

TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies (2023-2025)

Quarterly Project Newsletter - Issue 8 (December 2024)

TRUEDEM Observatory on Political Trust

The TRUEDEM Observatory of Political Trust, developed as part of the TRUEDEM project, is a dedicated research platform designed to monitor, analyze, and disseminate insights on political trust across European democracies. Led by Claudiu Tufiş, Luciana-Alexandra Ghica, and Bogdan Radu (University of Bucharest, Romania), the observatory provides an extensive and interactive repository of data, studies, and policy insights to support academics, policymakers, and the general public in understanding trust dynamics in governance.

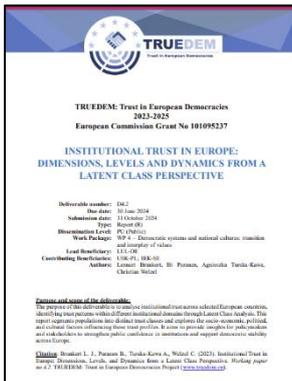
The observatory compiles long-term datasets from sources such as the Eurobarometer, European Social Survey, and World Values Survey, offering a comparative perspective on political trust across different countries and institutional contexts. Through systematic analyses, it examines how democratic performance, corruption levels, media influence, economic conditions, and governance quality shape public perceptions of trustworthiness. A key focus of the observatory is to identify patterns of declining trust in democratic institutions, assessing the consequences for electoral participation, political engagement, and the rise of populism.



In addition to data analysis, the observatory functions as a research hub, providing access to working papers, academic publications, and expert commentaries on trust and transparency in governance. It also serves as a forum for discussions through webinars and expert panels, bringing together researchers and practitioners to debate new findings and explore strategies for rebuilding trust in democratic systems. A policy-oriented section offers recommendations for strengthening institutional credibility, ensuring that insights generated through the observatory are directly relevant to governance reforms and decision-making processes.

As an ongoing initiative, the TRUEDEM Observatory is committed to maintaining up-to-date resources on political trust beyond the official duration of the TRUEDEM project. By continuously tracking trust levels, identifying emerging trends, and fostering interdisciplinary dialogue, the observatory plays a crucial role in supporting democratic resilience and transparency in Europe. For more details and access to resources, visit www.trustobservatory.eu/wp.

Institutional Trust in Europe: Dimensions, Levels, and Dynamics from a Latent Class Perspective



The TRUEDEM report "Institutional Trust in Europe: Dimensions, Levels, and Dynamics", authored by TRUEDEM project members Christian Welzel and Lennart Brunkert (Leuphana University, Germany), Agnieszka Turska-Kawa (University of Katowice, Poland), and Bi Puranen (Bikupan Research Institute), provides a detailed examination of trust in European institutions using Latent Class Analysis (LCA) across eight countries. The study identifies four key trust profiles: Low Trust, Political Trust, Law and Order Trust, and High Trust, each shaped by socio-economic, political, and cultural factors.

The analysis highlights regional disparities in institutional trust, with Scandinavian countries exhibiting the highest levels of confidence in democratic institutions, while Southern and Eastern European nations show greater skepticism toward electoral institutions and a stronger reliance on law-and-order institutions such as the police and judiciary. The findings suggest that institutional trust is a crucial factor in shaping political behavior, influencing voter turnout, populist support, and perceptions of government legitimacy.

The study further explores the impact of education, economic security, and generalized trust on trust levels, concluding that inequalities and political disenchantment contribute to declining trust in democratic institutions. The increasing reliance on law-and-order institutions, particularly in contexts of political instability, signals a potential shift in the public's perception of governance and authority. The authors emphasize the importance of transparency, accountability, and political inclusivity as key strategies to rebuild and sustain institutional trust across European democracies.

TRUEDEM Project Completes Qualitative Data Collection on Political Trust

The TRUEDEM project team has successfully completed its [qualitative data collection](#), delivering a comprehensive dataset that explores trust dynamics and perceptions of trustworthiness across diverse political and social contexts in Europe. The study's conceptual foundation examines the relational and situational nature of political trust, focusing on who trusts whom and why, how trust varies across contexts, and the cues individuals use to assess the trustworthiness of institutions and political actors. The research involved three major components, each providing unique insights into the trust-building process.

The first component consisted of 21 focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in six countries: Czech Republic, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Romania. Each FGD included 6-10 participants representing diverse demographic backgrounds, discussing citizen satisfaction with political systems, qualities of trustworthy leadership, and governance performance in crisis situations. The second component featured elite interviews with 161 politicians and policymakers across ten countries: Austria, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden. These interviews focused on institutional trust-building, challenges in fostering citizen engagement, and strategies to enhance transparency and accountability in governance. The third component involved 159 consultations with CSO leaders, conducted in the same ten countries. These discussions provided insights into how civil society organizations act as intermediaries between citizens and political institutions, fostering transparency, inclusivity, and democratic accountability.

To ensure methodological rigor and cross-country comparability, the project developed detailed guidelines, standardized interview scripts, and multilingual tools, including translated FGDs guides, recruitment questionnaires, and interview frameworks for both politicians and CSO representatives. The data collection process followed strict GDPR-compliant anonymization procedures, ensuring that all transcripts were fully anonymized to protect participant confidentiality.

TRUEDEM Webinar Series

The [TRUEDEM Webinar Series](#) is an academic platform dedicated to exploring the dynamics of political trust, democratic legitimacy, and governance in European democracies. Organized as part of the TRUEDEM research project, the series brings together scholars, policymakers, and experts to discuss the drivers of trust and distrust, the impact of political scandals and media, and the role of institutional reforms and digital innovations in shaping public confidence in democracy. Featuring interdisciplinary perspectives from political science, sociology, and psychology, the webinars provide in-depth analyses of both long-term trends and contemporary challenges to political trust. The series aims to foster research-driven discussions on strengthening democratic resilience and improving the relationship between citizens and political institutions.

A Conceptual Analysis of Trust

#TRUEDEM webinar

A Conceptual Analysis of Trust

Dr. Maria Uttenthal
Herlitz School
The University of Governance in Berlin
Germany

JOIN US ON OCTOBER 03, 2024, AT 16.00 CET

TRUEDEM Funded by the European Union

On October 3, 2024, Maria Uttenthal presented a novel interdisciplinary analysis of trust, integrating perspectives from political science, psychology, and sociology. Using Sartori's conceptual guidelines, she systematically developed a framework that moves from a universal definition of trust to more specific subtypes within interpersonal and institutional contexts. This approach bridges competing theoretical perspectives and offers a foundation for multidisciplinary consensus on trust as a key social and political concept. [Learn more here.](#)

What makes people trust or distrust politicians?

#TRUEDEM webinar series

What Makes People Trust or Distrust Politicians?
Insights from open-ended survey questions

Marte Winsvold
Institute for Social Research
Oslo, Norway

JOIN US ON NOVEMBER 29, 2024, AT 16.00 CET

TRUEDEM Funded by the European Union

On November 29, 2024, Marte Winsvold (Institute for Social Research, Oslo, Norway) presented a TRUEDEM webinar exploring the factors that shape public trust and distrust in politicians. Using content analysis of 1,105 open-ended survey responses, the study found that citizens assess politicians based on four key traits: predictability, intrinsic commitment, competence, and responsiveness. Notably, trust and distrust are not simply opposites—while predictability is the most common reason for trusting politicians, a perceived lack of intrinsic commitment is the leading cause of distrust. [Learn more here.](#)

A Scandal Effect: Local Scandals and Political Trust

#TRUEDEM webinar series

A Scandal Effect? Local Scandals and Political Trust

Sofie Hennau
Universiteit Hasselt
Belgium

JOIN US ON DECEMBER 10, 2024, AT 16.00 CET

TRUEDEM Funded by the European Union

On December 10, 2024, Sofie Hennau (Universiteit Hasselt, Belgium) presented a TRUEDEM webinar examining the impact of local political scandals on trust in municipal institutions and leaders. The study, based on data from Belgian municipalities before the 2018 local elections, found clear evidence of a "scandal effect"—citizens in municipalities affected by political scandals reported significantly lower trust in local government and their mayor compared to those in unaffected areas. [Learn more here.](#)

TRUEDEM Blog on Political Trust: Call for Submissions



The [TRUEDEM Blog](#) is inviting submissions for a blog post competition, open until December 1, 2024, aimed at fostering discussions on political trust and its role in European societies. This competition provides a platform for scholars at all career stages, including MA and PhD students, to share their insights on how political trust interacts with key socio-political issues such as polarization, migration, democratic participation, and institutional innovations.

Participants are encouraged to explore themes such as the impact of polarization on trust in political institutions, the relationship between trust and migration policies in Europe, the role of trust in shaping voter behavior during the 2024 EU elections, and how democratic innovations such as deliberative democracy and participatory

budgeting influence public trust in governance. Submissions should be up to 1,500 words, written in a style that is accessible to both academic and non-specialist audiences, including policymakers and the general public.

The competition will recognize up to five winning entries. All winning posts will be published in the TRUEDEM Blog, contributing valuable insights to ongoing discussions on political trust in Europe. Submissions should be accompanied by a short bio and photo of the author and must be sent via email to office@truedem.eu. For full submission guidelines and further details, [see here](#).

TRUEDEM Trust in European Democracies

Cross-country comparative comprehensive investigation of public perceptions of trust and trustworthiness (2023-2025)

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