



TRUST WITHIN EUROPE

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Political Capital is a Budapest-based, independent political research and consultancy institute with a decade of experience, a strong international network and reputation. The basic values of the institute are parliamentary democracy and market economy. The institute's main fields of interest are political radicalism, extremism and its social background, conspiracy theories, prejudices, election research and Russian political influence within the EU. Political Capital has strong expertise in quantitative analyses.

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Summary

In this research we aimed to give an overview of the current state of affairs and tendencies of trust.

Seven statements about the nature of trust

- 1) Trust is easy to destroy but much more difficult to build and rebuild. It is especially true for the political institutions.
- 2) Trust is hectic and stable at the same time. While we can clearly observe geographical patterns of trust and mistrust in Europe and that the order of institutions is stable, political events can lead to the dramatic rise or decline in trust and mistrust.
- 3) Mistrust is not necessarily and not always evil. Healthy democracies are based on a fine balance between trust and mistrust. For the proper functioning of a democracy, both vertical (towards institutions) and horizontal (towards other people) trust are needed. Low levels of vertical trust can undermine the effective governing of a society and poses a threat for the functioning of democratic institutions. Low levels of horizontal trust makes societies fragmented, vulnerable to the abuse of power, and dependent on the state. Horizontal trust is also essential for the economy, since it is the prerequisite of cooperating with strangers. But blind trust is not always adaptive, as it can make the citizens ignorant of the widespread abuse of power.
- 4) Corruption poisons trust. Perception of political actors as corrupt and experiences of corruption are two key factors leading to the erosion of trust in institutions.
- 5) Political and economic crises also undermine trust in traditional institutions and call for new explanations, leading to the proliferation of conspiracy theories.
- 6) Too high expectations erode trust in advance. Well-functioning institutions can generate trust in citizens, however, insufficient understanding of how the institutions work and the fact that people expect their governments to solve every one of their problems might reduce trust in them.

- 7) Mistrust can be bred by powerful ideologies. 'Fusion paranoia' became a widespread phenomenon: mistrust creates similar, conspiracy-based ideological narratives on the opposing sides of the political spectrum. Mistrust, rejection of the global status quo and a sympathy towards Vladimir Putin's regime and its ideology are becoming common denominators for anti-systemic movements on the left and the right.

Ten statements about the tendencies of trust in Europe

- 1) We could observe a dramatic decline in trust in the last decade. The proportion of those who trust the EU is only two-thirds of what we could observe before the crisis. As a consequence, Euroscepticism is gaining strength in Europe. In the current European Parliament, elected in 2014, practically twenty percent of the seats are filled by Eurosceptic parties, which is a significant rise from eight percent in 2009. At the same time, Euroscepticism is becoming more and more a part of the political mainstream. Trust declined most dramatically in countries that were hit hardest by the crisis and its afterlife: Spain, Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Italy, Slovenia and Ireland.
- 2) Distrust is dominant in Europe. In November 2014, 38 per cent of Europeans were extremely distrustful, while only 9 per cent were strongly trustful. The remaining 53 per cent had varying degrees of trust in the different institutions or did not have an opinion.
- 3) The crisis should not be blamed in itself; economic hardships just accelerated the decline of trust. The proportion of those who tend to trust their national parliaments has decreased in all of the "Old" EU member states in the last two decades – so the erosion of trust has started well before the outbreak of the crisis in Europe.
- 4) Trust in the EU is extremely fragile: the EU and its institutions are the most volatile in terms of trust among all political institutions.
- 5) Still, EU institutions are more popular than national political institutions. In 21 Member States citizens have less trust in their national parliaments than in the EU, while the case is the opposite in six countries only. It seems that the crisis of trust is not a crisis of trust in Europe but a crisis of trust in traditional forms of political representation.

- 6) Paradoxically, we trust the institutions we vote for the least. The least and most trusted institutions remained the same over the past ten years. The least trusted are national parliaments, governments and political parties; while the most trusted are the army, the police and the radio.
- 7) While the role of socio-demographic indicators is generally very weak, level of education seems to affect trust: lower trust levels go hand in hand with lower education levels.
- 8) Subjective well-being also correlates strongly with trust. Two-thirds of those not at all satisfied with their life are very mistrustful, while they compose only 28 per cent of the ones who are very satisfied. Objective well-being seems to be important as well: a higher living standard increases trust.
- 9) Social embeddedness, the extensivity of social networks, and the extent of help and support received from others inevitably enhance trust in individuals. The ones who feel discriminated against have significantly lower levels of trust.
- 10) There are four clusters of countries when it comes to trust:
 - a. The Nordic countries, the Netherlands and Switzerland where both vertical and horizontal trust is high
 - b. Belgium, Germany, Estonia, the United Kingdom, Ireland; the countries where both vertical and horizontal trust is moderate
 - c. Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Slovenia, Spain, France; the countries where both vertical and horizontal trust is below-average
 - d. Bulgaria, Cyprus, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia; the countries where both vertical and horizontal trust is extremely low.

Five statements on how the social media can help to spread mistrust

- 1) Social media sites are used as platforms of political mobilization by movements and parties that build their politics on mistrust. Also, it amplifies the “echo chamber effect” – likeminded people are radicalizing each other.
- 2) Social media seems to be not only a platform that ignores geo-

graphical borders, but also one that demolishes ideological borders. Political mistrust plays the perfect role of the common denominator between groups that echo mistrust. Fusion paranoia is a widespread phenomenon in social media. Ideas are shared and connected by different users, groups or even political movements, who are often at the opposite sides of the political spectrum.

- 3) The refugee crisis has led to an unprecedented proliferation of conspiracy theories, and to the integration of the whole spectrum of mistrust. For example, an anti-Semitic speech of the infamous conspiracy theorist David Duke on the refugee crisis (stating that the Jews are responsible for the influx of migrants) was shared by Occupy Movement HQ account on Twitter. David Duke expressed his admiration of Occupy beforehand. This is an example that the rejection of the “system” brings groups at the opposing sides of the political spectrum closer to each other.
- 4) At the same time, there is a diversity in conspiracy theories on the refugee crisis. There is a group of those who are more afraid of the Jews and envisage the ‘Zionist’ conspiracy and those who believe in the ‘ISIS Trojan horse’ conspiracy theory (the refugee crisis is the result of the activity of ISIS). The two are mainly separated from each other even though there are bridges between them. The ones who mainly want to blame the Jews and the ones who want to blame Muslims are still rather different, however, there are theories and groups that combine the two approaches.
- 5) The “Handbook of Refugees” that helps the settlement of refugees published by the W2EU organization became a starting point for many conspiracy theorists. Some of them blame George Soros as the mastermind behind the refugee crisis¹. The supporters and opponents of the Handbook are divided, separately tweeting each other’s posts – reinforcing the echo chamber theory again. However, the source of these two kinds of interpretations is the same neutral report from Sky News. Two completely different and mutually exclusive narratives arose from the same factual starting point – showing that distrust does not necessary need any factual basis.

¹ While OSF denied that it financed the project.

Recommendations: how to build and strengthen trust?

- 1) Strengthening trust cannot be a goal in itself. The goal should be to demolish the paranoiac and irrational patterns of mistrust while maintaining healthy levels of skepticism – the precondition of critical thinking that is needed for well-functioning democracies. But trust should not be made a norm, given that institutions and political players do not deserve it anytime and anywhere – especially in the light of illiberal tendencies in Southern and Eastern Europe.
- 2) Lowering expectations is crucial. In a lot of cases, mistrust is a consequence of the fact that there are still too high hopes for political institutions to solve all the problems. Politicians, instead of raising expectations sky-high during the electoral campaigns, should rather lower them in cooperation in order to avoid the total collapse of trust as a result of the disillusionment from politicians.
- 3) Trust is easier to be built bottom-up: strong social networks, interpersonal support and active involvement in organizations help to build up social capital and social trust. More social involvement should be encouraged to challenge the fragmentation of societies, which contributes to the rise of mistrust.
- 4) As higher education levels correlate with higher trust, education seems to be the key to maintain an acceptable level of confidence. Key fields of education are better understanding of social and political processes and increasing media literacy skills to counter conspiracy theories promoted on social media.
- 5) As mistrust is often based on the lack of experiences, direct positive contacts between the representatives of institutions and the citizens can help to re-build mistrust.
- 6) Since dissatisfaction with life seems to be a key factor of mistrust, the feeling of satisfaction and success shall be promoted within societies by lowering expectations and encouraging personal engagement. Local actions aiming at solving problems and bringing change shall be encouraged and supported.

1. The Nature of Trust

Election results across Europe in the past five years have shown a significant increase in support for Eurosceptic and anti-establishment parties. In the current European Parliament, elected in 2014, practically twenty percent of the seats are filled by such parties, which is a significant rise from eight percent in 2009². Furthermore, soft Euroscepticism is becoming more and more mainstream among politicians and voters of mainstream parties as well.

Politicians, not just the ones on the margins, are building their politics increasingly on mistrust in national and international political elites. Alexis Tsipras, Prime Minister of Greece; Jeremy Corbyn, new leader of Labour in the United Kingdom; and Donald Trump, currently the most popular presidential candidate in the United States, are obvious examples.

The decrease of political trust in institutions is articulated in the withdrawal from established political structures and mistrust in classic forms of democratic representation, as figures on declining electoral turnout (e.g. on the EP elections) and party membership rates demonstrate. Trust in institutions clearly determines the level of participation in an election. For example, the British turnout for the European Parliamentary election in 2014 was 35%³, which was strongly related to the belief among citizens that their voice does not matter in the elections, shared by 74% of the electorate⁴.

Research and recent survey results have shown that anti-establishment issues can be used to cover up policies otherwise unpopular with the electorate of populist parties. For example, as a 2014 Medián survey of voters of Jobbik, Hungary's far-right, pro-Russian party, which has been gathering support in recent election polls⁵, reveals a considerable preference for the United States (48%) over the Russian Federation

² The ratio of MEPs in the far-right EAF, formed in 2015, the non-attached MEPs (mainly consists of extreme right MEPS) the populist right EFDD, the radical left GUE-NGL altogether. In the previous cycle, the ratio of EFD, Gue-NGL and the non-attached MEPs.

³ European Parliament election turnout 1979–2014, <http://www.ukpolitical.info/european-parliament-election-turnout.htm>

⁴ NatCen, Social Research, Political Disengagement and Trust in Europe <https://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/308663/final-report.pdf>

⁵ Due to the 2014 parliamentary elections, Jobbik has become the third largest political party in the Hungarian National Assembly gathering 20.54% of the votes or 1, 020, 476 in total (National Election Office http://www.valasztas.hu/hu/ogyyv2014/858/858_0_index.html)

(27%) in a hypothetical new Cold War situation. This, however, is not reflected proportionally in Jobbik's political behavior, which continuously leans eastward and acts as an uncritical supporter of Vladimir Putin's geopolitical goals⁶. As Political Capital concluded in a study, "the Politics of No" creates a perfect breeding ground for exploiting the mistrust of external players. "Given the often dualistic nature of political debate — in which one is either "for" or "against" something or one has to vote "yes" or "no" — disillusionment with the EU could become a "push factor" for voters, driving them away from a united Europe and toward Russia, one of the main critics of European values. It does not mean that Euroscepticism should be automatically regarded as pro-Putinism. Widespread pessimism about the EU project and a general erosion of trust in Europe helps Putin to promote his regime's ideology and interests more effectively"⁷.

Jobbik and other European radical parties find their support base in the broader group of people disillusioned with the current system rather than only among advocates of their policies, connected to xenophobia and extreme protectionism, nationalism and an anti-Western attitudes⁸.

1.1. Approaches and origin of trust

With this in mind, political trust in the current democratic establishment is crucial – but an asset that is more and more difficult to find. In general terms, trust is the cognitive action of empowering a trustee at the present time because of its past-record of trustworthiness with the belief that the future return will be bigger than the current investment⁹. It means that the public votes for a given party, for instance, endowing them with legitimacy to govern with the conviction that they would

⁶ Juhász, Attila et al. (2015): *"I am Euroasian". The Kremlin connections of the Hungarian far-right*. Political Capital and Social Development Institute. Budapest: n.p. Available at: http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_SDI_Boll_study_IamEurasian.pdf

⁷ Krekó, Péter et al. (2015): *Europe's New Pro-Putin Coalition: the Parties of 'No'*. Institute of Modern Russia. Available at: <http://imrussia.org/en/analysis/world/2368-europes-new-pro-putin-coalition-the-parties-of-no>

⁸ Williams, Andrew J. (2005): *Liberalism and War the Victors and the Vanquished*. London: Routledge.

⁹ Žiliukaitė, Rūta (2007): "The Anatomy of Generalized Trust: The Case of Lithuania." In *Lithuanian Identity and Values*, edited by Savicka, Aida. Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. Available at: <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series04/IVA-31/front.htm>

deliver while at the helm. Piotr Sztompka conceptualizes it as “a bet on the future contingent actions of others”¹⁰.

This notion of trust has a number of implications and is highly dependent on the background of the subject of trust (trustor) including its socialization and its experience with social capital, the nature of the object of trust (trustee), and the circumstances of their relationship. Some scholars say that the concept of ‘political trust’ needs to be ‘scaled down’ to the peculiarities of the relationship between the trustor and the trustee¹¹. Consequently, evaluating public attitudes towards political institutions should focus only on the public’s immediate reaction to the performance of the object of trust¹². This is a more specific and linear approach, which employs positivist empirical research. Others consider political trust to be ‘defused’ support for the political system as a whole¹³ and focus exclusively on the implications of the public’s ‘normative expectations’. According to Easton’s classification, public trust spreads across a wide spectrum from specific to general, depending on the object of this trust: particularistic (political actors: elected political officials and leaders), institutional (based on the performance of the given institutions), structural (the general establishment, mode of governance, and basic values at its root), communal (identification with fellow citizens, trust in their judgment and reliability), and generalized (evaluation of the overall performance of politicians, institutions, the regime, the structure and the wider community)¹⁴. According to our research, introduced later in this paper, the different types of trust are so strongly correlated that it is completely justified talking about ‘defused’ trust as a feature of political systems.

A related debate in the literature is where trust comes from, and to what extent it is based on real experiences¹⁵. Some scholars argue that

¹⁰ Sztompka, Piotr. (1998): “Trust, Distrust and Two Paradoxes of Democracy”. *European Journal of Social Theory* 1 (1):19–32. p. 20

¹¹ Hardin, Russel. (2002): *Trust and trustworthiness*. Russel Sage Foundation

¹² Hardin, Russel. (2002): *Trust and trustworthiness*. Russel Sage Foundation

¹³ Easton, David. (1965). *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. New York: Wiley

¹⁴ Ervasti, H et al (2008): *Nordic Social Attitudes in a European Perspective*, London: Edward Elgar Publishing

¹⁵ Mishler, W. and R. Rose. (2001): “What Are the Origins of Political Trust?: Testing Institutional and Cultural Theories in Post-communist Societies.” In *Comparative Political Studies* 34.1: 30–62. Available at http://www.researchgate.net/publication/238430635_What_Are_The_Origins_of_Political_Trust_Testing_Institutional_and_Cultural_Theories_in_Post-Communist_Societies; Shaleva, Anna (2015): “Culture or Institutions? A Quasi-Experiment on the

political trust is the result of early-life socialization in a certain cultural environment. This approach places more emphasis on social norms as determinants of trust instead of the real experiences. Another approach, however, underlines the rational evaluation of institutions' performance done at the time by the public. Analyzing public satisfaction is crucial to understand why some institutions enjoy more trust than others¹⁶. Based on our researches, a combined approach is justified. Trust levels are both connected to the cultural environment that creates a general attitude towards others and institutions (on this basis, a ranking is established for countries, which remains quite stable over time), but, at the same time, the hectic nature of trust in given countries as a reaction to political events makes it obvious that experiences matter as well.

1.2. Types of Trust

Putnam has defined social capital as "connections among people – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them"¹⁷. Many scholars agree that trust is an essential element of social capital¹⁸.

According to a widespread and useful distinction, trust can be vertical and horizontal: the former means trust in authorities and institutions "above" the citizens, while the latter refers to the trust in other citizens, the personal or social trust.¹⁹ Two types of interpersonal trust should be distinguished: particular or "thick trust" and generalized or "thin trust". The former embraces trust towards specific individuals one knows, such as relatives, friends, acquaintances, neighbors etc., while the latter is trust in people in general. Particularistic trust is based mainly on "face-to-face contacts, long-term acquaintance and mutual reliable credentials"²⁰

Origins of Political Trust in Europe" SSRN Electronic Journal SSRN Journal; Sniderman, P.M.; & Hagendoorn, L. (2007). *When Ways of Life Collide*. Princeton University Press

¹⁶ Shaleva, Anna, 2015

¹⁷ Putnam, Robert D. (2000): *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster. p. 19.

¹⁸ Coleman, James S. (1988): "Social capital in the creation of human capital." In *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 94. (Supplement): S95-S120.

¹⁹ Vertical, institutional, and political trust, as well as horizontal, personal, and social trust are used as synonyms throughout this paper.

²⁰ Bähre, Erik and Peer Smets: Counting on People; Trust and Social Control in ROSCAs in P. Smets, H. Wells & J. van Loon (eds.) *Trust and Co-operation; Symbolic Economies in an Age of Cultural Differentiation*, 51–66, Spinhuis: Amsterdam p. 53

or on the association of the trustee (object of trust) with a single person such as a political leader, being it even the President or Prime Minister. Particularistic trust can be an important precursor to institutional trust as well when there is personal contact with political institutions and their leaders.

Generalized trust is “the potential readiness of citizens to cooperate with each other and to abstract preparedness to engage in civic endeavours with each other”²¹. Such trust stretches beyond face-to-face interaction and is closely knitted in the perception of the Imagined Community – the sense of belonging to a group (ethnic, national, religious, etc.) never having met all of its members and the attitudes the individual shows towards such members²². Political identities are playing a key role here. Generalized trust in others and how it relates to institutional trust – and the correlation of the two – will be examined later in this study.

1.3. Why is trust important?

For the proper functioning of a democracy, both vertical and horizontal trust are needed. Inglehart claims that a relatively high level of interpersonal trust supports the stability of democratic institutions²³, moreover, horizontal trust is also essential for the economy, since it is the prerequisite of cooperating with strangers.²⁴ “It is necessary not only to trust others before acting cooperatively, but also believe that one is trusted by others²⁵”.

Without a certain level of trust, institutions are practically unable to function. As Marien and Hooghe argues: “Low trust in political institutions results in less public willingness to defer to decisions taken by

²¹ Stolle, Dietlind; Soroka, Stuart; Johnston, Richard (2008). When Does Diversity Erode Trust? Neighborhood Diversity, Interpersonal Trust and the Mediating Effect of Social Interactions. *Political Studies*: 2008 VOL 56, 57–75

²² Stolle, Dietlind (2002): “Bowling Together, Bowling Alone: The Development of Generalized Trust in Voluntary Associations.” In *Political Psychology* 19.3, Special Issue: Psychological Approaches to Social Capital p. 497–525

²³ Inglehart, Ronald (1999): “Trust, well-being and democracy.” In *Democracy and Trust*, edited by Mark E. Warren. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 88–120.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 89.

²⁵ Gambetta, Diego (1988): “Can We Trust Trust?” In *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, edited by Diego Gambetta. Oxford: Blackwell. p. 216. Cited by Putnam, Robert D. (1993): *Making democracy work: civic tradition in modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p. 164.

those institutions. In the absence of voluntary compliance, governments have to resort to coercive measures to enforce regulations with the result that governing is rendered more difficult and more costly. Therefore, low levels of political trust can undermine the effective governing of a society and carry with them a potential threat to the functioning of democratic processes²⁶."

Some scholars argue, however, that not all types of personal trust are useful. Since particular personal trust is mostly attached to a group of people based on one's relation to the group, it does not necessarily have to produce trust in others. Generalized trust is extensive, and does not only apply to a particular group of people²⁷. "Blind" generalized trust is not necessarily helpful in all cases and environments, and can be harmful as well, if trust is abused.

1.4. What can strengthen and undermine distrust?

There are a lot of factors that can change existing levels of trust. Expectations and their relations to experiences play a key role in this process. "Political trust is likely to be dependent on citizens' evaluations of political institutions. These evaluations are based on citizens' normative expectations and perceptions of how institutions work²⁸." Following this line of thought, citizens perceiving that these institutions do not fulfil their normative expectation can lose political trust. The performance of institutions seems to be a key factor²⁹, as well-functioning institutions can convince the public that they are trustworthy, creating the most stable source of social capital³⁰. But perception of performance can completely depend on preliminary expectations. Too high expectations can

²⁶ Marien, Sofie and Hooghe, Marc (2011): "Does political trust matter? An empirical investigation into the relation between political trust and support for law compliance." In *European Journal of Political Research*. Vol. 50. 267–291. p. 282.

²⁷ Uslaner, Eric M. (2014): "The Economic Crisis of 2008, Trust in Government, and Generalized Trust." In *Public Trust in Business*. p. 19–50. Available at: <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/crr/journal/v13/n2/full/crr20108a.html>

²⁸ Grönlund, Kimmo and Setälä, Maija (2007): "Political Trust, Satisfaction and Voter Turnout." In *Comparative European Politics*. Vol. 5. No. 1. 400–422. p. 419

²⁹ Fukuyama, Francis (1995). *Trust: The Social Virtues and Creation of Prosperity*, London: First Free Press

³⁰ "What is social capital?" In *OECD Insights: Human Capital*. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/insights/37966934.pdf>

easily lead to quickly declining levels of trust if the experiences lag behind – which is a typical phenomenon, especially after elections. Sometimes real experiences do not play any role in shaping the levels of trust and construed perceptions dominate. Although some institutions may objectively achieve levels of trustworthiness through their performance, Hardin³¹ argues that citizens' trust in them could be hampered by insufficient understanding of how these institutions work or the cognitive misjudgment of visible figures in power who seem to dictate the institution's image. He makes a clear distinction between reliability and confidence, which lies in past experiences with the trustee, and the basis for trust, which is in the cognitive evaluation of construed perception. This construed perception is volatile because its building components are constantly changing rhetoric and manipulated information from non-official resources. On the other hand, cultural environment can also determine the levels of construed trust – as we will see when analyzing the differences in trust levels among geographical-cultural regions in Europe.

Reputation, which is an important determinant of trust, is mostly influenced by constructed perception by third parties' rhetoric and treatment of the trustor. For instance, much of the individual political reputation is built through the individual's presence in media, the media's treatment, political analysts' critique, and institutional attitudes towards the political figure. All these, including any allegations (false or true) of wrongdoing, have proven to be crucial for the building of reputation and level of trustfulness.

Corruption has proven to have an undeniable effect on public trust in institutions. The perception of political players as corrupt and the experience of corruption are two of the major reasons for the lack of trust and declining participation³². Those who have been exposed to corruption directly are more prone to lose their general political trust in a wide spectrum of institutions, be alienated from the system and, as a result, they lose their willingness to vote or they vote for populist parties promising "remedies" through the restoration of the *vox populi*³³ in the political system.

³¹ Hardin, Russel (2002): Trust and trustworthiness. Russel Sage Foundation

³² Ziller, Conrad and Thomas Schübel. 2015. "The Pure People' versus 'the Corrupt Elite'? Political Corruption, Political Trust and the Success of Radical Right Parties in Europe" Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties 25 (3): 368-386

³³ *ibid*

The presence of high corruption levels directly affects the rules of societal fairness, class privileges and financial inequality³⁴. As it creates inefficient governance, the culture of corruption creates an environment where only those who can afford it have access to public services. But corruption is not only the cause but the consequence of mistrust as well, creating a vicious circle. According to the 2006 Life in Transition Survey³⁵ conducted by the EBRD in 28 countries, mistrust of the political system is the main reason for the increase in tax evasion, withdrawal of public support, and participation in corrupt practices.

Corruption does not have the same impact on trust in the whole spectrum of a society. The upper segment of the society, who are relatively well-off and enjoy political and financial security, claim to judge the trustworthiness of institutions by their level of corruption³⁶. Meanwhile, those who see themselves as less well-off evaluate institutional trustworthiness based on the output³⁷. Consequently, there is a tendency to support authoritarian regimes more by the less well-off, as long as they deliver on their economic promises, while for the better-off, political honesty and corrupt (or anti-corruption) policies matter more³⁸.

People lacking resources and experiencing corruption are more likely to be politically apathetic and are more susceptible to conspiracy theories, which, subsequently, lowers their willingness to participate in political action even more. As a consequence, the average voter turnout for elections across a wide variety of countries fell from 83% on average to 72% between the years 2000–2011.³⁹ Austerity also plays a key role here: citizens feel less inclined to vote because of the feeling of financial deprivation, low economic performance and the lack of power of the states to act.⁴⁰

³⁴ Uslaner, Eric M. (1999): "Democracy and social capital." In *Democracy and Trust*, edited by Mark E. Warren. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 88–120.

³⁵ *Life in Transition Survey (LITS) 2006. A brief report on observations, experiences and methodology from the survey*. European. (2006). Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Available at: [http://www.ebrd.com/documents/comms-and-bis/life-in-transition-survey-\(lits\)-2006-a-brief-report-on-observations,-experiences-and-methodology-from-the-survey-\(2mb---pdf\)-.pdf](http://www.ebrd.com/documents/comms-and-bis/life-in-transition-survey-(lits)-2006-a-brief-report-on-observations,-experiences-and-methodology-from-the-survey-(2mb---pdf)-.pdf)

³⁶ Zmerli, Sonja, and Ken Newton (2011): "Chapter Four: Winners, Losers, and Three Types of Trust." In *Political Trust: Why Context Matters*. Colchester, UK: ECPR. 67–94.

³⁷ Fukuyama, Francis (1995): *Trust: The Social Virtues and Creation of Prosperity*, London

³⁸ Bachmann, R., and Inkpen, A. C. (2011): "Understanding Institutional-based Trust Building Processes in Inter-organizational Relationships." In *Organization Studies*. pp. 281–301

³⁹ Scafer, A. (2013): *Politics in the Age of Austerity*. Polity Press, UK, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Schafer, p. 11.

Perception of widespread inequalities can also undermine trust. Zmerli and Newton argue that this is a consequence of a widespread feeling of being 'the loser of society'⁴¹. When governance does not deliver equal access to vital services and does not provide for its citizens, the perception of inequality strengthens, with which disenchantment and distrust surge. Consequently, economic growth and access to its benefits is unattainable by a portion of society. The bigger this portion of the society is, the higher mistrust in established social structures will be, weakening the links in the social networks and destabilizing social cohesion and political stability. Eventually, diverting mistrust away from official state institutions can lead to a shift in mistrust towards actors outside of the establishment (either political parties or foreign states or organizations).

Atypical events, especially crises, play a key role in destroying trust. The financial and economic crisis of 2008 triggered a crisis of trust⁴² - which we will see later in the figures as well. At the backdrop of the Greek bailout talks, however, this crisis seems to be part of a 'trust development' process, a long story rather than a one-time interaction⁴³. Crises are also important because economic performance matters in shaping political trust. People's impression of economic performance and, to a lesser extent, unemployment have an effect on political trust as well.⁴⁴ Household income has an effect on the probability that a person trusts the government and the parliament.⁴⁵ Massive scepticism through fear of unemployment, economic hardship and loss of identity can make people seek explanations that are different from the mainstream.

Besides economic crises, social changes can undermine political trust as well. Concern for immigration can also breed hostility towards the political system. There is a clear relationship between immigration, negative perceptions and distrust of institutions, and governing elites.⁴⁶ Furthermore, citizens are more likely to distrust the political system if there are no parties that represent their views on immigration.⁴⁷ If this is true,

⁴¹ Zmerli, Sonja, and Ken Newton, 2011

⁴² Uslaner, Eric M, 2014

⁴³ Bachman, R., and Inkpen, A. C. 2011

⁴⁴ Mishler, W. and Rose, R., 2001, p. 24.

⁴⁵ Scafer, A., 2013, p. 198.

⁴⁶ McLaren, L. (2015): *Immigration and the Perceptions of National Political System in Europe*. Oxford University Press, UK, p. 124.

⁴⁷ McLaren, 2015, p. 118.

populist radical right-wing parties exploiting anti-immigrant sentiment might rather dilute than amplify mistrust.

Memberships in groups and institutions can help a lot to build trust. According to the structure-centered approach, generalized trust is constructed after a long process of early-life socialization into the society's cultural and political norms, via various public networks and associations, which, according to Tocqueville⁴⁸, increase people's trust in fellow citizens. On a voluntary basis, citizens participate in diverse communication with each other, which strengthens the perception of connectivity within a wider Imagined Community⁴⁹. Consequently, participants learn to trust each other and eventually institutions which have sprung from the democratic process, increasing general trust. Therefore, a system's capability of creating and maintaining civil organization, which mirrors local social values, matters a lot in creating trust⁵⁰. At the same time, interactions occurring in the family, at school or at the workplace⁵¹ are extremely important as well⁵², and sometimes so is creating models of interaction in organizations.

1.5. Ideologically driven mistrust and the fusion paranoia

Mistrust can be also breed by powerful ideologies, and mistrust can also become a common denominator for such ideologies. 'Fusion paranoia' is the phenomenon when mistrust creates similar, conspiracy-based ideological narratives on the opposing sides of the political spectrum. Researchers in the 1960s focused on the effect of conspiracism on the far-right and found that the far-left is also susceptible to it.⁵³ Research in the 1990s identified fusion paranoia as a "bipolar" phenomenon, affecting both the left and right sides of the political scale⁵⁴ and suggests that

⁴⁸ Tocqueville as discussed in: Kontinen, Annamari (2009): *Civic Mind and Good Citizens: Comparative Perspectives*. Tampere: Tampere University Press.

⁴⁹ Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. (1991). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Revised and extended. ed.). London: Verso. pp. 6–7.

⁵⁰ Rothstein, B. and Stolle, D. (2002): 'How Political Institutions Create and Destroy Social Capital: An Institutional Theory of Generalized Trust', accepted for 98th Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, Aug 29th–Sept 2nd, 2002.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ervasti, H. et al, 2008

⁵³ Bratich, Z. J. (2008): *Conspiracy Panics: Political Rationality and Popular Culture*. State University of New York Press, Albany, pp. 35–36.

⁵⁴ Bratich, 2008, p. 36.

the main danger of fusion paranoia is not in the “given political theory’s political affiliation but rather in the moment when elements gravitate from the mainstream to the extreme at either end, and then return to infiltrate and seduce that mainstream.”⁵⁵

Extreme and the mainstream are usually closer to each other than it seems.⁵⁶ The definition of extreme is that it is some degree of an exaggeration of common traits⁵⁷ and Bratich identifies the difference between extremism and mainstream as a discrepancy of “degree not of kind.”⁵⁸ Berlet and Lyons, following this logic, claim that “Despite widespread popular rhetoric, it is neither acute nor useful to portray right-wing populists as a ‘lunatic fringe’ of marginal right-wing ‘extremists’. Right-wing populists are not dangerous because they are crazy irrational zealots – but because they are not.”⁵⁹ This is in line with Cas Mudde’s⁶⁰ “pathological normalcy” approach, which asserts that the populist radical right’s ideology should be understood as the radicalization of mainstream values rather than the antithesis to them. It is especially true for mistrust – a tendency that is shared by a wide range of the electorate, so it can be easily regarded as mainstream. Mark Fenster writes that conspiracy theorists only trust the corruptness of politics and that lack of trust leads them towards feeling excluded from the political sphere.⁶¹ The everyday lives of people are driven by the fear of loss of employment and identity and conspiracy theories explain “the victory of seemingly demonological forces and the emptiness and inaccessibility of politics, but it also establishes a particular logic based on the interpretation of phenomena within an explanatory narrative form that is profoundly sceptical of dominant discourse.”⁶²

Conspiracy theories not only arise from mistrust – but they can also destroy trust. An experiment with British undergraduate students showed that willingness to participate in political activity decreases with expo-

⁵⁵ Bratich, 2008, p. 36.

⁵⁶ This is what the Horseshoe theory explains – which is going to be detailed in a later chapter.

⁵⁷ Bratich, 2008, p. 37.

⁵⁸ Bratich, 2008, p. 37.

⁵⁹ Berlet, C. and Lyons, M. N. (2000): *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort*. Guilford Press, New York, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Mudde, C. (2010): “The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy” *West European Politics* 33.6 1167-1186. Available at: http://works.bepress.com/cas_mudde/26

⁶¹ Fenster, M. (1999): *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*. University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, p. 71.

⁶² Fenster, 1999, p. 72.

sure to conspiracy theories, undermining trust⁶³. The main reason is that “being exposed to government conspiracy theories may increase feelings that one’s actions will have little impact, which may subsequently lower one’s intentions to engage in political behavior.”⁶⁴ A 2008 census in the US revealed that of the fifteen million people who registered to vote but did not do so in the end, 13% reported they did not vote because they felt their vote would not make a difference, while 46% of those not interested to vote reported they were not involved in politics.⁶⁵ Jolly & Douglas write that their report shows a link between exposure to conspiracies, the feeling of powerlessness and willingness to participate in political activities.⁶⁶

2. Tendencies and patterns of trust in the European Union

In the following, we present our detailed analysis of the level of trust Europeans have in their institutions, how that trust has changed over the past two decades, and how it differs among Member States. We used data from the European Commission’s Standard Eurobarometer series.⁶⁷

Eurobarometer surveyors ask respondents how much trust they have in certain institutions, including the written press, radio, television, the internet, the judiciary, the police, the army, political parties, national governments, national parliaments, the European Union and others. There are only two possible answers to these questions: ‘*tend to trust*’ and ‘*tend not to trust*.’ For further analysis, datasets can be downloaded from the GESIS Data Archive.⁶⁸ Our own calculations are based on raw datasets obtained from this archive.

⁶³ Jolly, D. and Douglas, K. M. (2014): “The Social Consequences of Conspiracism: Exposure to Conspiracy Theories Decreases Intentions to Engage in Political Activities and to Reduce one’s Carbon Footprint”. In *British Journal of Psychology*. 105(35–36), p. 41.

⁶⁴ Jolly and Douglas, p. 42.

⁶⁵ File, T. and Crissy, S. (2008): *Voting and Registration in the Elections of November 2008*. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p20-562.pdf>

⁶⁶ Jolly and Douglas, pp. 41–43.

⁶⁷ The Standard Eurobarometer is a series of surveys taken on behalf of the European Commission since 1973. Data is collected through in-person interviews with about 1000 people in each Member State at least twice per year. <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/General/index>

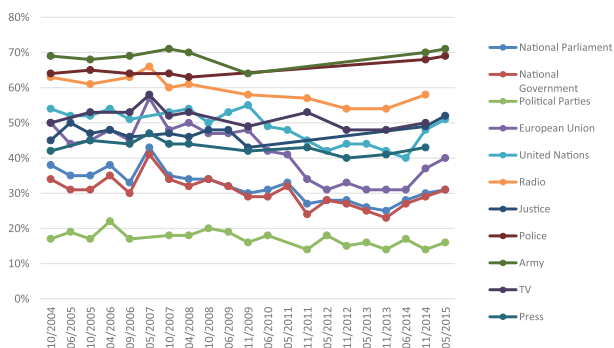
⁶⁸ <http://zacat.gesis.org/webview/>

2.1. Current levels of trust in the European Union

According to the latest Eurobarometer, which was polled in May 2015,⁶⁹ out of all surveyed institutions Europeans⁷⁰ tend to have the most trust in the police and the army: 71 per cent of respondents trust the army, and 69 per cent trust the police. A narrow, but still absolute, majority trusts the legal system (52%) and the United Nations (51%). Among different media types,⁷¹ radio is the most trusted (58%), followed by television (50%). The least trusted media format is the written press (43%).

Trust in the European Union is currently at 40%, which is lower than it is in the UN. However, people are more confident in the EU than they are in national governments. While the ratio of people who now trust the EU is only two-thirds of what it had been just before the 2007 economic crisis (when it was 58%), most Europeans still trust the EU more than their national governments, which are only trusted by 31% of respondents on average, while 63% tend not to trust them. Trust in national parliaments is at similar levels as trust in national governments. Europeans have the lowest level of trust in political parties: only 16% tend to trust them, while 78% mistrust (the rest did not respond).

Figure 1: **Trust in institutions**
(percentage of answers 'tend to trust' in the EU28)



⁶⁹ Standard Eurobarometer 83, <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2099>

⁷⁰ Weighted average for the 28 Member States.

⁷¹ These data come from Standard Eurobarometer 82, surveyed in November 2014.

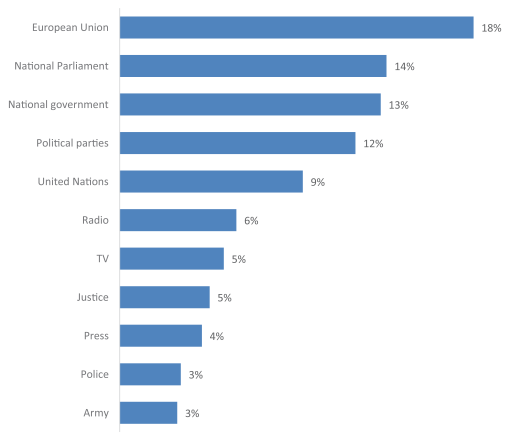
2.2. Trends – the volatility of trust in the period between 2004–2015

The most trusted and mistrusted institutions do not show much change over time. In the past 10 years the three most trusted institutions were always the army, the police, and the radio, while the three least trusted were always political parties, national governments, and parliaments. The middle of the list is much more hectic.

Trust in the European Union is the most hectic: we can see a drop of 20 percentage points in three years. In order to compare volatility more precisely, we calculated the relative standard deviations of these data series. The highest value is in the case of the European Union (18%), followed by, less surprisingly, the national parliaments (14%) and national governments (13%). Volatility of trust in the police and the army is only 3 per cent.

The good news is that in the last one and a half years, the volatility of the level of trust in institutions was a cure rather than a curse: since the end of 2014 (as a possible result of the recovery from the crisis), trust has been on the rise. The two main beneficiaries of this trend are international institutions: the EU and the United Nations.

Figure 2: **Volatility of trust** (*relative standard deviation of the proportions of those who tended to trust institutions in the EU28 between 2004–2015*)



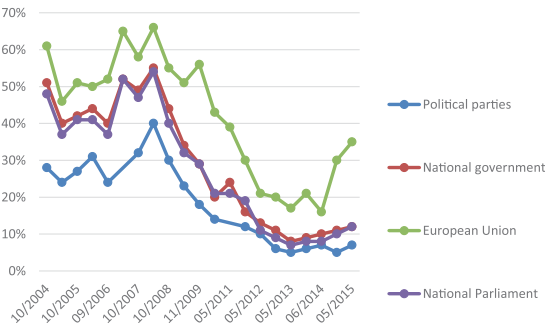
2.3. Recession erodes trust: extreme cases

On the level of the Member States, trust in domestic political institutions turns out to be the most volatile. Below we present some selected countries where the level of trust shows extreme volatility. Maybe not so surprisingly, some of these countries are the ones that experienced the deepest recession, followed by years of austerity.

Spain

Spain is one of the most dramatic cases. Trust in the national political institutions decreased by 47 percentage points (!) within 5 years. In 2013 less than 10 per cent of the adult population trusted the government and the parliament, while in 2008 these proportions were 55 and 54 per cent, respectively. Trust in the EU dropped at the same pace as trust in domestic political institutions during 2008–2013. These data suggest that people tend to judge these institutions similarly, without distinction. However, that has not been true during the past year, when trust in the EU has improved markedly (from 16 to 35 points), while trust in the government and the parliament has increased only slightly. The reasons might be that Spanish citizens are welcoming anti-corruption steps, and that EU leaders were rather slowing down the secession movements in Catalunya by saying that an independent Catalunya would not become automatically the member of the EU.

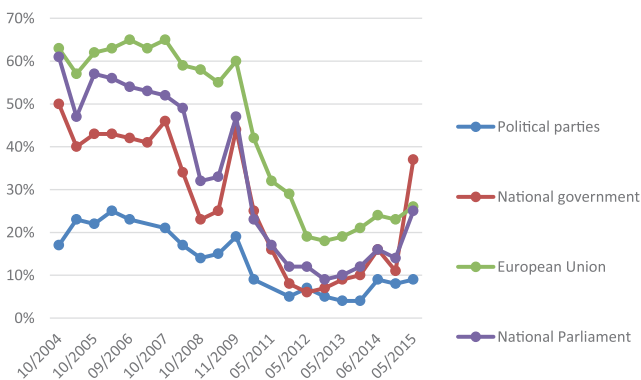
Figure 3: **Trust in institutions in Spain**
(percentage of answers 'tend to trust')



Greece

Back in 2004, the levels of trust in Greece were relatively high. More than 6 out of 10 Greeks tended to trust the EU and the Parliament. However, starting in 2008, there was a significant drop in trust at the domestic level. Even though trust returned to earlier levels by the end of 2009, this was short-lived. Within less than 2 years, trust in political institutions eroded to levels never seen before. In May 2015, trust in the government increased dramatically (as a result of the election of the first Syriza-Anel government), but – contrary to the Spanish example – trust in EU institutions did not. The explanation is simple: Greeks did not like the fact that international creditors, backed by leading EU politicians and institutions, were calling for more austerity.

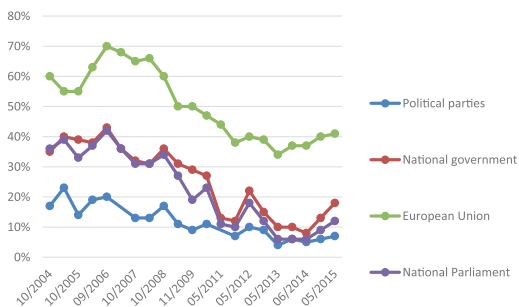
Figure 4: Trust in institutions in Greece
(percentage of answers 'tend to trust')



Slovenia

As in most post-socialist countries, trust in the European Union has traditionally been (since the country's accession) much higher in Slovenia than it has been in domestic political institutions. That does not mean it has remained stable over the past 10 years, but it has had fewer downturns than trust in the government has. The lowest values were measured in June 2014, when only 8% of Slovenians trusted the government, 6% trusted the parliament, and 5 per cent trusted political parties.

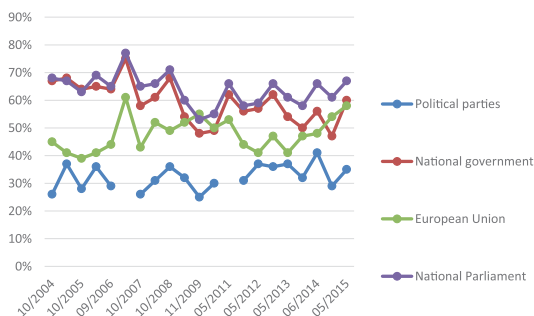
Figure 5: Trust in institutions in Slovenia
(percentage of answers 'tend to trust')



Finland

In some of the Member States (especially Nordic countries), the level of trust is rather stable and high. Finland is a perfect example of this “extreme stability”, as the absolute majority of Finnish people have tended to trust the national parliament over the past 11 years. Volatility is 24 percentage points – half of what was measured in Spain. Assessment of political parties was also stable – in the 25–41 percent interval – though, as everywhere, at a much lower level than the other political institutions. Contrary to what we find in Eastern European Member States, Finnish people tend to place more trust in domestic political institutions than in the EU.

Figure 6: Trust in institutions in Finland
(percentage of answers 'tend to trust')

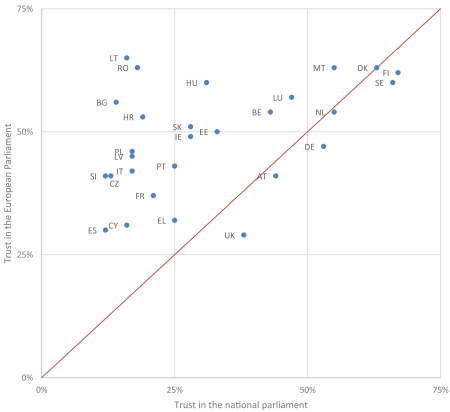


2.4. Who deserves more trust? European or national politicians?

Which directly elected institution do EU citizens trust more – the European Parliament or the national parliament? According to the survey conducted in May 2015, 43% of Europeans tend to trust the European Parliament, while 31% trust their national parliaments. This difference appears in most member states: In 21 countries, people tend to trust their own parliaments less than they trust the European Parliament (EP). In Denmark, the levels are equal (63% trust both). There are only six exceptions where national parliaments are preferred over the EP: Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

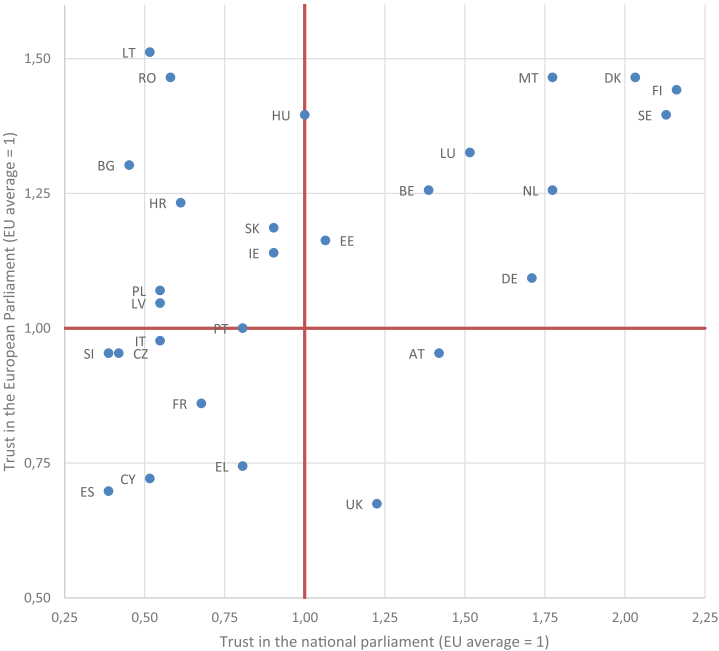
The most extreme differences can be seen in Lithuania, where 65 per cent of respondents trust the EP, while only 16 per cent trust the Lithuanian Parliament. The difference is also large in Romania (63 per cent vs. 18 per cent), Bulgaria (56 per cent vs. 14 per cent), and Croatia (53 per cent vs. 19 per cent). These countries are located in the upper left corner of the chart below. Five Member States are positioned in the upper right corner, where the absolute majority of respondents tend to trust both the national parliament and the EP. Four of these are North-Western European Countries: Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Malta, and the Netherlands.

Figure 7: **Trust in the European Union vs. trust in the national parliament** (*proportion of answers ‘tend to trust’ in May, 2015*)



Comparing the individual country results with the EU28 average makes the picture even sharper. Only two countries have below-average trust in the European Parliament and at the same time above-average trust in their national parliaments: the UK and Austria. Confidence in institutions in the Nordic countries and in the BENELUX states is well above the EU28 average regarding both the EP and the national parliament. Germany and Estonia are also in this quarter (see chart below). Most CEE states are positioned in the upper left quarter, with the most trust in the EP and the least in the national Parliament. Trust levels in Southern-European member states are below the average for both institutions.

Figure 8: **Trust in the European Parliament vs. trust in the national parliament** (in May 2015)



2.5. Extreme trust and distrust in political institutions

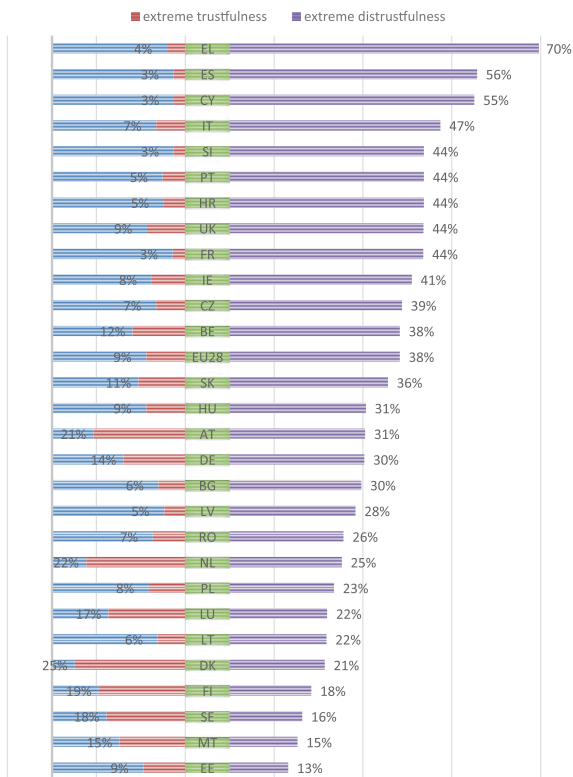
In the following, we focus on trust in four crucially important political institutions: (1) political parties, (2) national governments; (3) national parliaments and (4) the European Union. In order to measure extreme trustfulness and distrustfulness we analyzed data for those who trusted all four institutions and those who mistrusted all of them.

In the latest available raw dataset (which was polled in November 2014) 38 per cent of Europeans were extremely distrustful, while only 9 per cent were extremely trustful. The remaining 53% had varying degrees of trust in the different institutions or did not have an opinion.

If we look at the results on the country level, large differences can be seen:

- Distrust is at the highest level by far in Greece, where 70 per cent of respondents trust none of the institutions, while only 4 per cent trust all of them.
- Extreme distrust is also very high in other Southern-European countries: Spain (56%), Cyprus (55%), Italy (47%), and Portugal (44%).
- In Estonia, Malta, Sweden, and Finland, distrust is at a low level. In these countries less than every fifth person mistrusts these four institutions. Austria is an interesting example of polarisation in trust: both the extreme distrustful and trustful citizens have relatively high proportions. 31 per cent of respondents are not confident in these four political institutions, while at the same time 21 per cent trust all of them. The picture is quite similar in the Netherlands, where 25 per cent distrust the afore-mentioned institutions and 22 per cent trust them.

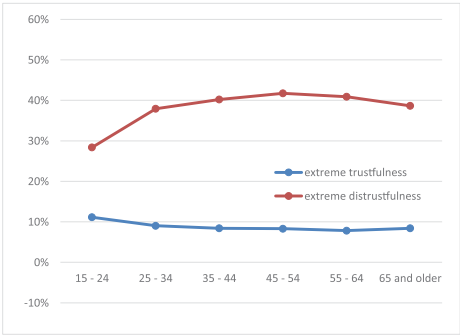
Figure 9: Extreme trust and distrust in the European Union
(Percentages of those who tend to trust in the EU, the national government, the national parliament and political parties, and those who tend to trust none of them, in November 2014)



Who is trustful, who is distrustful? Socio-demographic profiles

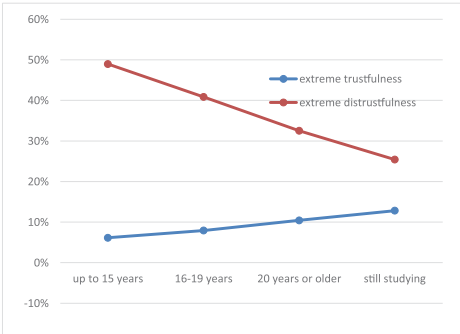
A promising fact is that the youngest generation has the lowest level of distrust (28% among ages 15–24, a much lower value than for others in the sample). The highest ratio can be observed among those aged 45–54, but their score of 42 per cent is just slightly higher than the average (38%).

Figure 10: **Relation between trust, distrust and the age of respondents**



Level of education also seems to affect trust/distrust. Those who finished their full-time education before the age of 16 tend to be the most distrustful: 49 per cent of these respondents are extremely distrustful, while only 6 per cent have confidence in the four selected political institutions. With the number of years spent in education, distrust decreases and trust increases. Those, who were studying in their twenties are more trustful (10%) and less distrustful (33%), than the average European. Those who are still studying seem to be the most trustful.

Figure 11: **Relation between trust, distrust and the age of quitting full-time education**



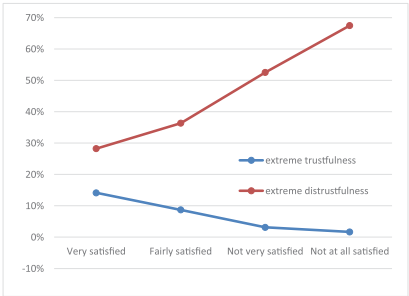
The financial situation of the respondents' household also seems to have an effect on the level of trust. Those who had difficulties paying their bills most of the time in the previous year tend to be more distrustful: 56 per cent of these people have no confidence in any of the four institutions, while among those who never or almost never had such problems this ratio is much lower: 33 per cent.

Figure 12: **Relation between trust, distrust and difficulties paying bills in the past year**



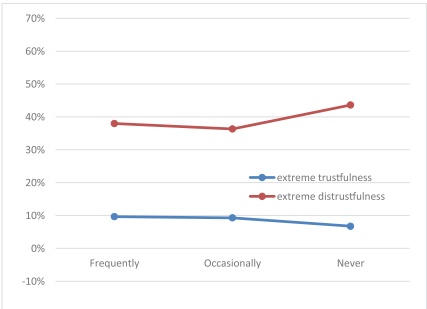
Data indicate that subjective well-being (satisfaction with life) also correlates strongly with extreme levels of trust. Those who are not at all satisfied with the life they lead are very mistrustful. Two-thirds of them trust none of the four institutions. With the increase of satisfaction, distrust decreases. Only 28 per cent of very satisfied Europeans have no trust in these political bodies.

Figure 13: **Relation between trust, distrust and satisfaction with life**



Political interest seems to raise the level of trust. Those who lack interest in political matters are slightly more inclined to be extremely distrustful. The difference is significant, but not large.

Figure 14: **Relation between trust, distrust and frequency of discussions on national political matters**



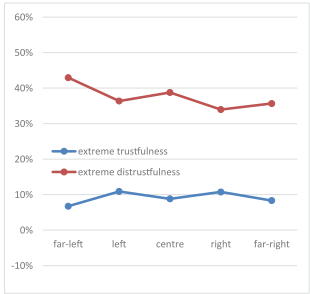
At the European level, there is no significant difference between responses of females and males. The proportions of extreme trustfulness and distrustfulness are almost identical. The results do not show a distinction based on the community type respondents live in either.

Position on the left-right political scale and level of extreme trust

In the EU28 sample, respondents with a ‘far-left’ ideological self-positioning are the most distrustful people (43%)⁷². We found that, at the European level, people with moderate political views, whether left- or right-leaning, tend to trust more – but generally, the right side of the political spectrum seems to be a bit more trustful.

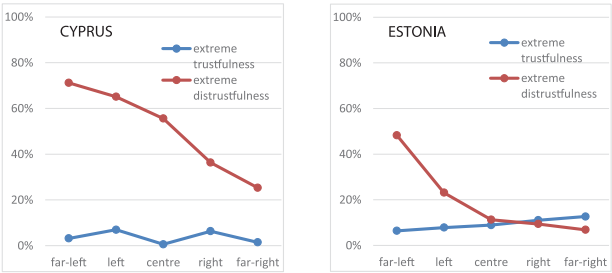
⁷² There are no party preference questions in the Eurobarometer surveys, but respondents can place themselves on the political left-right scale. It is a 1–10 scale, where 1 is for ‘left’ and 10 is for ‘right.’ On the graphs, ‘far-left’=1; ‘far-right’=2–4; ‘center’=5–6; ‘right’=7–9; ‘far-right’=10

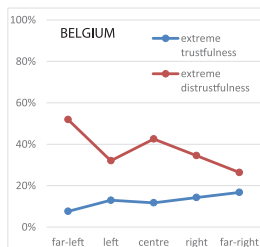
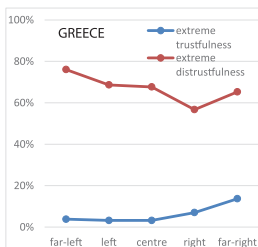
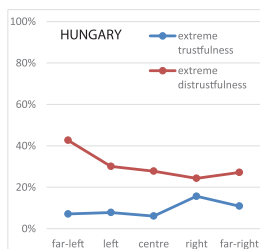
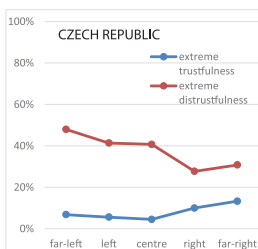
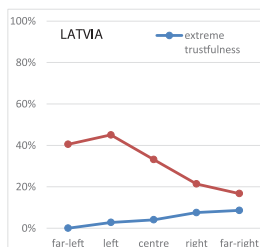
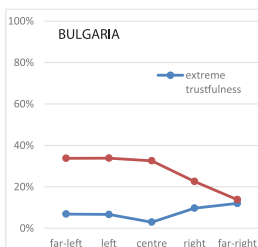
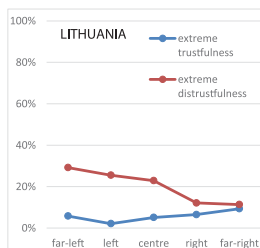
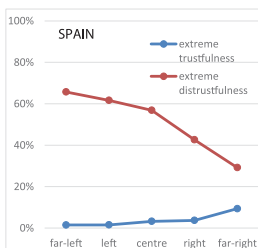
Figure 15: Relation between trust, distrust and the self-positioning on the political scale in the EU28



If we examine the level of trust among Member States, we see a very diverse picture. In some Member States, political ideology seems to have minor to no impact on levels of trust. These countries are Germany, the United Kingdom, Croatia, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, and Slovenia. In other countries, left-leaning persons are more prone to extreme distrustfulness. This is a broad group of mainly Southern and Eastern European countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Spain. Six of the ten countries have centre-right or conservative governments, which could be one of the reasons left-leaning persons tend to trust less than right-leaning ones. However, in the other countries, where liberal or left-wing governments reign, other factors must be responsible for this phenomenon.

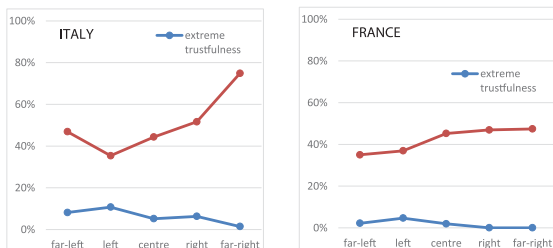
Figure 16: Relation between trust, distrust and the self-positioning on the political scale in some Members States





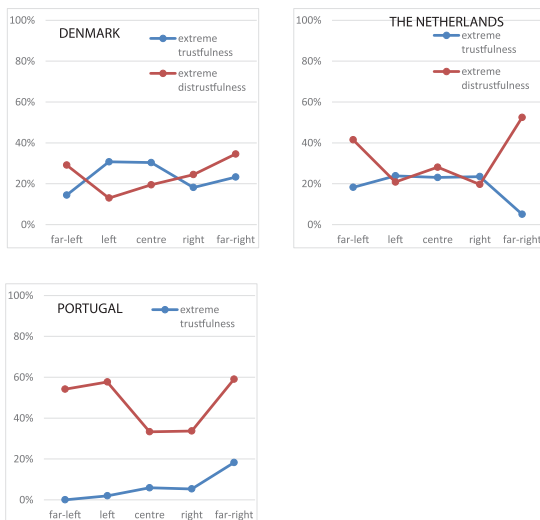
Those who positioned themselves on the right end of the political scale tend to be more distrustful only in France and Italy. In both countries left-wing governments reign.

Figure 17: Relation between trust, distrust and the self-positioning on the political scale in Italy and France



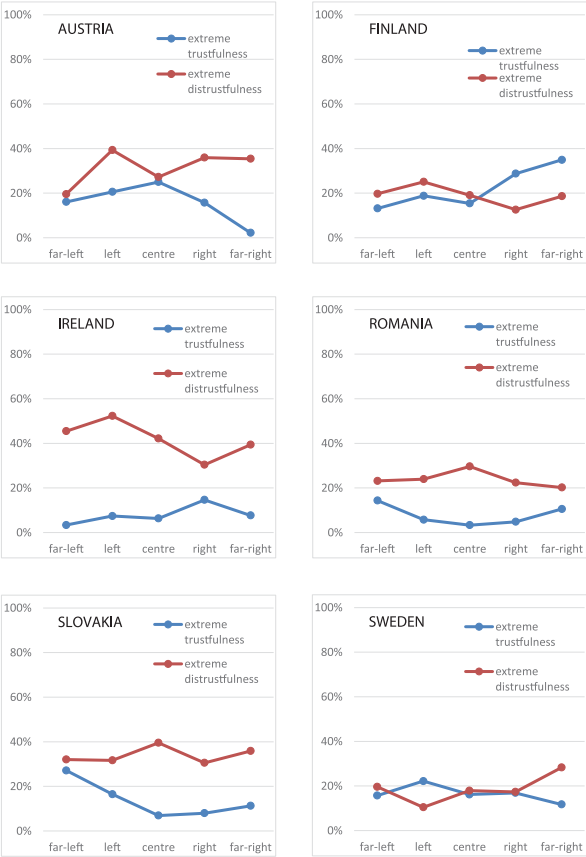
In some countries, people on both far-ends of the political spectrum are distrustful, as in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Portugal.

Figure 18: Relation between trust, distrust and the self-positioning on the political scale in Denmark, the Netherlands and Portugal



For Austria, Finland, Ireland, Romania, Slovakia, and Sweden, the patterns do not easily fit into any groups.

Figure 19: Relation between trust, distrust and the self-positioning on the political scale in different Members States

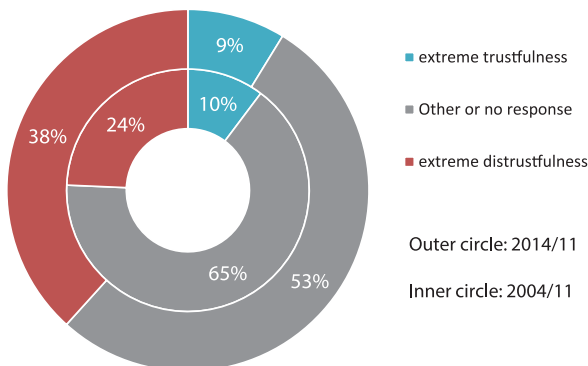


2.6. How extreme trust/distrust has changed in the last decade

In the following, we look at how extreme trust and mistrust have evolved in the past 10 years, using data from the November 2004 Eurobarometer survey. We did not chose 2004 solely as a basis for comparison to

be able to examine a 10-year period, but because it also was the year when 10 new Member States joined the EU. Another reason was that this survey had been conducted well before the global financial crisis hit the world in 2007/2008, therefore, it gives us a good chance to compare the “pre-crisis” and the “post-crisis” period.

Figure 20: Levels of extreme trust and distrust in the EU28 in 2004 and in 2014



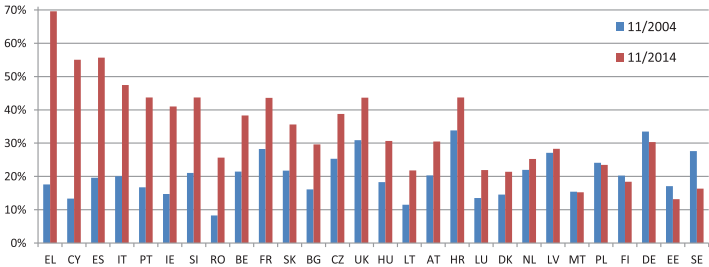
While the proportion of “extremely trustful” people declined only slightly (from 10% to 9%), the ratio of extremely mistrustful people increased dramatically. In 2004 24% of Europeans tended not to trust politicians, political parties, the government, and the European Union. By the end of 2014, it had risen to 38%.

Extreme distrustfulness increased the most in Greece, by 52 percentage points (pp), from 18% to 70%. The increase was above 20 pp in seven countries: Greece, Cyprus (+42), Spain (+36), Italy (+27), Portugal (+27), Ireland (+26) and Slovenia (+23). Almost all of them are countries that were hit hard by the economic crisis.

In three Member States, extreme mistrust grew by less than 5 percentage points. These are the Netherlands (+3), Latvia (+1), and Malta (+0).

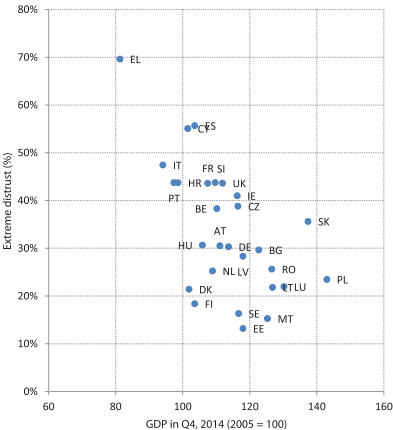
There are five countries where extreme distrust decreased. These are Poland (-1), Finland (-2), Germany (-3), Estonia (-4) and with a two-digit decrease, Sweden (-11).

Figure 21: Levels of extreme distrust in the Member States



There is a moderate negative correlation (-0.62) between the level of extreme distrust and the performance of the national economies. Those countries with a higher GDP growth rate tend to have a lower proportion of extremely mistrustful people.⁷³

Figure 22: Level of distrust and the performance of the economy in the last decade

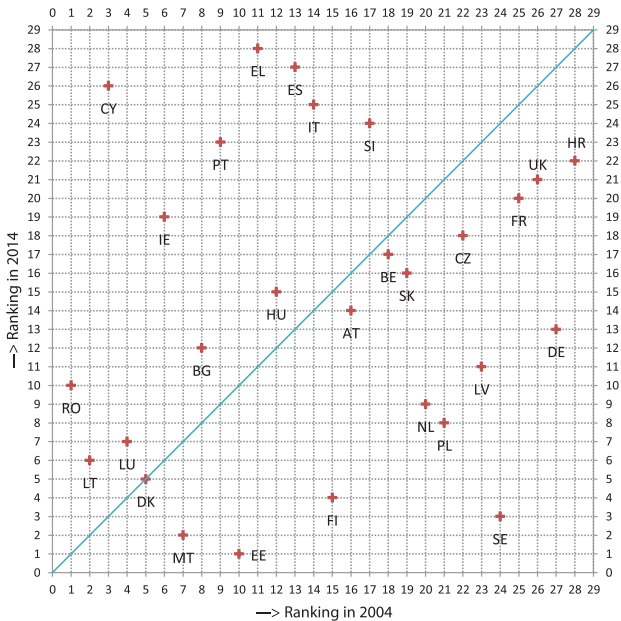


⁷³ We compared the 11/2014 distrust data and the Q4/2014 GDP data (Gross domestic product at market prices, chain linked volumes, index 2005=100) available on Eurostat. To double check, we calculated correlations of the trust data with quarterly GDP data from Q1/2008 – Q4/2014. The highest absolute correlation value was measured with the Q4/2014 GDP data.

While Greece now stands in the last position (28th, with the highest extreme distrust value), 10 years ago its rank was 11th. Spain fell from 13th to 27th. The highest drop was measured in Cyprus, from third to 26th. Altogether 12 countries now have a worse ranking than they had a decade ago. Only one country kept its position: Denmark was 5th in both 2004 and 2014, though the proportion of extreme distrust increased from 15% to 21%.

15 countries have better rankings than they had in 2004. The largest step forward was taken by Sweden, which had the 24th highest distrust rate in 2004. It is now ranked third, after Estonia and Malta. Germany (27th to 13th), Poland (21th to 8th), Latvia (23rd to 11th), the Netherlands (20th to 9th), and Finland (15th to 4th) belong to the group of countries that improved their position the most.

Figure 23: **Rankings of the 28 member states by their levels of extreme distrust**



2.7. How trust has changed in the past 20 years

In the previous sections, we looked deeply into how trust has changed in the past 10 years in the 28 member states of the EU. If we want to look into the situation one decade earlier, we have to restrict our scope: (1) Eurobarometer data are only available for a much smaller set of countries; (2) trust was measured differently, as another question was used,⁷⁴ but on a similar scale. This means that although the results can be compared, we need to be cautious.

As the political institution to monitor, we chose national parliaments. We compared the results of three Eurobarometer surveys conducted in December 1994, November 2004, and November 2014. Data were available for 11 countries, including Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, and the United Kingdom.

Generally, it seems that trust declined significantly in the last two decades. Distrust in national parliaments was higher in 2004 than it was in 2014 in only two countries (Germany and the Netherlands). In the other nine Member States, trust eroded and distrust increased during that decade. In the previous decade – from 1994 to 2004 – distrust increased in eight countries, and decreased only in two (Greece and Portugal). In Denmark, it remained the same.

If we focus on the 20-year period, we can say that the proportion of those who tend to trust their national parliaments decreased in all 11 of these countries. At the same time, distrust increased in all of them. It is clear that the erosion of trust started well before the economic crisis in Europe but it was accelerated by the crisis.

⁷⁴ The question was: *"To what extent do you feel you can rely on the national parliament to make sure that the decisions taken by this institution are in the interest of people like yourself?"* The two answer options were *"Cannot rely on it"* and *"Can rely on it completely."*

Figure 24: **Trust in the national parliaments, 1994, 2004, 2014**





3. Trust in Institutions vs. Trust in Others

3.1. Vertical and Horizontal Trust

This chapter aims at analysing trust in European countries using data from the sixth wave of the European Social Survey (ESS), carried out in 2006⁷⁵.

Besides analysing the level of political and personal trust in EU countries, our primary aim here is to create groups of countries which are similar in this respect, using multivariate methods. In the following, we take into account some possible classifications based on previous research.

It is clear that the differentiation between Eastern and Western European countries is not clear enough. Based on empirical results, in many

⁷⁵ ESS is a biennial cross-national survey, ran by academics. The survey was carried out originally in 21 Member States of the European Union, in five other European countries and in Israel. In our analysis the 21 EU countries and two other non-EU countries were included.

cases the separate analysis of Nordic⁷⁶ and Southern European countries, for example, was deemed to be necessary⁷⁷.

Kuovo proposed a new kind of categorization of countries into what he, according to Esping-Andersen, called regimes. It was done "on the basis of their differences in terms of institutional characteristics in order to contribute to the discussion of the impacts of the welfare state on social capital". He distinguished five regimes: Nordic + NL ("Social democratic"; Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands), Continental (Austria, Belgium, France, and Germany) Liberal (Great Britain, Ireland, and Switzerland), Mediterranean (Greece, Portugal and Spain) and Post-socialist (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine).⁷⁸

In this paper vertical and horizontal trust and their interrelations (the causal relationship between them and their main determinants) will be examined.

While there is quite strong correlation between the vertical and horizontal trust, people differentiate between the two types. Some scholars argue that there is a causal relationship between the two. Eek and Rothstein, using experimental research-design – the only way to determine the direction of causality – found that most likely it is horizontal trust (the trust in others) that is caused by vertical trust (the trust in institutions), and not vice versa. "The logic is that when people lose their trust in a person representing an important institution (i.e., an authority), they reason that if a »bad« person (e.g., immoral, unfair or untrustworthy) has authority, then other people might just as well be equally as »bad«."⁷⁹ They have also found that it is easier to destroy trust than to build it: when one loses trust in an authority, it has a greater effect on the loss of trust in others than the other way around. It means that preserving political and social trust is of the utmost importance. "Because once citizens in a society lose their trust in untrustworthy authorities, social capital will

⁷⁶ As the group comprises Finland also, the term "Nordic" is used instead of the often used "Scandinavian".

⁷⁷ For the analysis of trust for example it was used by Wollebaek and Selle in Wollebaek, Dan and Selle, Per. (2007) "Origins of Social Capital: Socialization and Institutionalization Approaches Compared" *Journal of Civil Society*. Vol. 3. No. 1. 1–24.

⁷⁸ Kuovo, Antii. (2011) "The sources of generalized trust and institutional confidence in Europe." *Research on Finnish Society*. Vol. 55. No. 4. 29–40. p. 31.

⁷⁹ Eek, Daniel and Rothstein, Bo. (2005): "Exploring a Casual Relationship between Vertical and Horizontal Trust." QCG Working papers Series. p. 5.

shortly run dry, and the process of building it up again with increased vertical trust through a replacement of the authorities, for instance, is more difficult.⁸⁰

Vertical trust: confidence in institutions

“Trust in the institutions of representative democracy is based on the perception that these institutions fulfil certain normative expectations”⁸¹. In the ESS respondents were asked to evaluate on an 11-point scale (0–10) how much they trust the following institutions and political actors:

- parliament in the respondent’s country
- the legal system
- the police
- politicians
- political parties
- the European Parliament
- the United Nations

The aggregated trust in these seven institutions and political actors is shown in Figure 1. The numbers at the end of the bars are the average level of vertical trust in the given country⁸². If we study it carefully, we cannot find the traditional East-West divide on this graph. In terms of trust, the South-West divide needs to be the most important: in Southern-European societies (Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, and Spain), the level of vertical trust is very low compared to that in Northern European ones. Generally, post-socialist countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia,

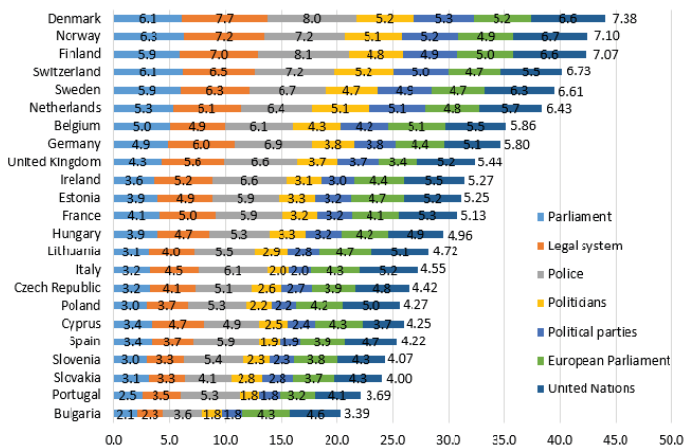
⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 30.

⁸¹ Grönlund, Kimmo and Setälä, Maija, 2007

⁸² The countries are sorted by the mean of total trust in these institutions. These numbers are the means of an index calculated as the average score on the seven above-mentioned variables. According to principal component analysis, the variables in all countries perform the same way and equally well, as well as form one dimension (communalities range from 0.259 to 0.861). However, it should be noted that the communality of the variable measuring the trust in the police is relatively lower than the communalities of the other variables (but all are higher than 0.25, the value that is used as a rule-of-thumb). It means the trust in the police is less than the trust in other institutions. In five countries the communality of this variable is lower than 0.4. (These countries are the following: Portugal (communality: 0.259), Ireland (0.326), Spain (0.354), Italy (0.372), and Germany (0.399).) The principal components extracted by these countries explain between 54.7 and 74.3 percent of the information. In further analyzes the index was used instead of the principal component, since the two measures produced virtually identical results.

Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) are mixed up at the end of the list, with Estonia, situated further up North, somewhat ahead of this group. The next group in line is that of “classical” Western European countries (Belgium, France, Germany⁸³, Ireland, Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), in which France lags a bit behind, while the Netherlands and Switzerland are somewhat ahead of the others. Finally, institutional trust is the highest in Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden).

Figure 25: **Vertical trust by country** (means, 11-point scale, 2012)



As mentioned in the previous chapter as well, it is also interesting that in Nordic and Western-European countries the level of trust in these institutions is quite steady, while in Southern and Eastern-European countries it is much more fluctuant.

Horizontal trust: trust in others

As mentioned earlier, social trust can be measured on an individual and on a generalized level. We have also mentioned in the beginning of

⁸³ In many researches the former Eastern and Western Germany are still separated. Although here the two parts were surveyed together, the data provides an opportunity to analyze them separately. The average value of institutional trust for the former Eastern-Germany is 5.31, while for the former Western-Germany it is 5.91

the study that the latter is more important for the proper functioning of a democratic system. In the ESS there are three questions measuring generalized interpersonal trust⁸⁴.

- These variables are correlating strongly⁸⁵. Although countries differ in this sense⁸⁶, they cannot be grouped by their correlational⁸⁷ patterns⁸⁸. As a consequence, we decided to make one variable out of these three.

On the following figure the mean of overall generalized an individual horizontal trust within countries can be seen.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ A) "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?"; B) "Do you think that most people try to be fair or would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance?"; C) "Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves?"

⁸⁵ Denoting the first question as Q1, the second as Q2 and the third as Q3, $r(Q1, Q2)=0.605$, $r(Q1, Q3)=0.526$, and $r(Q2, Q3)=0.528$

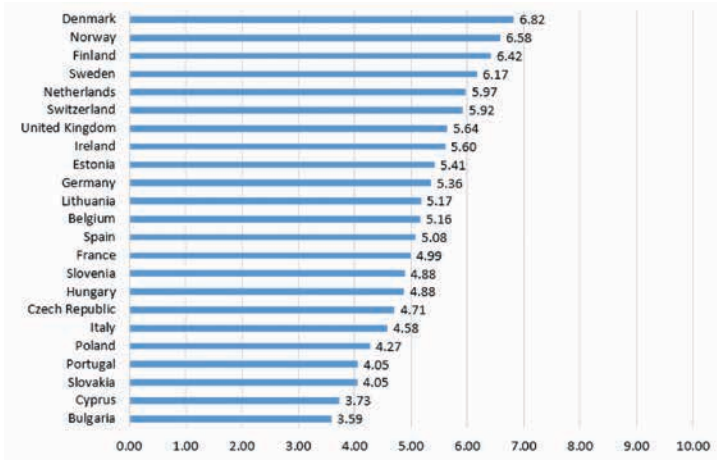
⁸⁶ Correlation between Q1 and Q2 ranges from 0.41 (France) to 0.69 (Czech Republic). Correlation between Q1 and Q3 ranges from 0.33 (France) to 0.62 (Czech Republic), and correlation between Q2 and Q3 ranges from 0.36 (Spain) to 0.60 (Czech Republic).

⁸⁷ Standard deviations of these correlations by countries are quite low, ranging from 0.01 to 0.09. Countries where the differences between the correlations are low are typically those where all three correlations are high. There are two exceptions though where the mean of these correlations is lower than 0.40. These are Poland (0.42, 0.34, and 0.39, respectively) and France (0.41, 0.33, and 0.41). In countries where the standard deviation of the correlations is high, the pattern is the following: trust in other people is highly related to the perception of fairness, but the sense of helpfulness is much less related to the opinion on the former two.

⁸⁸ The strength of the relationship is measured by the Pearson's correlation coefficient (r). Pearson's correlation coefficient measures the strength of the linear relationship between two variables. Its values ranges from -1 to $+1$. The value -1 implies a deterministic negative relationship, meaning that if the values of one of the variables increases, then that of the other variable decreases, and all data points lie on a line. The value $+1$ implies a deterministic positive relationship, meaning that if the values of one of the variable increases, then that of the other variable also increases, and all data points lie on a line. The value 0 means that there is no linear relationship between the variables. When interpreting the strength of relationships according to the correlation coefficient, the following rule-of-thumb is used: $\pm 0-0.1$ none or very weak positive/negative relationship, $\pm 0.11-0.3$ weak positive/negative relationship, $\pm 0.31-0.5$ moderate positive/negative relationship, and above 0.5 strong relationship.

⁸⁹ The index shown on the figure is the average score on the three above-mentioned variables. According to principal component analysis, the variables in all countries perform the same way and equally well, as well as form one dimension (communalities range from 0.490 to 0.790). The principal components extracted by countries explain between 58.6 and 76.1 percent of the information. In further analyzes the index was used instead of the principal component, since the two measures produced virtually identical results. (Zmerli and Newton found the same. For more see: Zmerli, Sonja and Newton, Ken. (2008): "Social Trust and Attitudes toward Democracy" *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 72. No. 4. 706–724.

Figure 26: **Generalised horizontal trust by country**
(means, 11-point scale)



The order of the countries is somewhat similar to the case of vertical trust. Social trust is the highest in Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden). This group is followed by Western European countries (Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany⁹⁰, Belgium, and France). It should be noted that France lags a bit behind the other ones, while Switzerland and the Netherlands are ahead of them. At the end of the list we can observe the mixture of Southern European countries (Spain, Italy, Portugal and Cyprus) and Eastern-European countries (Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria) again. Northern Baltic countries (Estonia, Lithuania), although they were part of the Soviet bloc, are separated from the Eastern European group showing a higher level of social trust.

Relationship between vertical and horizontal trust

The relationship between vertical and horizontal trust is moderately strong; however, countries can be very different in this respect. In Slova-

⁹⁰ The relatively low level of horizontal trust in Germany is not due to a possible huge difference between the former Western- and Eastern-Germany. The mean values for the two part of Germany are 4.40 and 5.16, respectively.

kia, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Spain, and Lithuania the relationship is weak, meaning that it is very hard to draw a conclusion about a person's level of horizontal trust from that of vertical trust, and vice versa. In all other countries, the relationship is moderate, with the exception of the Netherlands, where it is pretty strong.

After separately analysing the countries for vertical and horizontal trust, they can now be classified by taking into account both dimensions.⁹¹ Four clusters of countries were formed in this two-dimensional space. The first group comprises countries where both vertical and horizontal trust are low. The countries in the second group can be described by vertical and horizontal trust that are somewhat below the average⁹², while for the countries in the third group they are somewhat over the average. The fourth group embraces countries with high levels of both horizontal and vertical trust. In the following figure the groups are described by their average level of vertical and horizontal trust.

Figure 27: **Clusters of countries described by vertical and horizontal trust** (centralized means, 11-point scale)

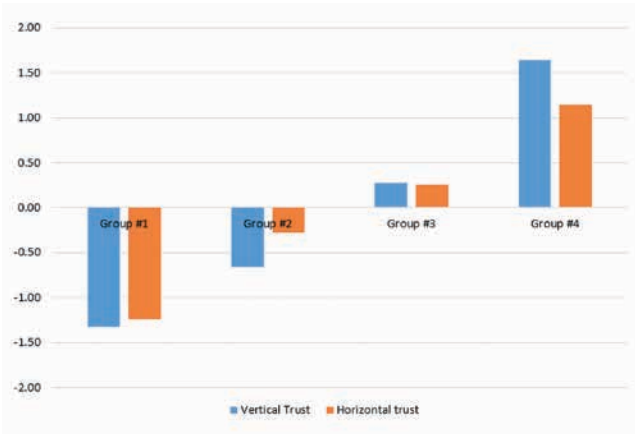
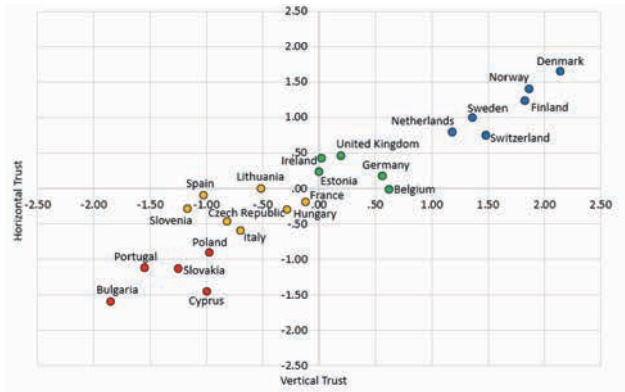


Figure 4 shows the classification of countries into the four groups described above. The separate analysis shows that Switzerland and the Netherlands

⁹¹ Countries were classified using hierarchical cluster analysis with centroid method.
⁹² Means are centralized around the grand mean. Due to this transforming both variables have a zero mean.

are very similar to the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden), forming the first group. This resembles the previously described regimes proposed by Kuovo. Although he proposed a regime consisting only of the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, here Switzerland also joins the group. The second cluster consists of countries from the Continental (Belgium, Germany) and Liberal regimes (Great Britain, Ireland). Estonia is also a member of this group. Interestingly, France lags behind other Western-European countries, belonging to the third group together with Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Slovenia, and Spain. The fourth cluster that can be described as having an extremely low level of horizontal trust contains Bulgaria, Cyprus, Poland, Portugal, and Slovakia.

Figure 28: **Classification of countries** (*centralized means, 11-point scale*)



An interesting result is that the higher the level of vertical and horizontal trust is, the stronger the relationship between them is in a given country. In countries where trust levels are low, the relationship between them is weak⁹³; where trust levels are around the average it is moderate⁹⁴; and in the group formed by the Nordic countries, the Netherlands and Switzerland, personal and institutional trust are closely related⁹⁵.

These groups should, however, be treated separately when the determinants of vertical and horizontal trust are explored.

⁹³ $r=0.271$

⁹⁴ In the group of countries somewhat below the average: $r=0.329$. In the group of countries somewhat above the average: $r=0.388$.

⁹⁵ $r=0.452$

3.2. Who trusts other people and political institutions?

Potential determinants of social trust

There has been an extensive investigation into the determinants of social trust in social science studies.⁹⁶ Here, based on previous literature, much of which also used the ESS survey, the potential explanatory variables are presented. After that, multidimensional explanatory models are built to answer the question: on what does trust in others and political institutions depend?

We examined the role of the following variables:

- Socio-demographic characteristics: gender, age, living with a spouse/partner, urban/rural lifestyle
- Socio-economic factors, resources: social status⁹⁷, subjective social position⁹⁸, unemployment⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Alesina, Alberto and Ferrara, Eliana La (2000): "Who trusts others?" CEPR Discussion Paper No. 2646.; Devos, Thierry and Schwartz, Shalom H. (2002) "Conflicts among human values and trust in institutions" *British Journal of Psychology* Vol. 41. 481–494.; Grönlund, Kimmo and Setälä, Maija, 2007; Herreros, Fransico and Criado, Henar. (2008): "The State and the Development of Social Trust." *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 29. No. 1. 53–71.; Kuovo, Antti, 2011; Neller, Katja (2008): "Explaining social trust: what makes people trust their fellow citizens?" In *Social Capital in Europe: Similarity of Countries and Diversity of People?* edited by Muelemann, Heiner. Leiden: Brill. 103–134.; Wollebaek, Dan and Selle, Per, 2007

⁹⁷ Respondent's social status is measured by a principal component extracted from three variables: highest level of education, occupational prestige, and the subjective evaluation of household income. Highest level of education was measured by years of full-time education completed and occupational prestige by ISEI. (For more on ISEI, see Ganzeboom, Harry B. and Treiman, Donald J. (1996) "Internationally Comparable Measures of Occupational Status for the 1988 International Standard Classification of Occupations" *Social Science Research*, Vol. 25. 201–239.) Household net income was also available in the dataset, but it was measured in deciles. This variable could not be used firstly because being a relative measure people with very different income values can belong to the same decile, and secondly because it characterizes the household, and not the respondent. That is why the subjective evaluation of the household income was used, where respondents had to evaluate their net household income. According to principal component analysis, the variables in all country-clusters perform the same way and equally well, as well as form one dimension (communalities range from 0.229 to 0.742). Although in the group of countries where both forms of trust are a little higher than the average, the communality of education is somewhat lower (0.229) than 0.25 used as a rule-of-thumb, the value is close enough, and the explained information is high enough (44.9%) to extract the principal component. The principal components extracted by clusters of countries explain between 44.9 and 59.6 percent of information.

⁹⁸ Respondents were asked to place themselves on a 0–10 scale, where 0 means the bottom of their society and 10 the top of it.

⁹⁹ Respondents were asked if they were unemployed in the last 12 months.

- Religiosity¹⁰⁰
- Belonging to a minority group, belonging to a group that is discriminated against
- Political orientation¹⁰¹
- Personal well-being: subjective well-being¹⁰², occurrence of negative events¹⁰³, feeling of insecurity¹⁰⁴
- Social integration and network: social embeddedness¹⁰⁵, receiving help and support from people who are close to the respondent, providing help and support to people who are close to the respondent
- Organisational participation¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Respondent's religiosity is measured by a principal component extracted from three variables: frequency of attending religious services, frequency of praying apart from religious services, and the subjective evaluation of how religious the respondent is. According to principal component analysis, the variables in all country-clusters perform the same way and equally well, as well as form one dimension (communalities range from 0.684 to 0.793). The principal components extracted by clusters of countries explain between 73.8 and 78.6 percent of information.

¹⁰¹ Respondents had to place themselves on an 11-point left-right scale.

¹⁰² Subjective well-being is measured by the average of satisfaction with life and the degree of happiness.

¹⁰³ It measures that how many of the following negative events occurred in respondent's life. The considered negative events are: divorce in the respondent's life or the respondent or close relative being a victim of crime.

¹⁰⁴ Respondents were asked that how safe they feel when walking alone in their neighborhood after dark.

¹⁰⁵ Respondent's social embeddedness is measured by a principal component extracted from the following three variables: the frequency of meeting friends, relatives, and colleagues, number of people with whom respondent can discuss intimate and personal matters, frequency of taking part in social activities compared to others of same age. According to principal component analysis, the variables in all country-clusters perform the same way and equally well, as well as form one dimension (communalities range from 0.372 to 0.611). The principal components extracted by clusters of countries explain between 50.0 and 53.0 percent of information.

¹⁰⁶ Respondents were asked whether they participate in non-political organisations or associations, and also if they are involved in voluntary or charitable organisations. The variable measures how many of these are true for the respondent.

- Opinion on political system: satisfaction with the system¹⁰⁷, evaluation of the government¹⁰⁸, the prevalence of democratic values¹⁰⁹
- First, we tested the role of the above-mentioned variables separately.¹¹⁰ However, socio-demographic variables and social status are always included in the models.

3.3. Explaining trust

Socio-demographic variables have a negligible effect on both vertical and horizontal trust. The only exception is in the fourth group (with the highest trust), where older people have lower levels of institutional trust. This is interesting, since most of the previous analyzes presented a positive relationship between age and trust, especially in the case of the personal trust. However, higher social status and subjective social positions prove to be factors enhancing both forms of social trust. In countries with the lowest trust, the effect is weaker but still significant.

Religion proves to be a weak but significant explanatory factor of vertical trust. The more religious people are the more they tend to trust political institutions, but this has no effect on their trust of other individuals. One possible explanation is that institutional religiousness generally cre-

¹⁰⁷ Respondent's satisfaction with the system is measured by a principal component extracted from the following five variables: satisfaction with the present state of economy, with the national government, with the way democracy works, with the state of education, and with the state of health services. According to principal component analysis, the variables in all country-clusters perform the same way and equally well, as well as form one dimension (communalities range from 0.357 to 0.678). The principal components extracted by clusters of countries explain between 51.4 and 56.2 percent of information.

¹⁰⁸ Respondents were asked that how much the following apply: the government protects all citizens against poverty, the government explains its decisions to voters, and the government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels. It was also asked to what extent these principles are important for the democracy in general. The evaluation of the government is measured by an index formed from this variables and weighted by the variables about importance.

¹⁰⁹ Respondents were asked how much the following apply: national elections are free and fair, rights of minority groups are protected, courts treat everyone the same, opposition parties are free to criticize the government, and the media are free to criticize the government. The importance of these factors for the democracy in general was also asked. The prevalence of democratic values is measured by an index formed from these variables and weighted by the variables as to importance.

¹¹⁰ For the analysis of the determinants of social trust, linear regression models were utilized. Due to the huge sample size even very weak relationships can also be significant; however, the effect of these variables is negligible. Therefore only relationships characterized by absolute beta values greater than 0.1 are presented.

ates trust in other forms of institutions as well, along with a belief in the status quo that institutions represent.

Not surprisingly, discrimination does not help in building trust. If someone feels he or she is a member of a discriminated group, this significantly lessens their trust in political institutions¹¹¹.

Subjective well-being is a very important enhancing factor in both types of trust. Those who are satisfied with their life and feel happy have higher levels of trust both in institutions and in other people. In the case of institutional trust, these variables also mediate the effect of the feeling of insecurity. The subjective well-being of those feeling insecure is significantly worse, and it decreases institutional trust. It is interesting, however, that in the case of trusting others this variable has an effect independent from subjective well-being. This is especially true in those countries characterized by a high level of personal trust.

Social embeddedness, the extensity of social networks, and the extent of help and support received from others inevitably enhance trust in individuals. The stronger this trust is in a given country, the stronger the effect of these factors is. In the case of countries with higher trust levels, these factors also have a significant effect on vertical trust.

The most important factor for enhancing trust is people's opinion of their country's political system. In a separate analysis, all three variables in this group (satisfaction with the system, evaluation of the government, and the prevalence of democratic values) have a significant effect on vertical trust. Those who are satisfied with the system and have a good opinion of the government and of the prevalence of democratic values trust their political institutions much more. However, when all three variables are included, it turns out that the effects of the latter two are mediated by the first one.

In the case of horizontal trust, satisfaction with the system also plays a pivotal role. In this case, citizens' opinion of the prevalence of democratic values has no effect, and the effect of their opinion on the government is also somewhat mediated. However, in the case of countries with higher trust levels, this variable still shows significant effect.

Taking into account the above-mentioned separate analyzes¹¹², final

¹¹¹ This effect is somewhat stronger in countries where trust is above the average or markedly high. In the case of horizontal trust, only people living in Nordic countries, the Netherlands or Switzerland trust less if they are members of such a group.

¹¹² Other variables listed among the potential explanatory factors were also asked. Unemploy-

models to explain the two forms of trust are built. In the case of vertical trust, socio-demographic variables (gender, age, living with spouse/partner, urban/rural place of settlement) and social status are included as control variables. Besides that, religiosity, membership in a discriminated group, subjective well-being, social embeddedness, receiving help and support from others, satisfaction with the system, and the evaluation of the government and democratic values prevailing in the country are used as explanatory factors.

Interestingly, it is more difficult to explain trust in countries where we can find low levels of trust. Aggregated effects of the above-mentioned variables are much weaker in countries where the trust level is extremely low.¹¹³ The importance of satisfaction with the system proves to be even more important factor than it was perceived to be before. In the cluster of countries where trust is the lowest, only this variable proves to be significant; nevertheless, its effect is strong¹¹⁴. In all other clusters beside this one, only the evaluation of the prevailing democratic values has an effect¹¹⁵, while the effect of satisfaction with the system remains strong¹¹⁶.

In the model explaining horizontal trust, a variable measuring the feeling of insecurity was also included; however, based on previous results, religiosity and membership in a discriminated group were excluded.

The explanatory power of this model is much lower in all country-clusters; however, it holds that in countries with a higher level of trust the aggregated effects of the variables included in the model are stronger.¹¹⁷ It is interesting though, that this is more the consequence of having a larger number of significant explanatory factors, rather than having stronger relationships. In the first cluster of countries, only the effect of

ment, minority group membership, politician orientation, experiencing negative events, providing help to others, and organisational participation had no effect either on vertical or on horizontal trust.

¹¹³ In the first cluster group of countries variables explain 36 percent of the variability of vertical trust, in the second group 44 percent, in the third 47 percent, and in the fourth 45 percent.

¹¹⁴ Beta = 0.52

¹¹⁵ In the second cluster beta = 0.10, in the third cluster beta = 0.11, and in the fourth cluster beta = 0.12.

¹¹⁶ In the second cluster beta = 0.54, in the third cluster beta = 0.57, and in the fourth cluster beta = 0.55.

¹¹⁷ In the first cluster group of countries variables explain 11 percent of the variability of vertical trust, in the second group 18 percent, in the third 21 percent, and in the fourth 23 percent.

satisfaction with the system is significant¹¹⁸. In the second cluster, besides this variable¹¹⁹, social status¹²⁰ and subjective well-being¹²¹ also proved to be significant. Those who have a higher social status and are more satisfied with their current situation tend to trust others more. In the countries in the third cluster the feeling of insecurity also plays a role¹²²: this feeling significantly lessens trust in others. Besides that, the effects of the above mentioned variables remain significant¹²³. In the case of those countries where trust is prominently high gender¹²⁴, age¹²⁵, and social embeddedness¹²⁶ have significant effects; however, social status loses importance in this regard. According to this result, women, older respondents, and those having more intensive social networks trust others more. Aside from social status, the effects of the other variables remain significant¹²⁷.

These variables have stronger overall predictive effects in countries where the level of trust is higher. A practical consequence can be that in these societies citizens respond to survey questions in a more susceptible and sophisticated way. In countries where trust is generally low, it might be more difficult to promote change. It can also be seen that many variables having significant effects in the previous partial models lost such influence in the final model. In this case, their insignificance does not mean that they do not have an effect at all, but rather that it is mediated by other variables. Therefore, a new type of model is built to explore not only the direct, but also the indirect effects of variables¹²⁸. In this model we use those variables that have considerable and consensual effects on vertical and/or horizontal trust according to the scholarly literature. In these models the causal effect of vertical trust on horizontal trust is also tested¹²⁹.

¹¹⁸ Beta = 0.22

¹¹⁹ Beta = 0.25

¹²⁰ Beta = 0.11

¹²¹ Beta = 0.13

¹²² Beta = 0.12

¹²³ Status beta = 0.12, subjective well-being beta = 0.12, satisfaction with the system beta = 0.20.

¹²⁴ Beta = 0.11

¹²⁵ Beta = 0.10

¹²⁶ Beta = 0.10

¹²⁷ Subjective well-being beta = 0.12, satisfaction with the system beta = 0.27, feeling of insecurity = 0.13.

¹²⁸ Path-models were utilized to explore this.

¹²⁹ In the first place, the following variables were included in the model in this order of cau-

As trust level increases, the models explain more and more of the diversity of horizontal trust¹³⁰. According to the models, the two clusters of countries with lower than average trust are very similar, as well as the two other clusters of countries characterized by higher than average trust; therefore, the analysis will focus mainly on these two groups. In the first group, neither social status nor social embeddedness have a direct effect on either form of trust. Their effects, however, are mediated by subjective well-being. This means that those having higher status and greater, more active networks trust both political institutions and other people more, solely because they feel better. If someone is satisfied with the current system, it increases their trust both in political institutions and in others; however, the latter effect is also mediated by vertical trust, meaning that those who are more satisfied probably have higher levels of political trust, which enhances trust in others. In both clusters belonging to this group subjective well-being have indirect effects mediated by satisfaction with the system and vertical trust, but in the group having higher trust-levels subjective well-being has a direct effect on horizontal trust, meaning that it can increase trust in others independently from other variables.

There are a lot of similarities in the models of the other group, where the two clusters comprising countries with high levels of trust are situated. The main difference is the role of social status. In the cluster characterized by lower trust, status has a direct effect on horizontal trust, but not on vertical. In the other cluster, it is vice versa, meaning that social status affects trust in political institutions independently of all other variables, but not trust in others. Moreover, in the cluster of the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, those having higher status tend to be more satisfied with the current system independently from their social embeddedness and subjective well-being – the factors that in

salinity: age, social status, social embeddedness, organisational participation, subjective well-being, satisfaction with the system, vertical, and horizontal trust. It turned out that organizational participation has no effect whatsoever; thus, it should be excluded from the model. The second problematic variable was age, since it has a significant effect on social status (older people tend to have lower social status) only in countries with very low level of trust; therefore, this variable was also missed out from the model. In these models we practically explained horizontal trust with all other variables, but we analyzed not only their direct, but indirect effects – that is, effects through other variables.

¹³⁰ In the first cluster group of countries variables explain 13 percent of the variability of horizontal trust, in the second group 19 percent, in the third 23 percent, and in the fourth 26 percent.

other cases mediated the effect of social status. In this group subjective well-being affects horizontal trust directly, similarly to the second cluster of countries. The other difference lies in the strength of the relationship between horizontal and vertical trust: in this group they are much more connected to each other than in the other group.

Possible outcomes of trust

It was mentioned before that higher levels of both vertical and horizontal trust can have positive outcomes concerning electoral and political behavior, political actions, and social values. The database provides opportunities to test their effects on the following variables:

- interest in politics
- whether or not the respondent voted in the last national election
- taking part in political actions such as: wearing or displaying a campaign badge/sticker, signing a petition, taking part in a lawful public demonstration, and contacting a politician or government official in the last 12 months
- attitude toward immigrants: xenophobia

Those trusting more in political institutions are more interested in politics. When analysing the models it seems that horizontal trust also has an effect, but this is spurious, since the real explanatory factor behind it is political trust¹³¹. Neither vertical nor horizontal trust have a considerable effect on voter turnout¹³² or participation in political actions¹³³. Both vertical and horizontal trust levels have considerable effects on xenophobia; however, their effects are somewhat overlapping. Both those who trust more in institutions and those who trust more in others are less xenophobic.

¹³¹ Linear regression analyzes were run. In the first model the effect of vertical, in the second one the effect of horizontal, and in the third one the effect of both types of trust were analyzed. Socio-demographic variables and social status were included in all of them to control for the effect of these.

¹³² To test this binary logistic regression was utilized.

¹³³ The variable was measured by the number of political actions the respondent taking part in. Linear regression analyzes were run. In the first model the effect of vertical, in the second one the effect of horizontal, and in the third one the effect of both types of trust were analyzed. Socio-demographic variables and social status were included in all of them to control for the effect of these.

4. 'Migrant invasion' as a Trojan horseshoe

The collapse of trust and the influx of conspiracy theories on the European refugee crisis on Social Media

Figure 29: **Graphic representation of a conspiracy theory related to the refugee crisis** (Source: Twitter)



In this chapter we present a case study on the total lack of trust in political institutions built upon the example of conspiracy theories on the ongoing European refugee crisis. We examine this phenomenon in social media, especially on Twitter. In the first part of the study we identify the main conspiracy theories that have appeared in the public discourse on this issue and spread like an epidemic in social media. We focus on Twitter, following a path with a “virtual snowball”. This method is based on the same logic as the offline “snowball”, but applied to social media: we start on the site of one relevant user, and then we track the profile’s followers in order to get to other users. With the help of this special method we are going to test the effect of “fusion paranoia” – the phenomenon which occurs when conspiracy-based ideas appear symmetrically on both ends of the political spectrum and have a mutual impact on each other. In addition, we examine how these theories are embedded in networks of people and their discourse, and how different groups representing different ideologies are connected through these networks. Finally, we analyze how the conspiracy discourse is embedded into the entire discussion on the refugee crisis in Europe.

It seems as though the refugee crisis integrates the whole spectrum of mistrustful people. We have found, as a relevant starting point of the virtual snowball, a video of David Duke's anti-Semitic conspiracy speech on the refugee crisis which was shared by Occupy HQ Movement's account on Twitter. Following this we have found other theories envisaging a Zionist/Jewish conspiracy behind the refugee crisis, some of them even seeing it as the 'Trojan horse' for an ISIS invasion. Then we explore how these conspiracies really make a connection between the two sides of the horseshoe, and we examine the main players who are acting as bridges between the two sides. The network analysis shows that while these bridges exist, and conspiracy theories serve as good bridges, the two separate groups are centralized around 'alternative' media channels that circulate these theories online. We have also illustrated that the group of those who are more afraid of the Jews and envisage the 'Zionist' conspiracy and those who believe in the 'ISIS Trojan horse' conspiracy theory are almost completely separated from each other, and there is only a weak bridge between them. In short, "fusion paranoia" exists between the left and the right, even if there is a difference between the groups who are receptive to the two main types of conspiracy theories. Hence, the 'echo chamber' effect – the mutual mobilization of likeminded people – has been also proven inside the groups believing in conspiracy theories. Finally, we have visualized the whole ongoing discourse about the refugee crisis within the same period of time – which has shown that the conspiracy discourse constitutes a small but significant part of the whole discussion.

4.1. The theoretical background of Social Media research

In recent years social media has emerged as a significant platform for political discourse. Much research has shown how Internet users are more and more likely to share their political thoughts through social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, or Myspace¹³⁴. Social media sites are also used as platforms of political mobilization by movements and parties. Social media can really serve as an important tool for mobilization –

¹³⁴ Rainie, L. et al (2012): Social media and political engagement. Pew Internet & American Life Project.

even beyond the virtual world. It is especially true in the case of populist movements that are expressing their mistrust with institutions¹³⁵.

But how does mobilization work? How, and with whom, do people share their political opinions? There are two main academic responses to these questions. One theory is based on disagreement. According to this theory, those who have a heterogeneous network give room for political debates and tend to show higher political activity than those who are surrounded by like-minded social peers. Politically isolated people without any social peers are the least active in public life¹³⁶.

Other scholars focus on the mobilization effect of like-mindedness, arguing that people tend to share their thoughts with people who have similar opinions – who are going to echo them. This is called the ‘echo chamber effect’¹³⁷. According to this theory, political activity will be higher if people are in their “comfort zone” regarding their political affiliation. These theories are also examined in the online sphere, scrutinizing whether users tend to follow, like and comment on those contents that echo their view and strengthen their opinions or, on the contrary, they are more active if their online network contradicts their view¹³⁸. Colleoni researched political homophily (the tendency to prefer like-minded peers) on Twitter, dividing users into Republicans and Democrats by the content they shared. They found huge differences between the two groups on this question, which means that the echo chamber effect worked well for these groups.

To combine the two theories, we can argue that sometimes even the other side of the political world can echo our views. Ideologemes can build a bridge between fundamentally different political groups and ideologies. According to the so-called “horseshoe theory”, originating from French writer Jean-Pierre Faye, political players on the far-right and far-left ends of the political spectrum are closer to each other than to the players in the political center regarding their ideological stances.

¹³⁵ Bartlett, J. and Birdwell, J. and Littler, M. (2011): *The New Face of Digital Populism*, London: Demos

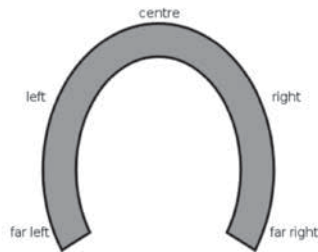
¹³⁶ Nir, L. 2011: “Disagreement and opposition in social networks: Does disagreement discourage turnout?”. In *Political Studies*. 59(3):674–692.

¹³⁷ Stinchcombe, A. L. 2010: “Going to extremes: How like minds unite and divide.” In *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews*. 39(2):205–206.

¹³⁸ Colleoni, E. et al (2014): Echo Chamber or Public Sphere? Predicting Political Orientation and Measuring Political Homophily in Twitter Using Big Data. *Journal of Communication*. 64(2): 317-332.

The horseshoe theory argues that both extremes (such as communism or Nazism) tend to value the collective above the individual and seek to discredit liberal, individualistic values.¹³⁹ This leads to the conclusion that left and right can be seen as having a meeting point on the far sides of the scale,¹⁴⁰ and entities in the extreme ends of the horseshoe are much closer to each other. (See the graph below)¹⁴¹

Figure 30: **The political spectrum according explained by the “horseshoe theory”**



The horseshoe theory is called ‘fusion paranoia’ in practice: a phenomenon in which conspiracy theories create a joint platform between ideologically different positions. The most typical example is when radical left-wing and right-wing groups echo the same kind of radical, anti-establishment conspiracy theories.¹⁴² The basis of this phenomenon is the sides’ common ground on anti-governmentalism: the lack of trust in institutions.

Fusion paranoia is an extremely widespread phenomenon on social media. Ideas are shared and connected by different users, groups or even political movements, who are often at the opposite sides of the political horseshoe. Social media seems to be not only a platform that ignores geographical borders, but also one that demolishes ideological borders. And political mistrust plays the perfect role of the common denominator.

¹³⁹ Taberner, S. and Finlay, F. (2002): *Recasting German Identity: Culture, Politics and Literature in the Berlin Republic*. Camden House, USA. pp. 124-125.

¹⁴⁰ Taberner and Finlay, 2002, p. 125.

¹⁴¹ Jane, E. A. and Fleming, C. (2014): *Modern Conspiracy: The Importance of Being Paranoid*. Bloomsbury Publishing, USA. p. 134.

¹⁴² Kelly, M. (1995): A Reporter at Large, “The Road to Paranoia”. *The New Yorker*. 60. Available at: http://www.newyorker.com/archive/1995/06/19/1995_06_19_060_TNY_CARDS_000370096

4.2. Strength of online mobilization

In this part we aim to combine the research on echo chamber and disagreement effects with research on the horseshoe theory and fusion paranoia on social media. Our question is whether extreme forms of political mistrust cross over the political groups and movements creating common networks between them. The topic that we are going to explore is the European refugee crisis. This ongoing crisis is a highly relevant 'hot topic' that creates a fertile ground for conspiracy theories. It is not accidental: conspiracy theories, as forms of "collective motivated cognitions", have the function of explaining atypical, important events on the basis of existing knowledge and in a way that serves best the psychological interests of the in-group.¹⁴³ Numerous kinds of conspiracies are circulating about the refugee crisis in social media. We are going to present the main directions and illustrate some features of these types of networked conspiracy discourse.

In the first part we explore one path of conspiracy theories on Twitter using a 'virtual snowball'.¹⁴⁴ Using this method we are going to illustrate how different users and political groups on different sides of the horseshoe cross over to each other with regard to conspiracy theories about the refugee crisis on Twitter in September of 2015. In the second part we attempt to test the echo chamber effect among the previously defined groups with text-and-data-mining techniques.

4.3. Conspiracy theories about the refugee crisis on Twitter

David Duke and Occupy: beginning of a beautiful friendship

Conspiracy theories on the refugee crisis connect groups with fundamentally different ideological stances. Some conspiracy-based ideas bring users with different political affiliations to the same platform. They have only one thing in common: a high level of institutional mistrust and obsession with conspiracy theories.

Our chosen starting point is a post on the OccupyHQ Twitter account.

¹⁴³ Krekó, P. (2015): Conspiracy Theory as Collective Motivated Cognition. In Bilewicz, M.; Cichocka, A.; Soral, W. (Eds): *The Psychology of Conspiracy*. Routledge, London. 60-67

¹⁴⁴ Félix, A. (2012): A Spirituális nő misztériumának nyomában. Történelmi örökség és kulturális folytonosság a radikális jobboldali nők egy csoportjában. *Kaleidoscope*. 3(4):190-199.

This group aims to coordinate between the different Occupy Movements, sharing an anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation, egalitarian, classical leftist agenda. On the 8th of September 2015, in the middle of the refugee crisis, the Twitter account of the Occupy Movement Headquarters shared a video of David Duke titled 'The Invasion of Europe and the Zionist Agenda'¹⁴⁵. Occupy is an extensive user of social media. Much research has shown how the movement used social media for mobilization; even its slogan – 'We are 99%' – originated from the internet.¹⁴⁶ Occupy Movement is known as a worldwide movement that fights against social and economic inequalities; however, the ideological background of the Occupy Movement is a bit vague. Although it is labelled mostly as an anti-globalist, leftist or even anarchist movement, it also has connections with right-wing groups and players. The connecting point is anti-capitalism, which is sometimes manifested in anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that are often articulated by the members of the movement.¹⁴⁷ When the movement became well-known, David Duke, a former Republican politician with strong links to the KKK, infamous for his racist, anti-Semitic views, was among the first that cheered the movement, calling it "Occupy against the Zionist Wall Street"¹⁴⁸.

While OccupyHQ is not the official Twitter account of Occupy Wall Street, this is clearly a forum that echoes the same ideological platform. The online crossing point between the OccupyHQ Twitter account and the speech of David Duke on refugee crisis is one blog called '*The Financial Armageddon*' *Economic Collapse blog*, which includes posts with anti-globalist, anti-capitalist sentiments and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories¹⁴⁹. Articles of this blog are often tweeted by Occupy sites, and this post was also shared from this blog.

In the video we have examined, David Duke summarizes the 'main di-

¹⁴⁵ The tweet is available at: <https://twitter.com/HQOccupy/status/641362937437810688>

¹⁴⁶ Theocharis, Y. et al (2013): *Using Twitter to Mobilise Protest Action: Transnational Online Mobilisation Patterns and Action Repertoires in the Occupy Wall Street, Indignados and Aganaktismenoi movements*. Available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2221824> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2221824>

¹⁴⁷ Sayani, D. (2011): *Anti-Semitism in the Occupy Wall Street Movement*. Available at: <http://www.thenewamerican.com/usnews/politics/item/9761-anti-semitism-in-the-occupy-wall-street-movement>

¹⁴⁸ Hamme, Erick (2011): *Former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke Supports Occupy Wall Street Movement*. CBS News, 27 October 2011. Available at: <http://cbsnews.com/news/article/former-kkk-grand-wizard-david-duke-supports-occupy-wall-street-movement>

¹⁴⁹ The blog is available at: <http://financearmageddon.blogspot.hu/>

rections' of the 'Zionist Agenda' on the invasion of Europe. According to his argument, Israel was active in substantializing the refugee crisis in Europe in order to destabilize the continent. Duke's argumentation has three main points, which are quite prototypical for conspiracy theories: 1) the Jewish lobby and organizations support the refugees coming to Europe 2) it is driven by the need for achieving complete Jewish supremacy in the Western world and 3) the Zionist media is hiding the real facts and the truth behind the ongoing crisis. As we have found that these elements are the key issues of the online discourse, we are going to use this speech as a basis to classify the different discourses that we discovered on Twitter on this topic. The popularity of this video on anti-globalisation on radical left sites is a typical example of how mistrust in official institutions can create demand for conspiracy content, demolishing ideological barriers.

'Handbook for migrants' as the proof for argument 1 (Jewish lobby)

Several conspiracy theories on the refugee crisis on Twitter have focused on the activity of the "Jewish lobby", which is identified as the most powerful one. We have found frequent references to a "Handbook" for refugees, allegedly supported by the Open Society Institute, which provides guidance in Arabic for refugees in Europe. In fact, according to the Open Society Foundations they did not fund the "handbook" and they do not support W2EU¹⁵⁰, the organization behind the guidebook. But from a conspiracy approach, this piece was proof that the Jewish conspiracy behind the refugee crisis exists: the refugees received help and assistance from the powerful lobby and were incentivized to come to Europe. Mr. Soros generally appears as a key actor of many conspiracy theories – and the refugee crisis is not an exception to this strong rule.

We have found two main types of tweets concerning the issue. One is of those users who support the W2EU initiative and talk positively about the Handbook and the activity of the Open Society Foundations. The other side considers Soros to be the mastermind behind the refugee crisis. The supporters and opponents of the Handbook are divided, separately tweeting each other's posts – again reinforcing the theory of the echo chamber. However, the source of these two kinds of interpretations

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.w2eu.info/>

is mainly the same Sky News neutral report about the Handbook¹⁵¹. Two completely different and mutually exclusive narratives have arisen from the same factual starting point.

Argument 2: The fight for the supremacy and world dominance

Focusing on the opponent group, the most frequent comment is that Soros encourages refugees to 'invade' Europe, and that he and his supporters are to blame for the increase in the number of refugees. One smaller group inside the opponent group goes even further with these conspiracies. According to such comments refugees are used as a weapon of Western interests. In another tweet these interests are parts of a 'Soros-CIA plan' to destabilize the Mediterranean.

This tweet was posted by the account of SyrianFreePress.net, a small page that also includes this article in a blog in which the role of Soros in the refugee crisis is explained in more detail:

*'Soros, who is nothing more than a multi-billionaire front man for the even wealthier Rothschild banking family of Western Europe, oversaw the complete destruction of the nation-states of southeastern Europe that now permit practical unfettered access of civil war and economic migrants from Syria, Iraq, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Sri Lanka, and other war-and-poverty-ravaged nations of the Third World.'*¹⁵²

According to an even more creative theory, ISIS was created to support the Jewish interests, namely, the creation of Great Israel. The most retweeted article on this issue is titled 'ISIS is working on Mossad/CIA Plan to Create Greater Israel', published by the blog 'Inspire To Change World', which also has a Twitter account¹⁵³. The mentioned article brings in ISIS as a new element of the puzzle, allegedly working for Israel and the CIA. The video in this article explains how the Islamic State connects to Mossad and the CIA and how they have generated the refugee crisis of

¹⁵¹ The shared article is available at: <http://news.sky.com/story/1551853/sky-finds-handbook-for-eu-bound-migrants>

¹⁵² The shared article is available at: <https://syrianfreepress.wordpress.com/2015/09/25/soros-eu-plan/>

¹⁵³ The shared article is available at: <http://www.inspiretochangeworld.com/2015/09/isis-is-working-on-mossadcia-plan-to-create-greater-israel/>

Europe, concluding that this is 'the root cause of all the refugee crises we are facing in the world right now'. The article was published on the 3rd of September and was shared and retweeted by around 10 600 users until the end of September, 2015.

Argument 3: The lies of the Zionist media and the 'truth': The Trojan horse

Next to the above mentioned blog 'Inspire To Change World', there are other news sites on Twitter that create, feed and circulate the conspiracy theories on the refugee crisis. This connects to the third point of Duke about the dominance of 'Zionist media' that tries 'to make Europeans hate themselves' and hide the 'truth' that is behind the current situation. These channels portray themselves as 'alternative media', which tell the 'truth' that is hidden by the mainstream, Zionist media.

One of the most popular channels is the Infowars channel of Alex Jones, one of the most popular conspiracy theorists with 76 000 twitter followers and 330 000 Facebook followers. Infowar's videos about the refugee crisis were shared and retweeted by many users on Twitter. These videos explain the Trojan horse theory, which actually dominates the conspiracy theories on the refugee crisis. It has several versions, but the basic idea is that ISIS generated the refugee crisis, and the people who arrive into Europe are not asylum-seekers, but the people of the Islamic state, and that they are 'sleeping terrorists'¹⁵⁴. The tweets mostly share the videos of 'Infowars' and other 'alternative' channels and explain the 'signs' of the Trojan horse. They include the 'fact' that most of the refugees are men in good health, and ask the most popular questions among these sites, such as why they have iPhones and other electronic equipment if they really are asylum-seekers.

The phrases in connection with the Trojan horse theory that are used most commonly on Twitter are such hashtags and comments as 'Muslim Invasion' and 'Invaders' on the one hand, and 'White Genocide' and 'White Resistance' on the other. These two kinds of expression on Twitter show the two different ideological channels in operation. There are some tweets that can more accurately be labelled as anti-Islamic, since

¹⁵⁴ The shared video is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WU8xKPe5MhA&feature=youtu.be>

they talk about the Islamization of Europe, and others which express more Anti-Semitic, anti-Israel attitudes. The latter kind express purely extreme right-wing contents. One of the crossing points of these two types is the hashtag #SaveEuropeFromIslam. Under this hashtag Twitter users integrate the conspiracy theories which argue that ISIS plans to conquer Europe this way with those which say that the Jews and Israel plan to conquer the continent through the refugee crisis. In this way, the Trojan horse theory collects all kinds of conspiracy theories that appear in connection with the refugee crisis in Europe from the two sides of the horseshoe. Another crossing point that we have found is on the blog *'The Financial Armageddon' Economic Collapse* blog that was already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The blog shares posts with each kind of conspiracy theory. It shares the videos of the Infowars channel, which conclude that the refugee crisis is the Trojan horse of ISIS¹⁵⁵. Second, it also shares the video of Duke, who highlights the Zionist conspiracy behind it.

As the articles of this blog are frequently shared by the OccupyHQ Twitter account, these theories potentially reach all the other Occupy followers. The common ground, namely anti-capitalism and anti-globalism, can create a perfect form of fusion paranoia.

4.4. Echoing that 'we all know': Echo chamber on Twitter

Based on the previously described phenomena, we assume that social media users' media consumption and activity is derived by the echo chamber effect. In order to test our hypothesis that users prefer to communicate with those who have similar political thoughts, we have downloaded some data from Twitter. Our data collection had two stages. First, we searched with a set of predefined search queries based on the qualitative phase results (see Table 1. left side), then we searched only for the word refugee and the most similar words (see Table 1. right side) within the same time period in order to see how these users embedded these data into the whole conversation on the social networks.

¹⁵⁵ The shared article is available at: <http://financearmageddon.blogspot.hu/2015/09/migrant-crisis-alex-jones-show.html>

Keywords and database

Figure 31: **Keywords by topics**

Relevant hashtags for conspiracy	Refugee crisis related words
#DavidDuke	Migrant
#zionist	Refugee
#OpMedia	asylum seeker
#occupy	
#soros	
#WR	
#SaveEuropeFromIslam	
#WhiteGenocide!	
#WhiteResistance	
#BarbaraLernerSpectre	
#whitegenocide	
#TrojanHorse	

Figure 32: **Databases**

	Relevant hashtags for conspiracy	Refugee crisis related words
Number of users	18 060	353 372
Number of tweets	24 725	450 910
Number of retweets	47 827	570 241
Time period	17.09.2015–26.09.2015 (10 days)	

Table 2 shows the basic statistical summary of the two data collections. Both data collections focused on only 10 days; therefore, the quantitative analytical part's usage is limited to a case-study with a smaller snapshot of the ongoing debate about the migrant crisis. Unfortunately, the official Twitter Search API gives back just the last 10 days' most relevant

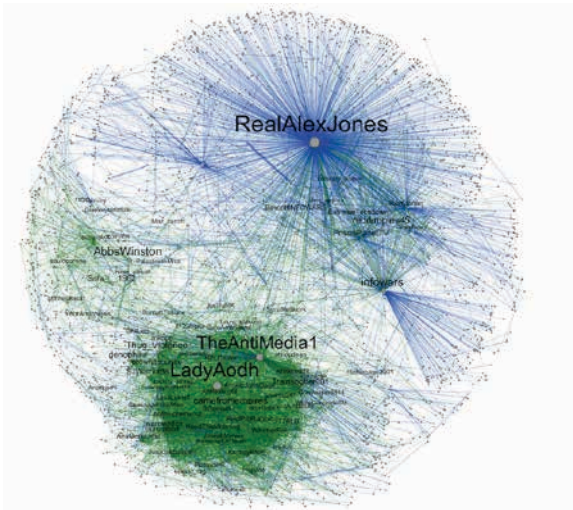
tweets and not a complete dataset regarding the search queries. Even though this methodology has a limitation, it is highly accepted for its use in social research when the focus is not so much on completeness as it is on structure and relevance.

With this social network analysis we attempt to understand the communication patterns among conspiracy theory supporters on Twitter. Based on the collected database we have created networks to illustrate communication flow and structure. In each network arrows indicate the direction of the information flow.

Communication patterns

In the network, nodes represent twitter-users, blue lines are the replies and green ones are the retweets. As we are only interested in the ones who participated actively in the communication, we have filtered the network based on the number of outgoing connections (out-degree), keeping only those users whose tweets have been retweeted or who replied to a tweet at least once. Node and label size indicates the original number of connections within the original network.

Figure 33: Network of Retweeters and Repliers



The network indicates two kinds of communication: retweeters (indicated in blue), who just share the post, and repliers (indicated in green), who also reply to each other. Both kinds of communication are centralized by some media channels whose thoughts are shared by the users. The big plot is the 'real discussion', in which the users reply to each other. However, this discourse is also delivered by one main channel: Infowars and its front-man, Alex Jones.

On the network, the users of the two colors are clearly separated from each other. This means that those who have just retweeted the contents and those who have replied to each other create two distinct groups. Both colored groups are centralized by a Twitter account of a media channel. The importance of 'alternative' media channels as main circulators of conspiracy theories is reinforced by this network. The smaller green group in the middle is centralized by two big nodes, one of which is called AntiMedia1. The tweets of this media platform have heavily Anti-Semitic and anti-Israel contents. Sometimes they also have strongly anti-capitalist content, such as the one with the face of Anonymous¹⁵⁶. The other big node within the green plot (LadyAodh) is a user who tweets posts about white genocide and the 'white genocide project' – a fear that Muslims will exterminate white men. In the middle of the blue plot is the other big 'alternative' channel: the Infowars and its spokesman, the famous and influential Alex Jones. The tweets of Infowars focus more on the 'ISIS Trojan horse' theory, which indicates that the real discussion is happening more among those who share this latter conspiracy theory.

Reply network: the real discussion

In the second network we have kept only those lines which indicate two-way communication, the replies (blue lines), because we are interested in how different political groups communicate with each other.

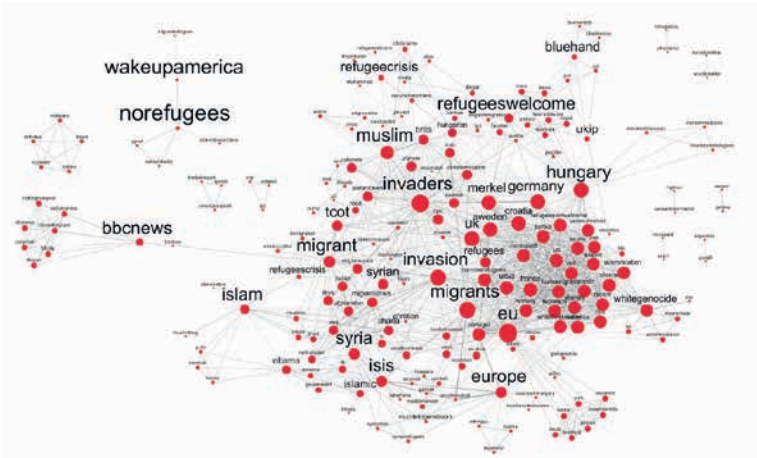
¹⁵⁶ The mentioned tweet is available at: <https://twitter.com/TheAntiMedia1/status/648174126415241216>

the official accounts of Anonymous, which reinforces the phenomenon of paranoid fusion. The bridge hashtags between the two sides are protest, Syria, syrianrefugees and p2. The latter hashtag is the symbol of progressive social media, the resource for progressives on social media¹⁵⁷. In this sense, this hashtag can summarize in itself the whole work of fusion paranoia between the two sides, which is, interestingly, connected through the online symbol of progressiveness.

The big picture: Refugee-migrant- asylum seeker keywords network

Finally, we illustrate the whole discussion about the refugee crisis on Twitter with the most relevant hashtags. Two hashtags are connected if they have been used by a significant amount of common users. Node size indicates the number of connections, and label size shows the importance within information flow (Betweenness Centrality)¹⁵⁸.

Figure 36: **Conspiracy discourses in the whole pattern of discourses on refugee crisis**



¹⁵⁷ The definition of p2 is available here: <https://www.hashtags.org/definition/p2/>

¹⁵⁸ Freeman, L. (1977): "A set of measures of centrality based on betweenness". In *Sociometry* 40: 35–41. doi:10.2307/3033543.

This graph visualizes the whole discourse of the European refugee crisis on Twitter with hashtags. The network reinforces the Echo Chamber Effect as the 'pro-migrant' hashtags are separated on the top from those hashtags like 'white genocide' (on the very right). The big picture shows the over-representation of anti-immigration hashtags such as 'invasion' and 'invaders', which are key parts of the conspiracy theories. However, words that are exclusively part of conspiracies are limited: they are more embedded in the larger 'anti-migrant' discourse.

On the left-hand side appear those hashtags which are connected mainly to the USA and UK. This shows that the refugee discourses of these countries are separated from the others, most probably because they have the highest number of English-speaking Twitter users. On the thickest part of the left side there are mainly European countries involved heavily in the current crisis. Words explicitly about conspiracy theories do not significantly appear in this big network, although the #trojanhorse is there on top. However, 'invaders' and 'invasion' are significant nodes in the middle, and the 'whites' also represent themselves at the bottom right, which includes the conspiracy discourse as well. On the top of this network a big node is #refugeeswelcome. At the bottom appear ISIS, Islam and Syria, which are the most frequent words describing the refugee crisis on Twitter in September, 2015.

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