

Research Articles

Ideological Bases of Institutional Trust in Eastern and Western Europe and the Effect of Motivated Social CognitionMárton Hadarics*^a

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Abstract

Our study investigates the assumption that citizens expect the democratic institutional system to operate in accordance with values and norms that are deeply embedded in public thinking of their country. As individual-level trust towards the institutional system is built mainly on these norms and values, our results show that differences between Eastern and Western European public thinking lead to asymmetries regarding the bases of institutional trust. Specifically, degree of income inequalities and perceived quality of welfare services seem to be more important factors in the postsocialist region in comparison with Western Europe. Furthermore, in accordance with the approach of motivated social cognition, we could also confirm that those with a higher level of conventionality motivation lean on normative ideological elements to a greater extent when they are indicating their personal level of institutional trust.

Keywords: institutional trust, income inequality, welfare services, motivated social cognition, conventionality motivation

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Introduction

With the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe, most countries from this region have changed to the course of democracy, and adapted the most important democratic procedural principles and a democratic political institutional system. At the same time, the last couple of decades has proved that trust towards democracy and its institutional system has not deepened significantly in the postsocialist region, consequently, the new system has struggled with a lack of legitimacy. To understand this regional problem, it is important to explore the bases of trust or scepticism, and to comprehend how different psychological mechanisms can influence the personal level of institutional trust in this region. The theoretical framework of motivated social cognition can provide us with a valuable aspect for this attempt.

Social sciences have been interested, for a long time, in the question whether our socio-political attitudes and ideological preferences can be traced back to individual-level psychological dispositions. In this area of research a great deal of attention has been devoted to *motivated social cognition*. According to this theory, to a certain

extent it is important for everyone to perceive the social world as a predictable, well-structured, unambiguous environment where stable and consistent rules guarantee our feeling of security. Different personality and social psychological studies associated this motivation with individual-level characteristics and traits like *intolerance of ambiguity* (Frenkel-Brunswik, 1948), *dogmatism* (Rokeach, 1960); *need for structure and order* (Allport, 1954; Schaller, Boyd, Yohannes, & O'Brien, 1995), *low levels of cognitive and integrative complexity* (Kelly, 1955; Tetlock, 1983), *uncertainty avoidance* (Kagan, 1972), *self-uncertainty* (Hogg, 2000, 2011), or *need for cognitive closure* (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). With such characteristics one will be motivated to accept social beliefs and opinions by which the unpleasant feeling of uncertainty can be overcome in the most effective and most rapid way. In most cases, these beliefs are in accordance with the dominant and consensual norms, values, stereotypes and other ideological elements of the public thinking because society as our largest reference group, provides the highest level of certainty about any kind of social belief. Consequently, someone with a higher need for order, structure and certainty tends to show a higher degree of norm-adherence, social conventionality, conformity, and to be more prejudiced towards non-conventional outgroups (e.g. Allport, 1954; Calogero, Bardi, & Sutton, 2009; Fu et al., 2007; Streufert & Nogami, 1989; Strickland & Weddell, 1972; Van Hiel, Pandelaere, & Duriez, 2004).

Uncertainty-induced conventionality motivation can be so strong that one can insist upon normative social beliefs even if this is not in accordance with her rational self- or group-interest. As it is argued by *system justification theory* (Jost & Banaji, 1994) and *social dominance theory* (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), by accepting normative social beliefs and ideologies people rationalize, support and conserve the existing social and economic conditions in a given society. This system justifying tendency, driven by conventionality motivation, can have an important effect on how the efficacy of the political institutional system of a specific society is perceived.

Political Support – Trust and Legitimacy

Strong public support for democracy, as a decision-making mechanism, and for its established institutional system is indispensable for the proper long-term functioning of any democratic country. Two factors can be identified in the background of this support, that have been in the scope of inquiry of social sciences for a while now: *legitimacy* and *trust*. The former is a perceived characteristic of an authority, institution or a social process that makes people to consider it as appropriate, fair and just (Tyler, 2006, 2010). Political legitimacy cannot be achieved without political trust. The latter means the assumption of citizens that those possessing political power do not intend to cause any harm, and are willing to operate in accordance with the consensual values and interests of the whole society (Newton, 2008). This sort of trust is the bond that connects us with the democratic institutions which represent our common interests. These institutions gain their legitimacy by the trust they can evoke towards themselves, or lose it due to the public skepticism and suspicion they can provoke in case of their dysfunctional operation.

Social Norms and Values as the Bases of Trust Towards the Political-Institutional System

If we examine any concepts related to political support, it becomes obvious that it is inseparable from the dominant norms and values of a given society. According to *consensus theories of legitimacy*, the acceptance of any specific social structure can only be voluntary and stable over time if it is based on norms and values that are consensually respected within the community, since legitimacy is perceived on the basis of these norms. A person, institution, social structure or procedure can be regarded as legitimate only if it seems to be adequate and desirable within a socially defined and accepted frame of norms, values, and beliefs (Beetham, 1991; French & Raven, 1959; Lipset, 1959; Parsons, 1958; Suchman, 1995; Tyler, 2010; Zelditch, 2001). And trust, which is an essential

requisite of legitimacy, is based on the assumption that those who possess power will act in accordance with these norms, and their priority will be to reach the common goals that are determined by these values and norms.

If we analyze the public support of the political-institutional system of a given country, we can argue that the more the institutional system can satisfy normative expectations set by the society, the more trust it can gain. In this regard, we can identify universal expectations that serve as important bases for individual judgments about institutional trust in every society. The primary base of trust towards any political institution, or the political system as a whole, is how its performance is perceived by the society. Performance can be defined by multiple constituents, since the state itself is responsible for the provision of numerous political goods. In this regard, the most basic obligations are the guarantee of *democratic political rights* (Clarke, Dutt, & Kornberg, 1993; Mishler & Rose, 1999; Newton, 2008; Norris, 1999; Rahmani, 2010), establishment of *economic efficacy* (Lipset & Schneider, 1983; Miller & Listhaug, 1999; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Wong, Wan, & Hsiao, 2011), provision of *welfare services* in an appropriate quality (Kumlin, 2004; Soss, 1999), and the initiation and maintenance of basic *procedural justice principles* in the operation of the institutional system, along with a low level of *corruption* (Clausen, Kraay, & Nyíri, 2011; Della Porta, 2000; Kotzian, 2011; Offe, 2004).

At the same time, great levels of differences can be identified among specific countries regarding the values and norms that dominate public thinking. These differences can have a serious effect on individual political and institutional trust judgments, since citizens of different countries may expect the political-institutional system to adhere to a country-specific set of norms and values. At this point, important differences can be expected between the Eastern and Western part of Europe, since the public thinking of the former socialist young democracies seems to have preserved its economically more egalitarian and paternalistic characteristics. According to numerous international comparative studies, citizens of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) young democracies have a stronger preference for *low income inequalities* (e.g. Alesina & Fuchs-Schündeln, 2007; Murthi & Tiongson, 2009; Suhrcke, 2001; Verwiebe & Wegener, 2000), and they also expect a wider scope of governmental *welfare services* and redistributive measures compared to Western European citizens (e.g. Alesina & Fuchs-Schündeln, 2007; Andreß & Heien, 2001; Corneo & Grüner, 2002; Lipsmeyer & Nordstrom, 2003).

Deep embeddedness of need for state paternalism and large-scale redistribution in CEE countries is highlighted also by the connection between these ideological elements and individual-level motivated social cognition. Research conducted in postsocialist countries shows that conventionality motivation (Hadarics, 2016) and psychological variables related to this kind of motivation, like authoritarianism (Korzeniowski, 2006; McFarland, Ageyev, & Abalakina-Paap, 1992; Todosijević, 2008), need for closure (Golec, 2002; Kossowska & Van Hiel, 2003), or conservation values (Duriez, Van Hiel, & Kossowska, 2005) endorse the acceptance of paternalistic and egalitarian economic attitudes and beliefs, because these are the ideological elements in this region that can provide the feeling of certainty and predictability by their normative nature.

Equality, Paternalism, and Political-Institutional Trust in Eastern Europe

Based on the regional features mentioned above, it can be assumed that in the CEE countries the level of trust towards the democratic institutional system will depend partly on dissimilar aspects in comparison with the Western European pattern, because people expect the institutional system to adhere to dissimilar norms and to fulfill dissimilar responsibilities. Naturally, political and economic performance variables that indicate the efficacy of the new system, like the public perception of economic conditions, governmental guarantee of democratic rights, and a low level of corruption are substantial predictors of institutional trust in the CEE region as well, just

like in Western Europe (e.g. Catterberg & Moreno, 2006; Dalton, 1994; Kitschelt, 1992; Mishler & Rose, 1999, 2001). At the same time, certain dissimilarities may arise if we consider ideological differences between the public thinking of these two regions regarding income inequalities and welfare services. After the Eastern European regime change, reduction of income inequalities and restoration of social security have become a significant expectation towards the newly emerged political-institutional system. The less the new system is able to or willing to fulfill these expectations, the more mistrust and political cynicism it can create towards itself. Since 'socialist legacy' is absent from the Western European public thinking, and income inequalities are considered there as much more justifiable and unavoidable, initiation of economic equality is not perceived as a governmental responsibility so unequivocally.

Thus it can be assumed that among CEE countries the larger the level of income inequality is, the more mistrust can be shown towards the new democratic institutional system, while this relationship is less likely to be revealed in Western Europe. Additionally, it can also be presumed that institutional trust depends on the perceived paternalistic and redistributive efficacy of the institutional system to a greater extent in the postsocialist region. These societies, with a decreased sense of existential and social security, can turn back to the paternalistic and egalitarian norms of the past, and evaluate the new institutional system in the light of these norms. Consequently, the withdrawal of trust towards the democratic institutional system can strongly depend on the emergence of these egalitarian economic norms.

Since these economic views are held more firmly by those who consider it more important to follow dominant social conventions, we can also assume that the political behavior of people with a higher level of conventionality motivation are influenced to a greater extent by the norms of egalitarianism and paternalism than the views of those who lack this motivation. The individual level of institutional trust of these people may depend even more strongly on the perceived performance of the institutional system in terms of redistribution and welfare services.

Our Study

In order to confirm our assumptions, we tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The individual level of trust towards the political institutional system is related to the extent of income inequalities in the CEE region, while there is no relationship between these variables in the Western European region.

Hypothesis 2: Both Eastern and Western European citizens show a higher level of trust towards the political institutional system if they perceive it to be able to provide welfare services in an appropriate quality, but this association is stronger in the CEE region.

Hypothesis 3: Among citizens of the CEE countries, the higher level of conventionality motivation someone possesses, the more her individual level of institutional trust is affected by income inequalities and the perceived quality of governmental welfare services.

Method

Participants

Our research was based on the 2008/2009 survey database of the *European Social Survey (ESS)* (ESS Round 4: European Social Survey Round 4 Data, 2008). On the basis of the database, we created an Eastern European

($N = 11367$) and a Western European sample ($N = 11546$), each including data of the representative samples of 6-6 countries. The Eastern European sample included data from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, while the Western European sample consisted of the national samples of Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Switzerland.^{i,ii}

Measures

All variables were taken directly or calculated from the questionnaire of the fourth (2008/09) round of the ESS research programme (ESS Round 4: European Social Survey Round 4 Data, 2008). A number of ESS items have an inverse scoring. In case of such items the scoring was reversed so that the higher scores marked the greater extent of agreement with the content of the given item. (Descriptive statistics of variables are displayed in Table 1).

Institutional Trust

Individual level of trust towards the democratic institutional system was measured by an index consisted of three items. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of trust towards their national *parliament*, *legal system*, and *police* on an 11-point scale (0=No trust at all; 10=Complete trust).

Perceived Quality of Welfare Services

This variable was operationalized by an index that was based on three items. These items measured citizens' opinion about the quality of three specific welfare services, namely the provision of *pension* (the standard of living of pensioners), *education*, and *healthcare services*ⁱⁱⁱ.

Income Inequalities

Since the applied ESS questionnaire does not contain any questions regarding how high or low level of income or economic inequalities were perceived by respondents in their country, the objective level of income inequalities were taken into account by every given country, operationalized by the national-level *Gini indices* from the year of the relevant ESS data collection (Eurostat, 2015).

Conventionality Motivation

Conventionality motivation was measured by an index which was based on five items from the *Human Values Scale* of the ESS survey, what assesses the so called motivational value types defined by Schwartz (1994). The specific items that were applied to construct our conventionality-index were evaluating the subjective importance of norm-adherence and personal security.^{iv}

Additional Control Variables

It was one of our goals to control our analysis for the effects of additional factors that had been shown to influence the individual level of institutional trust by previous research. For this purpose, additional variables had been operationalized and involved into our analysis.

Evaluation of National Economy — Personal judgment about the state of national economic conditions was measured by the following item: “*On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [country]?*” (0=*Extremely dissatisfied*; 10=*Extremely satisfied*)

Evaluation of Personal Income Level — Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of their personal satisfaction with their income situation on a 4-level scale.^v

Evaluation of Procedural Justice Within the Institutional System — In order to measure respondents' personal opinions about the operation of procedural justice within the institutional system, we constructed an index that was based on two ESS items. These items assessed to what extent respondents perceived different institutions to adhere to the justice criteria of equality and impartiality in their operation.^{vi}

General Social Trust — We tried to assess the personal level of unconditional trust towards other people and in the good intention of others. For this purpose an additional index had been constructed from three bipolar items of the ESS questionnaire.^{vii}

Demographics Variables — Effects of respondents' *gender, age, educational level, and objective income level* were also taken into account. Since the education systems of the countries making up the sample differ to a great extent, we defined education through the number of years spent with studies. In the case of objective income situation, respondents indicated on a scale their position on the basis of the whole income of their household. This 10-degree scale was developed individually for each country, following the same methodology. Each degree of the scale means one decile of income distribution on the basis of the median income as a point of reference.^{viii}

National Economic Performance — Objective economic performance of each participating country was also taken into account in the form of national *GDP per capita* data from the year of the relevant ESS data collection (The World Bank, n.d.).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	Eastern Europe			Western Europe		
	<i>M/N</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M/N</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Gender						
Men	5086	-	-	5331	-	-
Women	6281	-	-	6215	-	-
Age	48.07	18.06	-	48.36	18.38	-
Years of Education	11.90	3.47	-	12.91	3.99	-
Objective Income	4.92	2.31	-	5.75	2.70	-
Subjective Income	2.54	0.86	-	1.81	0.79	-
Conventionality Motivation	4.50	0.79	.70	4.18	0.87	.68
Institutional Trust	3.68	2.20	.84	5.44	1.86	.76
Welfare Service Quality	4.11	1.87	.67	5.75	1.54	.57
Satisfaction with Economy	3.38	2.28	-	3.98	2.34	-
Procedural Justice	3.87	2.28	.74	5.85	2.07	.54
Social Trust	4.10	2.07	.79	5.53	1.70	.71
Gini	29.97	5.53	-	30.20	2.37	-
GDP	18096.94	4689.67	-	38287.19	3086.76	-

Results

Data Analysis

Separate hierarchical regression models were set up to explain the individual level of institutional trust as dependent variable in case of both samples. Our primary predictor variables were the perceived efficacy of welfare services and the national level of income inequalities. Beside of these, national economic performance of respondents' countries, subjective evaluations about the state of national economy, institutional procedural justice and personal income situation were also taken into account as control predictor variables, just like conventionality motivation, individual level of general trust towards others, respondents' gender, age, educational level, and objective income level.

Two models were set up within both samples. By the first pair of models, exclusively the main effect of predictor variables were examined. By the second pair of models, our assumption was tested that in the CEE sample conventionality motivation intensifies the effects of income inequality and welfare efficacy on the level of institutional trust. For this purpose, two additional interaction terms were added to the models, the interaction of conventionality motivation with Gini-indices and perceived welfare efficacy.

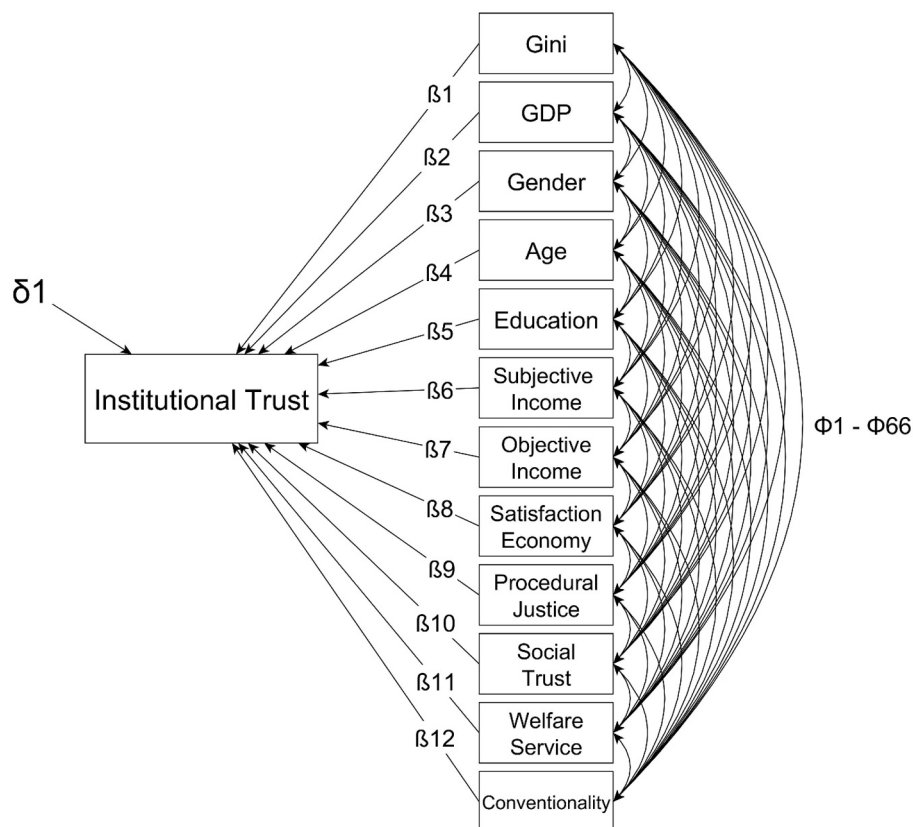


Figure 1. Saturated model specified for intergroup equivalency tests.

In the centre of our inquiry stood whether the relevant predictor variables make their effect with a differing weight in the two samples. To answer this question we checked the intergroup equivalency of the regression coefficients of the primary predictor variables by applying the method suggested by Byrne (2010). In the course of this, we

treated all the created regression models as a saturated structural equation model with a perfect fit. In the case of each intergroup equivalency analysis, a common two-grouped structural equation model was created, wherein the strength of the relevant relationships between the two groups was fixed one by one on a permanent level. If the χ^2 -based fit index of the common model deteriorated to a significant extent with this restriction, it indicated that the examined effect strength differed between the Eastern and the Western European groups to a significant extent. The specified model for the intergroup equivalency tests is shown in Figure 1.

Hierarchical Regression Results

Details of the hierarchical regression models are shown in Table 2. We can see that very similar variables predicted the level of institutional trust in the two samples, but important intergroup differences could be identified regarding the relative contribution of certain variables to our models.

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression Models Explaining Institutional Trust in Eastern and Western Europe

Variable	Western Europe						Eastern Europe					
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>b</i> (SE)	β	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	β	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	β	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	β	<i>p</i>
Constant	-1.845 (.318)		.000	-.108 (.982)		.912	3.454 (.505)		.000	5.432 (.897)		.000
Gini	.057 (.006)	.073	.000	.000 (.030)	.000	.990	-.090 (.009)	-.219	.000	-.131 (.022)	-.317	.000
GDP	1.380E-05 (5.00E-06)	.023	.005	1.410E-05 (5.00E-06)	.023	.004	-1.020E-04 (1.10E-05)	-.216	.000	-1.010E-04 (1.10E-05)	-.215	.000
Gender	.026 (.028)	.007	.353	.027 (.028)	.007	.337	.142 (.034)	.032	.000	.140 (.034)	.032	.000
Age	-.005 (.001)	-.045	.000	-.005 (.001)	-.045	.000	.004 (.001)	.032	.000	.004 (.001)	.031	.000
Education	.037 (.004)	.080	.000	.037 (.004)	.079	.000	-.006 (.006)	-.009	.318	-.006 (.006)	-.009	.319
Subjective Income	-.056 (.021)	-.023	.009	-.054 (.021)	-.023	.012	.063 (.027)	.024	.020	.062 (.027)	.240	.021
Objective Income	.017 (.007)	.024	.011	.017 (.007)	.025	.008	.063 (.011)	.066	.000	.062 (.011)	.065	.000
Satisfaction with Economy	.198 (.007)	.249	.000	.198 (.007)	.249	.000	.240 (.009)	.249	.000	.241 (.009)	.250	.000
Procedural Justice	.113 (.007)	.126	.000	.113 (.007)	.125	.000	.112 (.008)	.116	.000	.112 (.008)	.116	.000
Social Trust	.233 (.009)	.212	.000	.232 (.009)	.212	.000	.121 (.009)	.113	.000	.122 (.009)	.115	.000
Welfare Service Quality	.299 (.011)	.249	.000	.296 (.044)	.246	.000	.379 (.012)	.323	.000	.189 (.057)	.161	.001
Conventionality Motivation	.065 (.017)	.030	.000	-.356 (.226)	-.165	.116	.151 (.022)	.054	.000	-.290 (.160)	-.104	.069
Gini X Conventionality Motivation	-	-	-	.014 (.007)	.206	.052	-	-	-	.009 (.004)	.142	.038
Welfare Efficacy X Conventionality Mot.	-	-	-	.001 (.010)	.005	.914	-	-	-	.041 (.012)	.171	.001
<i>R</i> ²	.359			.359			.353			.353		

In reference to our assumptions one of the most important result is that the individual level of institutional trust of Eastern European respondents was influenced significantly more strongly by the perceived quality of welfare services than in the case of the Western European sample ($b_{W-Eu} = .29$; $p \leq .001$; $b_{E-Eu} = .37$; $p \leq .001$; $\Delta\chi^2 = 25.1$; $df = 1$; $p \leq .001$). Furthermore, national level of income differences of respondents' countries determined personal trust towards the institutional system in the opposite direction within the two samples. In the Western European sample institutional trust would be augmented by higher levels of income differences, while trust would be diminished by high level of income inequalities among Eastern European respondents ($b_{W-Eu} = .05$; $p \leq .001$; $b_{E-Eu} = -.09$; $p \leq .001$). It is also worth to note that subjective evaluation of national economic conditions affected

trust judgments to a greater extent in the CEE sample ($b_{W-EU} = .19$; $p \leq .001$; $b_{E-EU} = .24$; $p \leq .001$; $\Delta\chi^2 = 14.2$; $df = 1$; $p \leq .001$), while general interpersonal trust was a significantly stronger predictor in the Western European sample ($b_{W-EU} = .23$; $p \leq .001$; $b_{E-EU} = .12$; $p \leq .001$; $\Delta\chi^2 = 79.6$; $df = 1$; $p \leq .001$).

The second pair of regression models showed that in the Western European sample there was no significant interaction effect between conventionality motivation and either income differences ($F = 3.76$; $p = .052$) or welfare efficacy ($F = .12$; $p = .914$). On the other hand, both of these interaction effects turned out to be statistically significant in the CEE sample (conventionality motivation X Gini-index: $F = 4.29$; $p = .038$; conventionality motivation X welfare efficacy: $F = 11.73$; $p \leq .001$) – see [Figure 2](#) and [Figure 3](#).

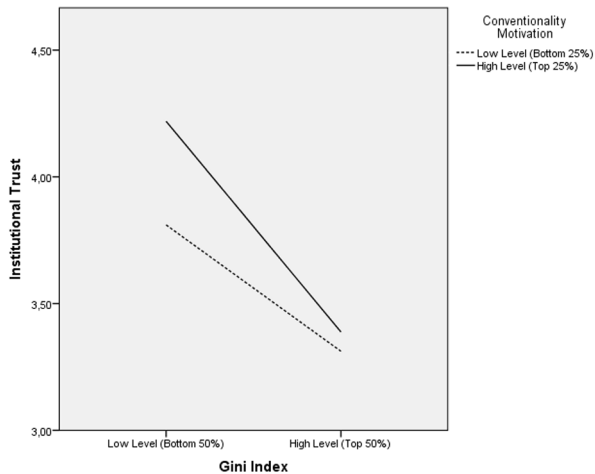


Figure 2. Joint effect of conventionality motivation and income differences on institutional trust in Eastern Europe.

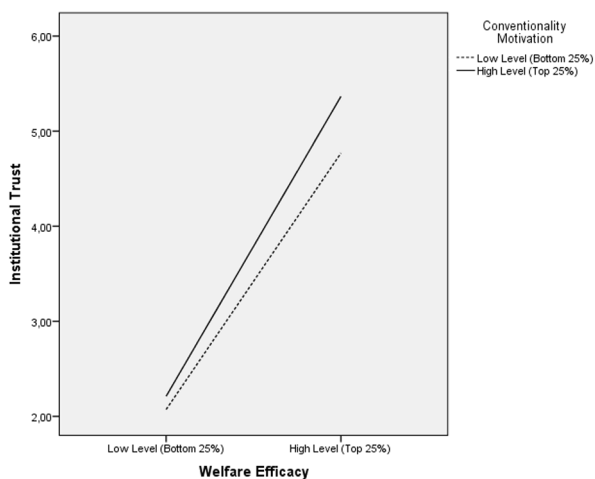


Figure 3. Joint effect of conventionality motivation and welfare efficacy on institutional trust in Eastern Europe.

Discussion

Differences Between Eastern and Western Europe

Our results indicate that in most aspects it depends on the same factors in the CEE region and Western Europe whether citizens trust the main institutions of the democratic system or become sceptic about them. More institutional trust is shown by those in both regions, who tend to trust other people in their interpersonal relationships, evaluate the quality of welfare services in a more favourable way, perceive the operation of the institutional system as just and fair, and are satisfied with the state of economic conditions in their country. The lower level of institutional trust in the CEE region is caused primarily by the fact that all the characteristics mentioned above are evaluated in a much more unfavourable way by the citizens of these postsocialist countries.

At the same time, important differences have been identified about the relative importance of the factors that serve as a base for our trust towards the democratic institutional system, and these differences reveal the ongoing effects of the 'socialist legacy'. In accordance with the higher preference for economic egalitarianism in the Eastern European region, citizens of the CEE countries show more trust towards the institutional system if they perceive that the new system is capable of restoring and maintaining this sort of equality. Exactly the opposite effect seems to take place in the Western European region. The higher level of income inequalities take place there, the more trust is gained by the institutional system. The reason behind this relationship can be that free market capitalism has a serious tradition in Western Europe, that is why several deeply embedded ideological elements are available there for people to explain and justify existing economic inequalities for themselves. Such ideological elements are belief in individual responsibility, effort, merit or the possibility of social mobility. These ideological elements had not played a significant role in the socialist public thinking, and have not taken root since the regime change, because the newly emerged economic inequalities have been seen to be a result of unfair processes by a huge part of citizens of these young democracies. Among such conditions, beside of the reduction of income inequalities, need for governmental paternalism and redistribution has increased too. Provision of welfare services like appropriate education, healthcare services or pension is regarded as an important responsibility of the state and its institutional system in both regions, at the same time, citizens of the postsocialist CEE region take the perceived quality of these welfare services into account with more weight when expressing their opinions about the political institutional system.

Beside of the findings mentioned above, our results show that the perceived condition of the national economy determines institutional trust to a larger extent in the postsocialist region compared to Western Europe, what indicates that enhancement of material and financial well-being is an exceptionally important expectation towards the newly emerged democratic institutional system. This is in accordance with the findings of Inglehart and his colleagues (e.g. [Inglehart, 2007](#); [Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, 2010](#)), who argue that so called *survival values*, which are associated to physical and economic security, are more important to be realized for Eastern European citizens than for Western European ones, while the very opposite pattern can be revealed in the case of *self-expression values*, like intellectual stimulation, environmental protection or cultural tolerance. Thus material accession seems to be a primary goal in the eyes of residents of the postsocialist CEE region, and based on the dream of 'welfare regime change' they expect the new institutional system to fulfill this dream for their citizens.

Additional important dissimilarities can be observed if we have a look at the relationship between the individual level of general interpersonal trust and trust towards the institutional system, which relationship turned out to be significantly weaker in the CEE sample. An explanation for this result can be that in the decades of authoritarian

and totalitarian socialism, social cooperation and informal self-organization within the society began to take shape directly opposed to the socialist institutional system, or at least intentionally out of its scope (Ferge, 2010; Ledeneva, 1998). In this way evaluations and beliefs about the political elite could split from the assumptions of common people about each other, and as it seems, this perceptual differentiation has been modified only to a very limited extent by the experiences gained within the frames of the new institutional system (see Uslaner & Badescu, 2004).

Conventionality Motivation and Institutional Trust

Our assumption was that people with a high level of conventionality motivation attribute great importance to factors that are based on widely accepted expectations, norms, and values, and this characteristic affects their level of trust towards the institutional system. The reason behind this assumption is that these people rely mainly on these conventional ideological elements when they make a judgment about their confidence in the institutional system, they evaluate the operation of the institutional system according to these beliefs, even if their rational self-interest indicated the consideration of other additional factors. State paternalism, large-scale redistribution, and need for income equality can be regarded as such conventional ideological elements in the postsocialist Eastern Europe. Our results support that in contrast to Western Europe, in the CEE region the more someone is characterised by conventionality motivation, the more her trust (or scepticism) is determined by the capability or willingness of the institutional system to guarantee income equality and proper welfare services.

As it is argued by *system justification theory* and the *theory of ideology as motivated social cognition*, epistemic needs that can provide the comfortable feeling of certainty and security, and are in close connection with conventionality motivation, can stimulate people to accept even a social, political, or economic system that is contradictory to their rational self-interest (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). This can happen because these motivations and needs, just like conventionality motivation, enhance the acceptance of ideological elements that can be considered as normative and conventional within the public thinking, since these can provide the highest level of certainty for individuals with these epistemic needs. At the same time, as it seems, these normative ideological elements do not justify and legitimize the current system in the postsocialist countries, but they contrast the real or assumed flaws of the new system with the characteristics of the old one. This peculiarity could also contribute to the low level of political and institutional trust within the CEE region, since the rapid transformation of the political and economic system was not accompanied by the transformation of social norms and values in the public thinking of these societies, that is why a special form of deviation could emerge between the operation of the new system and the expectations of citizens towards it. Inevitable difficulties of the transformation fostered social uncertainty, what consequently enhanced conventionality motivation within these societies. At the same time, norm and values that were related to conventionality motivation, were the norms and values of the previous system and not the new, that is how a *negative mistrust spiral* could emerge: the less the new institutional system can meet the expectations originated from the old system, the higher level of social uncertainty and insecurity it creates. Uncertainty enhances norm-adherence, but since these are norms of the past, trust towards the new institutional system will decrease again.

Conclusion

It seems that it can be accepted as a universal phenomenon that all societies expect the institutional system that regulates and organizes the everyday life of the given society to comply with the norms, values, and goals that are regarded as consensually accepted within that society. On the one hand this creates a large extent of similarity

among different societies, because citizens want the institutional system to operate in a just, transparent and accountable way, and to guarantee security, prosperity and comfort for the public. At the same time, the more the norm and value system of two countries differs, the more dissimilarities are likely to be revealed regarding public expectations towards the institutional system. That is how the bases of institutional trust (or scepticism) can diverge among different societies. This phenomenon can be important for all countries that have to establish the basic institutional system of democracy in a short period of transformation, as it could be observed a couple of decades ago in Eastern Europe, and as it can be observed today in other parts of the world. Uncertainty is an inevitable consequence of any large-scale social changes, and by enhancing attachment to the conventions of the past, it has the potential to undermine trust towards the new system.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that young democracies of Eastern Europe have a good chance to break the negative mistrust spiral described above, if they are able to show a satisfactory performance in the areas of universal expectations, what can provide a solid foundation for institutional trust. Transparent and fair operation of the institutional system, what is a basic expectation all over the world, can easily enhance the perceived legitimacy of the new system. An institutional system that is perceived and acknowledged as legitimate, can count on the voluntary obedience of its citizens, thus operating consistently it will have the potential to lay the foundations of new norms and values as well.

Notes

i) more about the applied sampling methods of ESS: <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/methodology/sampling.html>

ii) more about data collection methods of ESS:
http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/methodology/mixed_mode_data_collection.html

iii) Items: "Using this card, what do you think overall about the standard of living of pensioners?"; "Now, using this card, please say what you think overall about the state of education in [country] nowadays?"; "Still using this card, please say what you think overall about the state of health services in [country] nowadays?" (0=Extremely bad; 10=Extremely good)

iv) Items: "He believes that people should do what they're told. He thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching."; "It is important to him always to behave properly. He wants to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong."; "It is important to him to be humble and modest. He tries not to draw attention to himself."; "Tradition is important to him. He tries to follow the customs handed down by his religion or his family."; "It is important to him to live in secure surroundings. He avoids anything that might endanger his safety." (1=Very much like me; 6=Not like me at all)

v) Items: 1=Living comfortably on present income; 2=Coping on present income; 3=Finding it difficult on present income; 4=Finding it very difficult on present income

vi) Items: "Using this card, please tell me whether you think doctors and nurses in [country] give special advantages to certain people or deal with everyone equally?"; "And using the same card, please tell me whether you think the tax authorities in [country] give special advantages to certain people or deal with everyone equally? (0=Give special advantages to certain people; 10=Deal with everyone equally)

vii) Items: "Would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?"; "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?"; "Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves?" (11-point scales)

viii) for more information: http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/round6/survey/ESS6_data_documentation_report_e02_1.pdf

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