

THE ANALYSIS OF TRUST AS AN ELEMENT OF SUPPORT TO DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

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Abstract. *Declining trust is one of the central problems in modern politics. Trust declines in collective action arrangements. Trust is one of the "big questions," and "one of the normal obligations of political life." Embedded within it are fundamental issues of politics and democratic theory. This article discusses different conceptions of trust and its relations to democracy. The first part of the paper focuses on the conceptual and theoretical definition of trust. The second part provides an overview of one of the basic classifications of trust present in the contemporary literature. In the third part, the author discusses and provides appropriate argumentation on the relationship between trust and democracy.*

Key words: *trust, democracy, generalized trust, trust in political institutions.*

1. INTRODUCTION

As a multidimensional social phenomenon, embedded in socio-economic and cultural-historical conditions, trust affects the shaping of all aspects of social life and contributes to the stability of social relations (Leković, 2012: 65), which is undoubtedly of great importance for the democratic process itself.

In recent year, questions about trust and distrust have become prominent. Political psychology of trust involves ambivalent conceptual relations between democracy and trust. The relationship between democracy and trust is such that it can be considered contradictory (Christensen, Laegreid, 2003: 7). "Democratic systems institutionalize distrust by providing many opportunities for citizens to oversee those empowered with the public trust. At the same time, trust is a generic social building block of collective action, and for this reason alone democracy cannot do without trust" (Warren *et al.*, 1999: i).

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The importance and relevance of social capital is reflected in the strengthening of democratic stability, as a result that is normatively desirable for most people. According to the postulates of the theory of social capital, a decline in democratic support is a consequence of a decline of social trust (Newton, 2005: 4). On the other hand, trust as the attitudinal dimension of social capital plays a central role in strengthening the effectiveness of democratic governance (Seyd, 2016: 1). Particularly significant is the generalized trust, because democracy without generalized trust can lead to violence. For the same reason, the role of generalized trust in the process of constituting democracy, and in the development of a good society and good governance is indisputable. It is emphasized that generalized trust is a parameter for the evolution of moral standards in society. "Trust helps to build the social institutions of civil society upon which peaceful, stable and efficient democracy depends" (Zmerli, Newton, 2008: 707).

2. THE CONCEPT AND THEORETICAL DEFINITIONS OF TRUST

Taking into account that trust relationships are fundamental to the stability of democratic societies, trust has been the subject of considerable attention of social sciences in the last few decades. Economists often look to trust in the utilitarian sense: it functions as an "important lubricant in the social structure" and has the price as any other commodity (Arrow, 1974: 23, according to: Swedberg, 2006: 249); on the contrary, sociologists emphasize that trust has an independent quality which cannot be reduced to calculations and generating profits.

Trust is not easy to define, as evidenced by a vast number of books and articles on this concept (Newton, 2001a: 203). Sztompka (1999) determines trust as a stake in relation to future unforeseen actions of others. Fukuyama (2000: 4) notes that trust is a characteristic of the system, and argues that "the well-being of the nation, as well as its ability to compete, is conditioned by a unique cultural characteristic: the level of trust in society" (Fukuyama, 1995: 33). He introduces the concept of the radius of trust and argues that high level of trust in society is a major factor for its tendency toward democracy (see: Fukuyama, 2000: 4-5).

3. TYPES OF TRUST

There are many different levels and taxonomies of trust. Theoretically, there are several ways of categorizing trust. The most common types are *political trust* and *social trust* (see Figure 1) and they should not be viewed as the same thing (Putnam, 2000: 137).

Social trust (horizontal, interpersonal) is defined as trust in other people; it is essential for the cultivation of soil for stability and peaceful relations, which are the basis for productive human cooperation (Newton, 2001b: 3-7). Social trust is further divided into *generalized trust* (trust in people in general) and *particularized trust* (in groups and individuals who we are in contact with).

Political (public) trust is the ability of any government to govern effectively and efficiently without the use of coercion. In short, political trust is "individual's expectation that a political actor will act in his interest" (Bauer, Fatke, 2014: 51) Political trust is further divided into: *trust in political institutions* (e.g. parliament and governments) and *trust in political operators* (e.g. the president, political authorities and other political actors). Enhancing the legitimacy of the system, political trust is a key factor for stability and effectiveness of democracy.

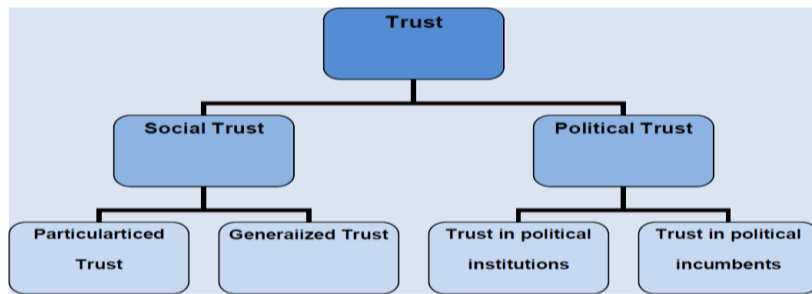


Fig. 1 Categories of trust
Source: Soithong, 2011: 31

Notably, there are five fundamental practices that can ensure trust in a democratic system: (1) communication between citizens to define public goals; (2) tolerance and acceptance of pluralism; (3) consensus on democratic procedures; (4) civic awareness among the actors competing for different purposes; and (5) citizen participation in governing organizations (Carreira, *et al.*, 2016: 6).

4. TRUST AS A FACTOR AND DETERMINANT OF DEMOCRACY

On the one hand, trust should be seen as a prerequisite for a democratic process while, on the other, trust is a result of democratic rule (Maldini, 2008: 186). Camaj (2014: 187) finds that trust directly affects both the regime’s survival and its effective functioning by influencing perceptions about the quality of the democratic regime and political involvement. In examining the relationship between democracy and trust, Inglehart (1999: 97) distinguished three important aspects of democracy: (1) its long-term *stability*; (2) the *level* of democracy at given points in time; and (3) short-term *changes* in levels of democracy.

A distinction between the various levels of political support is helpful for the debate about the relationship between democracy and trust. Dalton (1999: 10) also noted that it is essential to distinguish between five objects of political support (support for democracy) and two types of political beliefs (Table 1).

Table 1 Levels of Political Support (Support for Democracy)

Level of Analysis	Affective Orientation	Instrumental Evaluations
Community	National pride National identity	Best nation to live
Regime: Principles	Democratic values	Democracy best form of government
Regime: Performance	Participatory norms Political rights	Evaluation of rights Satisfaction with democratic process
Regime: Political Institutions	Institutional expectations Support party government Output expectations	Performance judgement Trust in institutions Trust party system Trust bureaucracy
Authorities	Feelings towards political leaders	Evaluations of politicians
	<i>General support</i>	<i>Specific support</i>

Source: Dalton, 1999: 10

According to Neo-Tocquevillians, both interpersonal and institutional trust is a building block of a functioning democracy and an inevitable element of civilised social and political life. Trust is vital to the lifeblood of democracy. Actually, the real question is: what kinds of trust are good for democracy? “*Particularized trust* tends to be attached to the kinds of group identities that are solidified against outsiders, which in turn increases factionalization and decreases chances that conflicts can be negotiated by democratic means..... Generalized trust, on the other hand, is connected to a number of dispositions that underwrite democratic culture, including tolerance for pluralism and criticism” (Warren, 1999a: 9).

Generalized trust is a vital component of democratic transition, given the fact that it increases the sense of empathy towards others and raises the level of tolerance, and thus resolves the collective action dilemma. Trustful people are more likely to volunteer in associations, which is an indicator of the intensity of social participation. In addition to enhancing connectivity through social networks and mobilizing common resources, generalized trust also affects the level of political participation. “Horizontally, generalized trust is an “attitudinal glue” that in a democracy uniquely requires citizens to accept one’s fellow citizens as equal participants in the political process” (Abramson, 2017: 3). According to Jamal and Nooruddin (2010: 45), generalized trust is important for democracies because it enhances communal ties, norms of reciprocity, and collective action among the populace. The close relationship between interpersonal trust and vitality of democracy is well documented by a number of studies (Almond, Verba, 1963; Inglehart, 1990, 1999; Putnam, 1993, 2000; Newton, 2001a, 2001b; Muller, Seligson, 1994: 647; Zmerli, Newton, 2008).

Political trust is not only an indicator of the quality of democracy; it is also crucial for the process of democratic governance given that the legitimacy of representative democracy essentially defines the political attitudes of citizens towards institutions and politicians. If citizens believe in the political system and politicians, this will guarantee the functioning of democracy. Satisfaction with democracy and trust in political institutions are strongly determined by factors such as: personal socio-economic position, evaluation of the economic situation, trust in other members of society, political efficiency, education, political knowledge, and political authoritarianism (Henjak, 2017: 352). For example, Bauer (2018) explores the causal link between unemployment and political assessments (i.e. trust in government and satisfaction with democracy), based on the data panel for two different European countries: Switzerland and the Netherlands. The main finding is that unemployment negatively affects different aspects of individual lives (Bauer, 2018: 3-7).

Political trust is an *important indicator* of political *legitimacy*, which is needed for a democracy to be stable and effective. Moreover, this kind of trust is crucial for the representative relationship as an important component of most democratic regimes. The relevance of institutional trust for democracy is reflected in the following: (1) it provides citizen support for the necessary political and economic reforms; (2) it creates conditions for reaching compromise and consensus; (3) it increases the likelihood of rejecting non-democratic alternatives and speeding up democratic consolidation; (4) it imposes itself as “creator of collective power”; (5) it strengthens the capacity of the system in maintaining and improving prosperity, increasing the efficiency of governments by strengthening the links between citizens and elected institutions that represent them; (6) it encourages political participation, civil rights activism and civil engagement: and (7) it opens space for politicians to pull unpopular moves within reform measures, which is particularly evident in times of crisis. Political trust is equally important for the stability of established democracy

as well as for new/flawed democracy, hybride regime or authoritarian regime. Trust in institutions is a basic feature of modern democracies and plays a key role in guaranteeing social, economic and political stability (Bonasiaa, Rita Canale, Liotti, Spagnolo, 2016: 4). Public support for democracy largely rests on whether political institutions work to satisfy people's expectations (Ching-Hsing, 2015: 9). "Since we are talking about politics and dialectics of trust and democracy, we should not fear popular mistrust of a particular administration as if it were a threat to democracy ("throw the bums out"). However, loss of general trust in the rules of the game, the good faith of the other side, or the fairness and competence of government is a more serious matter" (Abramson, 2017: 2).

Here, it is worth mentioned that there are also opinions according to which permanent distrust in the political system (institutionalized political distrust) may produce the necessary healthy skepticism to keep democracy more effective. This is paradox of democracy: institutionalising distrust for the sake of trust (Sztompka, 1997: 16). "There are two caveats though. First, empirical research has indicated a continuous growth in mistrust that has reached extremely high level, so as to represent a threat for democracy functioning. Second, there is a need for political institutions to adapt to the increasing levels of mistrust" (della Porta, 2012: 42). Notably, too much blind citizens' confidence in political institutions and/or in political leaders can be problematic for democracy just as too little trust, particularly bearing in mind that excessive trust develops political apathy and strengthens the loss of civic caution and control of power, which can eventually undermine democracy.

Examining the level and nature of trust, as a determinant of social practice, has significant implications in terms of democratic transition in post-communist Europe, as a phase of "democratic development" which is characterized by a "trust deficit" (as a result of the legacy of the former authoritarian regime). This is because (generalized and political) trust in CEE countries can be imposed as one of the unavoidable factors of their further movement towards market economy and democratic consolidation. Former communist countries are distinguished by the high level of structural social capital (informal networks), which is primarily a consequence of the dominance of traditional social relations and inefficient state institutions; at the same time, these countries record low levels of cognitive social capital in the form of a low level of interpersonal and institutional trust (Gaidyte, 2013: 5-8). In order to consider the consequences of confidence for regime support, democratic values and political involvement in Russia, Mishler and Rose (2005: 1057–1074) test the empirical validity of cultural and institutional theories, whereby quantitative analysis has unequivocally confirmed the argument of cultural theories according to which institutional trust encourages political involvement and contributes to public support for democratic ideals.

Instead of being constituted as a social and cultural norm in post-communist societies, generalized social trust is "strategically egoistic" and atomized (in-group, specific ("thick") trust) societal trust due to what his role is absent as a collective resource of political action. When it comes to political trust, a phenomenon known as a "post-honeymoon" effect emerged in most of the post-communist countries; namely, as economic and political reforms were introduced, political trust declined significantly, and was then stabilized at the level lower than in the early stages of transition. The fall in trust in political institutions in post-communist countries is the result of phenomena such as: endemic corruption at all levels, economic problems and social inequality, ethnic conflicts, bad legal framework, transition injustice and grey economy (Gaidyte, 2013: 5-8).

Based on the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2016, Figure 2 shows a weak or insignificant correlation between a level of general trust and the level of democracy in the selected transition countries (10 CEE countries: the Visegrad group countries (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia), Baltics states (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia), Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Republic of Serbia).

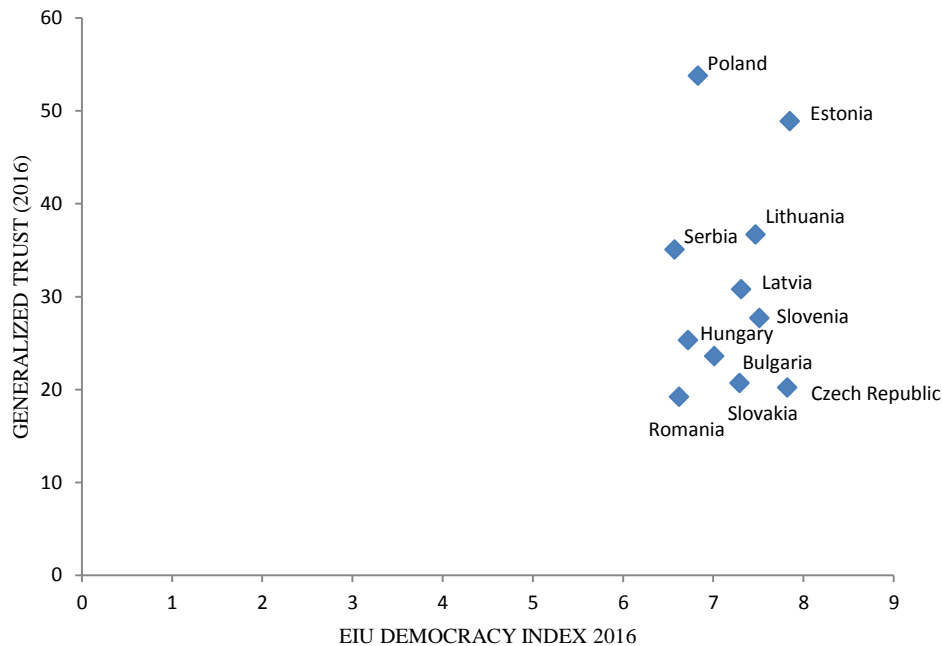


Fig. 2 Democracy and Trust in People

Note: Generalized trust is the average percentage who said “most people can be trusted” in each country. The EIU Democracy index, as a measure of democracy, is on the scale of 0 to 10. The index values are used to place countries within one of four types of regime: 1). Full democracies: scores of 8-10; 2). Flawed democracies: score of 6 to 7.9; 3). Hybrid regimes: scores of 4 to 5.9; 4) Authoritarian regimes: scores below 4.

Source: EBRD (2016) Life in Transition III and The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2016

Finally, according to Uslaner (2000: 20) economic inequality is the single biggest barrier to interpersonal trust in democratic nations. So, it is possible to increase trust indirectly by encouraging policies that reduce economic inequality (Uslaner, 2003: 15). Authoritarian societies destroy trust, but democratizing a regime will not automatically lead to higher levels of trust¹. Thanks to the democratic regime, the preconditions for strengthening generalized trust and expanding social networks are being created (Uslaner, 1999: 121-151). Democracy is consistent with high and low levels of generalized trust².

¹ See: Uslaner, E.M., “Trust and Economic Growth in the Knowledge Society”, available at: <http://www.esri.go.jp/en/workshop/030325/030325date2-e.pdf>) POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

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Decline of trust is a feature of many countries regardless of the diverse institutional structures, historical legacies and cultural underpinnings (Blind, 2006: 14). The key consequence of the fall in political trust is the undermining of the pillars of representative democracy, manifested by the increasingly low voter turnout and low level of participation. As a kind of response to the extremely low levels of political trust, deliberative democracy is put in place that could help establish a new general belief that "we're all in it together," as moral forms of politics where no group is disproportionate in advantages or disadvantages due to discretionary state actions. In the absence of more significant trust, processes of democratization may even lead to disaster, as can be clearly seen on the case with the flood of refugees from civil wars and nameless atrocities in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria.

5. CONCLUSION

There are different theories about the relationship between democracy and trust. Abramson (2017: 17) believe that trust and distrust ideally play complementary roles in a democracy. It is well known that democracy, as a system of decentralized action, generates the occurrence of uncertainty; on the other hand, generalized trust through risk reduction amortizes various types of day-to-day uncertainties (Volchenko, Shirokanova, 2017: 10).

When talking about the trajectory of trust in new democracies, the essential challenge of democratic transformation and consolidation of post-communist societies in the upcoming period would be remodeling institutional trust by improving government performance and breaking the vicious circle of particularized, narrow-radius trust and its transformation into far-reaching, flexible generalized trust. In order to move from partial democracy into a fully-fledged, consolidated democracy, new democracies require meritocracy, i.e. responsible and transparent institutions, as a guarantee of security and predictability of social interactions.

"Ultimately, democracy and trust do not need to refer to anything outside of the potentials already embedded in contingent social relations; they do not need metaphysics, nor do they need to rely on unquestioned tradition. Yet they together name and evoke the normative potentials already existing within social relationships for a good society of reflective, self-governing individuals" (Warren, 1999b: 343).

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ANALIZA POVERENJA KAO ELEMENTA PODRŠKE DEMOKRATSKIM PROCESIMA

Smanjenje poverenja jedan je od centralnih problema u modernoj politici. Poverenje opada u kolektivnim akcionim aranžmanima. Poverenje je jedno od "velikih pitanja", i "jedna od normalnih obaveza političkog života". Ugrađeno unutar njih, poverenje je fundamentalno pitanje politike i demokratske teorije. U ovom članku želim da diskutujem o različitim konceptima poverenja (i njihovim odnosima sa demokratijom). Rad se nastavlja na sledeći način. U prvom delu, daje se konceptualna i teorijska definicija poverenja. U drugom delu ukazuje se na jednu od osnovnih podela poverenja koja je prisutna u literaturi. Konačno, u trećem delu, ukazuje se na odnos između poverenja i demokratije i nudi odgovarajuća argumentacija.

Ključne reči: poverenje, demokratija, generalizovano poverenje, poverenje u političke institucije