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DETERMINANTS OF INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IN TRANSITION ECONOMIES: LESSONS FROM SERBIA

ABSTRACT: *This study aims to provide evidence on the drivers of institutional trust in transition economies. Trust in institutions is of critical importance for the consolidation of democracy, as well as for political and social stability. Bearing in mind the political developments during the transition, the fragile democracies of post-socialist countries have faced significant challenges in terms of declining institutional trust, leading to problems of legitimacy and government ineffectiveness. Therefore, the transition countries represent a fertile ground for testing the theories that explain the origins and dynamics of institutional trust. In this paper we explore the level of institutional trust in Serbia and test the alternative views on the determinants of trust in key institutions of*

cultural and institutional theories. The cultural perspective implies that the level of trust in institutions is dependent on citizens' long-standing and deep-seated cultural norms, while the institutional approach explains trust as the outcome of individual perceptions of institutional performance. In order to examine the cultural and institutional variables that explain trust in a set of public institutions in Serbia, we employ individual-level data from the Life in Transition Survey. The analysis is aimed at generating policy suggestions and measures that can raise institutional credibility.

KEY WORDS: *trust, institutions, norms, institutional performance, post-communist transition*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: P26, P30, Z13

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1. INTRODUCTION

Institutional trust is an extensively discussed topic in a growing body of literature on democratic stability, economic growth, social cohesion, and good governance. It is an indispensable element of a democratic political system. Serving as a link between citizens and the institutions representing them, institutional trust is considered an important determinant of the effectiveness and legitimacy of democratic governments. Multi-dimensional models of system support (Norris, 1999a) emphasize that a long-lasting and persistent lack of trust in regime institutions can challenge regime legitimacy. This is especially perceived as a problem from the perspective of democratic consolidation of the new political regimes in post-communist countries. These countries face widespread distrust in institutions, as has been reported in numerous empirical studies (Mishler & Rose, 1997; Kornai & Rose-Ackerman, 2004; Sztompka, 1999).

The political transformation of post-communist countries and the uncertain prospects for strengthening public support for the new democratic institutions has therefore drawn attention to the issue of the origins of institutional trust. A review of the literature on institutional trust indicates that there are several competing theoretical traditions that explain the origins of trust and offer seemingly different perspectives regarding the possibility of post-communist regimes generating trust in institutions. The cultural perspective argues that trust is exogenous to the political sphere and that it originates from deeply rooted beliefs and cultural norms communicated through early-life socialization processes. Cultural theories consider trust in institutions as an extension of interpersonal trust (Almond & Verba, 1963). Basically, it is individuals' general predisposition to trust or distrust that shapes trust in institutions. By contrast, the institutional perspective considers trust as politically endogenous, directly related to policy outputs (Rothstein, 2003). Institutional trust is rationally based and is built on individual perceptions of institutional performance. Institutional performance here is broadly defined, encompassing political and economic outcomes as well as the fairness and impartiality of government procedures. In the case of stable societies with consistently functioning institutions, the two alternative perspectives need not be mutually exclusive, as initial predispositions to trust or distrust are reinforced by later evaluations of institutional performance. However, in the case of post-communist societies that have undergone fundamental changes in social and political

institutions and suffered an obvious institutional discontinuity, the two alternative theories provide significantly different predictions. More precisely, these theories differ in their expectations regarding the new regimes' capacity to generate sufficient trust to consolidate democratic institutions (Mishler & Rose, 2001). The path-dependent nature of trust, as suggested by cultural theories, would take generations to build the trust required for a functional democracy, whereas if trust is determined by the quality of policy outcomes, institutions could generate public support by enacting sound policies and eliminating corrupt practices. In essence, these two lines of thought disagree on the relative importance of early-life socialization versus experience based on perceived performance for building institutional trust.

The purpose of this study is to test alternative theories on the origins of institutional trust in a single-country framework, in order to explain the drivers of institutional trust in Serbia. As institutional trust is recognized as one of the crucial elements of democratic consolidation, countries with low levels of trust are assumed to be less successful in consolidating their democratic systems. As an example, Serbia is a country that still finds itself in a state of prolonged democratic transition. Although the country has experienced more than two decades of political and economic reform, it is classified as a semi-consolidated (defective or flawed) democracy. Irregularities in electoral procedures and violation of elements that guarantee respect for democratic norms and institutions in recent years even indicate a certain democratic setback. Drawing on individual-level data from the large-scale public opinion survey *Life in Transition*, we estimate a multiple regression model of trust in order to explore whether institutional trust in Serbia is determined predominantly by cultural or institutional factors. Based on the experience of other post-communist countries, it is expected that the impact of cultural heritage will diminish over time, while the significance of institutional learning (experience of contemporary political and economic institutions) should be stronger. Testing the relevance of cultural and institutional factors as determinants of institutional trust in Serbia has important implications from the standpoint of policymaking aimed at building trust. Our research aims to identify the prevailing sources of institutional trust in Serbia and point to potential solutions for strengthening citizens' trust in institutions. The analysis contributes to research on the patterns of public support in post-communist countries and their prospects for strengthening institutional trust.

The paper is organized as follows. After introductory notes, section 2 provides a review of the literature on institutional trust and its determinants. In section 3 we specify an econometric model of institutional trust, describe the data used, and elaborate on the choice of variables. Section 4 presents and discusses the results of the empirical analysis. The last section provides concluding remarks and some policy implications.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. On the importance of institutional trust

The concept of trust is related to expectations of the likely behaviour of people or institutions (Rose-Ackerman, 2001a). An increasing academic interest in trust is associated with its role in overcoming the uncertainty that arises from the complexity of social life. While interpersonal trust refers to horizontal relations between individuals, institutional trust refers to the vertical relationship between citizens and political institutions. Institutional trust, comprehended as citizens' trust in a number of public institutions and actors, indicates whether these institutions act in accordance with public expectations (Tollbert & Mossberger 2006). Under conditions of limited knowledge and incomplete information about the political process and the behaviour of public officials that affects the lives of the ordinary citizens, trust enables actors to handle the uncertainty immanent in everyday transactions.

Exploring the causes of the advancement or decline of nations, Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) conclude that the quality of institutions is the fundamental determinant of the long-term development of society. The quality of institutions depends not only on their efficiency in providing goods and services, but also on their reliability in the eyes of citizens, and citizens' confidence in their effectiveness. Supporting the viability of democratic regimes (Chanley et al., 2000) and reducing transaction costs (Braithwaite & Levi, 1998), institutional trust appears to be a key foundation of a country's political life. It is considered the backbone of good governance and a stable democracy (World Bank, 1992). A high level of trust indicates that citizens consider political institutions as competent, authorizing them to represent their interests (Citrin & Muste, 1999). Moreover, it reinforces support for democratic regimes, encourages information exchange, increases government responsibility (Knack, 2002), and reduces corruption (Rose

& Shin, 2001). It is crucial for the legitimacy of a democratic regime (Braithwaite & Levi, 1998) and plays an important role in institutional development (Tollbert & Mossberger, 2006). Citizens that trust political institutions also tend to perceive collective decisions as legitimate, regardless of whether these decisions are in accordance with their interests (Rudolph & Evans, 2005). In societies where citizens perceive collective decisions as legitimate there is no need for costly control mechanisms (Gamson, 1968). It is difficult to implement policies and regulations when institutional trust and legitimacy are low. In such conditions citizens are less willing to comply with political decisions, so governments resort to coercive measures of rule enforcement, making governance more difficult and expensive.

The legitimacy issue is of particular importance for democratic consolidation in the post-communist countries, where the low levels of institutional trust threaten the survival of democratic regimes (Dogan & Higley, 1998). The specificity of trust patterns in post-communist countries compared to established democracies is related to the profound legacy of distrust in public institutions left by the previous regime (Mishler & Rose, 1997). The widespread corruption has affected the impartiality of public officials, leading citizens to create strong informal networks and develop particularized trust (Reiser, 1999). These strong interpersonal connections served as a protection against the repressive state (Wedel, 1992). Thus, it has been difficult for the newly developed democratic institutions to earn citizens' trust easily. It is therefore not unexpected that institutional trust in new democratic regimes is highly unstable, potentially endangering the consolidation of democratic institutions. As it serves as a buffer against autocratic regression (Badescu & Uslaner, 2003), institutional trust is crucial in emerging democracies.

Institutional trust is also assumed to have economic implications. Trust facilitates the cooperation of individuals and their engagement in collective action, and strengthens the incentive to finance public goods (Meikle-Yaw, 2006). The capacity of the state to collect taxes depends to a large extent on citizens having confidence in its institutions (Kuokstis, 2012). A low level of trust may affect citizens' readiness to pay taxes and consequently the quantity and quality of public services. Hellman and Kaufmann (2004) argue that an increase in perceived corruption in the business environment erodes trust in the judiciary and fosters tax evasion. Furthermore, a low level of trust may affect investment decisions because

citizens and businesses are less liable to take risks, affecting innovation, employment decisions, and long-term growth.

It is assumed that a decline in institutional trust widens the gap between society and the state, with negative repercussions for the country's ability to mobilize national resources and govern economic development (Diamond, 2007). This is why restoring institutional trust is considered one of the most important challenges of the 21st century. However, some authors consider that excessive unconditional trust by citizens can be as problematic as a lack of trust (Norris, 1999b). Although a low level of trust can be interpreted as a symptom of a weak civil society, unrestrained trust can cause political apathy and diminish the mechanisms of government accountability (Gamson, 1968). It can undermine government effectiveness so that a vicious cycle of declining trust and government ineffectiveness is created (Miller, 1974). This means that a certain critical stance towards government policy and actions encourages the accountability of government officials and consequently the quality of decision-making, and can actually strengthen democracy (Norris, 1999a; Rosanvallon, 2008). Thus, the decline of institutional trust need not necessarily produce negative effects (Cook & Gronke, 2005).

2.2. The alternative approaches to explaining the origins of institutional trust

Numerous empirical studies identify a trend of declining levels of institutional trust in consolidated democracies, as well as relatively low trust levels in the emerging democracies. As the deterioration of trust seems to be a continuing feature of contemporary democratic politics, the origins of institutional trust have sparked a vivid debate (Braithwaite & Levi, 1998; Warren, 1999).

Basically, there are two alternative explanations of institutional trust: cultural and institutional. The cultural approach emphasizes political culture as a source of institutional trust, accentuating values and attitudes as key determinants of trust (Almond & Verba, 1963; Putnam, 1993). Institutional theories consider institutional trust to be the result of a rational calculation of costs and benefits, based on citizens' evaluation of institutional performance and fairness (Easton, 1965; Mishler & Rose, 1997; Tyler, 1998). The vast majority of studies are based on these competing theories.

In the cultural approach, socialization processes and the pattern of interpersonal relations are essential for understanding institutional trust. Since different individuals have different priorities, they are likely to react differently to the same incentives (Inglehart, 1999; Shi, 2001). According to Almond and Verba (1963), norms and values significantly affect the process of generating institutional trust. Institutional trust is grounded in long-lasting and deep-rooted beliefs and embedded in cultural norms that are passed on to individuals through the early-life socialization process. Since socialization patterns differ significantly across socioeconomic groups, gender, and cohorts, the predisposition to trust varies in line with these individual attributes (Mishler & Rose, 1997). Micro-level cultural theories imply that substantial variation in individual values, linked to differences in age, gender, family background, income, education, etc., affect individual socialization environments and personal experience, thereby causing significant variation in the predisposition to trust (Dalton, 1996). A number of studies exploring the sources of institutional trust therefore include demographic factors such as age, gender, and education (Christensen & Lægveid, 2002).

Since institutional trust is embedded in cultural norms such as national identification or interpersonal trust, it is exogenous to the political sphere. In countries where prevailing ethnic identities tend to crosscut national identification, this precondition of institutional trust can be particularly challenged (Berg & Hjerm, 2010). Nevertheless, the most frequently explored source of institutional trust within the cultural framework is interpersonal trust, while institutional trust is simply perceived as an extension of interpersonal trust. When people trust fellow citizens they tend to cooperate with each other and are more likely to trust formal institutions (Putnam et al., 1993; Mishler & Rose, 2001).

The relationship between interpersonal and political trust is a widely discussed topic. Both types of trust correspond to the same type of belief, albeit oriented to different objects. Some empirical studies find a significant relationship between interpersonal and institutional trust. The direction of causality goes from trust in people to trust in institutions: individuals that trust fellow citizens also incline to trust institutions (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Levi, 1998). Others consider these phenomena as independent, associated with different economic, social, and political factors (Newton, 1999; Inglehart, 1999). There is no conclusive evidence that in-

terpersonal trust will necessarily translate into institutional trust: empirical research provides evidence for both arguments. Nor is there a definitive answer regarding causality direction. According to Hall (2002), erosion of interpersonal trust is likely to undermine institutional trust or vice versa, or a set of exogenous factors could be depressing both.

The institutional approach is embedded in the rational choice perspective (Miller, 1974; Mishler & Rose, 1997; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Hutchison & Johnson, 2011). Within this framework, institutional trust is determined by government performance rather than cultural norms (Newton, 2001). Citizens trust institutions on the basis of rational evaluations of institutional design and performance (Huseby, 2000). It is therefore endogenous to political processes (Mishler & Rose, 2001). Trust in institutions acts as a specific form of public support, referring to citizens' positive evaluation of institutional performance (Easton, 1965). Institutions that perform well economically and politically generate trust (Jennings, 1998; Hetherington, 1998; Brennan, 1998; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Rogowski, 1974), while poorly performing institutions encourage scepticism and distrust (Mishler & Rose, 2005). Institutional performance at the level of local governance is of particular importance for citizens' trust in institutions, since their performance is clearly observable and strongly determines the quality of citizens' lives. A vast amount of empirical research has identified the impact of socio-tropic evaluations of economic performance (Miller & Borelli, 1991; Hetherington, 1998; Mishler & Rose, 2001), while others confirm the significance for institutional trust of perceptions of individual economic positions (Citrin & Green, 1986; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Brehm & Rahn, 1997). In terms of political performance, individual evaluations of a system's ability to provide civil liberties, fair treatment, and transparent and effective governance are crucial for explaining trust in institutions (Rothstein, 1998; Mishler & Rose, 1997; Johnson, 2005).

A distinct subset within institutional theories of trust concerns the importance of procedural fairness (Grimes, 2006; MacCoun, 2005; Esaiasson, 2010) or procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 2006) for institutional trust and institutional legitimacy. According to the theory of procedural fairness, willingness to comply with the rules and decisions created and implemented by public officials depends on citizen's perceptions as to whether these decisions are fairly and impartially implemented, rather than whether they view the decisions

as beneficial to themselves or their group (Tyler, 2006). Perceived procedural fairness is correlated with institutional legitimacy, defined either as institutional trust or willingness to accept decision outcomes (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). This suggests that individuals are concerned not only with institutional outcomes but also with the fairness of the decision-making process that leads to these outcomes, and that citizens' evaluation of the fairness of government processes is related to their trust in political institutions.

In the empirical literature there is a clearly established link between procedural fairness, political trust, and institutional legitimacy in general. Analysing the experience of the United States and Norway, Miller and Listhaug (1999) conclude that individuals who perceive they are being treated fairly by the authorities tend to be more trusting towards political institutions. Linde (2012) obtains similar results in his study of the relationship between public authorities' perceived fairness and political trust in ten countries in Central Europe. Tyler (2006) demonstrates that citizens' perceptions of the fairness of the justice system in the United States are more significant in shaping its legitimacy than perceptions of its effectiveness. Two types of procedural justice are important here: justice in the quality of decision-making procedures and justice in the quality of the treatment that people receive in that process. Analysis performed by Grimes (2006) also confirms that procedural fairness influences citizens' trust in the authorities and their willingness to accept a decision outcome. Citizens' perceptions regarding an authority's willingness to engage in public dialogue, explain and justify its decisions, and address citizens' concerns are central to citizens' trust in the authority. Regarding the post-communist economies, Linde (2012) demonstrates that public perceptions of procedural fairness and the extent of corruption strongly affect institutional trust and system support in post-communist EU member states. Esaisson (2010) cites several reasons why citizens are interested in decision-making procedures: they may consider fair treatment as a moral right and procedural fairness as a reason to trust public officials, or as a sign that public authorities respect them. Perceptions of procedural fairness also help them evaluate outcomes when the fairness of outcomes themselves is uncertain.

In the cultural approach, institutional trust is a barometer of democracy (Putnam 1993; Almond & Verba, 1963). From this perspective the decline in institutional trust in many countries during recent decades represents a major problem, since

it could indicate a process of political alienation and declining social capital. In the institutional approach a decline in institutional trust does not represent a significant problem since it reflects citizens' perception of economic and political performance and the fairness of institutions. It should be noted, however, that mechanisms that generate trust operate differently in established and developing democracies.

Although offering different views on the origins of trust, the cultural and institutional approaches agree that trust is something that individuals learn and that it stems from experience. However, the time horizon varies significantly. Cultural theories insist on the predominant importance of the experience of early-life socialization, while institutional theories posit that learning is based on actual experience of institutions and that their political and economic performance fundamentally determines the trust in institutions.

Although cultural theories emphasize interpersonal trust as the foundation of institutional trust, this does not mean that institutional performance is unimportant. The main argument is that the cultural impact is more profound, even conditioning evaluations of economic and political performance (Eckstein et al., 1988). For instance, in societies that do not tolerate corruption, perceptions of corruption have a stronger impact on institutional trust than in societies where corruption is widespread and more tolerated. Conversely, the institutional approach emphasizes institutional performance as a source of institutional trust while not underestimating the importance of cultural inheritance. In an environment of stable and consistent political institutions, social influence and institutional performance should produce similar effects on institutional trust (Mishler & Rose, 2001).

Explaining the origins of trust has significant implications for emerging market economies. If trust in institutions is embedded in social norms and determined through the socialization process, generating the trust necessary for democratic institutions to perform effectively will take decades or generations. However, if trust is determined by institutional performance, democratic regimes can earn trust by implementing sound policies and fighting corruption, which implies a considerably shorter time horizon.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

3.1. The models of institutional trust

In testing the explanatory power of the cultural and performance determinants of institutional trust we draw on the lifetime learning model (Mishler & Rose, 2001), which considers trust in institutions as a function of institutional performance evaluation, but also accounts for early-life pre-political experiences, expressed in the form of interpersonal trust:

$$Tinst_i = B_1PE_i + B_2IT_i + u \quad , \quad (1)$$

where $Tinst$ represents a vector of trust in institutions in a given period; B_1 and B_2 are coefficient vectors; PE indicates contemporary evaluations of institutional performance; IT stands for interpersonal trust, and u is an error term. Since longitudinal data on trust in institutions in post-communist countries is unavailable, the model assumes citizens' ability to evaluate the performance of current institutions regardless of past experience, making trust in institutions a variable dependent on contemporary institutional performance. We slightly adjust the model for the purpose of determining separately the effects of evaluations of political and economic performance on institutional trust:

$$Tinst_i = B_1PE_{pol_i} + B_2PE_{ec_i} + B_3IT_i + u \quad (2)$$

In the second equation the vector of institutional performance is divided into vectors of institutions' political (PE_{pol}) and economic (PE_{ec}) performance. In addition to interpersonal trust, we include basic socio-demographic factors in the set of cultural variables as proxies for early-life socialization. As the theory suggests a possible reciprocal relationship between institutional and interpersonal trust (Brehm & Rahn, 1997), we test for the presence of endogenous variables or potential strong instruments that could affect the relationship between the dependent variable and the predictors in the model. We find that all independent variables appear to be exogenous and estimate the model with the micro-level survey data using the ordinary least squares procedure. More precisely, we conduct separate OLS regressions for the cultural, political performance, and economic performance variables, so as to assess the relative effects of each block of variables on

institutional trust. Finally, we test the combined model that includes all cultural and performance variables.

3.2. Data source and variables

The analysis in our paper is based on the survey data on institutional and interpersonal trust, and social influences and perceptions of political and economic institutional performance, collected in the most recent, third round of the EBRD's *Life in Transition Survey* (LiTS) (EBRD 2016). LiTS is a large-scale cross-national public opinion survey, conducted across the transition region, covering in its latest round 51,000 households in 34 countries (the countries of the former communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe plus Turkey, Cyprus, Greece, and for the sake of comparison, Germany and Italy). It is a household survey that explores the attitudes and experiences of people living in the transition region and provides a fairly comprehensive picture of their views on various social, economic, and political issues, such as democracy, the market economy, the role of the state, etc. The data used in our analysis was collected at the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016 through face-to-face interviews in 1,507 households in Serbia. Since trust in institutions is a phenomenon that does not fluctuate daily but changes relatively slowly, we believe that findings on the determinants of trust based on this data are still relevant.

The dependent variable in our analysis relates to the measure of institutional trust. In the LiTS, measuring trust in institutions is based on the question: "To what extent do you trust the following institutions?" and is indicated on a 5-point scale where 1 represents complete distrust, and 5 stands for complete trust. The list comprises 14 different institutions: the presidency, the government, regional government, local government, the parliament, courts, political parties, the armed forces, the police, banks and the financial system, foreign investors, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, and religious institutions (as listed in the LiTS questionnaire).

In creating a composite measure of institutional trust, we assume that trust tends to be generalized across different institutions, which implies that citizens do not have the ability to make sophisticated distinctions between democratic institutions. Although the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) performed on the data on trust in all 14 institutions produces 3 factor components with eigenvalues

larger than 1.0, the first component accounts for 59.5% of the total variance in all measures of trust (the second and the third components explain 8.4% and 7.67% respectively). After the orthogonal rotation of the three factor components (Table 1), the loadings indicate that the first rotated factor measures trust in state institutions (the presidency, the government, regional government, local government, the parliament, the courts, and political parties). The second factor is clearly a measure of trust in private and non-governmental organizations, while the third measures trust in the army, police, and the church (blanks in place of factor loadings <0.3). Based on the PCA results, we construct our composite measure of institutional trust by averaging individual scores of trust in institutions reflected by the first dimension.

Table 1: Dimensions of trust in institutions

Variable	Three-factor model		
	Rotated factor I	Rotated factor II	Rotated factor III
The presidency	0.3679		
The government	0.3880		
Regional government	0.3815		
Local government	0.3659		
Parliament	0.3995		
The courts	0.3071		
Political parties	0.3969		
The armed forces			0.6592
The police			0.5085
Banks and the financial system		0.3087	
Foreign investors		0.4593	
Non-governmental organizations		0.6150	
Trade unions		0.4649	
Religious organizations			0.4393
Eigenvalue	8.33	1.17	1.07
Percentage of variance	59.53	8.40	7.67
KMO measure of sampling adequacy (overall)	0.9429		

Source: EBRD Life in Transition Survey III, 2016.

The theories explaining origins of trust suggest a number of individual-level determinants of trust in institutions that we include in our model. Our key independent variables are divided into those related to the cultural perspective and those reflecting institutional performance.

The set of cultural variables reflects social influences and values as well as socialization experiences that affect people’s attitudes towards institutions. The variable closely intertwined with trust in institutions relates to interpersonal trust, measured in the survey by asking respondents: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means that you have complete distrust and 5 means that you have complete trust.” The advantage of this measure is that interpersonal trust is measured by the same metrics as institutional trust, and that it is measured directly, not utilizing different proxies. The group of cultural predictors also includes standard socio-demographic variables, including education, age, gender, and urbanity status, as proxies for the socialization influences.

Table 2: Independent variables – political and economic performance

Variable	Question <i>To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means that you strongly disagree and 5 means that you strongly agree.</i>
Political performance variables	
Political situation (retrospective)	<i>The political situation in our country is better today than around 4 years ago.</i>
Perceived corruption (retrospective)	<i>There is less corruption now than around 4 years ago.</i>
Free and fair elections	<i>Free and fair elections exist in my country.</i>

Independent press	<i>A press that is independent from the government exists in my country.</i>
Impartial courts	<i>A court system that treats all citizens equally rather than favouring some over others exists in my country.</i>
Economic performance variables	
State of the economy (retrospective)	<i>The economic situation in our country is better today than around 4 years ago.</i>
State of the economy (present)	<i>On the whole, I am satisfied with the present state of the economy.</i>
Individual economic conditions (retrospective)	<i>My household lives better nowadays than around 4 years ago.</i>
Individual economic conditions (present)	<i>All things considered, I am satisfied with my financial situation as a whole.</i>

Source: EBRD Life in Transition Survey III questionnaire

The independent variables capturing the effects of the perceived quality of institutions on individuals' trust include political and economic performance variables. The LiTS enables measurement of individuals' evaluations of perceived economic and political success (see Table 2 for a detailed description of the variables and the questions used). Political performance measures capture citizens' perceptions of the regime's capacity to produce desired outputs in the domain of equal treatment, political liberties, corruption, and government fairness. The economic performance variables include both socio-tropic and egocentric evaluations of the current economic conditions and enable comparison with economic performance 4 years ago.

3.3. The level of institutional trust in Serbia

The data on public support for democratic institutions in Serbia a decade and a half after the beginning of institutional transformation indicates that the median Serbian citizen is distrustful of institutions in general, while this holds especially true for the institutions of representative democracy. As reported in Table 3, only

3 out of 14 institutions enjoy positive overall levels of trust: the armed forces, the police, and religious institutions (mean values of trust over 3.00). On the other hand, citizens most distrust political institutions such as political parties, parliament, and local government. Across our set of political institutions, an average of 41% respondents are distrustful, 32% are neutral, and 27% express positive trust.

Table 3: Institutional trust in Serbia

Institution	Distrust (%)	Neutral (%)	Trust (%)	Mean
The presidency	35.0	25.1	39.9	2.98
The government	37.1	27.6	35.3	2.88
Regional government	40.3	37.5	22.2	2.68
Local government	42.5	34.2	23.3	2.65
Parliament	39.4	36.3	24.3	2.72
The courts	39.0	32.9	28.1	2.78
Political parties	52.8	34.0	13.2	2.37
Armed forces	11.8	23.6	64.6	3.72
The police	26.2	24.7	49.1	3.30
Banks and the financial system	29.3	35.9	34.8	3.00
Foreign investors	37.9	35.7	26.4	2.77
Non-government organizations	44.0	29.9	26.1	2.65
Trade unions	40.3	35.7	24.0	2.71
Religious institutions	20.0	29.5	50.5	3.42

Source: EBRD Life in Transition Survey III, 2016. *Note:* Trust scores on a scale of 1–5 are recoded so that 1–2 = Distrust; 3 = Neutral; 4–5 = Trust.

This pattern of low public support for institutions that are vitally important for the development of representative democratic systems (political parties, government, parliament), while actively supporting the least democratic, hierarchical institutions (the church, the army), has been recorded throughout the transition process in Serbia, as evidenced in earlier rounds of the LiTS and our previous studies (Golubović et al., 2014; 2018). The trend of weak citizen support for institutions responsible for the implementation of reforms, and strong support for

institutions whose transformation was necessary for the development of democracy, appears to remain. This is especially troublesome from the perspective of democratic consolidation (Diamond, 1999) and has been evidenced in the early years of transition in a number of post-communist countries.

4. TESTING ALTERNATIVE THEORIES ON THE ORIGIN OF TRUST

The individual-level theories on the origins of institutional trust suggest that individuals' trust in institutions varies according to their different socialization experiences (social influences, education, trust in people – as implied by the cultural perspective) or due to different perceptions of the institutions' political and economic performance (from the viewpoint of institutional theories). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of where trust originates should take into account a range of variables that embody both cultural and institutional factors. In order to explore how the suggested explanatory variables affect the level of institutional trust, we estimate separate multiple regression models of trust to assess the relative effects of cultural, political performance, and economic performance variables. In addition, we test the combined model that includes both cultural and performance variables. The estimated coefficients of regressing institutional trust on a selected set of predictors are presented in Table 4.

The regression results indicate that the explanatory power of the performance variables in shaping citizens' trust in institutions is relatively strong, inclining to confirm institutional theories of the origins of trust. The cultural model (Model 1) is statistically significant in terms of the F-statistics, but explains only 5% of the variance in institutional trust. Models including political performance (Model 2) and economic performance (Model 3) variables have significantly stronger explanatory power. The determination coefficient of the combined model (4) is slightly larger than that including the evaluation of political performance, suggesting that cultural predictors add very little to the explanation of the origins of institutional trust.

Table 4: OLS estimations of the determinants of institutional trust

VARIABLE	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Education	-0.026 [0.022]			-0.016 [0.016]
Age	-0.0003 [0.002]			-0.0004 [0.001]
Gender	-0.037 [0.060]			0.043 [0.043]
Urbanity status	0.0897 [0.064]			0.124*** [0.046]
Interpersonal trust	0.240*** [0.031]			0.091*** [0.023]
Political situation (retrospective)		0.177*** [0.025]		0.117*** [0.029]
Perceived corruption (retrospective)		0.205*** [0.025]		0.162*** [0.027]
Free and fair elections		0.139*** [0.027]		0.139*** [0.026]
Independent press		0.154*** [0.027]		0.152*** [0.027]
Impartial courts		0.087*** [0.026]		0.054** [0.026]
State of the economy (retrospective)			0.318*** [0.028]	0.068** [0.031]
State of the economy (present)			0.214*** [0.031]	0.076*** [0.028]
Individual economic conditions (retrospective)			0.013 [0.032]	-0.026 [0.027]
Individual economic conditions (present)			0.061** [0.028]	0.042* [0.025]
Constant	1.957*** [0.238]	0.493*** [0.069]	1.136*** [0.075]	0.032 [0.178]
Observations	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074
Adjusted R-squared	0.050	0.514	0.353	0.532
F statistics	12.4 (0.000)	228.01 (0.000)	147.03 (0.000)	88.13 (0.000)

Note: Standard errors in square brackets, p-values in parenthesis; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The only cultural variable that is statistically significant in Model 1 is interpersonal trust, with a rather strong positive influence on institutional trust. This finding partly confirms the cultural perspective and the assumption that trust in people tends to affect individuals' attitudes in terms of a more favourable disposition towards institutions. This result is in line with a number of previous empirical studies (Putnam, 1993; Inglehart, 1997; Luhiste, 2006). However, based on our data, these results are generated only when the set of cultural variables is assessed in isolation. When accounting for various performance variables the power of this predictor is significantly lower (an increase in interpersonal trust by one point on the 5-point scale raises institutional trust by 0.09 points in the combined model). None of the other proxies for cultural influences (education, age, gender, urbanity status) have statistical significance, while all of them, including interpersonal trust, explain only 5% of the total variance in trust in institutions.

Regressing institutional trust on the perceived political performance variables (Model 2) reveals that individual evaluations of political performance have a substantial impact on shaping citizens' trust in institutions. The five political performance variables combined explain as much as 51% of the variance in institutional trust. All variables are statistically significant, with relatively large effects on the dependent variable. The results imply that perceived institutional performance in providing fair and just governance generates stronger trust in institutions. The largest single influence on trust is produced by individual perceptions of the spread of corruption in society. Individuals who believe that the level of corruption has decreased in the previous four years tend to rank 0.2 points higher on the trust scale ($p < 0.01$). Similarly, believing that the political situation has improved over the last years increases individuals' trust in institutions by 0.18 ($p < 0.01$). People who believe that institutions treat them fairly and that the political system provides freedom and justice (existing free and fair elections, press independent from the government, courts that treat all citizens equally) are more likely to trust institutions.

The model of trust including the perceived economic performance variables (Model 3) supports the assumption that citizens' satisfaction with economic conditions has a robust effect on institutional trust. Three of the four economic performance variables appear to be statistically significant in the model, all of them

combined explaining around 35% of the total variance in trust. Socio-tropic economic evaluations have primacy over evaluations of individual household conditions. Individuals who perceive an improvement in overall macroeconomic conditions over recent years or are satisfied with the current state of the economy by one point on the scale tend to rank higher on the trust scale, by 0.32 and 0.21 points respectively ($p < 0.01$). Considerations of present individual economic conditions affect institutional trust to a certain extent, although the impact is rather weak (0.06 points at $p < 0.05$). Retrospective evaluations of household economic position do not impact trust in institutions in our model. This finding is unsurprising, as a number of empirical explorations of this relationship have confirmed that socio-tropic economic evaluations matter more than assessments of individual economic position (Mishler & Rose, 2001, 2002; Luhiste, 2006), aligning the citizens in our sample with individuals throughout the post-communist world, and also in established democracies (Clarke et al., 1992). Such behaviour is founded on the fact that individuals hold government institutions responsible for national economic conditions rather than individual well-being. If evaluated positively in terms of providing sound economic policies and a favourable economic environment, institutions enjoy higher levels of citizen trust.

Models of institutional trust including evaluations of political and economic performance (models 2 and 3) speak strongly in favour of the institutional perspective on the origins of trust. The results of these regressions confirm that individuals in Serbia trust institutions if they believe institutions are performing effectively. Our combined model of trust (Model 4) that takes into account both cultural and performance variables does not yield much new information. The addition of the cultural variables to the model containing performance predictors does not substantially increase the explained variance. The political performance variables remain significant in the combined model with slightly lower coefficient values, indicating the persistent explanatory power of perceptions of political performance for institutional trust.

We believe the combined model of institutional trust that explains 53% of the variance to be well-fitted. Standard post-estimation procedures were performed to assure that no assumptions of the OLS regression were violated. The Breusch-Pagan/Cook Weisberg heteroscedasticity test indicates homogenous residuals ($\text{Prob} > \chi^2 = 0.4844$), while the Shapiro-Wilk test for normal data confirms the

normal distribution of residuals ($\text{Prob}>z = 0.1156$). No multicollinearity was detected between the independent variables. In this model, two cultural variables seem to affect institutional trust to a certain extent. Interpersonal trust remains significant, although the value of the coefficient is 2.5 times smaller, indicating that interpersonal trust loses its explanatory power when accounting for the performance variables. Urbanity status appears to produce a certain effect on trust in institutions, in the sense that individuals living in rural areas tend to trust institutions more. Evaluations of economic performance remain significant in the combined model, although with decreased coefficient values. The baseline conclusion that follows from the analysis is that individual evaluations of political performance decisively affect trust in institutions.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The findings of our analysis of institutional trust in Serbia imply a widespread distrust in the representative institutions that are the corner stone of modern democracies. In order to identify factors that determine the level of institutional trust in Serbia we tested the relevance of the cultural and institutional approaches. Both theoretical perspectives on the origins of trust predict low levels of institutional trust in post-communist countries, but for different reasons. Cultural theories suggest that the legacy of distrust and the political culture inherited from the previous regime are the main causes of the absence of trust in new democracies, while institutional theories ascribe this to the poor performance of the democratic institutions. Either way, distrust in institutions is a severe threat to the legitimacy of democratic regimes. Distrust easily slips into a more general discontent with democracy and paves the way for populist or anti-democratic political forces. Under such conditions the issue of building trust in institutions is crucial.

Our results imply that trust in institutions is by and large endogenous, strongly supporting institutional explanations of the sources of trust. Although a certain effect of interpersonal trust as a cultural determinant cannot be overlooked, we find that institutional performance – particularly perceived political performance – has a stronger explanatory power than the cultural variables. The figures also speak in favour of socio-tropic economic evaluations as a factor affecting institutional trust. As long as citizens positively evaluate the conduct and performance of institutions in providing civil liberties, fair and transparent governance, and a

favourable economic environment, institutions will enjoy public support. Citizens in Serbia believe that the political system fails to provide an equal playing field for all citizens and deliberately discriminates. This relationship between citizens and institutions is the cause of the weak support for the political regime and its institutions, seriously obstructing the country's chances of consolidating its democracy.

The implications for government policies aimed at strengthening institutional trust in the long run are that government procedures need to be improved: the response to public priorities needs to be effective, citizens' freedoms need to be protected, and corruption needs to be eradicated. This study indicates that institutions earn trust by being trustworthy. Bearing in mind the time horizons suggested by the cultural and institutional theories regarding institutions' ability to generate sufficient trust to consolidate democracy, our results might be regarded as optimistic. If trust simply depends on improving government procedures the process could take months or years, but it is certainly an easier option than decades or generations of building trust by changing social norms or socialization patterns. However, it is not likely that trust in Serbian institutions will increase in the near future. As Freedom House reports indicate, the quality of democratic governance in Serbia has steadily declined for four consecutive years due to electoral irregularities, limited freedom of the press, and a hostile atmosphere toward the civil sector (Freedom House, 2018). Serbia is also regarded as a country with high levels of corruption, as measured by the CPI (Transparency International), with no recorded positive results in fighting corruption in the last decade. Therefore, generating trust in Serbian institutions will continue to be a challenge.

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