

DISTRUST IN THE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

THE CASE STUDY OF BULGARIA

Bachelor Thesis

by

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I. Introduction

Bulgaria's Democracy Index keeps going down, being ranked 52nd in the latest Economist Intelligence Unit study (EIU, 2011). According to the unit's analysis for Bulgaria (as cited in Lazarova, 2012), this downtrend is attributed to low levels of institutional trust due to weaknesses in governance and an underdeveloped democratic political culture.

This disturbing fact riveted the public attention and admonished the Bulgarian society that there is a need of comprehensive understanding of the institutional distrust. Therefore, the following thesis aims to provide valuable information about the reasons for this phenomenon in Bulgaria. This issue is considered extremely important and deserves to be carefully studied, because the trust that a society places in the national institutions exerts great influence on the satisfaction with the democratic development of the country and is a necessary condition for the long term stability of the political life (Almond & Verba, 1963).

Results of various international public opinion researches carried out since the early 1990s indicate that since the fall of the Communist regime Bulgarian citizens have become increasingly skeptical and critical towards the national political leaders and institutions (Boyadzhieva, 2009). Although the low level of trust placed in the political institutions of the country has been a widely discussed topic, there is still no agreement as to which its determinants are. Therefore, the major research question, driving this thesis, is: What is the central reason for the institutional distrust in Bulgaria?

This thesis focuses on the case of Bulgaria for two important reasons: on the one hand, because Bulgaria is the country with the lowest levels of institutional trust among all European countries (Tilkidjiev, 2010). According to the results of Tilkidjiev's comparative research, the institutional distrust in Bulgaria "appears to be country's trademark and exceptionalism against the European backdrop". On the other hand, there is so far no special, systematic study on this topic for Bulgaria. Only few scholars (e. g. Boyadzhieva, 2009) have studied the country with respect to the question on institutional trust, but so far none of them have empirically tested the explanatory power of its possible determinants. This makes Bulgaria an interesting, relevant and new setting to examine the reasons for the widespread institutional distrust.

This work is motivated by my willingness to go deep in the problem and produce an original work of research that explains how the institutional trust in Bulgaria is determined and hence, how it could be cultivated in the near future.

The thesis is divided into five parts. After the introduction, the second section starts by interpreting the general meaning of (institutional) trust and expounding the objects and types of political support. For this purpose, the most relevant aspects of the David Easton's system theory (1965) are extracted and used as a starting point of the further work. The theoretical review provides information about the most prominent theories used to explain the origins of institutional trust and ends with the hypotheses development. Afterwards, the empirical research is discussed in detail in section three. Part four contains the descriptive and the explanatory analysis, as well as the hypotheses testing. At the end, the thesis concludes with an edifying discussion about its possible shortcomings, policy implications and future research directions.

The theoretical part of this thesis presents the two main perspectives cited to account for the low levels of institutional trust in post-communist democracies, namely the institutional and the cultural theories. In brief, by applying the existing theories to the case of Bulgaria, it is investigated to what extent politically exogenous and politically endogenous factors influence the institutional trust in the country and which of them tends to be more significant. Therefore, a key question to be addressed in the next chapter is: Which of the two theories better explains the institutional distrust in Bulgaria?

After the review of the relatively abstract theoretical framework, this thesis proceeds with specific plausible hypotheses about the relationship between the institutional trust and its most prominent determinants. The hypotheses are tested using indicators of satisfaction with institutional performance (both political and economic) and trust in fellow citizens as independent variables to predict the trust placed in the Bulgarian political institutions. Since the type of the study is cross-sectional for explanatory purposes, it concentrates on only one point of time (the data come from the fifth round of the European Social Survey which is conducted in 2010), but also determines the cause-and-effect relationship between the above-mentioned variables.

The findings of the empirical research underline the great importance of the institutional performance, especially the political one, for the present society and prove that it is the major factor in explaining the low levels of institutional trust in Bulgaria. Because of the fact that they support the preponderance of the institutional over the cultural theories, it could be argued that there are grounds for hope that it will not take much time to cultivate the trust necessary for the effectively functioning of the Bulgarian institutions.

The results of this thesis contribute to the discussion about the possible determinants of institutional trust. They have value in building knowledge base, are of use when identifying potential symptoms of declining trust and a great help in understanding how the Bulgarian political institutions can generate it.

II. Theoretical basis

1. Definitions

In the beginning, the general meaning of trust needs to be explained. According to Offe (1999: 47), trust can be defined as the „belief that others, through their action or inaction, will contribute to my/our well-being and refrain from inflicting damage upon me/us”. Luhmann (1989) defines trust as a rational concept that refers to a specific type of behavior that a person (or a group of persons) has to other persons, institutions, social systems etc. This type of behavior becomes relevant when a person is vulnerable to the actions of others; can not control them or is not assured of their intentions and competence. Therefore, trust has nothing to do with knowledge, it is a belief about others’ actions with no certainty of the results and hence risk is its immanent property. When X trust Y, X delegates to Y control over Z in which X is interested. Thus, X knows that Y could harm him, but Y will not, not because X can control Y, but because Y will try not to do so (Luhmann, 1989).

The question addressing the political trust is more controversial, because there are many aspects that need to be considered first. While some of the definitions involve expectations and results of the political actions (Gamson, 1971: 41), other focus on the personal characteristics of the political leaders who actually hold the positions such as honesty and competence (Abramson, 1972: 1245). However, the interpretation of the term depends on the research question and the object to which trust is directed. Therefore, taking into consideration the fact that this thesis concentrates on the trust people place in the political

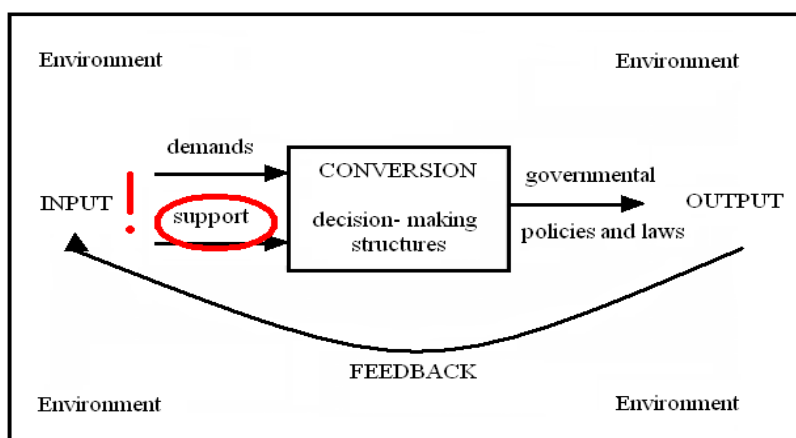
institutions of the country, a useful definition is provided by David Easton (1975: 447): “the probability that the political system (or some part of it) will produce preferred outcomes, even if unintended”. In this case, the term trust refers to the belief that the political institution will act and behave in accordance with the expectations of the trusting persons even in the absence of control (vertical trust).

This belief proved to be one of the most relevant and stable foundations upon which the political life of a country is built: it lowers the political transaction costs (Fukuyama, 1995) and is beneficial to both citizens and political institutions, because it gives people more certainty about the competence of the institutions, and institutions more power to represent the will of the people (Citrin & Muste, 1999). Moreover, it increases the support for the democracy, enhances the sharing of information, improves government accountability (Knack, 2002) and decreases corruption (Rose & Shin, 2001).

2. Objects and types of political support

For the purpose of interpreting the concept of institutional trust, this thesis is based on the classification of objects and types of political support offered by Easton (1965). He defines the political system in terms of inputs (demands and support), conversion (decision-making structures), outputs (governmental policies and laws), feedback and environment. In processing the inputs, the system eventuates in outputs which in turn have influence upon the inputs through the feedback. Of primary importance for this thesis is only the second type of input: the political support.

The political system (Easton, 1965):



According to Easton, the political support is a necessary condition for the persistence of the system, presenting the positive/negative attitude of the citizens towards the three system's objects: the political authorities, the political regime and the political community. Since the political community refers to the personal identification with the political system in broad terms, and not to the concept of trust (Easton, 1965), I lay it aside and concentrate on the other two system's objects. While, as conceptualized by Easton, political authorities include occupants of political positions, who have "acquired the primary responsibility for making decisions at the most inclusive level of the system" and "whose authority is considerably narrower" (for example, Angela Merkel as a chancellor of Germany), the political regime is divided into three sub-objects: constitutionally prescribed norms, "a broadly defined set of political values" as well as structures of authority, including governmental institutions and authorities' role such as the role of the president and chancellor ("formal and informal patterns in which power is distributed and organized with regard to the authoritative making and implementing of decisions- the roles and their relationships through which authority is distributed and exercised").

The difference between support for political authorities and regime support lies in their durability: the support for political authorities is more fleeting than the support for regime, because in contrast to the change of authorities, the change of the society's values is much more time-consuming process. However, they both need a certain level of political support, because this is the only way authorities discharge their duties adequately, and regime remains stable.

Furthermore, in order to correctly use the term "institutional trust" and, accordingly, empirically measure this concept, it should be systematized more precisely. For this purpose, there are two types of political support to be discussed (Easton, 1965; 1975), namely specific and diffuse support. The specific support refers only to the political authorities: it applies to the citizens' satisfaction with their performance and is precisely targeted at their day-to-day decisions. As new policies are produced, citizens would assess them differently and hence specific support is deemed to change constantly. In contrast to the first type of support, diffuse support consists of "a reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed or the effect of which they see as damaging to their wants" (Easton, 1965: 273) and refers to all three system's objects. It does

not depend on concrete political actions and concerns only what a political object is and represents. Moreover, it is notable for its durability which secures the system's stability in times of general disappointment, war or inflation. Although the two types of support have different causes and effects, they complement one another, because in the long run the diffuse support is based upon the past specific support. However, short-term failures of governments to satisfy citizens' expectations are common and do not endanger the diffuse support and the stability of the political system.

The diffuse support for regime and authorities is further subdivided into two categories: political legitimacy and political trust (because of its overriding importance, the second category is of primary importance in this work). Though, all things considered, the political trust, like the specific support, come from the satisfaction with the output of political authorities' decisions and hence from the assessment of concrete political actions, it is conceptualized as dimension of diffuse support. The reason for this is the effect of generalization (generalized output satisfaction): in time satisfaction/dissatisfaction with concrete political actions turns into general attitude towards all political authorities and the regime (Easton, 1975: 448, 449).

Objects and types of political support (Easton, 1965; 1975):

		OBJECTS		
		political community	political regime	political authorities
TYPES	diffuse support	personal identification	legitimacy ----- ! trust	legitimacy ----- trust
	specific support	—	—	satisfaction with performance/output

In order to summarize the concept, it is important to mention that from now on this thesis will focus only on the second subtype of diffuse support: the political trust. The referents of this type of political trust will be the political institutions. Although terms political and

institutional trust are often used synonymously to avoid repetition, from now on the term “political trust” will be replaced by the term “institutional trust”, as defined at the beginning of this chapter. This is meant to prevent any conceptual confusion and specify explicitly the object to which the trust of the citizens is directed. This sub-object of the political regime will be studied, because the trust placed in the governmental institutions is less immediately influenced by specific political actions and hence, would not make the research sensitive to government performance. Moreover, the chosen referent of trust is distinguishable from other types of support such as trust in authorities who actually hold the positions.

In this thesis, as a measure of institutional trust will be used the trust that citizens place in the national parliament. The trust in parliament is a good measure of institutional trust, because the legislative function of a country’s parliament is far from being its most important one and determining its origins is an ambitious undertaking which implications extend beyond the legislature itself. The parliament is the main representative institution of the democratic governments which most relevant task is to generate and maintain trust. Therefore, low level of trust in parliament is sufficient indicator of institutional dissatisfaction and should be seen as particularly worrying (Newton, 2000). For example, Beer (1966) holds that one of the parliaments’ most significant functions is to “mobilize consent” and conduce to “a continual exchange of communications” between the institutions and the citizens. On the other hand, according to Pakenham (1970: 529), parliaments “produce a wider and deeper sense of government’s moral right to rule” and put their “stamp of approval on initiatives taken elsewhere”. Accordingly, the trust/distrust placed in national parliament is extremely important, in particular, in the absence of previous democratic experience and is most likely to spillover to the trust/distrust placed in the overall set of governmental and civil institutions of a country.

It is important to mention here that neither the significance of the institutional distrust, nor the consequences of it are object of this work. However, for the purpose of emphasizing the importance of the given research question, they should be explained briefly. Some of the most mentioned phenomena which the institutional distrust could cause are: disengagement from the political process, lack of electoral participation, political disorientation, cynicism, passiveness, apathy, estrangement, intolerance, aggression, revolutionary tendency and even crisis of democracy (Moy & Pfau, 2000: 26-29).

3. Main theories used to explain the institutional trust

According to Newton & Norris (2000: 53), “The institutional trust is the central indicator of public’s underlying feeling about its policy”. It expresses and measures the relation between the citizens and the political institutions and is absolutely necessary to such new democracies as Bulgaria where the previous communist institutions have demonstrated themselves untrustworthy (Shlapentokh, 1989). It is generally believed that the democracies enjoy higher levels of institutional trust than the authoritarian regimes. Therefore, it is normal that new democracies like Bulgaria inherit certain levels of institutional distrust, which are supposed to decrease over time. Paradoxically, this is not the case in Bulgaria, because somewhere on the long way to democracy, Bulgarians’ confidence in the political institution of the country has declined still further (Boyadzhieva, 2009). Though some scholars have suggested that a certain level of distrust, also called “healthy skepticism”, is favorable to democracy (Clearly & Stokes, 2006), the distrust of Bulgarian citizens has reached dangerous levels and hence deserves special attention. This is why, it is important, now more than ever, to find out what is the major reason for this disturbing phenomenon.

This chapter presents the theoretical debate over the determinants of institutional trust. First of all, in order to discern the origins of institutional trust in new democracies from these in established ones, it is to be clarified that the low levels of institutional trust in post-communist countries is most often associated with a phenomenon, called “post-honeymoon effect”, and in the latter with post-materialist values and emergence of a more critical citizenry (Inglehart & Catterberg, 2003). The “post-honeymoon trend” among the new democracies refers to the unjustified demands of the society and expresses the skepticism after the transition. Although Bulgaria is listed by Freedom House as semi-consolidated democracy, characteristics of the Communist regime are still widespread and accordingly, it is not clear whether the disillusionment is caused by the communist heritage or this is just an excuse for the inability of the government to satisfy citizens’ expectations. Therefore, the main determinants of institutional trust in Bulgaria are to be explained in this section and empirically tested in the next one.

In the limelight of this review are two broad theories: the cultural and institutional perspectives (Mishler & Rose, 1997), which contend with each other, offering different standpoints on the origins of institutional trust in new democracies. While cultural theories

hypothesize that the institutional trust is politically exogenous, institutional theories posit that it is politically endogenous.

Using micro-level approach which underlines the differences in personal experiences, this thesis concentrates on origins of individual variances in institutional trust. Contrary to the macro-level focus whose main indicators of institutional performance are the Gross Domestic Product, the level of unemployment, the rate of inflation, the Freedom House and Corruption Indexes, etc., the micro-level one presumes that each person may assess the institutional performance differently and hence that institutional trust is predetermined by differences in socialization and/or by differences in individual experiences of each person with the political and economic performance of the institutions. Although the macro-focus might be a very useful tool for the better understanding of the trust building, it will not be examined here, because it highlights the cultural differences across countries (there is a generally shared view on institutional performance among people with full information within a country) and does not take into consideration individual responses. The micro-approach is preferred over the macro-one, because according to Mishler and Rose (1998), among individuals variations have stronger explanatory power than the between societies variations and convincing findings about the determinants of institutional trust can be obtained only at micro-level.

3. 1. Cultural theories

Although both theories highlight the great significance of experience, they differ in regard to what kind of experience predetermines the institutional trust. The cultural theories presume that it originates outside the political sphere from early-life relations. They posit that it is a result from the collective culture of a nation and is an extension of the interpersonal (horizontal) trust of each person (as defined in the beginning of this thesis). The cultural approach considers institutional trust to be heavily affected by the culture in which one was grown up and hypothesizes that people decide to trust their political institutions as a response to trust experience with other people which is accumulated over years (Dahl, 1971). Institutional trust is culturally determined from basic socialization patterns and is projected onto institutions, and not an effect of their performance. The interpersonal trust and the way citizens behave within their circle of family and friends serve as a basis for the development of trustworthy institutions which in turn cultivates trust. Therefore, the culturalist hypothesis is that the institutional performance is a result, and not reasons for institutional trust (Almond

& Verba, 1963; Eckstein, 1966; Inglehart, 1997). From the point of view of cultural theories the institutional distrust in former Soviet Bloc countries derives from the communist legacy which is associated with the undermined interpersonal trust and hence with political culture, characterized by distrust towards the political institutions. It may be mentioned here that these countries present the perfect setting for testing the cultural perspective, because the cultural legacy of the former regime is still a very influential factor.

According to this theory, the institutional trust springs from the social environment. The culturalist assumption is that sources of institutional trust are rooted in the trust relationships between individuals and their family, neighbors and friends, because they lay the groundwork of the later trust experience. It follows from this that if people trust each other, then they will generate high levels of trust and hence will form spontaneous sociability. This term refers to the ability of the people to easily form cooperative relations which are expected to reach the political institutions of the representative democracy (Fukuyama, 1995).

The basic assumption of these cultural theories that is of direct concern to the further work is that trust in fellow citizens and institutional trust should be correlated. It follows from this that at micro-level institutional trust/distrust will vary directly as the degree of interpersonal trust/distrust. Consequently, the interpersonal trust creates trust in institutions and an increase in the interpersonal trust should be accompanied by an increase in the institutional trust. Logically, as the levels of interpersonal trust in a country decrease, the levels of institutional trust should decrease, too. Therefore, country with low levels of interpersonal trust should manifest low levels of trust in institutions.

3. 2. Institutional theories

On the other hand, the institutional theories deal with short-term factors such as the evaluation of the institutional performance. According to this perspective, the institutional trust reflects the rational judgment of the citizenry based on its direct experience with the performance of the institutions. Similarly, as conceptualized by Easton (1965), citizens' evaluation of the institutional performance has influence upon the political support through the feedback (see page 6). In contrast to the cultural approach, institutional one promotes top-down development of political values and stresses emphatically that institutional trust emerges from what institutions are doing now (as noted, in the long run the diffuse support is based upon the

past specific support, i.e. the day-to-day decisions of the incumbent authorities). The institutional perspective hypothesizes that institutional trust is a consequence, and not a determinant, of good performance of the institutions. It follows from this that if an institution acts and behaves in accordance with the expectations of the trusting persons, then it will be trustworthy and will encourage further trust. The institutional approach posits that the institutional trust does not depend on horizontal interpersonal relations, but on an interpretation of institutional performance and reflects purely the achievement of the institutions. However, this approach does not rule out the possibility that culture has influence on the trust, but posits that this influence is not deterministic.

For the purpose of testing this theoretical perspective, it is to be specified which performance dimensions need to be considered in the model. Whereas in established democracies the economic performance is of utmost importance for the institutional trust, because the advantages of the democratic regime are usually taken for granted (Mishler & Rose, 1998), in post-communist countries the institutional trust is a result of both political and economic situation. New democracies place special emphasis upon the satisfaction with the work of the present government, because it differs considerably from the previous one and hence, these differences need to be assessed. Generally, citizens of new democracies will trust their political institutions as long as the economy runs well. However, they are inclined to hold political actors and institutions accountable for the economic prosperity and hence emphasize the role of the political performance (Alesina & Wacziarg, 2000). Besides the promotion of economic development and the satisfaction with the way government is doing its job, other aspects of institutional performance to be taken into consideration in this thesis are the evaluation of the quality of the health system and contentedness with the state of education in the country nowadays.

The main assumption of the institutional theories is that institutions of new regimes are trusted to the degree that they satisfy the expectations of the citizenry and accomplish what they have set out to do. Consequently, if the citizens' satisfaction with the institutional performance decreases, then the institutional trust will decrease, too. The performance assertion about the post-communist regime is that levels of institutional trust depend on the performance of the institutions and that the influence of this performance assessment will outweigh the effect of the early-life socialization.

The basic assumptions of both theoretical perspectives could be compared as follows:

CULTURAL THEORIES	INTITUTIONAL THEORIES
▪ Institutional trust is politically exogenous	▪ Institutional trust is politically endogenous
▪ Institutional trust is culturally determined from basic socialization patterns and is an extension of the interpersonal trust	▪ Institutional trust reflects the judgment of the citizenry based on its experience with the institutional performance
▪ Institutional performance is a result, and not a determinant of institutional trust	▪ Institutional performance is a determinant, and not a result of institutional trust
➔ Institutions are trusted to the degree that people trust each other	➔ Institutions are trusted to the degree that they satisfy the expectations of the people

The discernment of these two theoretical perspectives is a necessary condition for understanding and studying the determinants of institutional trust. Moreover, according to Mishler and Rose (1998), it is important also for the implications of these approaches. If the results of this empirical research prove that the institutional trust in Bulgaria is predetermined by the interpersonal trust, then the task of the institutions to generate sufficient trust will be much more difficult and time-consuming, because cultural values such as the interpersonal trust are among the long-term determinants of institutional trust (Orren, 1997). By contrast, if the findings of the thesis show that the institutional trust in Bulgaria is a result of short-term factors such as the evaluation of their political and economic performance, then the institutions could generate extra public trust either by improving their political performance or by providing economic development.

3. Expectations and hypotheses

Based on the cultural and institutional theoretical perspectives, this thesis examines the Bulgarian society's trust in institutions. It incorporates measures of institutional trust, interpersonal trust and political and economic performance in order to find out to what extent trust in fellow citizens and evaluation of institutional performance predict the institutional trust in the country. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that the dependent variable (trust in Bulgarian parliament) and independent variables (interpersonal trust and institutional performance) will correlate and this relationship will be strong and positive. Although it is generally believed that the cultural approach has greater relevance in former Soviet Bloc countries than in established democracies, it is expected that it will make only a limited impact on the institutional trust in Bulgaria. It is not hypothesized that it will not have any explanatory power, but that it will be weaker than this of the performance indicators and will

lose its relevance when the next determinants are introduced. According to the expectations, the institutional performance will be the most significant factor in explaining the low levels of institutional trust in Bulgaria and hence, people would decide not to trust the institutions if they are dissatisfied with their performance. Therefore, the cause for the institutional distrust in Bulgaria will be not as much the legacy of the former regime in the form of undermined trust, as the poor performance of the governmental institutions of the country.

In the first place, these arguments are based on the lack of convincing data that support the assumption that culture of distrust predetermines low levels of institutional trust (Mishler & Rose, 2001). On the other hand, these expectations are reinforced by scholarly evidences that question the direction of the relationship between interpersonal and institutional trust (Brehm & Rahn, 1997) or demonstrate that the concepts of institutional and interpersonal trust are different, because the interpersonal ties that are studied nowadays are much more superficial than relations underlined by Tocqueville and Putnam (Newton, 1999). Moreover, because of the self-criticism of Putnam and Pharr (2000) and their statement that: “The causes of the decline of confidence, we find, lie not with problems in the social fabric; nor are they the result of general economic conditions, the end of Cold War, the media (in any simple way, at least) or many other factors, often studded with proper nouns ... that previous observers have offered as explanations. The problem, we hold, is with government and politics themselves”, it is to be expected that the influence of institutional performance will override the explanatory power of the other determinant.

Nevertheless, the political context in the former Soviet bloc countries is very different from the one in the established democracies and there is significant variation in the relative importance of the trust origins both among and within countries. Therefore, the impact of interpersonal trust on the trust placed in Bulgarian institutions could not be precisely predicted only by the theory and hence, deserves to be empirically studied.

In respect of the origins of institutional trust, the following hypotheses are formulated. These are to be tested in the subsequent part of this thesis:

Basing on the cultural theories, it is to be expected that the institutional trust is positively related to the interpersonal trust and therefore:

H1 (Micro-level: socialization experience): **The more people trust each other, the more they will trust the political institutions.**

Basing on the institutional theories, it is to be expected that the institutional trust is positively related to the assessment of the institutional performance and therefore:

H2 (Micro-level: assessment of institutional performance): **The better the political institutions are considered to perform, the more people will trust them.**

In regard to the relative importance of both theories, it is hypothesized that:

H3 (Micro-level: socialization experience and assessment of institutional performance): **At micro-level institutional trust is mostly explained by the performance of the political institutions.**

III. Empirical research

1. Data source

The empirical research of this thesis comprises European Social Survey micro-level data from Bulgaria (N=2434) which provide valuable information about society's values change and political attitudes. The individual data used are from the fifth wave of the survey which is conducted at the end of 2010 in 28 European countries (ESS round 5, 2010). These data are preferred over those from World Values Survey and European Values Study, because in European Social Survey there are several comparable variables that could be used as good measures of the concept.

2. Operationalisation

The empirical research of this thesis tests the hypotheses (H1, H2 and H3), using survey-level variables as measures of the cultural and institutional theories' basic assumptions to predict trust in Bulgarian political institutions. The identified dependent variable and a measure of institutional trust that is of direct concern of this work is the "trust in the Bulgaria's parliament". Independent variables related to the cultural theories that measure the concept of interpersonal trust are: "trust in the most people" and "people: helpful or self-interested". Basing on the institutional theories, independent variables that measure the concept of institutional (both economic and political) performance are: "satisfaction with the national

government”, “satisfaction with the present state of economy”, “state of education: good or bad” and “state of health services: good or bad”. All of these variables have already been used in other researches and therefore are considered appropriate measures of the concepts.

The operationalisation of the theoretical concepts could be illustrated as follows:

Dependent variable	Theories	Independent variables
Trust in parliament (measure of institutional trust)	Cultural theories (interpersonal trust)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Trust in most people ▪ People: helpful or self-interested
	Institutional theories (institutional performance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Satisfaction with the government ▪ Satisfaction with the state of economy ▪ State of education: good or bad ▪ State of health services: good or bad

In this thesis, the dependent variable “institutional trust” refers to the society’s trust in Bulgarian institutions. The European Social Survey question (2010) used to measure this kind of trust is: “Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust?” The named institutions are: *Bulgaria’s* parliament, legal system, police, politicians, political parties, European Parliament and United Nations. The trust placed in these institutions will be illustrated in the next chapter in order to confirm the assumption that the institutional distrust is generalized among the overall set of institutions. However, of direct concern to this work are only the responses to the question of support for the national parliament. Trust in country’s parliament is an appropriate measure of institutional trust, because, as noted above, decrease in its levels should be seen as particularly alarming. Moreover, it will be illogical if people discriminate between the institutions, because according to the cultural perspective, the interpersonal trust results in generalized institutional trust, and not in trust in a particular institution. Similarly, according to the institutional theories, there is no logical reason for people to discriminate between the institutions, because it is still difficult for people of post-communist countries to determine the contribution of the particular institutions (Mishler & Rose, 2001). The biggest priority of this ESS question is that it is not sensitive to government performance and specifies directly the object to which the trust of the people is directed.

To measure the concept of interpersonal trust with no reference to membership of voluntary association or active civic involvement, the European Social Survey (2010) asked people to answer the following two questions:

- “Using this card, generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can not be too careful in dealing with people? Please tell me on a score of 0 to 10, where 0 means you can not be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted.”
- “Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves?” The respondents were asked to indicate their answers on an eleven point scale (0-10) where 0 means “mostly look out for themselves”, and 10 means “try to be helpful”: the intended difference is between self-interested and altruistic people.

In the European Social Survey (2010), the independent variable institutional performance is measured with the following four standard survey questions:

- In regard to the political performance: “Now thinking about *Bulgaria’s* government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job?” The respondents were asked to indicate their answers on an eleven point scale (0-10) where 0 means “extremely dissatisfied”, and 10 means “extremely satisfied”.
- In regard to the economic performance: “On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of economy in *Bulgaria*?” The respondents were asked to indicate their answers on an eleven point scale (0-10) where 0 means “extremely dissatisfied”, and 10 means “extremely satisfied”.
- “Still using this card, please say what you think overall about the state of health services in *Bulgaria* nowadays?” The respondents were asked to indicate their answers on an eleven point scale (0-10) where 0 means “extremely bad”, and 10 means “extremely good”. This question includes assessment of quality, access and effectiveness/efficiency of the health services.
- “Now, using this card, please say what you think overall about the state of education in *Bulgaria* nowadays?” The respondents were asked to indicate their answers on an eleven point scale (0-10) where 0 means “extremely bad”, and 10 means “extremely good”. This question covers the evaluation of quality, access and effectiveness/efficiency of the state of education.

The biggest priority of the European Social Survey questions used in this empirical research is that they all have been measured with the same units of measurement and ranges. This not

only facilitates the methodology of the study, but also makes all findings directly comparable and easily interpretable.

3. Methodologies

The explanatory power of the both theories for Bulgaria is tested by multiple correlation and regression analyses using the independent variables to predict the dependent variable “institutional trust”. However, because of the lack of available researches for Bulgaria on this topic and because of the fact that the surveys offer only univariate data, these analyses are expressly performed for this thesis:

- In the correlation analysis, the statistical relationship between the dependent and independent variables are measured. The analyses indicate the degree of the correlation between the variables, but do not infer causal relations (independent variables can not be considered causes of the dependent variable). The correlation coefficient (between -1 and 1) shows the strength and the positive/negative direction of the dependence. The statistical significance (p-value) measures to what extent the result is likely to have occurred purely by chance. The lower its level is, the stronger the results are.
- In contrast to the correlation analysis, the regression analysis gives information about the causal relationship between two or more variables and is a useful tool when quantifying the influence of several independent variables on a single dependent variable. The standardized regression coefficient Beta allows comparison of the predictive power of the independent variables, and the Adjusted R Squared is the variation in the dependent variables that could be explained by all independent variables.

4. Objectives

Using these variables and methodologies, the objectives of the empirical research are:

1. To explain how the dependent variable “trust in Bulgaria’s parliament” correlates with the independent variables used to measure the interpersonal trust of the Bulgarians.
2. To test what influence has the interpersonal trust on the institutional trust by regressing the variables of interpersonal trust on the level of trust in Bulgaria’s parliament.
3. To explain how the dependent variable “trust in Bulgaria’s parliament” correlates with the independent variables used to measure the satisfaction with the performance of Bulgarian institutions.

4. To test what influence has the institutional performance on the institutional trust by regressing the variables of institutional performance on the level of trust in Bulgaria's parliament.
5. To compare the explanatory power of the both cultural and institutional theories, as operationalised here.

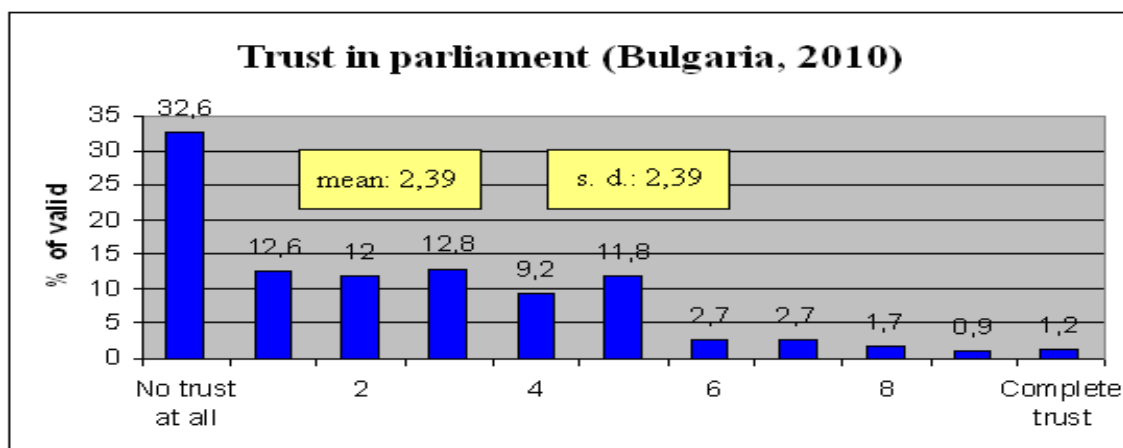
In order to stay focused, I decided to simplify the complexity of the concept and limit the empirical research, concentrating only on the trust in parliament, explained by the micro-cultural and micro-institutional perspectives. This approach restricted the implications of the empirical research to a certain degree, but did not affect the results negatively (the possible shortcomings of this approach are discussed in detail in the conclusion part).

IV. Data analysis

1. Descriptive analysis

Table 1 clearly illustrates the low levels of trust that Bulgarians place in the national parliament (ESS, 2010). As indicated, whereas only 1.2 per cent of the interviewed in 2010 tend to place complete trust in the parliament, 32.6 per cent of them do not trust it at all, and the rest are mostly skeptical. Evidence of the institutional distrust is also the mean score of the dependent variable which measures the central tendency. On the eleven point scale ranging from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust) the mean score for Bulgaria is only 2.39. 2.39 is also the value of the variable's standard deviation which points to wide variation in levels of trust in parliament within the country.

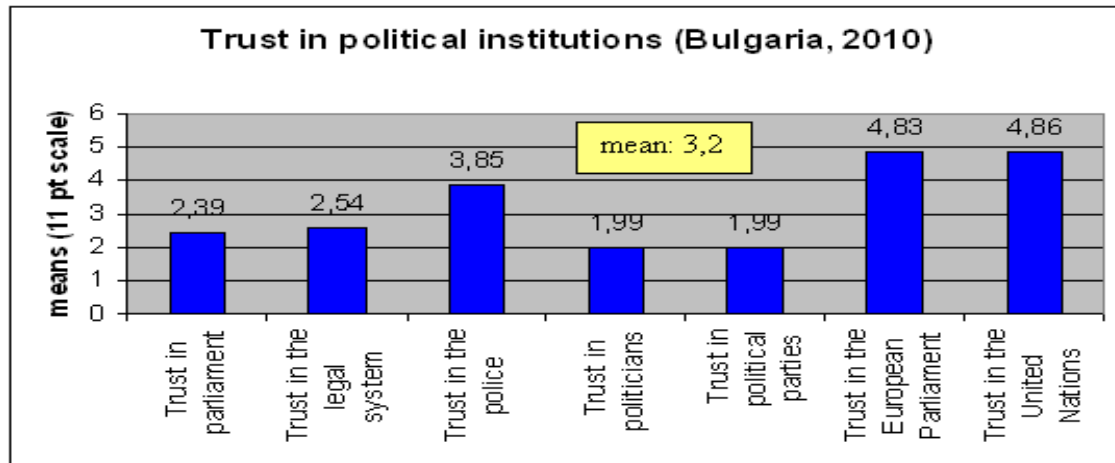
Table 1 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)



These results not only confirm the assumption that contemporary Bulgarian citizens have become very critical towards their national parliament, but also demonstrate that the micro-model used in this thesis is more appropriate approach than the macro-one, because it takes into consideration the differences in individuals' responses.

Table 2 reports the trust that the Bulgarian society places in other institutions such as the legal system, the police, the politicians, the political parties, the European Parliament and the United Nations. As shown, the mean score of trust in all seven institutions is 3.2 which indirectly confirms the assumption that the institutional distrust is generalized among all institutions. Among the national institutions, there is just a little bit less mistrust in the police (mean score is 3.85), but there is still no positive trust in any of them. Consistent with the argument that the measure of institutional trust used in this empirical research represents the distrust placed in the overall set of institutions, the mean score of trust in national parliament (2.39) is slightly below the average trust in all seven institutions.

Table 2 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)



Although the levels of trust placed in the European Parliament (mean score: 4.83) and in the United Nations (mean score: 4.86) are also below the middle point of the scale, they are an exception from the mistrusted national institutions. However, these differences in trust levels between national and international institutions are not object of this thesis and will not be discussed further, because they are attributed to the fact that “obviously, disappointed by the way in which their national institutions perform, Bulgarian citizens, transfer their trust in

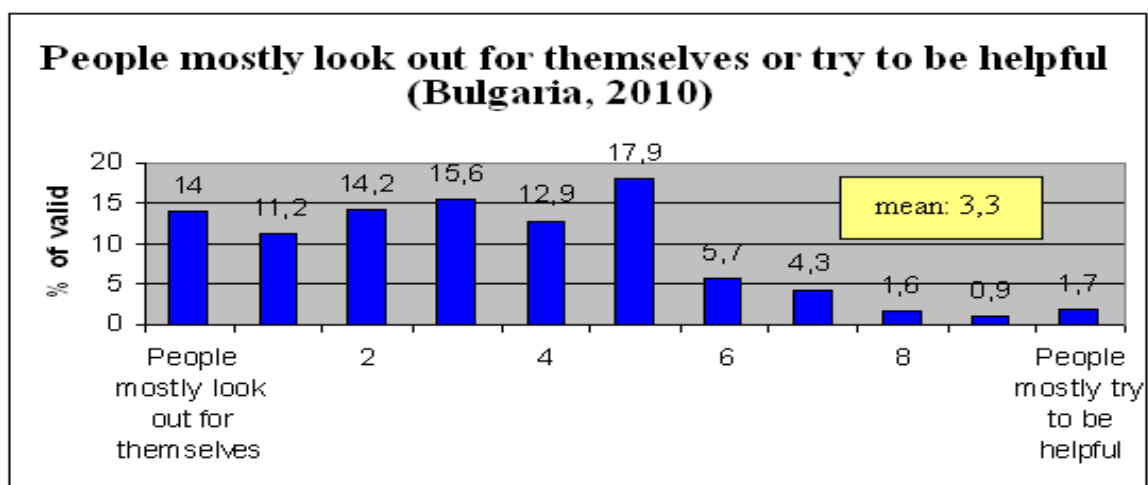
favor of international organizations with the hope that those would be able to guarantee the furthering of democratic processes in the society” (Boyadzhieva, 2009).

Before proceeding to the process of hypotheses testing, the independent variables need also to be quantitatively described. Although the trust in fellow citizens is higher than the trust in parliament, the most Bulgarians still distrust other people. As indicated in tables 3 and 4, the majority of the respondents said that most people can not be trusted and people are mostly self-interested. Having mean scores of 3.51 and 3.3, respectively, the both measures of interpersonal trust indirectly confirm the cultural theories that countries with low levels of trust in people manifest low levels of institutional trust.

Table 3 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)



Table 4 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)



On the other hand, the performance evaluations of the Bulgarian institutions testify in favor of the institutional theories. Consistent with this micro-perspective, all measures of institutional performance indicate dissatisfaction among the Bulgarian population. Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8 show that the median citizen in the country is dissatisfied with the way the Bulgarian government is doing its job and with the present state of economy, and a little bit less discontented with the present state of health services and education nowadays (mean scores are, respectively, 3.45; 2.38; 3 and 4.08).

Table 5 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)

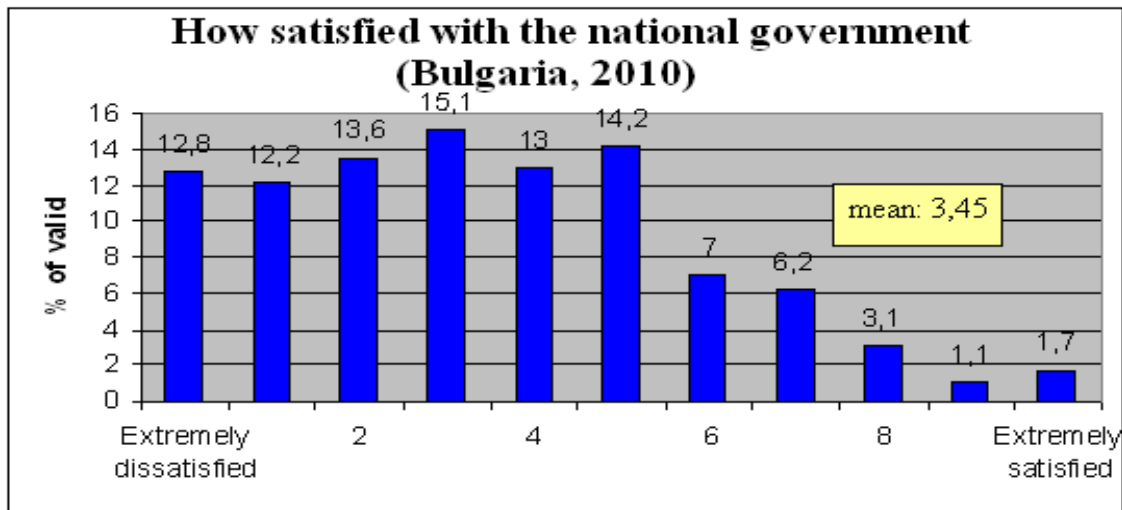


Table 6 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)

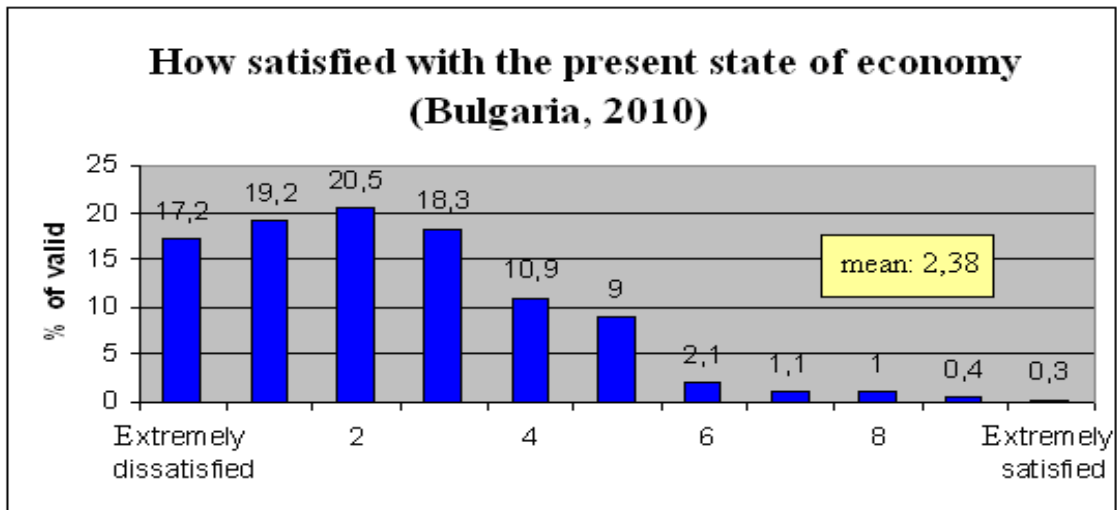


Table 7 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)

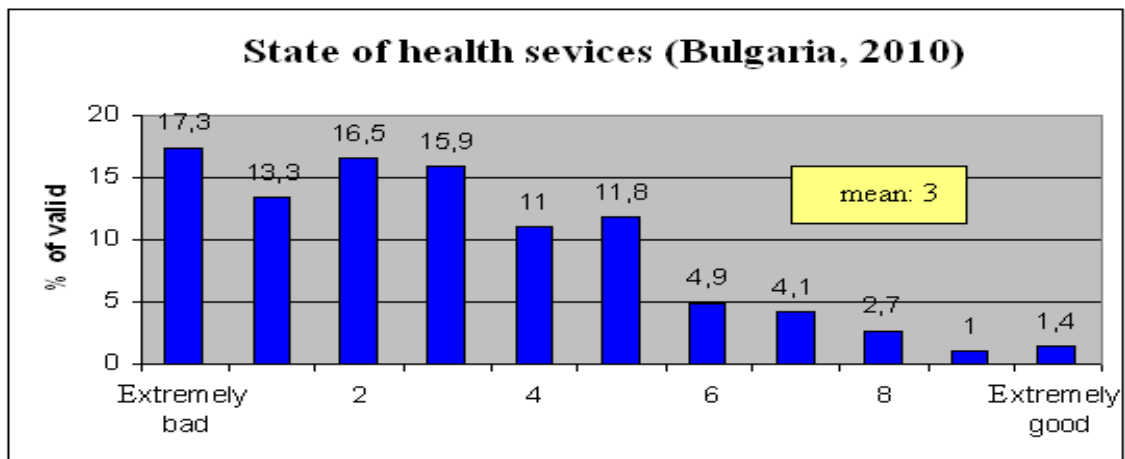
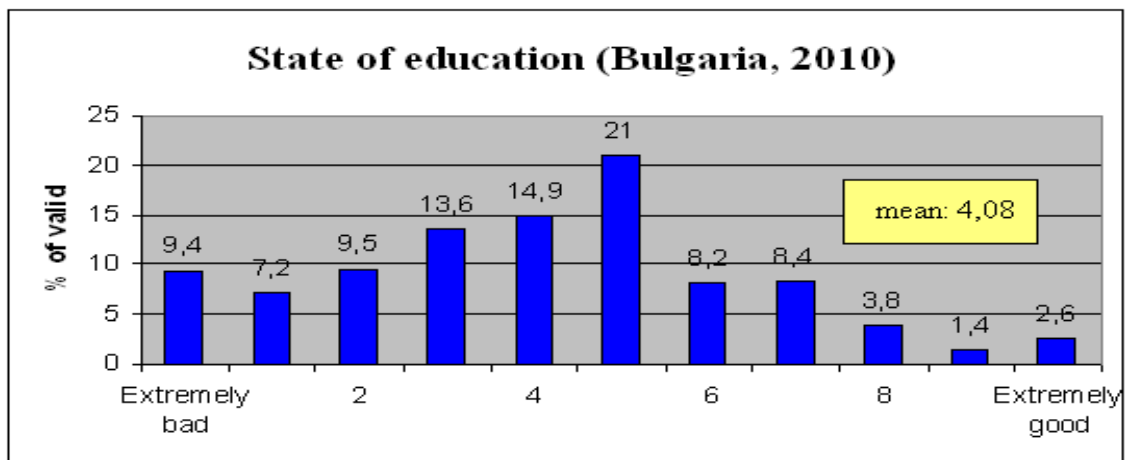


Table 8 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)



Nevertheless, all these findings can only indirectly confirm the theories' assumptions. Therefore, in order to empirically test the hypotheses, multiple correlation and regression analyses are used. As already noted, these quantitative techniques will give more information about the statistical relationship between the variables and their relative explanatory power for the low levels of institutional trust in Bulgaria.

2. Hypotheses testing

2. 1. H1

According to the micro-cultural theories, the trust that people place in the political institutions of a country is related to the relationship that they have towards others. Therefore: 1. the trust

in fellow citizens, whatever its origins are, and the institutional trust should be positively correlated within a country and 2. the interpersonal trust should determine the institutional trust. Basing on these assumptions and consistent with H1 it is to be expected that: the more people trust each other, the more they will trust the political institutions.

The correlation analysis (see table 9) indicates that the relationships between the variables: “trust in parliament” and “people: helpful or mostly looking out for themselves” and “most people can be trusted or you can’t be too careful” are relatively weak. The correlation coefficients show that the dependence between “trust in parliament” and “people: helpful or mostly looking out for themselves” (0.220) is higher than the dependence between the measure of institutional trust and the second variable used to measure interpersonal trust (0.175), but the difference is still modest (there is also no potential multicollinearity detected). However, the signs of both results are positive and highly statistically significant at 0.1 per cent level which means that an increase in the levels of interpersonal trust is accompanied by an increase in the levels of institutional trust and this relationship is very unlikely to have arisen purely by chance.

Table 9 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)

	Trust in parliament	Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful	Most of the time people helpful or mostly looking out for themselves
Trust in parliament	—	0.175	0.220
Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful	0.175	—	0.487
Most of the time people helpful or mostly looking out for themselves	0.220	0.487	—

p < 0.001
 p < 0.01
 p < 0.05

Nevertheless, this statistical correlation is not sufficient indicator of the presence of a causal relationship between the variables. On the other hand, the regression analysis (see table 10) focuses on the causality between the dependent variable “trust in parliament” and its determinants “people: helpful or mostly looking out for themselves” and “most people can be trusted or you can’t be too careful”. The Beta coefficients represent the relative contribution

of each of the independent variables to the prediction of the institutional trust. Therefore, as indicated in the table, the variable “people: helpful or mostly looking out for themselves” (Beta: 0.18) is considered better predictor of the trust in parliament than the other independent variable (Beta: 0.09). They both are statistically significant at 0.1 per cent level, but together account for only 5 per cent of the variance in trust in parliament (see Adjusted R Squared). These results do not contradict the cultural hypothesis, but provide very little evidence in its favor (the variables are only weakly related) which suggests that there should be other determinants of institutional trust that better explain its low levels in Bulgaria- in this thesis- the institutional performance, as hypothesized by the institutional theories.

Table 10 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)

	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig.	Tol.
Most of the time people helpful or mostly looking out for themselves	0.18	0.02	0.18	7.62	0.0000	0.76
Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful	0.08	0.02	0.09	3.86	0.0001	0.76

Intercept	1.50
Valid N	2,315.54
Multiple R	0.233
Multiple R Squared	0.054
Adjusted R Squared	0.054
F value	66.51
F sign	0.0000

2. 2. H2

According to the micro-institutional theories, the institutional trust depends on the capacity of the institutions to meet society’s preferences and is caused by a gap between people’s expectations and perceptions of the institutional performance. Consequently, if the citizens’ satisfaction with the institutional performance decreases, then the institutional trust should decrease, too. Therefore: 1. indicators of political and economic performance should be positively correlated with the level of institutional trust and 2. the institutional performance should determine the institutional trust. Basing on these assumptions and consistent with H2 it is to be expected that: the better the political institutions are considered to perform, the more people will trust them.

Table 11 shows the findings of the correlation analysis of the second concept which includes four measures of institutional performance. Consistent with the institutional hypothesis, the correlation coefficients between the variable “trust in parliament” and the overall set of variables used to measure the institutional performance are moderate and positive. This means that there is a positive relationship between the trust in institutions and the indicators of their performance. The strongest is the dependence between the “trust in parliament” and the “satisfaction with the national government” (0.526). In the second place is the “satisfaction with the present state of economy in country” with $r=0.420$, followed by “state of education in country nowadays” (0.281) and “state of health services in country nowadays” (0.248). As indicated in the matrix, there are no highly correlated pairs among the explanatory variables, so that possible multicollinearity could be ruled out. The level of statistical significance is $p<0.001$ which means that there is only 0.1 per cent chance that the obtained results were accidental. Consequently, the institutional trust depends on the levels of citizens’ satisfaction with the political and economic performance of the institutions and an increase in these levels is accompanied by an increase in the levels of institutional trust.

Table 11 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)

	Trust in parliament	How satisfied with the national government	How satisfied with present state of economy in country	State of health services in country nowadays	State of education in country nowadays
Trust in parliament	—	0.526	0.420	0.248	0.281
How satisfied with the national government	0.526	—	0.515	0.277	0.294
How satisfied with present state of economy in country	0.420	0.515	—	0.405	0.356
State of health services in country nowadays	0.248	0.277	0.405	—	0.523
State of education in country nowadays	0.281	0.294	0.356	0.523	—

$p < 0.001$
 $p < 0.01$
 $p < 0.05$

However, the causal relationship between the responding variable and its predictor variables is still an empirical question, which can only be answered through a multiple regression

analysis (see table 12). As shown, the main indicator of political performance “satisfaction with the national government” has the greatest single influence on the dependent variable of any other individual variable in the concept (B: 0.41) and exceeds the relative impact of the “satisfaction with the present state of economy in country” almost 5:2 (Beta: 0.17). The regression coefficient of the third measure of institutional performance is relatively low (Beta: 0.09) which means that “state of education in country nowadays” has only a little effect on “trust in parliament”- for one unit increase in the satisfaction with the state of education, trust in parliament would increase by only 0.09 units. However, all three indicators show up as being highly significant ($p < 0.001$) meaning that the results have only 0.1 per cent chance of not being true. The last explanatory variable “state of health services in country nowadays” has no predictive power at all, not only because its Beta coefficient is 0.02, but because its level of significance is 0.417 (i.e., there is only 58.3 per cent chance that this difference is not due to chance). However, it is to mention that this last variable is significant predictor of “trust in parliament” in a simple linear regression (not shown), but an insignificant one when other explanatory variables are added (as in table 12). This inconsistency is attributed to the fact that the variance that this predictor variable shares with the responding variable overlaps with the variance that is “divided up” between some of the other predictor variables and the responding variable.

Table 12 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)

	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig.	Tol.
How satisfied with the national government	0.40	0.02	0.41	18.54	0.0000	0.72
How satisfied with present state of economy in country	0.21	0.03	0.17	7.42	0.0000	0.65
State of education in country nowadays	0.09	0.02	0.09	4.06	0.0001	0.69
State of health services in country nowadays	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.81	0.4173	0.67

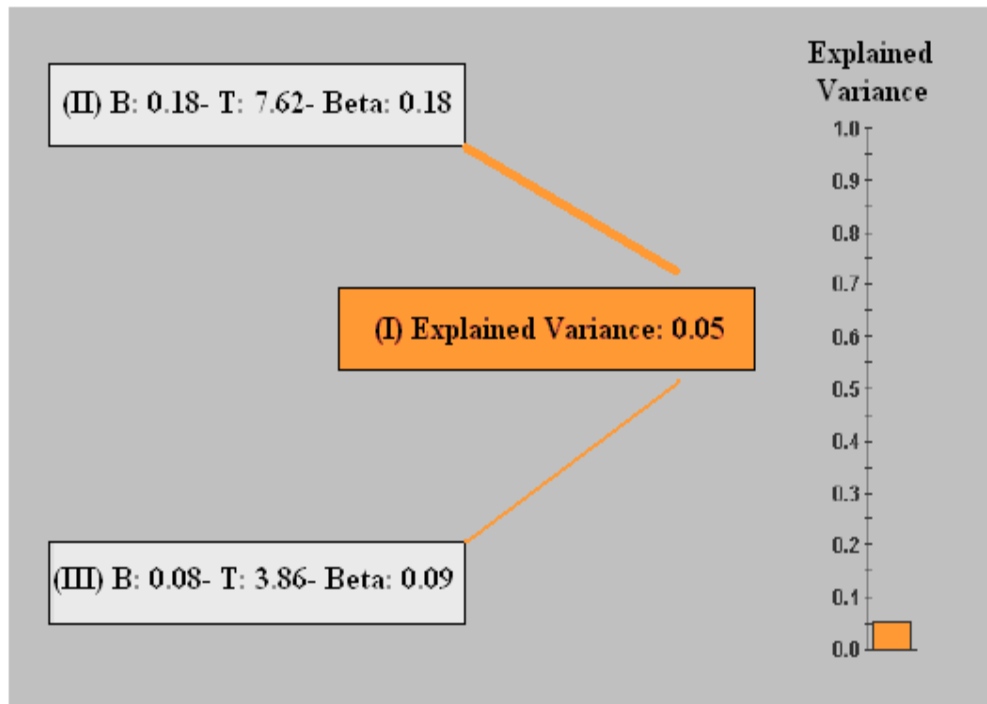
Intercept	0.12
Valid N	1,983.53
Multiple R	0.562
Multiple R Squared	0.316
Adjusted R Squared	0.314
F value	228.01
F sign	0.0000

The explanatory power of the institutional theory for Bulgaria is 31 per cent or six times the variation explained by the measures of interpersonal trust (see Adjusted R Squared). Predictably, how Bulgarian society perceives the institutions has a significant effect on the trust it places in them. Consequently, the results of the empirical research coincide with the results expected from the H2 and the better the political institutions are considered to perform, the more people will trust them.

2. 3. H3

Until now, the two main theories cited to account for the low levels of institutional trust in Bulgaria have been discussed independently (the variance in institutional trust explained by each of the theories is clearly illustrated in tables 13 and 14).

Table 13 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)



Dependent variable:

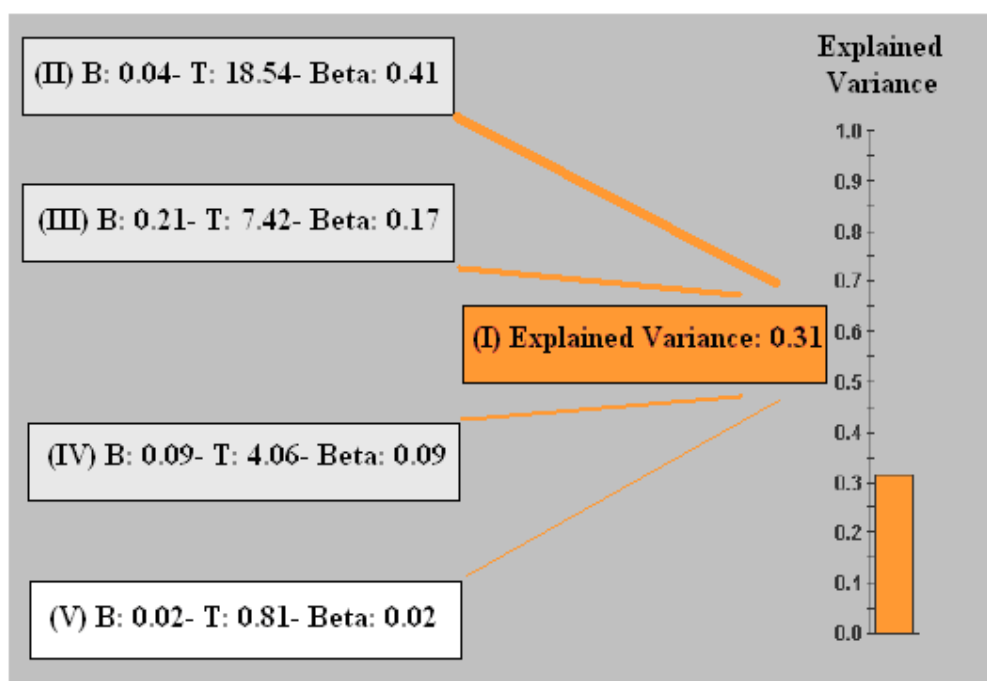
(I) Trust in parliament

Independent variable:

(II) Most of the time people helpful or mostly looking out for themselves

(III) Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful

Table 14 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)



Dependent variable:

(I) Trust in parliament

Independent variable:

(II) How satisfied with the national government

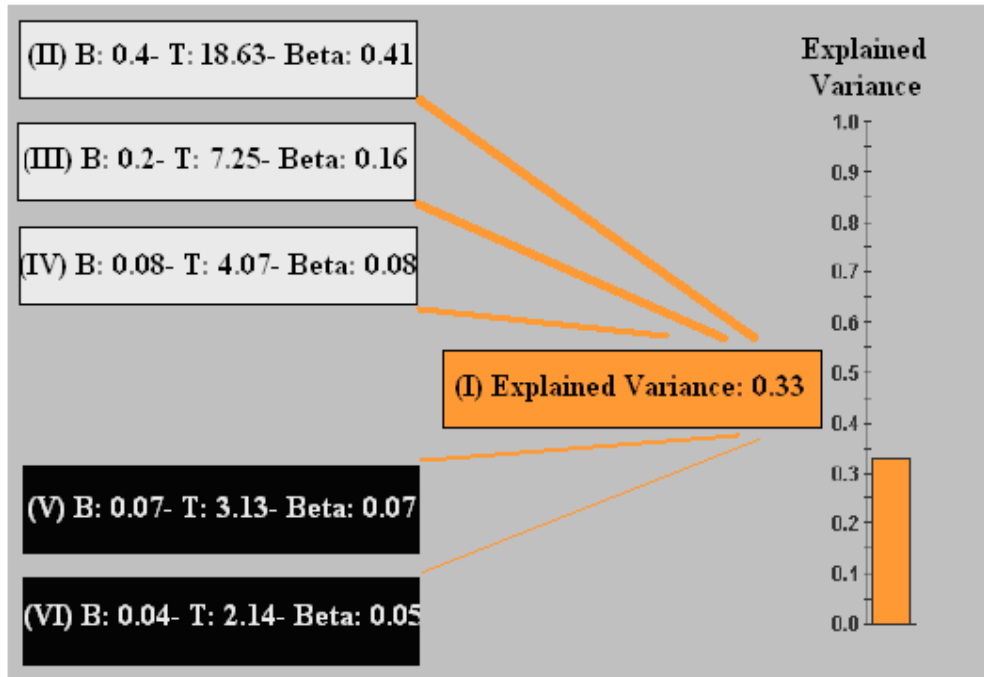
(III) How satisfied with present state of economy in country

(IV) State of education in country nowadays

(V) State of health services in country nowadays

However, the two theoretical explanations are not mutually exclusive and therefore, in order to test their relative explanatory power and confirm H3, the two blocks of independent variables have been also regressed together in two steps (see table 15). As already discussed, the fraction of the variation in the dependent variable that is accounted for the measures of interpersonal trust is only 5 per cent. However, when the performance indicators are added (excluding the variable “state of health services in country nowadays” to avoid insignificant results), the variance explained by the both theories increases to 33 per cent. In regard to the relative importance of the both perspectives, in table 15 it is also demonstratively illustrated that the cumulative effect of the measures of institutional performance (Beta: 0.65) exceeds the cumulative effect of the measures of trust in people (Beta: 0.12) by more than five times. This multiple regression analysis confirms H3 by showing that at micro-level institutional trust is mostly explained by the political and economic performance of the institutions, and not by the interpersonal trust of the Bulgarian citizens.

Table 15 (Source: European Social Survey, 2010)



Dependent variable:

(I) Trust in parliament

Independent variable:

(II) How satisfied with the national government

(III) How satisfied with present state of economy in country

(IV) State of education in country nowadays

(V) Most of the time people helpful or mostly looking out for themselves

(VI) Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful

V. Conclusion

The major objective of this thesis was to present the theoretical debate over the origins of institutional trust in Bulgaria, to develop plausible hypotheses and empirically test them, thereby answering the given research question.

In brief, all three hypotheses formulated for this thesis have been corroborated by the results of the empirical research. Although there is only a little evidence in favor of the H1, the interpersonal trust still has a positive effect on the trust that Bulgarians place in their political institutions. However, its explanatory power is six times weaker than those of the performance indicators and therefore, in answer to the major research question driving this

thesis it can be concluded that the central reason for the institutional distrust in Bulgaria is the unsatisfactory performance of its national political institutions.

Consequently, in regard to the policy implications of thesis it can be inferred that: since the institutional trust in the country is not a result of the interpersonal trust of the society, but of its performance perceptions, the political institutions could cultivate the trust needed for their effectively functioning by “simply” improving their political performance, providing economic growth and acting in accordance with the citizens’ expectations. These higher levels of institutional trust seem desirable not only for the incumbent authorities and governmental institutions, but also for the quality of the representative democracy.

Clearly, as is to be expected, there is not one right answer for a given research question and there are many trade-offs in this thesis. However, there is always a value in what we do not know and therefore, this concluding section is meant not only to summarize the main findings, but also to discuss its possible shortcomings which can be improved in the future.

Firstly, the results reveal that the interpersonal trust and the evaluation of institutional performance are far from being the only sources of institutional trust, because together they explain only 33 per cent of the variation in institutional trust. Since the theoretical and empirical discussion of this thesis has been reduced to a dispute over the relative explanatory power of only two theories, namely the cultural and institutional perspectives, some could argue that there are also other predictors of the institutional distrust in Bulgaria. Secondary factors that can be considered as individual bases of institutional trust in further researches are the media effect, the well-being and the political interest of the citizenry. The inclusion of these concepts in the empirical analysis may be a very useful tool for the better understanding of trust in institutions and its determinants.

Furthermore, in order to stay focused, I decided to simplify the complexity of the concept and limit the empirical research by concentrating only on the trust in parliament, explained by the micro-cultural and micro-institutional perspectives. As noted, this approach did not affect the results negatively, because the trust in parliament is most likely to spillover to the trust placed in the overall set of political institutions of a country, thereby proving its great importance for the political system (see pages 9 and 17). However, further researches on institutional trust in Bulgaria could use an index of trust in all political institutions or principal component

analysis to reduce dimensionality. They could also adopt macro-focus to identify between countries differences or combine micro and macro-approaches to thoroughly examine the differences between national and individual origins of institutional trust.

Other possible shortcoming of this thesis is that because of the lack of comparable time-series data, it provides only a snapshot of institutional trust in Bulgaria in 2010. This is not to suggest that this cross-sectional study for explanatory purposes was wrong or useless, because it still provides clues which could contribute to the further discussion about the determinants of institutional trust, serve as a proper basis for over time comparison and be used as a starting point of longitudinal studies. This is, rather, to suggest that in future this defect could be eliminated, so that repetitive tendencies and dependences could be identified and more accurately studied.

Since the most of the mentioned shortcomings are due to the limited size of the thesis, future researches on this topic could use more complete approach and cover all aspects of political support when resources for deeper study are available. Nevertheless, I believe I coped with the task to bring further attention to the importance of institutional trust without losing sight of the big picture and answered the major research question: What is the central reason for the institutional distrust in Bulgaria?, basing all arguments on convincing empirical evidences. These evidences could be of advantage when identifying potential symptoms of declining trust and a great help in understanding how the Bulgarian governmental institutions can generate it in the near future.

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