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Topic

**Political Trust as a Variable or as a Process? -
A Methodological Question**

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1. Introduction: the Crisis-Hidden Relationship between Political Trust and Representative Democracy

It is in the recent decades that there is a decline of political trust or trust in political institutions in some democracies in the Western part of the world. Some scientists' studies testify this fact. The United States of America represent the best example of a reduction of political trust. Gary Orren examined political trust in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s (Orren 1997). His study led to the conclusion that the loss of political trust began in the 1960s and 1970s, with a slight increase of political trust during the 1980s and a repeated insertion of a decline of political trust in the 1990s. Gabriela Catterberg and Alejandro Moreno studied political trust in established and new democracies (Catterberg / Moreno 2006). They realised that the extension of democracy has been accompanied by a gradual loss of political trust during the last decades.

What reasons are responsible for the decline of political trust? In order to answer this question, a methodological question arises: Should political trust be used as a variable or as a process? But at first the term trust must be defined.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Defining Trust

It is in social sciences that there is no commonly accepted definition of trust. The term trust is mostly described by the synonymous expressions of confidence, strong belief or faith. What is the nature of trust? „At its core, trust constitutes a subjective evaluation of a relationship between a subject (the one who trusts) and an object (the one who is trusted)“ (van der Meer / Hakhverdian 2016: 3). As part of this trust relationship the subject takes the shape of a citizen and the object is characterized by an institution like government, parliament, parties or news media. This concept of trust led to some theories of trust by social scientists (Luhmann 1979; Seligman 1997; Anheier / Kendall 2002; Khodyakov 2007). In Luhmann's theory of reducing complexity trust takes the means of coordination. Seligman considers trust as an important prerequisite for successful cooperation in society. With regard to the relationship between interpersonal trust and membership in voluntary associations Anheier and Kendall examined the important approaches of trust in economics, sociology and political science. Taking account of this approach Khodyakov refined a three-dimensional approach of trust, in order to explain trust as a process. His developed three-dimensional approach of trust plays a great role in my study.

2.2 A Three-Dimensional Approach of Trust

Based on the approach of trust by Anheier and Kendall, Khodyakov created a three-dimensional approach of trust for his empirical studies: thick interpersonal trust, thin interpersonal trust and systemic or institutional trust (Khodyakov 2007: 120 - 124).

Thick interpersonal trust as the first type of trust is built on the basic trust, which is characterized by strong ties in personal relationships with family members, relatives and close friends. This means that personal familiarity and strong emotional ties are of prime importance in relationships. The second type of trust represents thin interpersonal trust, which is founded more on community norms than on personal relationships. It is based on weak personal ties, which are embedded in a common network of society. This implies that social norms like common or similar needs and interests as well as commonly shared ethical or moral rules play a greater role than personal relationships. The third type of trust relates to systematic or institutional trust, which is also called political trust. It describes trust in a democratic system like in national governments, in national parliaments or in political parties. Political trust is considered as a measurement model for the citizens' trust in political institutions of a representative democracy. In comparison with the two other types of trust political trust is impersonal. It is in my study that I primarily deal with political trust, because this type of trust is a decisive element for the stability of representative democracies.

2.3 Explaining Political Trust

Political trust generally means trust in institutions and represents an impersonal trust. This term is mostly used in political science (Newton 2001; Uslaner 2002). In sociology the same fact is called system trust (Luhmann 1988; Giddens 1990).

How can the relationship between people and institutions be characterized as part of political trust? Political trust represents „a basic evaluative orientation toward the government founded on how well the government is operating according to people's normative expectations“ (Hetherington 1998: 791). The citizens' normative expectations relate to the everyday activities, which are exerted by government and its institutions (Khodyakov 2007: 123). That is why trust in political institutions is based „on their perceived legitimacy, technical competence, and ability to perform assigned duties efficiently“ (Khodyakov 2007: 123).

What is the meaning of trust in political institutions? Most of the social scientists are of the opinion that political trust is significant for the smooth functioning of democracy (Hetherington 1998: 792). Therefore trust in political institutions represents a necessary element of the legitimacy and the stability of representative democracy.

But how should political trust be used in the methodological sense? As a variable or as a process?

3. Research Question: Political Trust as a Variable or as a Process? -

A Methodological Question

It is in my study that the following methodological question arises: Should political trust be employed as a variable or as a process?

Social scientists use political trust as an independent or a dependent variable (Khodiakov 2007: 125). Employing political trust as an independent variable strives for advantages like decreasing transaction costs, strengthening cooperation, building social capital or stabilizing the representative democracy. Political trust being used as a dependent variable can be affected by factors like increased unemployment, declining growth or degree of social inequality. These factors influence the bound variable „political trust“ concerning the building, development and maintenance of trust. Political trust as a variable focuses on the present.

On the other hand, political trust as a process comprises the temporal dimensions of past, present and future, which affect the building, development and maintenance of trust (Khodiakov 2007: 125). It constitutes a historical process and includes the two interpersonal forms of trust (Khodiakov 2007: 127). It is based on these mentioned features that Khodiakov defines trust as a process as follows:

„Trust is a process of constant imaginative anticipation of the reliability of the other party's actions based on (1) the reputation of the partner and the actor, (2) the evaluation of current circumstances of action, (3) assumptions about the partner's actions, and (4) the belief in the honesty and morality of the other side“ (Khodiakov 2007: 126).

Khodiakov's definition has an agentic character of trust with its three main components: iteration, projectivity, and practical evaluation (Khodiakov 2007: 126). Iteration relates to the leverages „of past patterns of behavior on social practices through routines, traditions, and schemata“ (Khodiakov 2007: 126). Projectivity means „anticipation of the future based on an actor's hopes, fears, anxieties, aspirations, desires, and calculations“ (Khodiakov 2007: 126). Practical Evaluation is understood as „the capacity of actors to judge the applicability of alternative options for action according to existing information as well as behavioral norms and moral standards“ (Khodiakov 2007: 126).

It is the methodological question „Political trust as a variable or as a process“ that I analyze on the basis of empirical research works and documents concerning selected established and new representative democracies.

4. Empirical Analyses of Political Trust in New and Established Democracies

4.1 Dependent Variable: Political Trust

There are a lot of dependent variables as part of political trust: confidence in parliament, government, political parties or in civil service. In the following I occupy myself with confidence in parliament: development over time in new and established democracies. It is for this study that data concerning established and new democracies were obtained by the World Values Surveys (WVS) and the European Values Surveys (EVS) (Catterberg / Moreno 2006: 33). These surveys „have been conducted in about 80 societies in different waves of interviews between 1981 and 2000“ (Catterberg / Moreno 2006: 34). The waves of interviews occurred in following periods: 1981 - 83; 1990 - 91; 1995 – 96, 2000 - 2001. Table 1 illustrates confidence in parliament in percent by new and established democracies in these periods (Catterberg / Moreno 2006: 36 - 37).¹

Table 1 reveals the following important results after a period of four surveys:

- * In general political trust has been declining in most countries. But there is a great difference between new and established democracies. While many new democracies have experienced a considerable decrease of political trust, established democracies record a moderate decline.
- * It is in new democracies that Belarus, a former Soviet Republic, has a modest increase of confidence in parliament, while Slovakia records a significant rise.
- * It is in established democracies that some countries like Belgium, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden reveal a mild to moderate increase of confidence in parliament.
- * It is in established democracies that Spain is a special case: neither a decrease nor an increase of confidence in parliament.
- * A significant case is Germany, because West Germany as an established democracy has a greater decrease of confidence than East Germany as a new democracy.
- * It is in new democracies that Argentina, Hungary, Poland, and the former Soviet Republics like Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania show a great loss of political trust.
- * It is in established democracies that Australia and Finland record a great decline of political trust.

4.2 Independent Variables: Quality of Political Institution

There are also a lot of independent variables that influence the political trust in insti-

¹ It is in the appendix that you will find table 1.

tutions: financial satisfaction, satisfaction with life, governmental responsiveness, political attitudes, materialist values, political interest, political radicalism, corruption, interpersonal trust, organizational membership, and socioeconomic factors. It is in table 2² that these above independent variables are used as determinants of political trust by regarding four world regions: six established democracies (Finland, Japan, Spain, Sweden, USA, West Germany), six former Soviet Republics (Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine), eight new democracies in Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia) as well as four Latin American nations (Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Peru) (Catterberg / Moreno 2006: 44). Data derived from World Values Surveys in 1995 and in 2001. Table 2 shows three different effects in relation to the determinants of political trust in parliament and in civil service: significant positive effect, significant negative effect, and no effect.

Table 2 indicates the following essential results in 1995 and in 2001:

- * In the framework of the above effects the analysis shows statistically significant variables of each group of selected countries in relation to the determinants of political trust: established democracies with 9, the former Soviet Republics and democracies in Latin America with 7, and democracies in Eastern Europe with 6 significant variables.
- * Determinants like financial satisfaction and governmental responsiveness have a significant positive effect in all groups of countries.
- * Independent variables like satisfaction with life, organizational membership, age, and gender show no effects in all groups of countries.
- * Corruption reveals a significant negative effect in all world regions with the exception of Latin America. It is in Latin America that corruption has no effect.
- * Political radicalism shows different effects in world regions: a significant negative effect in established democracies and in former Soviet Republics, no effect in democracies in Eastern Europe and in Latin America.

4.3 Trust as a Process: Development of Political Trust in Parliament

It is in table 3³ that development of political trust in parliament is represented in new European democracies. Table 3 is taken from the study „Political Trust in New De-

² It is in appendix that you will find table 2.

³ It is in appendix that you will find table 3.

mocracies“ by Daniela Braun (Braun 2012: 199).⁴ Political trust in parliament is explored in two groups of East European countries: group 1 with Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and group 2 with Hungary, Slovenia and East Germany. It is measured in percent in the period from 1989 to 2008.

Table 3 shows the following important results:

- * Group 1 records a great citizens' confidence in the transition to democracy in 1989 - 90. The percentage was 60 percent to 70 percent. In the following period from 1991 - 93 to 2008 the citizens' trust declined to a considerable extent and settled, with the exception of Romania, to a level below 20 percent.
- * It is in contrast to group 1 that group 2 reveals a lower citizens' confidence in the transition to democracy in 1989 - 90. The percentage was 40 percent to 50 percent. In the following period from 1991 - 1993 to 2008 the decline of citizens' trust was not very great. The percentage was 17 percent to 32 percent. It is the striking fact that Hungary shows an increasing citizens' trust over 60 percent in 2002 with a subsequent decline.

5. The Preliminary Outcomes of this Analytical Study

It is in the framework of these empirical analyses that pursuing the research question „Political trust as a variable or as a process? - A methodological question“ leads to the following results:

- * Both methodological forms have their authority in science.
- * Trust as a variable mostly focuses on the present situation and is able to provide a comprehensive overview of political, economic and social factors affecting political trust or being affected by political trust.
- * Trust as a process comprises past, present and future and furnishes a deeper understanding of political trust with reference to the factors identified of „Trust as a variable“: genesis, development and maintenance of political trust as part of the factors identified.
- * Both methodological forms of political trust could create a synthetic form, in order to explain the decline or the rise of political trust within a certain period: a new quality of political trust would arise.

⁴

The original title of this study is:

Braun, Daniela: Politisches Vertrauen in neuen Demokratien. Wiesbaden 2013.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Table 1: Confidence in Parliament

7.2 Table 2: Determinants of Political Trust

7.3 Table 3: Development of Political Trust in Parliament

Table 1

TABLE 1 Confidence in parliament: Development over time in new and established democracies

	1981-83 (%)	1990-91 (%)	1995-96 (%)	2000-01 (%)	Change between first survey and 2001
<i>New democracies</i>					
<i>Latin America</i>					
Argentina	72	17	14	10	-62
Chile		63	38	34	-29
Mexico	27	34	41	21	-6
Peru			14	9	-5
Mean	50	38	27	19	-26
<i>Former Soviet Republics</i>					
Belarus		29	26	33	4
Estonia		68	42	25	-43
Latvia		71	24	26	-45
Lithuania		65	24	10	-55
Russia		43	21	18	-25
Ukraine			34	25	-9
Mean		55	29	23	-29
<i>Eastern Europe</i>					
Bulgaria		48	42	26	-22
Czech Republic		15	20	13	-2
East Germany		41	16	37	-4
Hungary		84	39	37	-47
Poland		73	31	31	-42
Romania		20	18	18	-2
Slovenia		36	24	24	-12
Slovakia		10	29	39	29
Mean		41	27	28	-13
<i>Other</i>					
South Africa		61	56	44	-17
South Korea	67	34	31	10	-57
Turkey		55	47	44	-11
<i>Established democracies</i>					
Australia	55		30		-25
Belgium	34	42		37	3
Britain	39	46		35	-4
Canada	42	37		37	-5
Denmark	36	41		47	11
Finland	65	33	31	41	-24
France	47	43	39	39	-8
Italy	30	31		33	3
Japan	27	28	24	20	-7
Netherlands	43	53		54	11
Norway	76	59		69	-7
Portugal		37		45	8

Table 1
continued

TRENDS IN NEW AND ESTABLISHED DEMOCRACIES

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TABLE 1 continued

	1981-83 (%)	1990-91 (%)	1995-96 (%)	2000-01 (%)	Change between first survey and 2001
Spain	47	38	34	47	0
Sweden	44	45	43	49	5
USA	51	42	28	37	-14
West Germany	51	50	28	33	-18
Mean	46	42	32	42	-4

N (per country and survey) = approximately 1,000

Note: Percentages show those saying they have 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot of' confidence. Figures in bold type indicate cases of large decline in confidence after adoption of democratic government.

Source: 1981 to 2001 World Values Surveys.

Source: Catterberg, Gabriela / Moreno, Alejandro:
The Individual Bases of Political
Trust: Trends in New and
Established Democracies. Inter-
national Journal of Public Opinion
Research, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2006,
pp. 36-37.

Table 2

TABLE 3 Determinants of political trust: Overview of four world regions

	<i>Six established democracies</i>	<i>Six former Soviet Republics</i>	<i>Eight new democracies in Eastern Europe</i>	<i>Four Latin American nations</i>
Financial satisfaction	+	+	+	+
Satisfaction with life	o	o	o	o
Governmental responsiveness	+	+	+	+
Democratic/authoritarian index	+	o	+	+
Materialism/postmaterialism index	-	o	o	o
Political interest	+	+	o	+
Political radicalism	-	-	o	o
Corruption permissiveness index	-	-	-	o
Interpersonal trust	o	+	+	+
Organizational membership	o	o	o	o
Education	o	-	o	-
Income	-	o	+	+
Age	o	o	o	o
Gender	o	o	o	o
Religiosity	+	o	o	o
<i>N</i>	5,690	6,350	4,770	8,623

+ = significant positive effect

- = significant negative effect

o = no effect

Note: Analysis produced ordinal probit estimations, with robust standard errors. Detailed tables showing actual coefficients can be obtained from the authors on request. Probabilities were obtained using CLARIFY. The dependent variable is an additive index of trust in parliament and trust in civil service.

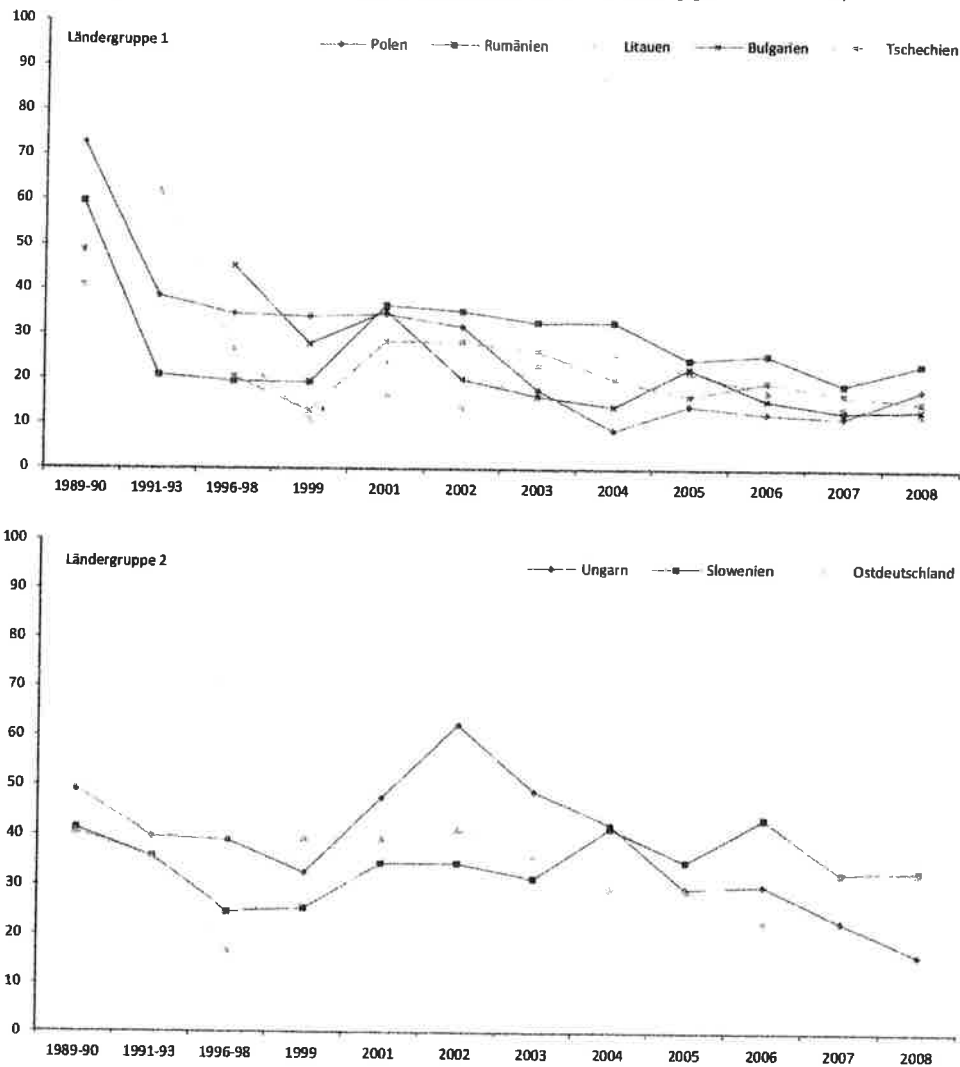
Nations included: Six established democracies: Finland, Japan, Spain, Sweden, USA, West Germany. Six former Soviet Republics: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine. Eight new democracies in Eastern Europe: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia. Four Latin American Nations: Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Peru.

Source: 1995 and 2001 World Values Surveys.

Source: Catterberg, Gabriela / Moreno, Alejandro;
 The Individual Bases of Political Trust: Trends
 in New and Established Democracies, Inter-
 national Journal of Public Opinion Research, Vol. 11,
 No. 1, 2006, P. 44.

Table 3

Abbildung 11: Vertrauen in das Parlament (Ländergruppen 1 und 2)



Quelle und Anmerkungen: vgl. Abbildung 9.

Source: Braun, Daniela: Politisches Vertrauen in neuen Demokratien. Wiesbaden 2013, p. 199.