' may make steeper the road towards practical concretisation (a dimension of what they call "consequentiality"). These considerations help us to understand why it is important to assure that deliberative settings have to focus on concrete outcomes and proposals. And for this reason, in our study, we restrict the discussions to quite specific environmental challenges, namely sustainable mobility and plastic pollution.

Experiments of Deliberative Democracy (DD) have already been applied to the policy area of climate governance. Stevenson (2015) concludes in her literature review on such (limited) experiments of micro-deliberation that these experiments generate a number of positive outcomes. According to Stevenson (ibid, p. 63):

"Experiments in micro-deliberation have produced interesting and largely encouraging findings for the potential for deliberation to enhance social responses to climate change. Citizens engaged in deliberation have been shown to have a significantly higher level of ambition than most political leaders have displayed. Micro-deliberation has also generated less scepticism, greater desire for action and willingness to act, and a greater willingness to pay for mitigation. Importantly, deliberation also has enabled people to better understand and accept some aspects of alternative discourses held by other people."

Boulianne (2018) also adds that positive outcomes also relate to trust: "Participation in a public deliberation is expected to increase levels of trust in political institutions and leaders" (ibid, p. 6). This happens because participants i) become more aware of the need for compromise; ii) eventually develop a more accurate opinions on politicians involved in experiments (also Neblo et al., 2018); iii) assign further legitimation to the process because their point of view has been heard or considered. Boulianne stresses that, when measuring political trust as an outcome, it is important not only to include a control group (as we do), but also to consider trust as a multi-dimensional concept, by separating, for example, trust towards politicians/experts (in our case) or institutions (Parliament, Government, etc.) from the trust towards the adoption or the discovery of a specific solution to a problem, which is the topic of the DD setting (in our case, climate change).

In her study, which again focuses on climate change related policies, Boulianne adopts a strategy that is quite similar to the research design we adopted. From a political survey focusing on institutional trust, she extracted people to participate in the DD polls. Variations in political trust were measured through a simple 1-4 scale, both referring to the institutional level that is competent for the policy area discussed in the DD polls ["how much do you trust government?], and to the specific policy domain discussed ["how much do you trust government's

ability to deal with climate change?"]. The variating trust levels were assessed through t-tests. In her study, Boulianne largely finds confirmation of treatment effects, i.e., differences between participants and non-selected, available participants after the treatment.

In contrast to previous studies, we are specifically interested in how the involvement of experts and politicians in deliberative settings may have an impact on participants' levels of trust, as well as on their broad preferences in terms of democratic systems. Deliberation without an information phase can be counterproductive because it is said that cognitive errors become amplified through participants' influence over one another (see Sunstein 2005). Several studies show that the participation of policy experts or politicians in deliberative settings has little impact on agenda setting within the deliberative process (on politicians, see specifically Gronlund et al., 2022; Farrell et al., 2020; Sørensen & Torfing, 2019; on experts, see Leino et al., 2022; Muller et al., 2023; Moore, 2017; but on how power relationship affects deliberation, see Kostovicova & Paskhalis, 2021; Parkinson et al., 2022; Parthasarathy et al., 2019;), although other research finds the opposite (Pelletier et al., 1999; Flinders et al., 2016).

However, while we have studies focusing on how deliberative institutions may address deficits in traditional forms of institutional decision-making (e.g., Fung, 2006), we lack studies focusing on the opposite direction, i.e., specifically on the impacts of politicians' and experts' involvement in deliberative settings, and either institutional trust or democratic preferences of the participants. Clarifying the effect of the involvement of these actors is particularly important because the relationship between preferences towards different (representative, deliberative, delegative, technocratic) forms of democracy are complex, as citizens may understand them as either alternative or complementary/compatible systems (Pilet et al., 2020). Thus, for example, trust in experts (or technocratic attitudes) may well be compatible and mutually reinforcing with delegative preferences (e.g., Kim, 2024), or demonstrate support towards representative democracy (Bertsou and Pastorella, 2017). Understanding the relationship between trust in politicians and trust in experts has become particularly sensitive in recent (pandemic) times (e.g., Yuen 2023) and, more generally, in times marked by the emergence of "techno-populism", and thus the contrast between "technocracy" and "populism", both of whom imply a monistic understanding of political legitimacy, in the hands of either "experts" or "the people [through their delegates]" (see Bickerton and Invernizzi, 2019). Our paper intends to address such gaps in deliberative democracy studies.

3. Research Design and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Data Collection Strategy

The study was conducted with an experimental research design. This approach has already been adopted, as aforementioned, by similar studies examining the relationship between deliberative democracy and trust by means of online deliberative polls (ODP; e.g., Boulianne, 2018), and of pre- and post-activity questionnaires submitted to participants to both participant to ODPs and people assigned to the control group. Our study has several innovative aspects, compared to what has already been conducted in this area. The original aspects are namely two: the execution of experiments in different countries (four, in our case: Italy,

Greece, Poland and Denmark), thus increasing the external validity of the results, and the use of diverse "stimuli" within the ODPs.

The ODPs were developed through a dedicated platform designed and defined by a partner company, based on our directions. All the interactions, either within the discussion groups and between participants and politicians/experts (see below), occurred in written form. The experimental activity lasted five days, and took place from February 20-24, 2023. The research design called for the formation of 16 groups, 12 of which were experimental, and four control groups that would not participate in the deliberative experiment, but would still answer the pre- and post-experiment questionnaires. The research design foresaw 12 experimental groups (three per country) with 15 people each (see Table 1). Participants were recruited from an online survey elaborated for other purposes in the EnTrust project, as they had declared their willingness (also considering a small – 50€ - monetary incentive) to participate in the deliberative experiment. In each case, country-level quotas for gender, age, and educational level were fulfilled.

Table 1: Experimental Research Design

	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
Pre-Event Questionnaire	X	X	X	X
Briefing Material	X	X	X	
Participation in ODP	X	X	X	
Interaction with Politicians	X	X		
Interaction with Experts	X		X	
Post-Event Questionnaire	X	X	X	X
N	15	15	15	45

The actual numbers of participants in the groups in the four countries involved (see Table 2) were slightly different, tending to be higher for each group, with the exception of the Danish control group, where there were many non-responses to the questionnaire.

Table 2: Number of participants in the Online Deliberative Polls

	Country				
Group	DK	GR	IT	PL	Total
A (Interaction with Politicians and Experts)	25 (21)	23 (21)	24 (23)	23 (20)	95 (85)
B (Interaction with Politicians only)	21 (20)	21 (13)	19 (14)	21 (19)	82 (66)
C (Interaction with Experts only)	17 (14)	20 (13)	18 (17)	20 (19)	75 (63)
D (Control Group)	32 (28)	55 (45)	39 (34)	46 (38)	172 (145)
Total	95 (83)	119 (92)	100 (88)	110 (96)	424 (359)

Note: Including the control group (in parentheses, number of participants who answered both questionnaires)

Within each country, the three experimental groups were given different stimuli for discussion. In one experimental group (Group A), participants were scheduled to interact with both politicians (two per country: see below) and academic experts (common to all groups and all countries: see below) on afferents of climate change and ecological transition. In experimental Group B, interaction occurred exclusively with politicians. In experimental Group C, interaction occurred exclusively with academic experts. The objective of the discussion, as communicated to the groups' participants, was to arrive at the definition of two policy proposals for each group, proposals that would then be voted on by the participants of all the groups in order to select the best one.

For each country, the partner company provided a senior moderator, with the task of coordinating forum moderation activities by junior moderators recruited from each of the partner universities participating in the EnTrust consortium. In general, each community had a junior moderator in charge of moderation, which was, however, rather passive, except for any reminder activities of deadlines to be met throughout the schedule. On a daily basis, meetings were held at the country level between senior and junior moderators, in order to comment on the progress of the work, and at the general level within the EnTrust task force. This group was made up of two researchers from the partner company, two researchers from the lead university, with all four senior moderators present.

Each of the ODP participants was provided with information/material to ensure an informed participation on the two topics to be discussed, namely combating plastic pollution and sustainable mobility. The information material consisted of about 15 pages of graphics and data related to the two topics under discussion, and was developed by a team of researchers from the University of Warsaw and adapted to different national contexts, and was translated by researchers from the EnTrust project.

The telematics' platform provided by the partner company consisted of several sections that participants could access once they logged on and answered the pre-trial questionnaire.

One section, which was for reference only, allowed participants to read the material. Another section, called "Discuss with other participants," appeared to each participant, and was divided into two subsections, each devoted to the specific topics under discussion.

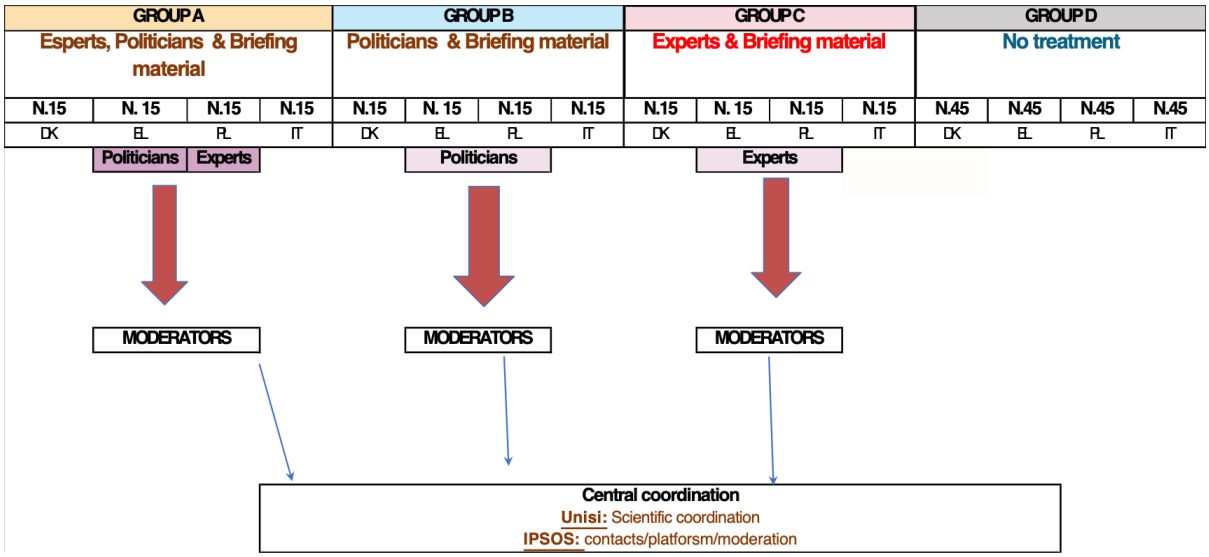
One section was called: "Ask Your Questions". It first allowed participants to view short videos (lasting between five and ten minutes) prepared by each politician in preparation for the ODP and in which the politicians set out their opinions and proposals on the topics under discussion. It then provided space to propose questions and seek clarification from the politicians (Groups A and B) and experts (Groups A and C) involved in the experiment. The questions were posed in written form by the participants on Monday and Tuesday; they were collected and - in the case of the questions to the experts -translated into English by the junior moderators involved in the project, then forwarded to the politicians and experts, who proceeded, within a 24-hour window, to answer (in written form) them. The responses were then uploaded to the platform between Wednesday and Thursday.

A section of the platform, called "Define Your Proposal," allowed participants, in dedicated subsections, to come up with a couple of policy proposals for each group and for each theme (plastic pollution and sustainable mobility). The proposals were selected on Thursday 23 and then submitted, during the last day of activities - that is, on Friday 24 - for voting by all participants in the other discussion groups. In this way, one proposal was selected per theme to then be forwarded to the politicians involved in the project for further consideration. At the close of the proceedings, participants, as well as volunteers belonging to the control groups, responded to the post-activity questionnaire.

There were two politicians per country who participated in the event, with the exception of Poland, where, at the last moment, one of the two politicians, who had been available, withdrew. These were at least regional level politicians, focused on environmental issues and belonging to parties from different political alignments- tending to be one party from a progressive area and one from a conservative area. As for the experts, however, we obtained two internationally prestigious academics in the field of climate policy studies (from the University of Heidelberg and the University of Padua).

Figure 1: Timeline of Deliberative Experiment.

	Monday, February 20, 2023	Tuesday, February 21, 2023	Wednesday, February 22, 2023	Thursday, February 23, 2023	Friday, February 24, 2023
	DAY 1 PRE-ACTIVITY QUESTIONNAIRE; WARM UP AND DISCUSSION START	**DAY 2 DISCUSSION AND FORMULATION OF QUESTIONS: to politicians and experts (group A); to politicians (group B); to experts (group C)**	**DAY 3 DISCUSSION**	**DAY 4 ANSWERS BY POLITICIANS AND EXPERTS; PROPOSALS COLLECTION**	**DAY 5 VOTING ON PROPOSALS; POST-ACTIVITY QUESTIONNAIRE**
Morning session: 8:30 a.m.-3.00 p.m.	**All Groups: PRE-ACTIVITY QUESTIONNAIRE; Groups A and B:** watch videos of politicians and comment; **All, but Group D:** discussion on the topics	Comment to politicians messages and discussion on possible questions to ask **POLITICIANS (groups A and B)** and **EXPERTS (groups A and C);** discussion on the topics	**(all, but group D):** Discussion on the topics	**Sending politicians' answers to groups A/B and experts' answers to groups A/C; comments on answers**	(all, but group D): Proposals submission
Afternoon/evening session: 3.00 p.m.-9.30 p.m.	Discussion on the topics **(all, but group D);** comment to politicians messages (**group A and B**); discussion on possible questions to ask **POLITICIANS (groups A and B) and EXPERTS (groups A and C)**	**(all, but group D):** Discussion on the topics; **Moderators/Junior moderators: Collection of questions to politician; collection and traslation (in english) of questions to experts**	**(all, but group D):** Discussion on the topics	**(all, but group D):** Discussion on the topics; **collection and definition of policy proposals to be voted on**	**(all, but group D) Voting on proposals. All Groups: POST-ACTIVITY QUESTIONNAIRE**



3.2. Dependent Variables Considered

In this study, our first focus is on the impact that participation in ODPs can have in terms of variation in the level of trust towards different institutions: we focused on the national parliament, political parties, the European Union, as well as on 'scientific experts'. The institutions were included to measure possible variations in terms of 'technocratic' preferences

among participants as a result of interaction (or not) with experts on the issues discussed in ODPs.

Before this backdrop, we explore how participation in ODPs may have an impact on preferences for different democratic forms. In particular, we focus on the relationship between political trust and preferences for direct democracy, 'delegative' (plebiscitarian: O'Donnell, 1994) democracy, and technocratic attitudes. Available literature has already demonstrated that all of the above is connected to political trust. The relationship between political trust and preferences for direct democratic tools, such as referenda, is contested. Hug (2005) finds no significant relationship in Eastern European countries; Dyck (2009) reports a negative influence of direct democracy on political trust; Bauer and Fatke (2014: 63) finally offer more qualified arguments: they demonstrate "positive effects of extensive direct democratic rights and negative effects of actual use of direct democratic instruments on political trust". As for claims for 'strong leaders', this is theoretically vastly connected to political distrust – and is also indirectly confirmed by studies showing that, in consensual democracies, claims for strong leadership are less diffused than in majoritarian democracies (Camoes, 2003). As for technocratic attitudes, the picture is mixed: according to Bertsou and Pastorella (2016: 430): "Levels of trust in current representative political institutions motivate technocratic preferences", in the sense that "citizens are more inclined to show support for the technocratic mode of governance when they have weaker democratic attitudes and are distrustful of their politicians and representative institutions, either in themselves, or because of structural factors such as corruption or political culture". More recently, Chiru and Enyedi (2021: 109) show that: "Two individual-level factors are prominent in triggering citizens' support for technocracy: inefficacy, that is, the feeling that politicians are not responsive to their needs and views and authoritarian values". Also, and interestingly, "the most privileged citizens in these societies, that is, those who are better educated, more affluent and have higher social capital, tend to display more favourable attitudes towards technocracy".

In addition to these immediate measures, we also explored the variation of a variable that, according to the literature, often has an indirect impact on the level of political trust, and this is political efficacy. Political efficacy is, in turn, divided into 'internal' and 'external' (Craig et al., 1990). The former refers to the extent to which an individual "feels competent to avail himself of the opportunity to use" institutional channels (Craig, 1979: 229). External political efficacy refers to the extent to which an individual feels that he or she has influence on the political process, and the degree to which he or she believes that political institutions are responsive to their demands (Craig, 1979; Craig et al., 1990; Geurkink et al. 2019) . Both internal and, particularly, external political efficacy have been found to be empirically associated with political trust (Craig et al., 1990).

In addition, we were also interested in measuring the impact of the participation in ODPs on what we called an "antipoliticians' index". This intends to measure distrust towards professional politicians, and has been built as an additive index from six different items (Likert scale, 1-5), i.e.,: "Politicians cannot be relied on"; "Politicians lie to get ahead"; "Politicians take decisions competently" [reversed]; "Politicians obey the law while in office" [reversed]; "Politicians aim to do their best to serve the country" [reversed]; "Politicians mostly work to get

reelected, rather than work to solve problems" (Cronbach Alpha ≈ 0.88). Finally, we measured how participants eventually modified their opinions on the preferred role of citizens[8] and experts[9] in the policy-making process.

3.3. Independent Variables Considered

First, we aim to capture both, on the one hand, the impact of the participation in the deliberative experiment and, on the other, the specific impact of our three different ODPs' formats, namely our formats A (interactions with both politicians and experts), B (interactions only with politicians) and C (interactions only with experts), on the dependent variables of our interest (see above).

Moreover, we also aim to capture the extent to which the self-assessment of the deliberative experiences by the participants' impact on our dependent variables under consideration. We thus built models measuring, alternatively, the extent to which participants considered the deliberative experience biased,[10] the transparency and 'sincerity' of the debates,[11] the overall levels of justifications adopted in the debate (Steenbergen et al., 2003)[12] and the usefulness of the experience as a whole.[13] All these models merely include the answers of those participants that were part of the deliberative experiment and who consequently had to answer a battery of items assessing their experience, in contrast to people included in the control group.

3.4. Methodological Techniques

To assess the effect that the impact of participation on our ODPs on the variables of interest, we rely on a lagged-dependent-variable linear regression model (Ashenfelter, 1978), which, under certain assumptions, has the advantage of providing more accurate estimations of the effect (Ding and Li, 2019) than other methods, such as the difference-in-difference regressions (DID; Jiménez and Perdiguero, 2019). All our models control for country, gender, age (grouped in four ranges: 18-29, 30-49, 50-64 and 65+), political interest and ideological self-positioning on a 0-10 scale (0=Extreme Left, 10=Extreme Right).

[8] Q: "A real democratic process should include arenas where citizens can directly interact with politicians".

[9] Q: "A real democratic process should bind political decisions to experts' evaluation of the decisions taken"

[10] Q1: "On a scale of 0-10, how objective and unbiased did you find the information material? 10= I found it totally biased and favouring some positions"; Q2: "How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? The moderator of my group tried to ensure that opposing arguments were considered" (1-5 Scale).

[11] Q: "Overall, I believe that people really expressed what was on their minds" (Likert 1-5 Scale).

[12] Q: "Many people expressed strong opinions without offering justification" (Likert 1-5 Scale).

[13] Q: "How useful was the event as a whole?" (Likert 1-5 Scale).

4. Empirical Analysis

As Table 3 summarises, the impact of participation in our ODPs on self-reported trust is very limited and never reaches statistical significance. This is true in all of its different forms, i.e., by broadly considering all the different forms of interactions with politicians, experts or both: see first column. However, many other indicators have been significantly influenced by participation in the experiment: consequently, some further reflections on the validity of self-reported trust to capture trust are suggested.

Table 3: Impacts of participation in ODPs (different groups) on trust, political efficacy, democratic preferences and anti-political attitudes (OLS Regressions with Lagged IV)

	All Treatments	A vs Control	B vs Control	C vs Control
Preference for representative democracy	-0.04	-0.02	-0.16	0.00
Preference for direct democracy	**0.23****	0.15	0.24	**0.29***
Preference for delegative democracy	-0.11	0.02	**-0.28***	-0.12
Preference for technocracy	-0.14	0.00	**-0.31***	-0.12
Real democracy should include citizens' arenas	-0.04	-0.15	0.02	0.03
Real democracy should bind to experts' decisions	-0.02	0.03	-0.10	0.05
Trust in Parliament	0.06	0.08	0.41	-0.19
Trust in Political Parties	0.11	0.03	0.13	0.15
Trust in Experts	0.00	-0.12	-0.01	0.17
Trust in EU	0.07	0.32	-0.06	0.03
External Political Efficacy	**0.29*****	**0.40*****	**0.39****	0.13
Internal Political Efficacy - general	-0.00	0.08	0.06	-0.16
Internal Political Efficacy - particular	0.17	0.23	**0.35****	0.04
Anti-Political Index	**-0.10****	-0.05	**-0.22*****	-0.05

Note: *=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01

Overall, our interviewees seem to better appreciate *direct democratic* tools after five days of participation in our experiment. We could interpret this finding as a desire to have a decisive voice in political debates, once more complex phases of agenda-setting and debates have

been set by political representatives. This is even stronger in countries where direct democracy tools are often used, such as in Italy and Poland, as our (unreported) country variables show. The increase in external political efficacy (i.e., more strongly perceived responsiveness by the political sphere) is also coherent with this interpretation, as well as quite a robust finding, in line with what literature suggests. It reveals the empowering effect that participation in deliberative settings may have, particularly – again – in countries where external efficacy is lower (Italy and Poland).

When analysing more closely the impacts of *different kinds of interactions* between participants and political representatives and/or scientific experts during the deliberative exercise (see the second, third and fourth columns), we can easily notice that the interaction with *both* actors rarely seems to have specific impacts. In fact, only external political efficacy has significantly increased. Perhaps, in this case (Group A, second column), participants may fail to specifically 'appreciate' the contributions provided by each specific actor. However, a very similar pattern is observable in our fourth column, capturing the impact of participating in ODPs with exclusive interactions with experts *vis à vis* the control group. In this latter case, the impact is actually even lower, and reaches a weak statistical significance only in inspiring stronger preferences for direct democratic tools. Instead, ODPs participants in Group B (exclusive interaction with politicians) provide more significant variations. Participation in Group B seems to lead participants to better recognise and evaluate the role of political representatives: see, in particular, the decrease in preferences for technocracy and deliberative democracy, and the higher external political efficacy (i.e., assessment of political responsiveness), and, crucially, the strong decrease in anti-political attitudes. Exclusive interactions with politicians also significantly increase 'particular' internal political efficacy (the corresponding item is: "I feel like I am able to take an active role in a group involved with political issues").

Tables 4A and 4B report the impact of the self-assessment of the deliberative experiences by the participants on the various dependent variables under consideration. Although some results are difficult to interpret, most of them seem to follow coherent patterns. The clearest finding is that the more positive the assessment of the deliberative experience in nearly all the dimensions is, the more likely the participants are to support the provision of deliberative arenas in the policy-making process and, at the same time, to defend the ideal of representative democracy. In this sense, representative systems and deliberative arenas are seen as potentially complementary. Support for delegative forms of democracy – or for a subordination of political over expert-based knowledge - is instead circumscribed to participants that denounced a lack of quality in the 'deliberative' setting, in the sense that assertive statements prevailed over reasoned counterarguments. In sum, we could argue that a (perceived) poor quality of the deliberative debate convinced participants about the necessity of moving the political decisions towards more autonomous (either political or technocratic) loci of power.

Trust in different actors is sometimes affected by individual assessments over the deliberative experience. In particular, the belief that the participants effectively exposed their own arguments and did not practice self-censorship had strong positive effects, although it is difficult to draw strong theoretical conclusions from this. We also detected a counter-intuitive, negative impact of the perceived objectivity of the briefing material on trust in EU institutions.

Arguably, the relationship presented in Table 4B lacks strong theoretical connection, if compared with findings summarised in Table 4A. The latter offers interesting clues on democratic preferences and, more particularly, the role that deliberative institutions and arrangements may have, according to the participants of our experiment, on the policy-making process.

Table 4A: Impacts by individual assessments of ODPs' experience on democratic preferences (OLS Regressions with Lagged IV)

		Preferences for…				Real democratic process should…	
Concept	Corresponding Item	Representative Democracy	Direct Democracy	Delegative Democracy	Technocracy	Include Citizens' Arenas	Bind to Experts' decision
Fair Process	Briefing Material Unbiased					Pos (**)	Neg (**)
Satisfaction	Event as a whole was useful	Pos (**)	Pos (**)		Pos (**)	Pos (***)	
Access to 'Voice'	Moderator ensured all the arguments were considered	Pos (***)				Pos (**)	
Sincerity of Participants	People really expressed what was on their minds	Pos (*)			Pos (**)	Pos (*)	
Low Levels of Justification	People argued without justifying their arguments			Pos (**)			Pos (***)

Note: *=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01. Only statistically significant impacts are shown

Table 4b: Impacts by individual assessments of ODPs' experience on trust, political efficacy and anti-political attitudes (OLS Regressions with Lagged IV)

		Trust in…				Political Efficacy			Anti-Politics
Concept	Corresponding Item	Parliament	Political Parties	Experts	EU	External	Internal (general)	Internal (particular)	Anti-Political Index
Fair Process	Briefing Material Unbiased				Neg (***)				Neg (**)
Satisfaction	Event as a whole was useful				Pos (*)				
Access to 'Voice'	Moderator ensured all the arguments were considered	Pos (***)							
Sincerity of Participants	People really expressed what was on their minds	Pos (***)	Pos (**)	Pos (***)					
Low Levels of Justification	People argued without justifying their arguments		Neg (**)			Pos (**)			

Note: *=p<0.10; **=p<0.05; ***=p<0.01. Only statistically significant impacts are shown

5. Conclusions

This chapter aims to shed new light on the relationship between participation in deliberative settings and different individual attitudes related to political trust. It presented findings from deliberative polls, conducted in four countries. It focused on the extent to which participation in deliberative democracy experiments can impact both institutional trust and several potentially related variables, such as political efficacy, anti-political attitudes, preferences for different varieties of democracy. The study also explored how individual assessments on the quality of the democratic experiment may affect all the variables considered above.

Our research finds that self-reported trust in different institutions do not significantly vary between participants and non-participants in online deliberative polls. However, on the one hand, external political efficacy (i.e., the belief that citizens may have an influence on representatives' decisions) quite consistently increased among participants. On the other hand, a number of democracy-related political opinions, including preferences for different (representative, deliberative, direct) democratic mechanisms, as well as institutional trust, are significantly affected by positive/negative evaluations of the democratic experience by the participants. In other words, participants who positively evaluated the experiment on a number of criteria (including perceived equality and lack of normative bias in the discussion) tended

to show stronger institutional trust and support for inclusive democratic policy-making processes. Our results thus emphasise the importance of considering individual-level, subjective factors to assess how participation in deliberative experiments can impact on key political attitudes.

The impact that we found in terms of self-reported institutional trust is limited. To understand the limited effects, we have to consider that participation in an ODPs is quite a 'soft' stimulus, in the sense that, in contrast to offline DPs, interactions and communication are asynchronous, and do not require persistent and continuous participation. Furthermore, the experimental design with a control group may make the registration of statistically significant impacts more complicated. However, other dependent variables, often intervening variables in the trust relationship between citizens and institutions, have been shown to be influenced by participation in the deliberative experiment. This encourages reflections on how institutional trust should be measured, and highlights the potential advantages of indirect questions. Moreover, the results of the deliberative experiment offer food for thought on the most efficient ways to improve institutional trust. Deliberative situations, in which politicians and experts play a role, can in any case improve external political efficacy and, in the case of interactions with politicians, in addition to internal political efficacy.

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European Civil Society Organisations' trust in the EU institutions: An expectation of an open and informed policy debate

Matteo Vespa, Carlotta Besozzi

1. Introduction: Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and EU-level policy-making

In recent decades, pan-European Civil Society Organisations[14] (CSOs) have acquired over time an increased relevance in EU-level policy-making. Several aspects of this phenomenon have been researched, such as the development of the European public discourse on CSOs' involvement (Saurugger 2007), their role in the European multilevel governance and public sphere (Heidbreder 2012), their function for the legitimacy of European policies (Yiğit 2009), or their avenues of participation and degree of effectiveness across different Directorates-General of the European Commission (Kröger 2008). However, recent events, such as the corruption scandals within the EU institutions, or the negotiations around environmental policy, have shown the interrelationship between CSOs' participation in policy-making processes and the level of trust between CSOs and EU institutions, which has been little studied so far.

This chapter presents findings about the development of trust and distrust patterns by pan-European CSOs towards the institutions of the European Union when dealing with EU-level policy-making, and the factors influencing its dynamics. This chapter is based on a qualitative, inductive text analysis[15] (see Kendall 1999; Kuckartz 2013: 65-120) of the findings presented in the "Report on practices of enhanced trust in governance", part of the Work Package 7 of the Horizon 2020 EnTrust project. Such findings emerged from a survey aimed at pan-European CSOs, which was completed by 48 respondents from 47 CSOs; from Focus Groups (FGs) which involved 15 CSOs from different policy fields recruited via the survey, via e-mail to CSE member organisations and partners, and via Civil Society Europe's (CSE) social media channels

[14] CSOs that operate as membership or network/umbrella organisations at the European (not national) level.

[15] The whole report was analysed and the parts presenting new data related to the above-mentioned topic were highlighted and singled out. Afterwards, the highlighted parts were coded and topical and sub-topical categories were established, from which the definitions provided in the chapter are formed. Based on the systematisation of the analysed text according to the sub-categories, the axial coding emerged, which is presented in Figure 3 on page 120. The findings presented in this chapter come entirely from such analysis.

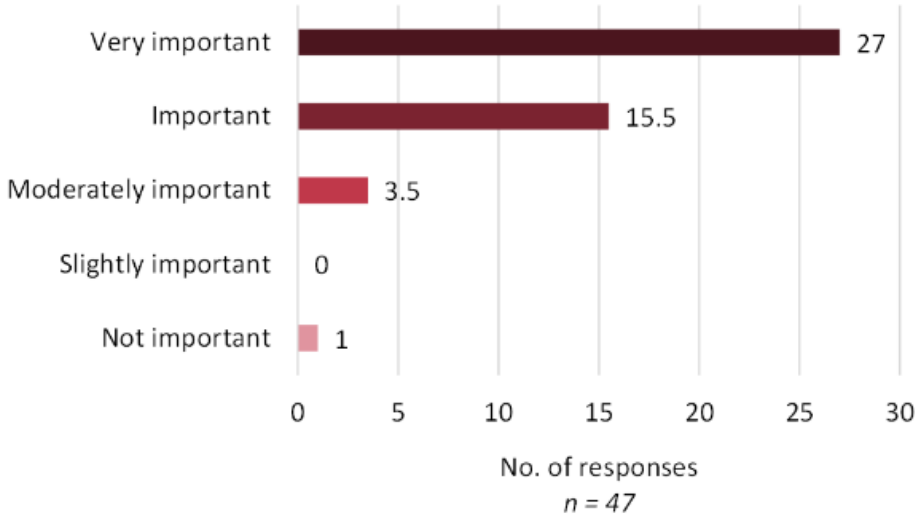
and newsletters; from seven unstructured interviews with pan-European CSOs for the case studies on trade agreements and the Nature Restoration Law.

2. The nature of CSOs' trust and distrust towards the EU institutions

The participants in the FGs clearly identified that trust in political institutions was not a feeling, but rather a "right, [...] as a citizen", to expect institutions to deliver on their promises, to be reliable, and to deal with the social consequences of their economic policies; when such expectation is not met, distrust arises (see Esser and Besozzi 2023a: 40). In this respect, CSOs consider themselves as representatives of citizens and as stakeholders carrying citizens' voices, and therefore they feel the right, as citizens, to be involved in the policy-making, expecting it to be upheld.

Trust was also considered a 'working necessity': the belief in the relevance of the EU level as a policy-making space to deliver effective policies, and in the possibility of CSOs' work as having some influence over the policy-making process, is the *conditio sine qua non* of CSOs' work at the European level. In the survey, trust was described as "necessary" (see Esser and Besozzi 2023a: 35), and the vast majority of the surveyed CSOs considered trust in the EU as important for their work and activities, as shown in Figure 1, since their advocacy work was based on the expectation (or hope) that EU institutions had the power to make the changes requested by civil society, and the will to listen, and therefore that CSOs could contribute to EU-level policy-making.

Figure 1: Importance of trust in the EU and its institutions for activities



Note: All organisations have the same weight (1), therefore, two respondents from the same organisation only count as half (0.5). (Source: Esser and Besozzi 2023a: 43, Fig. 6)

Trust in the EU was also considered as part of the pan-European CSOs' mission as organisations linking the grassroots to the institutions: as one participant put it: "We, as member-based organisations […] bridge that trust between national-level organisations and EU-level

policy makers […] In that regard, [...] trust is a key element for our work" (see Esser and Besozzi 2023a: 43). Having trust in the EU institutions is also related to the element of mutual trust: mutual trust was considered by the participants as essential for the effectiveness of their advocacy work, but also for the possibility and conditions of public funding to CSOs. Mutual trust is critical to CSOs' advocacy work, and without it, their funding sources, operations, and missions would undergo drastic changes. For instance, the participants in the survey expressed an increased difficulty in accessing policy-making (in terms of transparency and participation) after the Qatargate scandal,[16] due to a perceived anti-NGO narrative. CSOs' trust in the EU institutions could, therefore, be defined as instrumental and based on a 'working rationality', which however also underlines a certain dependency on ensuring mutual trust for the effectiveness of one's advocacy work.

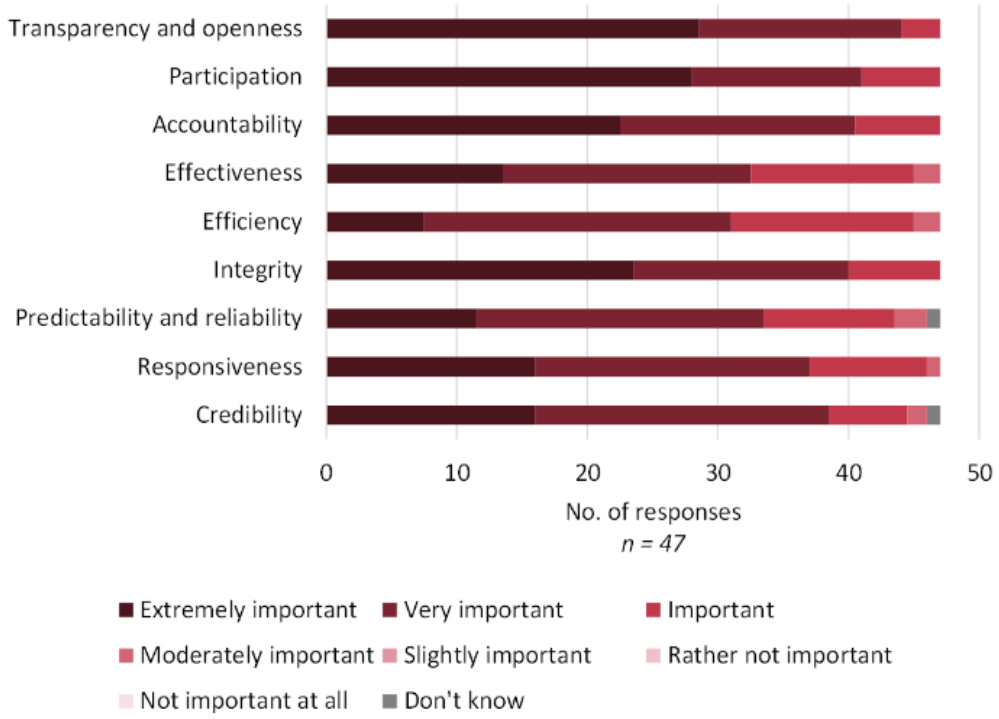
When arguing their positions about distrust, participants in the survey showed two seemingly opposing views: some of them indicated that reducing distrust in the EU institutions was essential, considering distrust as a 'lack of trust', while others stated that a certain dose of distrust was essential for democracy, not viewing trust and distrust as two opposite concepts. However, on closer look, the two claims are not opposites, but rather point at two different aspects of the trust relationship between CSOs and EU institutions. The CSOs claiming the first understanding of distrust framed their role as being to reduce their members' distrust towards the EU institutions, as a way to ensure their members' engagement and participation in EU-level activities. That, in turn, strengthens the pan-European CSOs' position vis a vis the EU institutions, but also ensures that the members of the pan-European CSO perceive the usefulness of such an organisation. Therefore, reducing distrust means advocating on behalf of their constituencies in order to uphold, in the eyes of their members, a belief in the relevance of the EU as a policy-making space, and the trust, as an expectation, that CSOs can contribute to those policies. In that framework, distrust is considered as a lack of trust, derived from such an expectation not being fulfilled. On the other hand, those CSOs that saw distrust as a healthy component to democracy argued that institutions should not be blindly trusted, that distrust was useful to better the policies and for the institutions to behave in a way to gain trust, and that it was essential to ensure that EU institutions put citizens' interests first, instead of economic interests and interests of the Member States. Such argumentation can be upheld precisely because there is the trust that the EU is an effective policy-making space, and that CSOs can influence it, acting as watchdogs. Such a role was confirmed by the fact that the participants expressed the opinion that political institutions and public authorities should provide a platform to express and address distrust, and that it is important to have opportunities to exercise distrust and find a constructive-critical position towards the EU and its institutions. In that sense, trust in the EU institutions as an effective forum of policy-making, combined with a certain element of distrust in order to keep the institutions in check, make the CSOs align with the notion of 'watchful trusters'.

[16] 'Qatargate' refers to a corruption scandal that unfolded in Brussels in December 2022, which involved MEPs and people linked to the NGO and trade union sector. The individuals involved received illicit funds from Qatar to whitewash the human rights record of the country.

3. The main determining factors of CSOs' trust in EU institutions

The main criteria used by CSOs to assess the trustworthiness of the EU institutions, therefore determining the upholding of trust as an expectation, can be thus summarised: participation '(informed policy debate'), transparency ('open policy debate') and coherence to EU values ('policy debate which delivers effective policies aligned with EU values'). These factors were the most highly rated by CSOs in the survey, as visible in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Importance of good governance principles for confidence in EU institutions



Source: Esser and Besozzi (2023a: 36, Fig. 4)

In Figure 2, the highest-ranking values are 'transparency and openness', 'participation', 'integrity' and 'accountability'. As is explained below, 'integrity' is subsumed under 'coherence to EU values', while 'accountability' is included in our concept of transparency. Furthermore, 'participation', 'transparency' and 'coherence to EU values' summarise the main keywords associated with trust by the participants in the survey, and the lack of these three values summarises those associated with distrust. As can be noticed, participation is linked to 'input legitimacy' (i.e., legitimacy from the gathering of stakeholder input), transparency to 'throughput legitimacy' (i.e., legitimacy based on the conduct of the procedures), while coherence to EU values is linked to 'output legitimacy' (i.e., legitimacy based on the results of the policies).

Participation

Based on the analysis of the responses from the survey and the focus group, participation is defined here as the possibility for Civil Society Organisations to meaningfully contribute to EU policy-making, including the agenda setting and monitoring phases. The importance of participation as a factor of trust is also shown by the fact that those CSOs that felt an increase in their trust in the institutions linked it to the fact of receiving more attention and of being taken seriously by the institutions, while those that perceived a growth in distrust tended to link it to the fact they were involved in fewer meetings and consultations, and perceived less engagement from the side of the institutions. Within participation, three elements can be taken into account: the agenda setting, the quality of the involvement, and the monitoring. CSOs find agenda setting to be one of the major moments of a policy because, as one FG participant put it: "[i]f we miss that out, the rest can only be a reflection of what has happened in the agenda-setting phase" (see Esser and Besozzi 2023b: 82); therefore, the lack of involvement in the inception of a policy generates distrust. The quality of the involvement is another crucial element for determining the level of trust based on participation: CSOs fear that consultations can tend towards tokenism, especially when it is unclear what impact they have on consultations. As one FG participant put it:

> *"Consultation is also important. We welcome this […] but it's one end. It's not continuous. You're part of something, up to a point, and you don't even know when it comes to policy implementation, even decision, how much your contribution will be taken [into account] in the process […] I don't think this [consultation] should be perceived as dialogue" (see Esser and Besozzi 2023b: 89).*

The involvement in the monitoring of the policies is also perceived as important for CSOs' trust in the EU institutions, since CSOs believe in their ability to provide an input due to their expertise on the subject matter and their grassroots connections. The lack of involvement in the monitoring phase develops distrust, as participant CSOs felt that, without their input, EU institutions would be unaware of the impact of their policies, and of the sentiments and practices in all EU regions, with the risk of ineffectively repeating policies and programmes due to path dependency. This element speaks to the importance of CSOs' participation in order to have an 'informed policy debate'. This is well exemplified by the debate on the Nature Restoration Law in the European Parliament and its impact on CSOs' trust towards the institution. The CSOs interviewed for the case study highlighted that the EPP ignited a polarisation on the vote on the Nature Restoration Law, leading to their being unavailable to meet with organisations supporting the law, or their refusal to engage in a meaningful conversation when such meetings took place. The interviewed CSOs agreed that in the Plenary vote, political manoeuvers overtook the actual policy content of the law. That fuelled distrust towards MEPs due to the shift from an evidence-based policy debate to a political powerplay.

Transparency

Transparency is defined here as the possibility of accessing information, the clarity of the procedures, and their reliability in foreseeing the outcomes. Connected to transparency is accountability, which in this context means being able to identify who is responsible for what within a policy-making process. In fact, as one FG participant put it, institutions are "trustworthy if you know what they're doing, how they're doing it, when you can engage with them, and how the decisions are being taken" (see Esser and Besozzi 2023a: 41). The importance of transparency for CSOs' trust in EU institutions is clear in the positive assessment an FG participant gave of the consultative practices of DG EMPL: "In DG Employment [... w]e know when, what, and to whom to send [something] and how to engage. It's more transparent in this sense because you know what they're doing and how they're doing it […]" (see Esser and Besozzi 2023b: 88). Conversely, examples of distrust arising from lack of transparency can be found in the CSOs' attitude towards the Council of the EU, which is considered a 'black box', since CSOs have "no idea how the discussions are going, who's taking [part in] the discussions, or when the discussions are taking place" (see Esser and Besozzi 2023: 100). Furthermore, availability of information on EU funding allocation, and transparent and fair evaluation of applications for funding and tenders were considered relevant for CSOs' trust in the EU, while difficulty in accessing information on funding sources and complex application requirements, which therefore make the evaluation criteria unclear, generate distrust.

Coherence with EU values

Coherence with EU values is defined here as the expectation that the EU institutions, both in their actions and their policies, follow the principles and values of the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and that they put the wellbeing of citizens (understood at large) before private economic interests or political calculations. Support for civil society is also included here. Trust in the EU institutions is higher when they concretely promote EU values and citizens interests over other national, political or economic agendas: for instance, for some CSO respondents, trust in the Commission increased due to its integrity in reacting to rule of law violations in Poland and Hungary, and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, while distrust in the EU Council and European Council increased because of the prioritisation of economic-driven national agendas over European interests, and the lack of action with respect to the rule of law in some countries, which was strengthened by the unanimity rule. Support for civil society organisations, also in terms of financial support, and of the possibility for CSOs to effectively manage funds, as well as in terms of scrutiny on the openness of civic space in candidate countries, increase trust in the EU institutions. Lack of or weak actions to contrast shrinking civic space within the EU and of an inter-institutional common approach, as well as more complicated and stricter funding and reporting rules for EU funding to support civil society, increase distrust.

It appears that transparency and participation have an impact on the degree of coherence to EU values of EU policies. A CSO interviewed for the case study on trade agreements indicated that, as the EU started as an economic union, it was expected that economic interests would be put first; furthermore, cases of maladministration, and the phenomenon of revolving doors

between the EU institutions and the corporate sector, impacted on the coherence with EU values, thereby fuelling distrust. The case studies in the report show how the lack of transparency and participation influence the degree of coherence to EU values of the final policies: for instance, in the case of the EU-Canada trade agreement (CETA), the lack of transparency by the Commission on the negotiations did not allow civil society organisations to counterbalance the corporate interests in the trade deal, and the overrepresentation of business associations vis a vis workers' and civil society organisations, and the disconnect with government in the domestic advisory groups to monitor trade agreements, resulting in tokenism, favoured corporate interests.

The role of an institutional culture of openness and EU officials' trust in CSOs

Transparency and participation are 'process based' criteria to evaluate the EU institutions' trustworthiness (and therefore to determine CSOs' trust towards the EU institutions), i.e., they deal with the process of policy-making. As the institutions are in charge of the policy-making process, those factors depend on the institutions. More specifically, they depend on the presence of an institutional culture of openness, as well as on the EU officials' trust towards CSOs. Based on the analysis of the report's findings, an institutional culture of openness is defined here as the tendency, from institutions, to perform their policy-making transparently, allowing the participation of stakeholders and civil society representatives. EU officials' trust towards CSOs is defined here as the circumstances under which the officials recognise, respect and trust CSOs and their expertise. The two concepts are distinct: while the institutional culture regards the general orientation of attitudes towards CSOs as a whole, EU officials' trust towards CSOs can be performed by some officials towards certain CSOs. Of course, it is possible to suppose an influence of the institutional culture of openness on the officials' trust towards CSOs, however, the former can also have an influence of its own on transparency and participation, and the latter is not solely determined by the institutional culture.

From the report, it emerges that CSOs perceive a generalised lack of a culture of openness and civil dialogue in the EU institutions:

> *"I've personally met great people who understand a lot. Most of them have come from the sector and moved to the institutions. They are doing amazing work, but I also think that their impact is very limited because there really is no organisational culture of openness within the institutions" (see Esser and Besozzi 2023a: 42).*

One of the problems underlined by the participant CSOs is what they perceive as the technocratic culture of the Commission. Such an approach is characterised by legal concerns, risk aversion, impartiality, which equates civil society actors to other stakeholder representatives, such as industry, as well as a sense of expertise for which the consultation with civil society is complementary, but not essential, especially in times of emergency where participation is seen as hindering the efficiency of decision making. Such a practice clashes with CSOs, due to their political approach, which is combined with an expertise sometimes lacking in Commission officials, especially when they have just been moved from one sector to another. This

results in limited transparency, in consultations that are sometimes perceived as tokenistic or imbalanced, and in favour of economic actors, and even paternalistic attitudes.

Being trusted by the EU officials is considered central for CSOs to have access to information and to have meaningful exchanges with the institutions; in fact, the perceived increase in officials' trust or distrust is correlated with the increase or decrease of possibilities of participation, according to CSOs. CSOs believe that officials' trust towards CSOs also impacts the possibility of institutional support for civil society, e.g., via funding programmes (considered one of the elements of coherence with EU values). According to CSOs, such a trust is based on the recognition of CSOs' expertise, which however takes time to establish, especially for new, minimally-resourced organisations, and has to be constantly renewed. However, from CSO experience, trust can be facilitated when the institutions' officials and CSO representatives feel a commonality of values and goals. Officials' distrust towards CSOs can increase, and therefore opportunities to participate decrease, when the perceived credibility of the entire sector is hit, as happened with the Qatargate scandal, and the subsequent anti-NGO narrative.

4. The degree of formalisation: a structural civil dialogue

'Degree of formalisation' is defined here as the institutional arrangements and mandatory protocols to engage with civil society, and guidelines on how they should be involved, which formalise the commitments to transparency and CSOs' participation in policy-making within a structured framework of civil dialogue. The degree of formalisation influences CSOs' trust in the EU institutions because it shapes the institutional reliability on implementing such commitments, thus decreasing the uncertainty due to interinstitutional and interpersonal variability: as one FG participant put it: "Regardless of the people who come and go […] the people are bound by those existing protocols" (see Esser and Besozzi 2023a: 41).

An interinstitutional framework on civil dialogue does not exist at the EU level, therefore the initiative of having formalised settings of civil dialogue is left to the individual institutions, or to its subunits. The general feeling emerging from the FGs is that the formalisation of civil dialogue is not enough to build an institutional trust, independent from the persons implementing it, and that the institutions are seen as bureaucratic, untransparent and difficult to engage with. It would be, however, incorrect to subsume institutional trust under trust in public officials: from the FGs, it clearly emerges how CSO participants make a clear distinction between institutional and interpersonal trust, agreeing that "there [was] a difference between trusting people who [worked] for the institutions and the institutions themselves" (see Esser and Besozzi 2023a: 40), and that, even if they are correlated, they are two distinct constructs.

The impact of personal trust towards public officials on institutional trust is mediated by the degree of discretionality the institutionalised framework emanates. In fact, the degree of formalisation of civil dialogue creates the framework of duties and constraints within which the public officials manage their interactions with CSOs. In a more formalised framework of civil dialogue, the quality of its implementation still relies on public officials, and the formalised

framework might also include internal rules that would impede willing officials from going further in transparency and CSOs' participation, e.g., in the possibility of sharing documents. Therefore, a low degree of formalisation influences the dynamics of CSOs' trust towards the EU institutions, as it increases the discretionality of public officials, and therefore increases the weight that the concrete degree of transparency and participation within the single policy items has in shaping CSOs' trust. This is well expressed by an FG participant:

> *"With the way the EU is functioning, the only thing we can do - because it's a situation in which we are - is to find inside the institutions people who will follow up on what is important for us. Then we have a good chance for our concerns to be really considered and be positively addressed. If we don't have champions inside the institutional process, we are side-lined. The trust or the mistrust for me is also resulting from this way institutions are functioning, definitely not as what should be in a transparent democracy" (see Esser and Besozzi 2023a: 71).*

5. The role of personal relations between CSOs and EU public officials

In the absence of an institutionalised civil dialogue, CSOs' trust towards public officials increases when there is a feeling of sharing the same mission and pursuing the same goals with officials, as well as when public officials seriously consider CSOs' demands, include them in the policy outcomes, and provide the contact details of the other officials working on the files. CSOs' trust towards public officials is, therefore, shaped by the recurrent interactions with public officials, where the previous experiences influence the expectations towards future ones. CSOs' trust in EU officials, over a long period of time, can contribute to trust towards the EU institutions. However, such a personal foundation of institutional trust is undermined by the frequent rotation of public officials, which 'resets the game' in terms of personal relationships and policy work, thereby creating frustration on the side of CSOs, especially in the absence of a formalised civil dialogue structure. The variability of CSOs' experiences with individuals in the different sections of the various institutions makes it difficult to provide a clear-cut picture of a generalised assessment of CSOs'/EU institutions' trust relations, as a whole.

6. Conclusion

From the analysis of the report's findings, it emerges that CSOs' trust towards the EU institutions can be defined as an expectation of open and informed policy debate, which delivers effective policies aligned with EU values. Distrust arises when such expectations are not met. Transparency and participation are shaped by the degree of formalisation of the relations between CSOs and EU institutions (a structure of civil dialogue). Such a degree of formalisation provides public officials with the framework of action for their interactions with CSOs. Such repeated interactions over time contribute to shaping CSOs' trust towards the institu-

tions. However, the rotation of those public officials, which 'resets the game' of personal interactions, in the absence of a formalised structure of transparency and participation (civil dialogue), negatively influences CSOs' trust in EU institutions. The influence that personal trust (or distrust) towards public officials has on the institutional trust (or distrust), however, is limited by the variability of CSOs' individual experiences with different public officials. A visualisation of the analysis findings can be found in the axial coding in Figure 3.

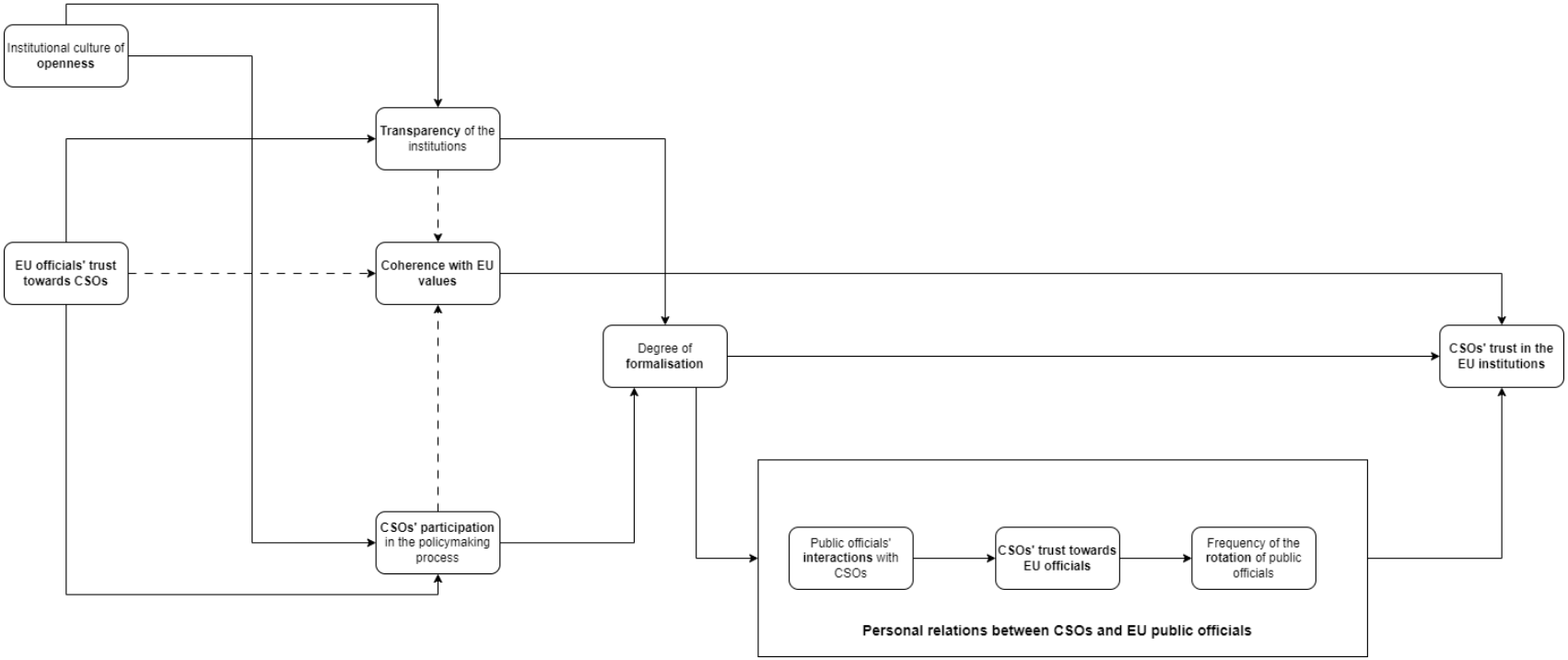
Compared to the full arrows, which indicate a strong link, the dashed arrows indicate how one factor has a knock-on effect on another factor: the EU officials' trust towards CSOs is considered to have an impact on the possibilities of institutional support for CSOs, which is part of the 'coherence to EU values'; transparency and participation have an impact on the degree of coherence to EU values of EU policies. Furthermore, the arrow linking the degree of formalisation to the dimension of personal relations between CSOs and public officials indicates both the framework (of duties and constraints) for public officials' interaction with CSOs, and the degree of importance of the personal relations for the CSOs' institutional trust: the less the degree of formalisation, the more important personal relations with public officials become.

This chapter did not analyse the 'feedback mechanisms', i.e., the influence that CSOs' trust and distrust towards EU institutions and public officials have on their behaviour when engaging in EU-level policy-making, as well as the influence that CSOs' engagement strategies with the EU-level policy-making have on the institutions' and public officials' trust and distrust towards CSOs and their personnel. However, their study will be important for future research in order to delineate the complete cycle and relationship of trust and distrust between the pan-European CSOs and the EU institutions.

The above-mentioned findings support the importance of procedural fairness as an implicit reference point for institutional trustworthiness and the development of trust on the CSOs' side. The criteria for institutional trustworthiness, as identified in the analysis, are reflected in the primary factors for judgements of procedural fairness, as indicated by Tyler (2000): participation, i.e., the possibility to express one's own opinion on the case (regardless of the final decision); neutrality, i.e., authorities allowing a level playing field, following impartial rules, and making factual, objective decisions, which in the analysis emerges in the request of a level playing field between CSOs and economic interests as a sign of coherence with EU values, and in the expectation of an informed policy debate, based on facts and taking objective decisions; trustworthiness of authorities, i.e., the authorities' sincere consideration of one's arguments, signalled by taking one's argument into account in the justification of a decision, which is a key element of the CSOs' participation requests; finally, treatment with dignity and respect.

Furthermore, research in other fields (such as Abdelzadeh et al. 2015; Hooghe and Wilkenfeld 2008; Jennings et al. 2009) have proven the importance of the political context and social environment, as well as personal experiences with public officials, in the development of institutional trust.

Figure 3: Axial coding of the factors and dynamics influencing Civil Society Organisations' trust towards the EU institutions when dealing with EU-level policy-making



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Conclusions: Forms, explanations, and implications of institutional (dis)trust

Christian Lahusen, Marian Pradella

1. Introduction

The exploration of trust in political institutions and systems stands as a pivotal area of scholarly inquiry, reflecting its critical role in academic and public discourse. This concluding chapter integrates the extensive literature on trust, which serves as the foundation for our analysis, with novel insights offered by the EnTrust project. By drawing on a diverse academic landscape, we aim to enrich the dialogue on trust with fresh perspectives and methodologies.

Our engagement with existing research establishes a benchmark, allowing us to position the EnTrust project's findings within the broader discourse. This approach not only reaffirms the relevance of well-trodden theoretical paths, but also illuminates underexplored avenues. The contributions from various disciplines within this volume extend beyond conventional frameworks, presenting new understandings of trust and distrust in governance. These innovative perspectives, rooted in empirical evidence, offer a refined analysis of trust's mechanisms, challenges, and implications.

As we navigate from a comprehensive review of the literature to the EnTrust project's specific contributions,[17] we underscore how these insights both align with and diverge from established narratives. This synthesis presents a dynamic and multifaceted view of trust, underpinning the volume's contribution to a more nuanced understanding of trust and distrust. The reflections herein synthesise these advancements, contemplating their significance for governance and the trajectory of future trust research. In particular, three key areas of advancement can be put forward through the EnTrust project.

2. Trust and distrust in democratic systems of governance

The EnTrust project's initial contribution lies in its empirical validation of a predominantly theoretical debate within the social sciences that underlines the co-presence of trust and distrust and their relevance for democratic forms of governance. Beyond the general assumption that governance requires trustworthy political institutions and a sufficient degree of institutional trust among citizens, this debate also considers the significance of distrust. Democratic

[17] The documentation of the literature review and meta-analysis are available as supplementary materials via the EnTrust Website: https://entrust-project.eu/outputs/other-output/ This website also contains the documents that summarise the key findings of the EnTrust project, including the *Guide on 'enlightened trust'*, the *Integrated Research Summary*, and the *Integrated Policy Paper*.

theory particularly underlines the value of institutionalised distrust within democratic structures, highlighting foundational elements such as the rule of law, separation of powers, governmental alternation, independent media, and a robust civil society (Offe 1999; Sztompka 1998). Distrust between citizens and state powers is intrinsic to the trustworthiness of a political system (Braithwaite 1998; Warren 2018), partly because it acts as a catalyst for democratic innovation by fostering transparency through the rigorous scrutiny, oversight, and regulation of those in power (Warren 1999; Patterson 1999).

Empirical research has started to explore this dynamic, providing initial evidence that a nuanced, cautious trust, balancing trust and distrust, prevails among citizens of democratic systems (Bertsou 2019; Norris 2002; Maggetti et al. 2023), thus complementing democratic provisions that value trust and distrust. The EnTrust project has dedicated itself to this issue, and the findings presented in the previous chapters have clearly demonstrated the relevance of analysing both trust and distrust in democratic governance systems. The data gathered from interviews, focus group discussions, surveys and media content analyses collectively reveal a widespread conviction that the cohesion, functionality and stability of democratically organised societies strongly depends on a significant portion of trust. However, democratic governance does not only tolerate moderate levels of trust, relegating unconditional forms of trust to authoritarian and autocratic systems. Our research findings also elucidate the significance of distrust for the legitimacy, vivacity and renovation of democratic systems. Trust in trustworthy politicians, institutions and processes was valued as a relevant resource for democratic governance. Equally important, however, is the role of distrust towards those deemed untrustworthy, whether they be politicians, institutions, or processes. Political distrust is cherished as a legitimate approach, insofar as it contributes to democratic processes of participation and deliberation, monitoring and institutional reform. It appears that democratic systems are deemed trustworthy to the degree that they allow sufficient space for the expression and handling of distrust. The institutional capacity to process distrust even seems to be important in preventing generalised forms of distrust. Unconditional distrust is a major concern for many research participants, as it can lead to political alienation, fragmentation and radicalisation, thereby undermining the legitimacy, stability and functionality of democratic governance systems.

3. Structural dimensions: trust and its contexts

Previous research has focused on charting the levels and forms of political trust, identifying key explanatory variables. This effort has included the extensive use of standard measures of the general propensity to trust (e.g., global barometer surveys, World Value Study; OECD 2017). In particular, survey-based research has developed and applied generalised trust metrics, asking respondents about their inclination to trust other people and/or institutions (e.g., governments, parliaments, politicians, courts, mass media, NGOs, or corporations) across governance levels (e.g., local, regional, national, European). Survey analyses reveal three key insights into the nature and fluctuation of trust within governance systems (TiGRE 2020; Perry 2021; Ahrendt et al. 2022). Firstly, trust in institutions is inherently dynamic, reflecting its responsiveness to varying contexts and scenarios. Secondly, there is a notable disparity in the

degree of trust vested in different types of institutions; entities responsible for law enforcement, and those not directly involved in the majority political processes (like the police, courts, and armed forces), tend to be viewed as more trustworthy than those associated with majoritarian governance and legislative functions (such as governments, parliaments, and political parties). Lastly, public trust in political institutions varies significantly across countries. Within Europe, for instance, Nordic countries display higher trust levels compared to Eastern and Southern European nations. Beyond Europe, Asian countries generally exhibit elevated levels of trust, while Latin American countries record the lowest, alongside a marked variability within the African continent.

The variability of trust in political institutions has provoked considerable effort to identifying causative factors. Literature commonly distinguishes between determinants located at the individual, institutional, and societal levels, with notable emphasis on European contexts. At the individual level, factors such as age, education, gender, and socio-economic status play crucial roles, with older individuals, those more educated, women, and those from higher socio-economic backgrounds typically showing more trust (Ellinas and Lamprianou 2014; Johnson 2005; Marien and Hooghe 2011; Scheidegger and Staerkle 2011; van Erkel and van der Meer 2016; Voicu and Tufiş 2017). Additionally, religious affiliations, political engagement and interest play crucial roles; individuals deeply engaged with politics and regularly consuming political news tend to have higher levels of trust in political institutions (Goubin and Hooghe 2020; Koczanski 2019; Marien and Hooghe 2011; Voicu and Tufiş 2017). Furthermore, the alignment or mismatch between citizens' political views and those of the elites affect trust; misalignment, as seen with liberal immigration policies, reduces trust (Dennison et al. 2020; Simon 2023; Verboord et al. 2023), whereas the election of populist parties can increase trust among their supporters (Hajdinjak 2020; Kołczyńska 2023). At the institutional level, the determinants of trust shift towards the perceived characteristics and performances of institutions themselves. The perception of institutions as fair, effective, and impartial is foundational for fostering trust (Kluegel and Mason 2004). Conversely, corruption and a lack of transparency are major trust detractors (Hough et al. 2013; Iacono 2019). At the country level, economic stability and low levels of corruption and crime correlate with higher political trust. Economic challenges and political scandals, such as post-pandemic inflation or corruption affairs, can significantly erode trust, thus highlighting the critical role of institutional performance, including effective economic management and anti-corruption measures.

EnTrust findings, presented in Chapter 6, reinforce many of these insights. The online survey confirmed that higher trust is often conferred to non-politicised institutions like the army, police, and courts, compared to politicised entities, such as parliaments and political parties. Trust levels were found to be influenced by sociodemographic factors, notably, lower religious practice, higher levels of education and lower incomes had varying negative impacts on trust in national and European governance across regions. The study highlighted the critical role of fair treatment, transparency, and perceptions of corruption on political trust, noting that negative experiences can significantly erode trust. Furthermore, a "trust gap" was identified, showing higher domestic political trust among individuals aligned with governing parties, in comparison with those supporting the opposition, or Eurosceptic parties. This gap underscores the complex interplay between political culture, individual experiences, and the

broader societal context in shaping trust in governance, illustrating the dynamic nature of political trust and distrust. An important contribution of these analyses resides in the examination of trust and distrust constellations, revealing that people combine trust and distrust in political institutions in various ways and to different degrees. Distinct categories emerged: 1) respondents with low levels of trust and distrust in political institutions, representing an attitude of detachment and separation; 2) citizens who are more distrustful than trustful of institutions; 3) respondents with unconditional trust in political institutions, with little or no distrust; and 4) citizens who express high levels of both trust and distrust. The fourth adopt an attitude of vigilant or enlightened trust. The study noted that trust and distrust are influenced by both overlapping and distinct factors (see also Entrust 2024: 4ff).

The co-presence of trust and distrust was also validated by the findings of the psychological analyses, presented in Chapter 5. This developmental perspective revealed that trust and distrust are influenced by individual needs and experiences, but also by principles and forms of perception, evaluation, and reasoning. Participants from different age groups delineated trust and distrust as distinct, yet coexisting phenomena, advocating a balanced, moderate trust based on critical evaluation rather than blind acceptance. Key to fostering trust was the demand for decisions and policies to be well-founded and transparently communicated, noting how information overload and resulting uncertainty can lead to distrust. The importance of predictability, transparency, and consistency for trust enhancement was emphasised, with fluctuating anti-Covid measures eroding public confidence significantly. Additionally, the study underscored the foundational role of experiential factors in shaping trust and distrust, with direct interactions with authorities or critical experiences during the pandemic acting as key determinants. The expectation of reciprocity in trust, particularly in personal interactions, and the impact of perceived distrust from authorities, highlighted a complex interplay of expectations and experiences. Procedural aspects, such as voice, transparency, and predictability universally enhanced trust across all age groups, albeit with varying impacts (see also EnTrust 2023a: 262ff).

Chapter 7 contributed further insights into the relational dimension, as it explored the effects of online deliberative experiments on political trust, specifically regarding climate change discussions in four countries. While direct impacts on trust were limited, the deliberative processes significantly influenced participants' sense of political efficacy and their views on balancing environmental concerns with economic interests, indicating deliberative democracy's capacity to shift public opinions on vital issues. Moreover, the study delved into how interactions within deliberative settings – specifically with political representatives and scientific experts – affect trust. Engaging exclusively with politicians boosted recognition of their roles and diminished anti-political sentiments, suggesting that direct political engagement can increase political efficacy and mitigate cynicism. Conversely, engagements only with experts led participants to prioritise personal initiatives over collective political actions, indicating a potential move away from political solutions towards a technocratic viewpoint. Thus, political engagement seems to foster trust in institutions, whereas expert-only interactions may lead to disengagement from political solutions (see also EnTrust 2024: 60ff).

4. Dynamic dimension: trust, distrust and its arenas

Previous research has also been interested in deciphering the dynamic features of institutional trust, and engaged in longitudinal analyses that aim to reveal the effect of significant events or changing circumstances. Electoral processes, in particular, have been identified as crucial, demonstrating the significant impact these democratic practices have on public trust in political systems (Boda and Micsinai 2016; Hooghe and Stiers 2016). This trust-enhancing effect is contingent on the procedural integrity and perceived equity of the electoral process (Mauk 2022). Moreover, the aftermath of elections sees political affiliations playing a critical role, where a "winner-loser" effect, alongside growing polarisation, tends to diminish political trust. This effect is particularly pronounced among supporters of populist parties within democracies that exhibit relative fragility, indicating a nuanced interaction between electoral out-comes and political trust dynamics (Hajdinjak 2022; Kołczyńska 2023).

Governmental actions, policy measures, and crises, from economic instability to health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, are critical in shaping and altering public trust. Crisis events can initially trigger a "rally effect," coalescing communities in a unified front of solidarity against perceived adversities. Despite this initial unification, such solidarity often proves ephemeral (Dinesen and Jæger 2013; Matzkin et al. 2023; Nägel et al. 2023). As crises progress, trust typically diminishes, especially if the governmental response is perceived negatively by the citizenry, and the response to crises is deemed inadequate or mismanaged (Bangerter et al. 2012; Kroknes et al. 2015; Nielsen and Lindvall 2021). In this context, the personal appeal of politicians and the nature of media coverage, exert a significant influence on political trust, as well. Negative portrayals of politicians, especially when exacerbated by scandal-centric media narratives, fuel increased political cynicism (Dancey 2012; Sikorski et al. 2020; van Elsas et al. 2020; Weinberg 2022).

The Entrust project provides important complementary insights, focusing on analysing the formation and contestation of trust and distrust across various arenas, thereby enriching our understanding of their dynamic nature. Various arenas were identified for this purpose, and specific research studies were implemented for the related field-work: 1) the micro-level, concerning interactions between citizens and public authorities; 2) the meso-level, involving political contentions between social movement activists, civil society organisations and political institutions at both national and European levels; and 3) the macro-level, relating to public debates within mass media.

A first arena of trust and distrust formation was the focus of Chapter 2, which addressed street-level encounters between citizens and staff from public authorities. This study explored the critical case of disadvantaged families, and thus unravelled the layers, forms, and dynamics of trust and distrust, as experienced by both vulnerable families and frontline public welfare service workers across seven countries. It emphasised the pivotal role of reciprocally and institutionally embedded relationships, presenting trust and distrust as dynamic, evolving components influenced by mutual actions and perceptions. The research supports prior findings by evidencing the negative impact of social inequalities and vulnerabilities on institu-

tional trust and distrust. Vulnerable families were generally more distrustful of public authorities and their staff, a stance that appears reasonable considering their heightened vulnerability and dependence. The study illustrated trust as a processual phenomenon, dependent on time and patterned by the relational characteristics of encounters. Caseworkers' reliability and personalised approach were key to building trust, though the study cautioned against the pitfalls of excessive trust leading to complacency. Trust and distrust emerged as fluid concepts, evolving with each interaction (see also EnTrust 2021: 245ff).

The second arena of trust and distrust formation and contestation addressed by the EnTrust project is related to the sphere of contentious politics, and the political relations between engaged citizens and political institutions. Chapter 3 explored the rise of new democratic social movements and their impact on political participation and public trust, particularly against the backdrop of increasing disillusionment with traditional political frameworks. The findings unveiled a delicate balance between trust and distrust in societal dynamics, emphasising that while a foundational level of trust is crucial for social functioning, extreme forms of dis/trust, including 'blind' or 'naive' trust and widespread distrust, are detrimental. The data evidences the relevance of moderate levels of distrust, valuing its role in promoting critical thinking and vigilance, which, in turn, supports democratic engagement and guards against complacency. Conversely, excessive trust risks eroding societal cohesion by deterring necessary scrutiny and enabling unchecked authority. In regard to social movement dynamics, trust and distrust seem to complement each other, given that institutional distrust is an important mobilising resource, while internal trust is important for enabling collective action. By advocating for more open, transparent, and participatory democratic processes, both within social movements and political institutions, these movements strive to enhance critical trust and empower citizens, underscoring the potential of active participation in these movements to instigate meaningful societal change (see also EnTrust 2022a: 201ff).

In regard to the European level, Chapter 8 provided insights into the dynamics between civil society organisations (CSOs) and EU governance, aiming to understand the role of trust and distrust in these relationships. The study underscored that trust within the EU is fundamentally rooted in its principles and values, as outlined in EU Treaties and the 2001 White Paper on Governance, which promoted a participatory turn in the relations between EU institutions and organised civil society. However, the 'Qatargate' scandal in 2022 marked a setback, increasing the EU institution's distrust in CSOs, even though recent trends show a renewed effort to recognise and formalise CSOs' role in democratic governance at the EU level. Trust and distrust are described as bidirectional and reciprocal. A key facilitator of this mutual trust was the shared perception of a joint mission, suggesting that alignment of objectives and values can enhance trust and alliances between CSOs and EU institutions. However, the absence of civil dialogue and formalised participation pathways contribute to distrust in EU institutions. Despite steps towards more substantive engagement, the absence of a coherent strategy for civil dialogue at the EU level, alongside legal challenges to civil society's space, demonstrate that trust and distrust will continue to coexist, thereby shaping the relationships between CSOs and EU institutions (see also EnTrust 2023b: 74ff).

The third arena of trust and distrust formation analysed by the EnTrust project focused on mass mediated public debates. Chapter 4 shows the extent to which news media, political journalism, and social media play a role in mediating trust relationships within democratic systems, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings highlighted a clear division between mainstream newspapers and social media platforms. In legacy newspapers, coverage tended to balance trust and distrust in pandemic responses, primarily focusing on government actions, scientific opinions, and expert advice, while putting less emphasis on opposition voices or anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination sentiments. Trust was not radically contested, and critical, sceptical and conditionally distrustful stances dominated. Conversely, social media, especially through newspaper comment sections on platforms like Facebook, became venues for public expressions of dissatisfaction and distrust towards the government and scientific community. Social media thus emerges as an arena where distrustful citizens challenge trust in governance, with this contestation more directly aimed at governments rather than science and experts. The pandemic notably exacerbated the divide between traditional news media and social media, illustrating a movement of general distrust from mainstream news platforms to social media spaces (see also EnTrust 2022b: 79-83).

5. Outlook: trust, distrust and its implications

Scientific discourse on trust and distrust in governance has further explored their consequences and implications, which are of particular relevance to public discussion and political deliberations. Trust has been found to increase adherence to government mandates and collaboration with institutions during crises (Bargain and Aminjonov 2020), alongside fostering higher tax compliance (Carstens 2023), and stronger support for public policies and the European Union (Davidovic and Harring 2020; Macdonald and Cornacchione 2023; Chiru and Gherghina 2012; Harteveld et al. 2013). It also impacts civic participation, with higher trust levels boosting engagement in traditional activities like voting, while lower trust tends to lead to non-traditional forms of activism, such as protests (Braun and Hutter 2016; Carstens 2023; Mattila 2020). Trust has considerable social implications, promoting tolerance towards religious and ethnic groups, as well as more positive attitudes towards immigration (Halapuu et al. 2013; Hooghe and Wilkenfeld 2008; Paas and Halapuu 2012; Sipinen et al. 2020). Additionally, trust appears to affect individual well-being and life satisfaction positively (Paolini et al. 2022; Boelhouwer et al. 2016; Habibov et al. 2022; Prada and Roman 2021).

However, EnTrust findings show that distrust does not necessarily engender detrimental implications per se. 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 influencing 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-tradi-

tional 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.

These insights help to identify those beneficial factors that contribute to the capacity of democratic forms of governance to reinvigorate civic participation and support, while continuously monitoring and restoring their democratic elements. Institutional trustworthiness arises as a factor. 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. Responsive governance is crucial, whereby policies should be the result of an inclusive dialogue among heterogeneous social groups and individuals. 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 concerns and aspirations of citizens. 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 tends to steer clear of the extremes of blind obedience and cynical disengagement, towards a sustainable model of informed, dynamic, and continuously renegotiated trust.

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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

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