

Impact of Salience on Differential Trust across Political Institutions in the Czech Republic*

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Abstract: This article explores why citizens express varying levels of trust across six institutions of political representation within the Czech Republic using a set of rival models. In addressing this question, this study argues that systematic differences in institutional trust are related to salience. Institutions with high visibility or salience to the public, i.e. government, lower chamber and president, will be trusted on the basis of their perceived political and economic performance. In contrast, institutions that are less salient to citizens are not evaluated on the basis of performance but on more diffuse criteria. Competing models of trust are divided into two groups. Top down explanations emphasise what institutions do; and hence focus on political and economic performance. Bottom up accounts of institutional trust refer to social mechanisms such as values, culture and knowledge. The empirical results presented in this study reveal that trust in salient political institutions is more strongly shaped by political performance. Otherwise, there is no systematic pattern to the determinants of trust in political institutions. These results suggest that citizen trust in political institutions emerges from a variety of top down and bottom up mechanisms, where salient institutions are different in that they are evaluated more on the basis of the political performance of office-holders.

Keywords: institutional trust, differential trust, levels of governance, salience, political sociology, Czech Republic

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Introduction

This article examines why there are varying levels of trust across different political institutions of representation. A brief examination of the average degree of trust in Czech political institutions reveals no clear pattern with level of governance, formal power or visibility (salience) to the public. Figure 1 reveals that high levels of public trust are given to institutions with low levels of formal power; a pattern that coincides with the relative visibility or salience of institutions, with the notable exception of the president. This is puzzling because it seems that citizens have greater trust in low salience political institutions, which they know least about; while high salience institutions such as the government are trusted least because of their unsatisfactory performance.

This interpretation of Figure 1 suggests that the determinants of trust in low and high salience institutions rest on different foundations where trust in the latter is based on performance. This study will test this argument using survey data from the Czech Republic. Hence the concept of 'trust' employed derives from the survey response process. Using Easton's [1975: 437] logic of 'specific support', this study will focus on public trust in *political* rather than *public* or *state* institutions.

Previous research that has compared trust in public (e.g. media, business, and churches), state (judiciary, police, military, etc.) and political institutions (government and parliament) has invariably found that the latter are trusted least [Norris 1999; Dalton 2004]. However, such comparisons may be more confusing than enlightening as they are not a comparison of 'like-with-like'. This is because domestic political institutions are unique for two reasons: (a) all contain elected incumbents, and (b) they are in most cases strongly associated with political parties.

Consequently, in order to study why there is differential public trust across institutions it makes sense to consider only those organisations of a similar type so as to ensure that any causal inferences drawn from model testing are not the product of extraneous influences such as anti-party sentiment [see Dalton and Weldon 2005]. The survey data used to examine public trust in political institutions of representation come from a post-election survey undertaken in the Czech Republic in June 2006. However, use of this specific dataset may be defended on the basis that it provides a rich set of explanatory variables to examine varying levels of trust across political institutions in a post-communist state. More generally, the research presented here contributes to the general study of trust because there are relatively few detailed systematic analyses that aim to explain why citizens express differential trust in political institutions [Levi and Stoker 2000: 482, 496].

This article is divided into four sections. In the first section, an explanation of why there is differential trust in political institutions is presented along with two hypotheses linking trust with relative salience. The second section presents the evolution of trust in the Czech Republic between 2000 and 2012; and this provides the context for the post-election survey data from June 2006 used in this study to examine rival models of trust in political institutions. This is followed

Figure 1. Relationship between institutions and level of public trust in the Czech Republic

Institution	Level	Formal power	Salience	Level of trust	Key feature
President	National	Low	High	High	Head of state elected by parliament. Generally, a national political figure. The previous president (Václav Klaus) was generally seen to be partisan (ODS). He was elected in 2003 and again in 2008.
Government	National	High	High	Low	Minimum winning coalition, 2002–2010. ODS became the largest party after the 2006 elections and formed a government in early 2007 after protracted negotiations.
Chamber of Deputies	National	High	High	Low	200 members elected through List PR. Evenly balanced between left and right after the 2006 elections. With MWC much legislation is generally on the basis of cross party consensus.
Senate	National	High	Low	Low	81 members, created in 1996, SMD two-round elections have low turnout, are held each year to elect a third of the senate. Majority of public opposed creating a senate and it has been unpopular. Has limited veto power. Dominated by ODS in 2006.
Regional Assemblies	Local	Low	Low	High	Created in 2000, elections in 13 regions (plus Prague which is legally a single municipality) have been held every 4 years since 2002 and have medium turnout. Regional administrations are generally coalitions of major parties. In 2004 regional government was dominated by ODS, however, in the 2008 elections lost out to ČSSD and KSČM.
Local Councils	Local	Low	Low	High	Created in 1992, 6234 municipal councils are elected for 4 years and are mainly composed of local independent candidates yielding a community based politics. Local elections generally have low turnout.

Source: Author.

Note: Institutions sorted on the basis of high or low trust as indicated in CVVM survey time series data. MWC denotes 'minimum winning coalition', PR refers to 'proportional representation' and SMD to 'single member districts'. Level of trust categorisation is based on the relative level of trust exhibited by the public in monthly surveys conducted over a decade (2000–2012).

in the third section by a description of the five models tested in this article. The fourth section outlines the data and methodology used in this study. Thereafter in the penultimate section there is a presentation of the results of the model testing and a comparison of the rival model's fit to the patterns of trust observed. In the final section, there are some concluding remarks regarding the implications of this empirical study of trust in the Czech Republic.

Why is there differential trust across political institutions?

It is important to highlight from the outset that the definition of trust used in this article is positivist in that it is based on the results of a standard mass survey question. Thus the differentiation in the literature between trust in an institution or office-holder is left open; as it is not possible to determine what respondents had in mind when answering the battery of trust items.¹ This positivist perspective has the merit of underscoring the fact that different institutions listed in a standard set of trust questions are likely to elicit very different considerations requiring a series of explanatory models [Zaller 1992]. Before turning to a consideration of rival explanations of trust in political institutions and their associated blocks of explanatory variables, it is important first to map out the dependent variable. In other words, what are the main political institutions examined in this study and how do they differ from one another?

Trust in institutions and salience

In this respect, Easton [1975] noted that specific support for institutions depends on being aware of what the various political institutions actually do [see Yang and Holzer 2006]. This insight highlights the importance of political knowledge among citizens and the relative visibility or salience of institutions to the general public. In this study, both knowledge and salience will be defined using survey data. The operationalisation of political knowledge is based on eight indicators that measure informational differences among citizens using standard survey items such as a political quiz. In contrast, measuring the relative salience of political institutions is problematic because there is no standard survey question for this task.

In this article, political institutions will be divided into two groups: those with 'high' and 'low' salience. An institution's relative visibility to the public is

¹ This necessarily pragmatic approach does not undermine the theoretical importance of distinguishing between systemic and non-systemic trust. Easton [1975] argues persuasively that distinguishing between 'diffuse' and 'specific' political support is fundamental for understanding the functioning of a political system. Here it is argued that the standard batteries of trust items do not allow a researcher to determine if trust is being expressed for an institution or office-holders. The survey-based literature on institutional trust indicates that such a distinction is often not made by respondents in an interview.

Table 1. Patterns in item non-response rate for trust in political institutions as an indicator of salience (%)

Year / mean values	High salience institutions			Low salience institutions			N
	President	Govern- ment	Lower Chamber	Senate	Regional Assembly	Municipal Council	
2000	3	3	3	7	NA	14	11 411
2001	2	3	3	7	39	12	10 692
2002	3	4	4	8	33	12	9683
2003	4	3	3	5	25	8	9691
2004	3	3	4	6	23	9	9526
2005	2	4	4	6	21	8	9758
2006	3	5	5	7	18	8	10 619
Mean item non-response (2000–2006)	3	4	4	7	27	10	10 197
Level of trust in June 2006	63	43	29	25	47	60	2002
Mean level of trust (2000–2012)	62	35	23	22	40	61	≈130 000
Difference in trust in June 2006 minus mean for 2000–2012 period	+1	+8	+6	+3	+7	+1	
Mean difference in institutional trust	+4						

Source: CVVM monthly surveys, 2000–2012.

Note: CVVM undertakes an average of ten to twelve surveys per annum, i.e. one per month excluding August due to holidays. These estimates refer to respondents who chose to answer ‘don’t know’ or refused to make any response. Here item non-response is interpreted as providing an indirect measure of the relative salience or visibility of the six main political institutions to the general public. There are no data for Regional Assemblies for 2000 because this tier of government was created in this period.

measured indirectly using the level of non-response, i.e. don't know or no answer, to the battery of trust in political institution questions. The central idea here is that institutions with comparatively low salience in the eyes of the public will have higher rates of item non-response regarding trust.

On the basis of the survey evidence collected over a six-year period with more than sixty surveys and sixty thousand respondents, presented at the top of Table 1, Czech political institutions may be broadly divided into two clusters: (a) President, Government and Chamber of Deputies in a 'high salience' group where item non-response is always 5% or less and (b) Senate, Regional Assemblies and Municipal Councils constitute a 'low salience' group in which average item non-response for the trust questions over a six-year period is most often 6% or greater.

The pattern evident in the top part of Table 1 makes intuitive sense, where the youngest political institution, i.e. Regional Assemblies formed in 2000 with the first direct elections in 2002, exhibits the lowest salience; and hence the highest average rate of item non-response between 2000 and 2006. As this institution's visibility to the public has increased, the rate of non-response to the trust question for Regional Assemblies has steadily declined from 39% to 18% in five years as shown in Table 1. In sum, an indirect item non-response measure of the relative visibility or salience of political institutions to the general public behaves as expected; and the patterns observed match with expert judgements on the Czech political system.

Figure 2. Relationship between institutional trust and salience

	Low trust	High trust
High salience	Government and Chamber of Deputies elicit low trust because of lower than expected performance and anti-party sentiment.	The President is trusted highly because the performance of the office-holder satisfies public expectations.
Low salience	The work of the Senate is not well known; and hence trust is not strongly shaped by performance. Consequently, trust is based on a variety of criteria.	Municipal Councils and Regional Assemblies are trusted on a diffuse set of 'bottom up' criteria; and not on the basis of their performance which is largely unknown.

Source: Author.

Note: This typology represents the relationship between the relative salience of an institution and the determinants of trust in that institution. The focus of this article is on demonstrating that high salience institutions are trusted on the basis of performance (a top down explanation), as the determinants of trust in low salience institutions is based on a wider range of (bottom up) factors such citizen values and political culture as outlined in Figure 3.

Trust, salience and performance

If one accepts that political institutions may be divided into high and low saliency groups in the manner just outlined, one might expect that institutions with different levels of visibility to citizens will have different bases for eliciting trust from the public. Within this study it is argued that political institutions with high salience will elicit trust on the basis of their perceived performance. This is because the outputs of institutions with higher salience are more open to evaluation by citizens as relevant information is more readily available in the national media. Here the logic is simply that better performances should lead to greater levels of trust [Parry 1976: 136]. This is the logic underpinning the top part of Figure 2.

In this article, institutional performance is envisaged as having two facets: political and economic. The former refers to general satisfaction with institutional action where partisanship is very likely to influence how an authority is evaluated. In contrast, economic performance relates to evaluations of the economy from a variety of perspectives: national versus personal and prospective versus retrospective. As the Czech economy is small and open to changes in global markets, it is reasonable to expect that expressions of trust stemming from perceived performance will be primarily political in nature. This is because political institutions do not directly control economic activity; and hence cannot be held directly responsible for changes in economic conditions. More will be said on these two facets of performance a little later.

Top down versus bottom up explanations of trust

Institutions with low salience must elicit trust responses that are based on other considerations. Within the literature on trust in political institutions there is a general division between a 'top down' performance-based explanation and a 'bottom up' culture, knowledge or value-based approach [Mishler and Rose 1994, 2001; Hooghe and Stolle 2003]. Here it is argued that public trust in institutions is not dependent on the success of incumbents, but derives from the society in which the political institutions are embedded. Consequently, the bottom part of Figure 2 shows that the basis for trust in low salience institutions will not be performance, but other society-based factors such as political culture and citizen values. Here citizen trust in political institutions is not grounded in incumbents' performance in office but is based instead on attitudes toward the political 'regime' and 'community' (to use Easton's terminology).²

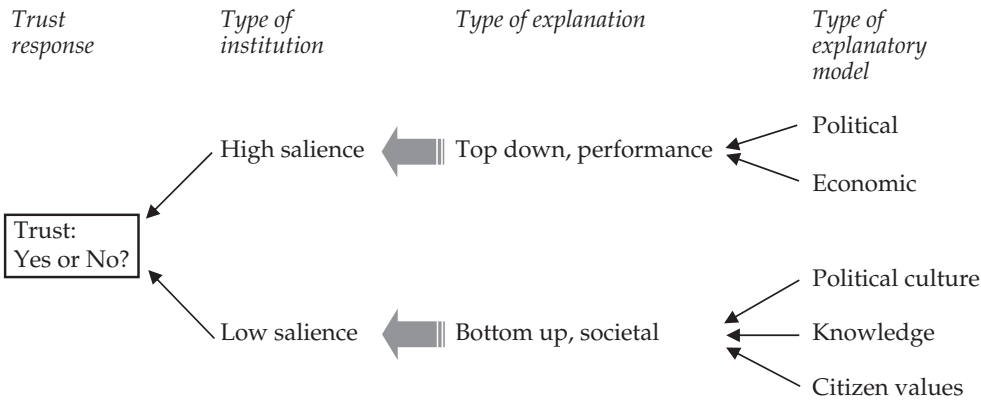
² It is tempting to denote these 'bottom up' explanations as representing 'diffuse support' but this would be inaccurate within Easton's system theory. Diffuse support refers to political regimes and communities and not to particular political authorities.

Using insights from these two explanations of the origins of citizen trust in political institutions, one may formulate two hypotheses linking citizen trust in a political institution and its salience to the public. Here it is expected, for the reasons noted above, that trust in high salience institutions will be based on their performance; and trust in low salience institutions will arise from features of society such as culture and values.

- H.1 Public trust in high salience political institutions is primarily a product of political performance and to a lesser extent economic performance.
- H.2 Public trust in low salience political institutions is not based chiefly on performance evaluations but on other factors such as political culture and citizen values indicating an institution’s embeddedness within society.

The relationship between institutional trust and salience highlighted in these two hypotheses is explicated in more detail using the typology presented in Figure 3. Here one can see that classifying institutions on the basis of high and low levels of trust and salience yields four possible outcomes. The link between trust and salience is influenced by whether or not an institution is evaluated on the basis of performance. High salience institutions with good performance evaluations will attract high trust, as will low salience institutions in a social milieu characterised

Figure 3. Explanations and models of differential trust in political institutions



Source: Author.

Note: The grey solid arrows linking ‘type of explanation’ to ‘type of support’ indicate an analytical link between attitudes observed and explanation and models used to explain these attitudes of trust. High salience institutions are the president, government and lower chamber; while low salience institutions are the senate, regional assembly and local councils.

by specific values and cultural norms or greater levels of political knowledge. In short, the observed levels of trust in political institutions may emerge through different paths or mechanisms. In this study, the focus is on the impact of salience on expressed trust.

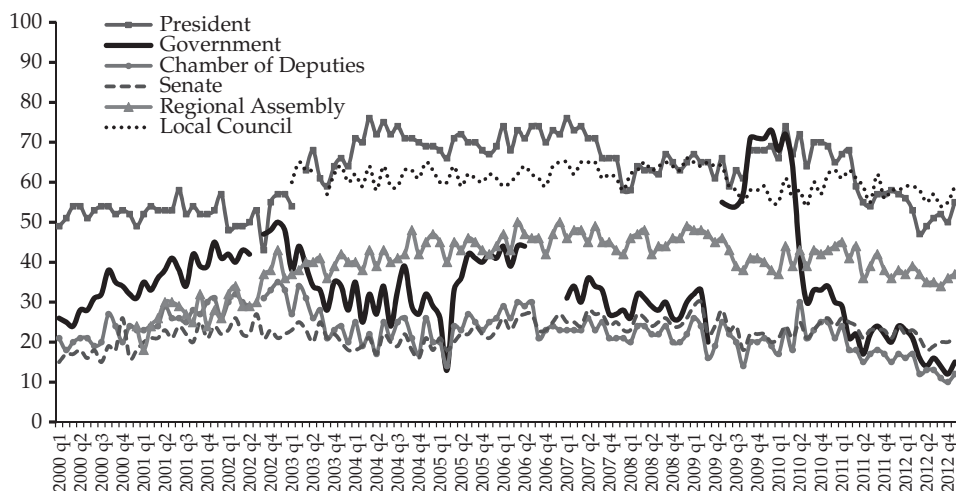
Prior to discussing the testing of these two hypotheses linking public trust in institutions with their relative salience, it is important first to make some remarks regarding the evolution of trust in the Czech Republic between 2000 and 2012. Thereafter, it will be argued that the individual level survey data used in this study, a post-election survey from June 2006, facilitates making inferences about the general relationship between the visibility of an institution to the public and the level of trust it attracts from citizens.

Institutional trust in the Czech context

One of the central concerns with the post-election survey data used in this article is the representativeness of the evidence. The bottom part of Table 1 reveals that the estimates of trust in political institutions made in June 2006 are a little higher than the mean scores observed for the 2000 to 2012 period, i.e. for all institutions it is +4%. On the one hand, one could argue that this mean difference indicates the post-election survey employed in this study is sufficiently typical to make the data from June 2006 useful for making generalisations about public trust in Czech political institutions.

On the other hand, the bottom part of Table 1 shows that trust in specific institutions such as the Government (+8%), the Chamber of Deputies (+6%) and Regional Assemblies (+7%) have elevated estimates vis-à-vis the mean values for the 2000–2012 period. Undoubtedly, these higher levels of trust are linked with the effects of a recent general election campaign in April–May 2006. However, as the goal of this article is to study those *relationships* that shape support for trust in political institutions the *absolute* levels of trust are not of central interest. Moreover, the 2006 post-election survey contains one of the richest sets of explanatory variables of all the datasets currently available for analysis.

Let us now turn our attention to the broad pattern of differences in trust in six political institutions in the Czech Republic since 2000. The time series for trust in institutions shown in Figure 4 demonstrates that the differences in public trust are stable in nature; and clearly evident for more than a decade between January 2000 and November 2012 (across more than 120 surveys and one hundred thousand respondents). The hierarchy of popular trust in institutions, evident in Figure 4, where greatest confidence is expressed in the President followed by Local Councils, Regional Assemblies, Chamber of Deputies and Senate. Moreover, this ‘stratification’ in attitudes suggests that there may be systematic differences in the bases of trust across all six political institutions examined: this is a central question addressed in this study through the two hypotheses outlined earlier.

Figure 4. Trends in trust in political institutions in the Czech Republic, 2000–2012 (%)

Source: CVVM monthly surveys, 2000–2012.

Note: The estimates are based on samples of 900 to 1000 respondents with a sampling error of 4% or less depending on the size of the estimate. The monthly survey estimates are denoted on the horizontal axis in terms of annual quarters to facilitate labelling, but the data have not been aggregated. Missing segments in a time series indicate that the trust question was not asked in these months due to elections: trust items at these junctures were likely to be confusing for respondents. This is most evident in the trust in government series. With the exception of the trust in government series, the other trust in institutions time series tend to follow stable parallel trajectories eliciting consistently different levels of trust from the public.

Another of the key patterns evident in Figure 4 is that trust in government exhibits considerable variation. Most often trust in government is similar in level to the upper and lower houses of parliament. However, on occasion, trust in government attains the same heights attributed to the President as was the case in late 2009 and early 2010 for the technical government of Jan Fischer. One implication of high variance in trust in government is that this specific time series in public opinion is more strongly determined by the public's perceptions of office-holders' political performance than is the case with all other institutions. Conversely, it is possible also to argue that the other institutions' relatively stable trust ratings reflect attitudes toward the institution itself rather than the activities of the office-holders.

One might reasonably ask: is public trust in political institutions in the Czech Republic different from elsewhere in Europe? There is no definitive answer to this question because there are few if any survey datasets that provide cross-national comparisons of both national and sub-national political institutions. Within the comparative study of trust in national political institutions the Czech Republic is

often noted to be lower than EU-15 member states because of its communist past and the transition process experience [Klingemann 1999]. Here reference is typically made to evidence regarding trust in the lower chamber of parliament and the national government from various waves of Eurobarometer, the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), the European Social Survey (ESS) and the European/World Values Surveys (EVS/WVS).

One of the key limitations with such comparative survey data is that the questions ('trust' versus 'confidence' in an institution) and response options (4- versus 2-point scales) are often different. Moreover, as noted above, such international studies rarely examine sub-national institutions associated with regional and local/municipal levels of governance. For these reasons, it is difficult to conclude that public trust across *all* political institutions in the Czech Republic is significantly lower than that observed elsewhere. What is clear is that the relative ordering of public trust in political institutions in the Czech Republic does match that observed elsewhere in Europe, although the absolute values recorded may be different. A pervasive anti-party sentiment results in national governments and parliaments attracting the lowest levels of trust across all of Europe and elsewhere. In sum, there is no systematic reason to think that the results reported in this study should not be generalisable; and be the subject of future empirical research beyond the Czech Republic.³

Data and methodology

In this article, five models of trust (plus a socio-demographic 'position in society' explanation) will be tested across six institutions as shown earlier in Figure 3. This modelling strategy yields a large number of parameters ($N=160$), as reported later in Table 2, not all of which are of central concern here. In order to keep the discussion within reasonable bounds, the presentation of results will focus on evaluating the two hypotheses outlined above. The validity and reliability or 'quality' of the rival models will be explored informally in terms of the extent to which individual variables behave as expected and exhibit statistically significant effects. Because of space constraints it will not be possible to review all of the explanatory variables. However, the statistical significance of specific coefficients are nonetheless important in guiding future research. It is appropriate at this juncture to briefly focus on the logic of the six rival models of political trust that will be tested. The expected relationship between institutional trust and salience is outlined above at the end of the first section.

³ More generally, Thomassen and van der Kolk [2009: 346] conclude from an analysis of CSES data that support for democracy based on perceived economic performance is very similar in old and new democracies. Such evidence supports the view that the Czech Republic's post-communist legacy does not undermine its uses as an informative case study for making generalisations.

Model 1: political performance

The link between trust and political performance has been interpreted in a number of ways. First, institutions of political representation are deemed trustworthy if they enhance citizens' welfare through their effectiveness [Downs 1957]. Second, political trust is an investment decision where the output of a political institution is a public good consumed by all citizens [Olson 1965: 12]. Third, trust in a political institution reflects public approval of recent performance because the authority is representative and responsive to citizens' wishes [Miller and Listhaug 1990: 358; Loewenberg, Mishler and Sanborn 2010: 481; Mishler and Rose 1994].

These and other political performance explanations of trust are almost always general in nature; and hence do not make predictions regarding specific institutions. Easton [1975: 442] argues in this respect that support for political authorities is best viewed as being based on general rather than specific performance. Such reasoning is based on extensive empirical evidence which demonstrates that citizens have limited knowledge of political institutions [Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Althaus 2003].

Consequently, general indicators of political performance are used. Here three items will be employed for this task: (1) satisfaction with government, (2) satisfaction with democracy, and (3) a belief that whatever government is in power 'makes a big difference'. The first item deals with the performance of the most powerful political institution whose actions and policies shape the performances of most other authorities. Previous research demonstrates that public trust judgements are influenced by incumbent governments [Citrin 1974; Mishler and Rose 1997; Hetherington 1999]. The second indicator captures general support for the regime—a factor strongly emphasised by Easton [1975].

The last question tests if the choice of government or office-holder influences the expression of trust. This Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) measure is designed to be a measure of popular perceptions of government accountability [see Listhaug, Aardal and Opheim Ellis 2009: 329]. In theory, one would expect *ceteris paribus* that greater electoral accountability will be associated with higher levels of institutional trust. However, if political institutions have a history of coalition based executives in which the 'same faces are always in power' then trust is likely to be diminished [see Vowles 2010]. A set of partisanship variables are also included because previous research demonstrates that partisans often have a more positive view of an institution if their party is in office [Bartels 2002; Gershtenson, Ladewig and Plane 2006: 896–899]. It is important to control for this effect to ensure that trust indicators are not simply reflections of respondents' partisanship.

Model 2: economic performance

The economic performance model used in this research employs standard economic voting measures that capture *level*: personal versus egocentric or national versus sociotropic evaluations, and *time horizon*: past/retrospective or future/prospective components [Kinder and Kiewiet 1981; Fiorina 1981].⁴ The literature on the impact of economic perceptions on vote choice is large; and there is debate about the impact of different variables [Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000, 2007, 2008]. Unfortunately, there is much less work on how economic perceptions influence public trust in political institutions.

Egocentric or sociotropic orientations indicate if trust is based on evaluations of personal or national economic benefits. Previous research shows that satisfaction with government is closely related to sociotropic perceptions of how well the national economy is performing [e.g. Alvarez and Nagler 1998: 1360–1362]. Moreover, the ‘clarity of responsibility’ thesis within the economic voting literature suggests that institutions more directly concerned with executive decisions regarding taxation and spending, such as the government and lower chamber, will exhibit a stronger relationship between trust and sociotropic economic performance than all other institutions [Hobolt, Tilley and Banducci 2010].

A retrospective economic viewpoint indicates that respondents express trust in an institution on the basis of policy outcomes rather than current policy platforms for future action: and hence would reward or punish an institution for their past successes or failures [Fiorina 1981]. As the institutions examined here differ on the basis of salience, it is reasonable to think that high salience institutions will be most strongly associated with a sociotropic prospective orientation because they are generally located at the national level, and low salience institutions with an egocentric retrospective outlook.

An additional item was included to capture if our Czech case study exhibits a post-communist profile where the socialist legacy predisposes citizens to believe that key political institutions such as the government can influence the economy [Rohrschneider and Schmitt-Beck 2002]. It is expected this variable should have no significant effects, thereby checking the idea trust in political institutions in the Czech Republic is determined by a socialist model of democracy where the state is expected to intervene extensively in society.

⁴ Sub-national economic sentiment indicators are not available. This is not problematic here because the four measures available are subjective; and it is reasonable to think that respondents’ experience of the local and regional economic situation will be included in the calculus yielding responses to the personal and national items.

Model 3: political culture

An alternative theoretical explanation of public trust in political institutions emphasises the importance of political culture and more specifically civil society and social capital [see Mishler and Rose 2001]. In essence, the sources of trust in political institutions are seen to reside within society and not the political system itself. Almond and Verba's [1963] 'civic culture' thesis and Robert D. Putnam's [2000] 'social capital' argument both claim that trust in political institutions depends critically on having strong social networks. The central mechanism of institutional trust is 'bottom up', where citizens' participation in social networks and civic institutions generate interpersonal trust, which in turn creates popular support for political institutions.⁵

Three different indicators are used to test the political culture model of trust in political institutions. The first measure investigates citizens' sense of external political efficacy. This attitude is commonly seen as one of the foundations for a political community as each member feels they have the power to change political decisions. The other two political culture model variables—organisational membership and community activism—capture the extent to which citizens are actively involved and working with their friends and neighbours.

The causal argument investigated here is that citizens who are well integrated into their communities and participate in collective activities will develop higher levels of interpersonal trust, which will in turn be translated into a high level of trust in political institutions. The previous literature says little about the cultural bases for differential trust. However, the 'size and democracy' literature stemming from Dahl and Tufte's [1973: 14, 87] classic work suggests that trust in sub-national political institutions will be more interpersonal and affective in nature. For this reason, one would expect that sense of external political efficacy (i.e. ability to shape political decision-making) will have a greater positive impact on trust in regional assemblies and local councils.

However, the 'dark side' of local personalised politics is that it may yield clientelism, corruption and office-holders who lack competence. Citizens who are active in their communities would be more exposed to such problems leading to lower levels of trust. Tarrow [2000] suggests alternatively that increased citizen activism stems from a loss of confidence in national authorities to act competently. Turning our attention now to differential trust, one researcher found that trust in office-holders was higher for local government incumbents in Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK. Similar trust differentials have been found

⁵ The concept of 'political culture' is operationalised in this research with sense of efficacy and social integration. However, it could also be interpreted more broadly as encompassing all three of the 'bottom up' explanatory models as shown in Figure 3. Distinguishing between political culture, knowledge and citizen values is justified here because this division provides more evidence on what facets of a 'bottom up' societal explanation of institutional trust explain most variation for each of the six bodies examined.

in the USA and Japan. However, in Europe this differential trust was not based on 'intensive interpersonal relations or a dense network of civil organisations' [Denters 2002: 809]. Consequently, in this study one would expect that membership of voluntary organisations will have no significant impact on trust in sub-national political institutions.

Model 4: political knowledge

Political trust is often defined in terms of citizens' expectations towards institutions of representation and executive decision-making such as government. A key element in this expectations conception of trust is that citizens have knowledge of what political institutions do [Easton 1975; Hardin 1999; Montinola 2004]. There is considerable survey evidence which demonstrates that there are systematic differences among citizens in expressed interest and knowledge of politics [Converse 1964, 2000; Althaus 1996, 2003].

These differences are important because citizens with higher levels of knowledge tend to be more trusting of political institutions, more supportive of democratic principles, are more politically active, and are have an increased likelihood of expressing preferences related to the performance of political institutions [Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry 1996: 71–72; Althaus 1996, 2003; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996: 221–224, 259–260]. Unfortunately, there is little direct evidence in previous research of a positive correlation between knowledge (as measured in a simple political quiz) and trust in political authorities: and hence little guidance as to how information or knowledge impacts on trust across the full range of political institutions.

However, an influential strand within liberal political theory predicts that informed citizens will be more critical; and will consequently exhibit less trust in institutions of political representation [e.g. Berlin 1958; Riker 1982]. As high salience institutions are more visible they will attract greatest scrutiny; and hence the lowest levels of trust as public expectations are not met. In contrast, low salience institutions such as sub-national authorities attract less attention, less critical reflection and will for this reason show on average a positive relationship with an individuals' level of informedness.

A popular, and related, explanation of low trust in political institutions is the role played by the media. A number of authors have argued that much media reporting of politics tends to be critical, focusing on scandals; and this presents citizens with a negative picture of the performance of political institutions [Dalton 2004: 71–74]. However, the evidence on this 'media malaise' thesis is mixed because media effects are both channel- and context-dependent. Research by Rahn and Rudolph [2002] on trust in local and national authorities in the United States found that exposure to the print media increases trust while frequent watching of television has the opposite effect. There is limited research on the specific link

between internet use and trust in political institutions. For example, Curtice and Norris [2004: 101–104, 113] found that internet use had no impact on political trust in Britain. However, as internet news consumers are known to be a well-informed and opinionated minority there is strong reason to think that this group will be less trusting than all others [see Schlozman, Verba and Brady 2010].

Model 5: citizens' values

In this article, two dimensions of citizens' values are examined: left-right orientation and religiosity. Both of these factors have played a fundamental role in structuring party system development in Europe [Lipset and Rokkan 1967]. The link between ideology and trust is complex; it is often shaped by context as the following research indicates. Miller [1974a, 1974b] found in the American context that in the mid-to-late 1960s strong adherence to left or right positions was associated with attenuated levels of trust in political authorities. This is because ideologues were frustrated that their preferred policies were not adopted by centrist incumbents. Later research by Craig [1993] and King [1997] found that centrist citizens exhibited less trust when party competition was strongly polarised.

Such work suggests that the relationship between ideology and trust is mediated by feelings of institutional representation and responsiveness. If this is indeed the case, one would expect that the relationship between ideological orientation and trust will be strongly coloured by the partisanship of institutional incumbents. Specifically, those with a left-wing orientation will exhibit less trust in institutions dominated by rightist office-holders, e.g., in June 2006, President Klaus, the Senate, and most regional assemblies and local councils. Conversely, those on the right will express less trust in institutions such as the government and lower chamber, which were controlled by left-wing parties during the first half of 2006.

Turning now to our second facet of citizen values, the civic engagement and social capital literatures suggest that individuals who are religious tend to exhibit higher levels of interpersonal; and hence institutional trust. As most religious communities (with the possible exception of the universalism of Roman Catholicism) are built around local rather than national congregations, and tend to be involved in local charitable activities (perhaps in partnership with local or regional governments) one would expect trust to be higher among the more religious citizens for sub-national institutions. For salient national level institutions the positive impact of greater interpersonal trust may be offset by the media's critical reporting of the 'immoral' or 'amoral' activities of national political figures yielding negative coefficients.

In addition to the variables included in the five models outlined above, a further five socio-demographic indicators have been included in all models tested. This select set of 'position in society' indicators capture potentially important

individual level resource effects. It is important to stress here that the literature on political trust has repeatedly demonstrated that trust attitudes do not reflect social characteristics [Levi and Stoker 2000: 481]. However, a key reason for including this small battery of structural variables is to take account of the possibility of omitted variable bias in the regression model estimations.

Data and methods

In this study, a post-election survey from the Czech Republic is used to explore how respondents in face-to-face interviews answer trust in domestic political institutions questions. This quota sample survey was fielded on 9–21 June 2006, immediately after the general election, by the Public Opinion Research Centre (Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění, hereafter CVVM).⁶ The set of six dependent variables examined in this study comes from a standard question asked by CVVM in almost all of its monthly surveys since the early 1990s. The wording of this item is very similar to that used in other countries and within international surveys. The exact format is as follows.

And can you please tell me more specifically, if you trust or do not trust the following institutions? The response options are: (1) Definitely trust, (2) Rather trust, (3) Rather not trust, (4) Definitely do not trust, (5) Don't know / no answer. The set of institutions examined are: (a) Government of the Czech Republic, (b) Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic, (c) Senate of the Czech Republic, (d) Regional Authority, (e) Local Council.

All six dependent variables were recoded in a similar manner: response options 1 and 2 were coded as one and all other responses as zero. This yields a dependent variable that compares expressions of trust in an institution versus all other responses: distrust and lack of opinionation. One might criticise this recoding decision on the basis that distrust and lack of opinionation are qualitatively different response options. However, the goal here is to examine citizen trust in contrast to all other possible responses that reflect various aspects of lack of trust: passive (don't know and no answer) and active (rather and definitely do not trust).

Models were also estimated excluding all respondents who gave non-committal answers, i.e. don't know or no answer. These give substantively similar results to those reported in Table 2. The decision to model explicit trust in an institution versus all other responses was retained because (a) it simplifies the interpretation of model parameters, i.e. trust versus active and passive distrust,

⁶ More detailed information regarding this survey and the questions used in this study are available from the Czech Social Science Data Archive (ČSDA) website at <http://archiv.soc.cas.cz/articles/en/2/DATA.html>.

(b) this coding is most often used in models of institutional trust in the literature, and (c) for statistical estimation reasons. In the latter case, treating 'don't know' and 'refused' answers as missing data complicates model comparison using Chi-square and deviance based statistics because overall model fit to the data depends on the number of cases in each model, which would of course be different.⁷

In order to simplify the presentation of model results, the blocks of independent variables (described in the third section and shown later in Table 2) used to operationalise each of the explanatory models will be represented as single 'sheaf coefficients' [Heise 1972; Buis 2010: 177–188]. Estimation of sheaf coefficient assumes that the each block of independent variables determines the values of the dependent variable through a latent variable. For example, economic performance is a latent variable that shapes trust in the government; and the economic performance latent variable is measured using the battery of five ego-centric/sociotropic and retrospective/prospective evaluations plus a belief the government has control over the economy. Each of the six sheaf coefficients may thus be viewed as an overall factor loading representing the impact of each explanation on trust in a specific institution. Figure 5 shows that this greatly simplifies presentation of the many probit model results as shown in Table 2.

Discussion

In order to test the rival models of trust in political institutions and the two hypotheses outlined in the second section, it is necessary now to turn our attention to the regression modelling results shown in Table 2. The presentation of the results of the six models tested is kept succinct and clear through reporting only the relative impact of each explanatory variable, which is given as a 'change in probability'; where statistically significant effects ($p \leq .05$) are highlighted in Table 2. Change in probability refers to the impact of some personal characteristic or attitude on expressing trust in an institution. For explanatory variables with more than two categories such as age the change in probability refers to the difference of expressing trust between the minimum and maximum values of the six trust (dependent) variables.

The results shown in Table 2 reveal that each of the six institutions examined elicits a different response profile from Czech citizens: there is no common pattern of significant parameters for any subset of institutions based on criteria such as level of governance, formal powers, and salience as highlighted above in Figure 1. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that citizens' expressed trust in institutions is strongly characterised by difference; as there is no common basis for trust in political authorities as 'bottom up' explanations suggest.

⁷ As probit models are estimated with maximum likelihood estimation, it is preferable to have as many cases as possible to ensure that the estimator converges toward consistent and unbiased final estimates.

Table 2. Probit models of public trust in key political institutions in the Czech Republic, 2006 (change in probabilities, minimum to maximum values)

Models and variables	A	B	C	D	E	F
<i>(1) Political performance</i>						
Satisfied with previous government	-.05	.40 ***	.20 ***	.02	.03	.10 ***
Satisfied with democracy	.12 ***	.14 ***	.13 ***	.10 ***	.11 ***	.09 ***
Govt. in power makes a big difference	.02	-.01	-.06	-.05	-.03	-.02
ODS party ID	.24 **	-.03	.05	.08 **	.05	.06
ČSSD party ID	-.09 **	.26 ***	.09 **	.01	<.01	.01
KSČM party ID	-.05	-.03	-.01	-.06	<.01	.04
KDU-ČSL party ID	.17 **	.11	.08	.09	.07	.03
<i>(2) Economic performance</i>						
Egocentric retrospective	.03	.06	.03	-.06 *	.04	-.02
Egocentric prospective	<.01	-.07	-.02	.01	.11 **	.08 **
Sociotropic retrospective	-.10 **	.13 **	.07 **	.01	.06	.04
Sociotropic prospective	.22 ***	.06	.12 ***	.15 ***	.18 ***	.09 **
Govt. has control over economy	<.01	.04	<.01	-.06	-.02	<.01
<i>(3) Political culture</i>						
External political efficacy	.03	.02	.10 **	.17 ***	.15 **	.14 **
Member of voluntary organisations	.08	.05	-.10 **	-.07	-.03	-.04
Political and community activism	-.20 **	-.09	.16 **	.05	-.20 **	-.18 **

Table 2. Probit models of public trust in key political institutions in the Czech Republic, 2006 (change in probabilities, minimum to maximum values)—part 2

Models and variables	A	B	C	D	E	F
<i>(4) Knowledge</i>						
Interested in politics	-.08 **	-.04	-.04	.01	.03	.01
Watch 30 minutes of news on TV	.02	.03	.02	-.04 *	.07 **	.01
Read newspapers for 30 minutes	-.03	<.01	-.01	.06 *	-.05	-.02
Listen to 30 minutes of news on radio	-.01	.01	.01	-.01	-.03	-.01
Read news on internet for 30 minutes	-.17 **	-.08	-.04	<.01	-.13 **	-.10 **
Political knowledge scale	.03	-.11 *	-.12 **	-.09 *	.15 **	.06
Exposure to election campaign	.20 **	.12	.09	.02	.14	.16 **
Major differences between parties	-.01	-.08 **	.01	<.01	-.09 ***	-.07 **
<i>(5) Citizen values</i>						
Right-wing orientation	.17 ***	-.15 ***	-.06 *	.05 *	.08 **	.07 **
Left-wing orientation	-.12 ***	.09 **	.03	-.06 **	<.01	.05
Attend religious services frequently	-.04	-.01	-.04	.07 *	.13 **	.12 **
<i>(Sd) Socio-demographics</i>						
Age	-.15 **	.10	.05	.07	-.06	.05
Living as a couple	.01	-.01	-.01	-.05 **	-.02	<.01
Female	.05 **	.02	.02	.04 *	.02	.02
Household income (quartile)	-.03	.01	-.01	.03	.03	.03
Subjective social class	.19 ***	.04	.05	.17 ***	.06	.03

Table 2. Probit models of public trust in key political institutions in the Czech Republic, 2006 (change in probabilities, minimum to maximum values)—part 3

Models and variables	A	B	C	D	E	F
Model fit statistics (N=2002):						
Wald $\chi^2(31)$	387	604	264	236	302	194
Log pseudo likelihood	-1000	-967	-1079	-1032	-1226	-1232
McFadden's Adj. R ²	.21	.27	.09	.08	.09	.05
AIC	2064	2001	2222	2128	2516	2527
BIC	2243	2181	2401	2307	2696	2706
% correctly classified	74	79	74	76	67	67
Lambda (λ)	.27	.51	.12	.10	.32	.15

Source: CVVM, Czech National Election Study, 9–21 June 2006, N=2002.

Note: The probit regression model estimates are based on unweighted data. Numbers in parentheses refer to model order given in Figure 1. The columns are labelled as follows: (A) President, (B) Government, (C) Chamber of Deputies, (D) Senate, (E) Regional Assembly, and (F) Local Council. In this table model parameters are presented as change in probabilities where the values reported indicate the change in probability (plus or minus) for expressing trust in an institution in terms of each independent variable changing from its minimum to maximum value. Significance of statistical estimates is denoted as follows: * $p \leq .10$, ** $p \leq .05$, *** $p \leq .001$.

The model fit statistics at the bottom of Table 2 show that the models estimated perform best in explaining the variation in public trust for two of the most salient political institutions: the president and government. All other institutions regardless of their national or local level position in the Czech system of governance are modelled less well in the sense that total explained variance is less than half of that for the president or government. It might be argued that a key attribute of these two institutions relates to their powers of persuasion [Edwards 2009; Blair 2010: 70, 94, 272, 317, 346, 365].⁸

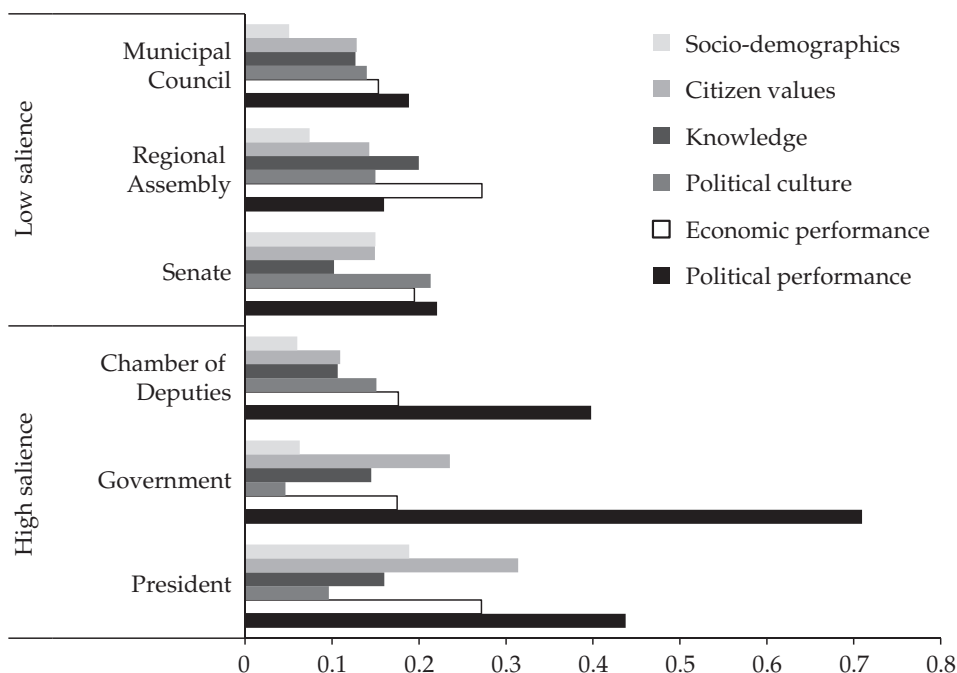
An examination of the effect of all thirty-one explanatory variables across each of the six political institutions yields few general effects. The results in Table 2 show that satisfaction with democracy is positively related to trust in all institutions. Otherwise the direction and significance of specific variable parameters vary across the six models tested. Given the proliferation of coefficients and the absence of striking patterns across institutions, it makes sense at this juncture to consider the blocks of independent variables associated with each of the five models (plus the battery of socio-demographics) as indicators of six latent variables. Consequently, re-estimating the models reported in Table 2 and focusing only on the sheaf coefficients that represent the combined effects of the blocks of variables associated with each general explanation greatly simplifies model comparison.

Comparison of rival models

The evidence presented in Figure 5 demonstrates the relative explanatory power of each of the six models for all six political institutions using sheaf coefficients. As explained above, each sheaf coefficient represents a measure of the combined effect of all the indicators for each explanatory model tested. The coefficients for each independent variable within the models have been combined into an overall model parameter. The focus here is less on which explanatory models best explain trust in specific institutions than on identifying the most powerful sheaf parameter effects. The two hypotheses outlined above in the second section predicted that political institutions salient to the public would be more strongly determined by the 'top down' political and economic performance models. In contrast, low salience institutions such as the senate and regional and municipal councils would be more strongly determined by 'bottom up' explanations such as political culture, knowledge and citizen values.

⁸ This pattern fits with a valence politics perspective where the ability of office-holders in political institutions to perform is what matters most to citizens. Here popular perceptions of political leaders such as the prime minister, president, party leaders are primarily evaluations of performance [Clarke et al. 2009: 30–52, 281–305]. Exploring a valence account of trust in political institutions is an important line for future work.

Figure 5. Comparison of rival models of public trust in Czech political institutions, 2006



Source: CVVM, Czech National Election Study, 9–21 June 2006, $N=2002$.

Note: The models' parameters were estimated using unweighted data. The bars are 'sheaf coefficients' which represent the mean effect for all the blocks of variables included in each of the six explanatory models tested. The sheaf coefficient estimations assume that the block of variables used for each model as shown in Table 2 are indicators for unmeasured latent variables such as political performance, political culture and citizen values. Sheaf coefficients have the advantage of allowing a comparison to be made between differences in explanatory power among different blocks of variables; or in this case, rival explanations of trust in institutions.

The central message from Figure 5 is that the performance models explain most of the variance observed for the president, government and (lower) chamber of deputies—all high salience institutions.⁹ In general, political performance is the best fitting of all the models tested followed closely by economic performance and citizen values. These findings confirm the expectations outlined earlier in the first hypotheses (H.1) in the second section. There it was argued that

⁹ Some caution is warranted here because the political performance items are defined in terms of the government and lower chamber; and this may explain why these particular parameters are so strong for these two institutions.

public trust in high salience political institutions is primarily a product of 'top down' mechanisms associated with political performance and to a lesser extent economic performance. A similar pattern, with lower levels of explained variance is also observed for the senate. This suggests that this relatively new national institution (established in 1996) may be developing the same basis of trust as the more established lower chamber; and hence emerging as a 'future' high salience institution.

Turning our attention now to the three low salience institutions, the pattern evident in Figure 5 does not confirm the second hypothesis (H.2) where it was proposed that trust in low salience political institutions is not based principally on performance evaluations, but on other factors such as political culture and citizen values: both indicators of an institution's embedding within society. The mediating effect of institutional salience on the relationship of economic performance on trust appears is more puzzling. Figure 5 reveals that the impact of economic performance on trust in regional government (a low salience institution) was stronger in June 2006 than that observed for the government and lower chamber. This is contrary to expectations and it is not clear why this should be the case.

The model fit statistics demonstrate that none of the models tested explains much of the variance observed. This implies that society-based 'bottom up' explanations are not superior to performance-based 'top down' accounts, as postulated in H.2. The fact that none of the six models tested on low salience institutions (senate, regional assemblies and local councils) explains very much of the total variance observed is important. This evidence demonstrates that attitudes of trust in less visible institutions are widely spread across all socio-demographic groups and among those holding varying political opinions and values.

Conclusion

Using a common explanatory and modelling framework designed to compare the determinants of trust across different institutions of political representation, this research has shown that citizens' differential trust in institutions depends on the visibility of an institution to the public. Popular trust in salient national institutions such as the government, lower chamber and president are primarily driven by perceived political and to a lesser degree economic performance. As performance often does not match expectations, only a minority of citizens express high levels of trust in these institutions. The office of President is an exception, demonstrating that trust has important office-holder (or leadership) effects that may follow a similar logic to that proposed by the valence politics (or competence voting) explanation of electoral behaviour. This model of vote choice argues that voters evaluate parties seeking election on the basis of perceived general competence [Karp 2009: 31, 44–49].

In contrast, political institutions characterised by low salience do not attract any strong expectations; and hence are not evaluated by citizens on the basis of performance. The evidence presented in the foregoing pages reveals that there are no key determinants of trust in low salience institutions with regard to the top down and bottom up explanations proposed and the half dozen models tested. An examination of the sheaf coefficients reported in Figure 5, and their confidence intervals (not reported), shows that for low salience institutions all explanatory models have approximately the same impact on trust. In other words, the determinants of trust in low salience institutions are diffuse.

To sum up, this study of trust in representative political institutions in the Czech Republic lends support to previous cross-national research that citizen trust in salient political institutions is most strongly determined by political performance [Newton 1999: 186; Dalton 2004: 197–199]. For low salience institutions, expressed trust is not strongly determined by either ‘bottom up’ or ‘top down’ explanations. Therefore, society-based theories of trust in political authorities would appear to be less relevant for all institutions regardless of level of visibility to the public. Greater understanding of trust in high and low salience political institutions is likely to come from dynamic analyses of time series data where more information about the context in which answers to trust questions in surveys is included in the explanatory models tested.

Recent work using a time series estimator called ‘vector autoregression’ (VAR) reveals that aggregate trust in government in the Czech Republic between 1996 and 2006 was determined by (a) general satisfaction with the political situation and (b) the impact of trust in the president on trust in government was mediated by trust in the lower chamber [Lyons 2012: 132–135]. In other words, trust in political institutions is interrelated—a feature that may be inferred from the shared variance evident in Figure 4—and is also intertwined with the general political mood that is both complex and dynamic in nature. These preliminary time series analyses results suggests that the static cross-sectional analyses reported in this study are only capturing some of the contextual determinants of citizen trust in political institutions; and this may help explain the limited explanatory power of the models reported.

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