

# **Post-Authoritarian Trust**

## **How Democratic Backsliding Affects Trust in Institutions in Post-Communist Countries**

**Sebastian Wilgotsson**

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**Tutor: Ketevan Bolkvadze**

## **Abstract**

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, multiple countries in central and eastern Europe have gone through a democratization process yet trust in institutions have remained low in these countries. Now Poland and Hungary are experiencing a democratic backsliding and autocratization and still trust in institutions remain low but stable. This paper examines whether these countries' autocratic past are influencing trust to remain stable despite the countries currently going through a democratic backsliding. The findings of this paper is that autocratic past alone cannot explain why trust remains stable but is an important variable when analysing trust in institutions by looking at economic and institutional performance. The need for more research on how trust functions in post-communist states with an authoritarian past is needed.

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## **Introduction**

### **Background**

Since the early 2000's, central and eastern Europe (CEE) have gone through a democratization process, in many ways because of EU enlargement into the area. Many countries shed their autocratic past after the fall of the Soviet Union and joined western European countries in what appeared to be the great democratization of the European continent. Two frontrunners for democracy in the CEE were Poland and Hungary, but recent events have seen these two nations suffer from democratic backsliding (Vachudova, 2020).

Fast forward to 2021 and the covid-pandemic. In mid-September approximately 60 percent of the adult population in Europe has been vaccinated, but in Bulgaria the story was different with only 19 percent being vaccinated at the time. Experts theorized this was because of the low trust the country's population had for the institutions. Because the country was an autocracy, the population of Bulgaria had very low trust for the parliament, government and other institutions. The mistrust came from the country's autocratic history, the population had no trust in their institutions because it was used to a regime that lied and kept information from the public (Washington Post, 2021). If this was the case in Bulgaria, what is to say that this is not true in other post-communist countries as well? Bulgaria's population with a history of autocratic rule have very little trust in their institutions but is just one of many countries in central and eastern Europe with autocratic background. There are many more post-communist states that have democratised in the years since the fall of the Soviet Union besides Bulgaria, Poland and Hungary for example. It is therefore not unlikely that these countries, as well as Bulgaria, have a population with a low trust in their institutions. The vaccinations levels of Poland and Hungary were not as low as those in Bulgaria, however trust may affect other areas of society than just vaccination. Since Poland and Hungary have experienced a democratic backsliding in recent years, it is interesting to see if this democratic backsliding has affected the population's trust in institutions. In a country without this history of dictatorship and autocracy the assumption is that when democracy fails, the population will lose trust in institutions. However, if a population already has low trust in institutions or are used to an autocratic regime with badly functioning institutions because of a country's autocratic history trust might not fall or at least not be very affected by democratic backsliding. That is why this essay will try to answer the question. If there is low or barely

any trust in institutions in central and eastern European, post-communist countries, is trust affected by democratic backsliding?

In this text I will examine whether trust in institutions is affected by a decrease in democracy in countries with experience of autocratic regimes in modern history. I will look at Poland and Hungary, as stated, two former frontrunners for democratization in the CEE, now experiencing democratic backsliding and right-wing populist parties as the incumbent party (Vachudova, 2020). As the state of democracy in these countries is deteriorating, I will try to prove that because of the population being used to autocracy and dictatorship, trust in institutions will barely be, or not at all affected.

## **Disposition**

To prove my hypothesis, I will begin by briefly discussing my hypothesis, research question, what the aim for this essay is and how it contributes to academia. I will then discuss the literature and theory used by this essay to build the hypothesis and continue with a method and material section, describing the methodology of this essay as well as presenting the main datasets I will be using in the study of this essay. Continuing, I will operationalize important concepts and terms used in this study and then discussing some problems I have stumbled upon when conducting my research. The analysis is made up of three parts, firstly I will give a brief history of Hungary's and Poland's autocratic past and the years leading up to the democratic backsliding in the respective countries Secondly, I will discuss how time and economic and institutional performance are theorized to affect trust. Thirdly, I will discuss how these theories can be applied in the context of Poland and Hungary and why it is important to account for their history when analysing how trust is influenced by different variables. To summarize this essay I will end with a conclusion to briefly discuss the findings of this essay and what future research should focus on.

## **Research Question and Hypothesis**

The question I will try to answer is as following; in countries with a history of autocracy, does democratic backsliding affect a population's trust in their institutions?

My hypothesis is that trust in government will be more or less stable in these countries, either because of the trust in institutions already being so low that it is hard to make it go lower or because of the population's collective memory of an authoritarian regime.

The purpose of this study is to broaden the understanding of the democratization process in central and eastern Europe and deepen the theory on democratic backsliding. Additionally, this study could be a basis for further research on the subject and hopefully be of use to politicians on a domestic and EU level to better understand what drives a democratization process and how to understand trust in institutions in post-communist countries.

## Literature Review and Theory

in *Political trust and distrust in post-authoritarian contexts* (2010) the authors Richard Rose and William Mishler test six hypotheses regarding why trust varies according to individual characteristics and differences in national and temporal contexts, specifically in post-authoritarian states. The hypotheses all originates from macro and micro-level social and cultural theories. The test is executed by analysing surveys the New European Barometer conducted in 14 different post-communist countries. What they find is that many of these hypotheses are true but do not necessarily rule out one another but on the contrary work in tandem with each other. Furthermore, they find that economic and political performance of institutions is vital for influence on individuals trust and that as the performance of institutions improves so should trust increase.

The analysis and it's use of these six hypotheses are highly relevant for this essay as the authors discusses what influences the peoples trust in institutions in specifically post-communist states. They also acknowledge the passage of time as an important factor for trust in countries with an autocratic history, as does this essay. Mainly they discuss it regarding two points. Firstly, as a state goes from being autocratic to democratic the first general perception among the country's inhabitants is a great increase in trust for the country's institutions which then gradually decreases as time passes. Secondly, the authors recognise a population's collective memory of an autocratic regime. A part of the population will have been raised and lived in a totalitarian state. This in turn influences the peoples trust in institutions and how the government and it's institutions are perceived. However, what the article does not acknowledge is the younger citizens, those that have not lived under authoritarian rule. As they have not experienced the same sort of government it should mean that trust in institutions in this age group should be higher than the country's average.

## **Method and Material**

### **Method**

To study this, I have chosen to look closer at Hungary and Poland because of a number of similarities between the nations. Their history of autocratic regimes, they are geographically close to one another, their successful democratization process and entrance into the EU and their recent experience of democratic backsliding and right-wing populist parties (Vachudova, 2020). These similarities make them perfect to study together.

Furthermore, I intend to not go beyond the scope of Europe in this essay partly because I wish to keep the analysis on a smaller scale, and I also want to mainly look at European post-communist countries.

The study will be theory consuming but my hope is to add to existing research as well and better explain how trust in institutions works in countries with an autocratic history. Because of this I believe my study to be scientifically relevant, whether my hypothesis turns out to be true or not. If true I will have made an important discovery for further research, if false there will be no reason to pursue further research on the subject.

The study will be a quantitative study where I will look at already existing data on trust in institutions and democracy for Hungary and Poland. Because I will be using peer reviewed, existing data this means that my study will already have internal validity and reliability (Teorell - Svensson 2007, s. 40, 56-57).

I believe a quantitative study is a good research method for this sort of research question. There is a need to consume and analyse a big amount of data to generalize the thoughts and opinions of a country's population. This is a quantitative study's greatest strength, to be able to gather and analyse a huge amount of data and to draw conclusions and generalize the results (Teorell - Svensson 2007, s. 68-70).

Of course, quantitative method is not a very precise tool and often receives critique for not being able to identify causality, with this in mind it would perhaps be proficient to do a mixed method study and look more closely at a case study. However, because I believe it possible to prove my hypothesis through data reviewing alone and because of my finite time I will not be pursuing a mixed method study (Ibis).



I will try to prove my hypothesis in two ways, statistically and graphically. What I am trying to prove is a non-correlation between two variables. I wish to prove that trust in institutions is not affected by democratic backsliding. This means that I don't want to witness any statistical significance between my variables. Furthermore, I will graphically prove my hypothesis by reviewing each country's democratic index and trust in institutions as time charts in linear graphs. It is then simple to prove my hypothesis when my case's democratic index decreases but the trust in government does not (Teorell - Svensson 2007, s. 144- 146, 208-215).

To look at how democratic backsliding influences trust in post-communist states it would have sufficed to only look at one country. However, this study focuses on both Poland and Hungary because if the hypothesis holds true in two countries rather than one it grants some validity to this study and increases the chance of the hypothesis being accurate in other post-communist states with an autocratic past.

## **Material**

### **QoG**

To find data on a population's trust in institutions I will use the Quality of Government Institutes (QoG) dataset. The Quality of Government Institute is an independent part of the Department for Political Science at Gothenburg University. It gathers, compiles and presents data on a number of different subjects ranging from access to water, health care and electricity to how freedom of speech is affected by a government and of course how a population trusts their police force, legal system and other institutions (QoG, 2021).

The data on trust in institutions is gathered through the European Social Survey (ESS). It is an academically driven cross-national survey conducted in 35 European countries through face-to-face interviews measuring attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of the European population. The surveys are conducted at two-year intervals starting in 2002 and ending in 2018 (ESS: A, 2021). The participants of the study are randomly selected in order to secure validity, all participants must be aged 15 years and older with no upper age limit and be representative for their private household with private household being defined as "*One person living alone or a group of people living in the same dwelling unit with its own lockable front door. A dwelling unit is a self-contained place to live that does not require basic facilities such as cooking, washing or toilet facilities to be shared with the occupants of other dwelling units*" (ESS: B, ss. 34-35, 2021). There is no limit for nationality, citizenship or language. All countries must be submitting an effective achieved sample size of minimum

1500 participants (ESS: B. ss. 35, 2021). Face-to-face interviews increases the risk of the interviewer affecting the data, to ensure this does not happen the ESS conducts research focused on three areas *Preparation and prevention*, *Monitoring and detection* and *Assessment and evaluation*. This research is then used to implement measures to improve data quality and minimize interviewer effect on the interviews and promote desirable interviewer behaviour (ESS: C, 2021).

### **V-Dem**

To measure democracy in a country I will use the Varieties of Democracy Institutes (V-Dem) Liberal Democracy Index. V-Dem is an independent research institute also based at the Department for Political Science at Gothenburg University. V-Dem index distinguishes between five high-level principles of democracy: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian, and collects data to measure these principles (V-Dem: A, 2021).

## Operationalization

To measure trust in institutions I will use the QoG institutex index of trust in parliament, trust in police and trust in legal system and to measure democracy I will use V-Dems liberal democracy index.

Modern history I have chosen to view as the latest fifty years. I have chosen to study Poland and Hungary since they are both countries that have experienced an autocratic regime in the latest fifty years. This is enough time for a nation to experience both a democratization process as well as democratic backsliding while still keeping dictatorship fresh in memory. If I view modern history as period of time longer than fifty years ago, there is a problem with keeping the memory of an autocratic regime in a population's mind. A time period shorter than fifty years runs the risk of not being enough time to experience both a democratization process and democratic backsliding in a single lifetime. My hypotheses rests upon an autocratic regime still being present in the population's collective memory.

To measure a nations *level of democracy* I have chosen to use V-dem's Liberal Democracy Index. This index measures democracy on a scale of 0-1 where 0 is the lowest score possible being a fully authoritarian state and 1 being a perfect liberal democracy. The index emphasizes and puts much weight on constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary and checks and balances that regulate and limit the exercise of executive power. The index also takes the level of electoral democracy into account (V-Dem Codebook. ss. 44, 2021). I believe this to be a strong operationalization of level of democracy and grants validity to this essay as V-Dem is widely known and regarded as a good measurement of a country's democratic standing.

To measure *trust in institutions* I have, as stated earlier chosen to measure this as *trust in parliament*, *trust in police* and *trust in the legal system*. These institutions have been chosen because it is interesting to see how the population trusts their institutions that are policy and law setting, law administering and interpreting and law enforcing. The data is gathered from the Quality of Government institute's collection of said indexes. All of these indexes have been collected through the European Social Survey (ESS). The survey has been administered in 30 European countries including Poland and Hungary, which are the main subjects of study for this essay. The aim of the survey is to measure, monitor and interpret changing values and attitudes in the European population and to develop a series of European social indicators

(Teorell et.al. ss. 194-197, 2021). What follows is a short description of the indexes, what it measures and how and why it is relevant for this essay.

*Trust in parliament:* This index is measured on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 means the surveillant has no trust in the institution at all and 10 means complete trust. This index measures how much trust the surveillant has in the parliament. This is relevant for this essay as the parliament is policy and agenda setting for an entire country (Teorell et.al. ss. 196, 2021).

*Trust in police:* This index is measured on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 means the surveillant has no trust in the institution at all and 10 means complete trust. This index measures how much trust the surveillant has in the policing force. This is relevant for this essay as it is the institution enacting and enforcing a nation's laws and measures how the population experience being treated fairly by the police force (Teorell et.al. ss. 197, 2021).

*Trust in the legal system:* This index is measured on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 means the surveillant has no trust in the institution at all and 10 means complete trust. This index measures how much trust the surveillant has in the legal system. This is relevant for this essay as this measures how the population experience being judged fairly by the nation's judicial force (Teorell et.al. ss. 196, 2021).

*Trust in other people:* This index is measured on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 means the surveillant has no trust in the institution at all and 10 means complete trust. This index measures how much trust the surveillant has in other people. This is not measuring trust in an institution, but it is interesting to see how a population trusts others and compare this to how the population trusts institutions and see if there are any general trends in trust in a country (Teorell et.al. ss. 196, 2021).

This study also brings up institutional and economic performance as a way of influencing trust in a country. To measure institutional performance, I have chosen to look at this as perceived corruption, this does not give an established indication of how well an institution actually functions but what it does is giving an indication of how well the population thinks

the institution functions as a well-performing institution. This is functions as an operationalization for this essay as it views institutional performance as how the population perceives the institutions to perform rather than the institutions actual performance.

Economic performance is operationalized as GDP per capita and economic inequality as this is what the literature focuses on as well as giving a well established view of a nation's economic progress.

## Problems

As previously stated, a problem with the design of a quantitative research analysis is determining causality between two variables. A quantitative study is perfect for managing and analysing a big amount of data however, it has difficulties finding and identifying causal mechanisms and determining causality. The best way to try determining causality is finding a control variable and perform a control to rule out other explanations and determine causality for the variables (Teorell - Svensson 2007, s. 206). I do not see this as a problem for this research study as I am not looking for to determine causality but more looking for a non-relationship between two variables. What I am looking for is to show that democratic backsliding does not affect trust in institutions in countries with an autocratic history. As long as there is no statistical connection between the two this should determine that my dependent variable does not affect my independent variable. There is a problem determining that it is in fact because of Poland's and Hungary's autocratic past that trust in institutions remains unaffected, this could have been solved by designing and conducting a new survey, however this was not possible because of time limits when conducting this study. At the time of writing, no other way of determining that autocratic past is vital to trust in institutions in post-communist, post-authoritarian states as come to mind and is thus a problem for this paper.

Of course, what is hard to determine is that there are no other underlying variables affecting trust in institutions, however I will not use a control variable because of my limited time constructing and conducting this essay as well as it being unnecessary. I find it unnecessary because of, as previously said, I am not looking for a connection between my independent and dependent variable but rather trying to prove that there is no connection. One control variable this essay could use is control countries. To show that the population in countries without an autocratic history lose trust in their institutions would be beneficial for this essay in order to prove that democratic backsliding does affect trust in other countries. However, this essay will not use a control country in order to show that democratic backsliding affects trust as it is written during a limited time period and to analyse a third country would be too time consuming. It is also very difficult to find a country that has not experienced autocracy in recent history and at the same time has experienced a democratic backsliding. One such country is India that since 2013 has fallen in the Liberal Democracy Index from 0.54 to 0.34. This is the lowest score in the Liberal Democracy Index since 1976 when India scored a 0.28 (V-Dem: B, 2021) after Indira Gandhi was ordered to be removed from office after allegations of election fraud and declared a state of emergency, removing rights and freedoms from the

Indian people and ruling by decree (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021). This was a very short period of low score in the Liberal Democracy Index as India scored 0.53 (V-Dem: B, 2021) in 1978 after Indira Ghandi chose to resign after loosing the election in 1977 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021). It is also the only time India have had such a low score since the country's first general elections were held in 1952 (V-Dem: B, 2021). This makes India quite a good control country but since this essay focuses on post-communist countries on the European continent and the geographical and cultural differences between Poland and Hungary and in turn India are too great, it falls beyond the scope of this essay.

I also discovered a problem when looking for data to use in this essay. The original thought was to compare V-dems Liberal Democracy Index to data on trust in government to see how the trust in the governing body of a country by a population had been affected. It was very difficult to find data on trust in government thus the aim for this essay shifted as it was easier to find data on trust in institutions such as parliament, legal system and the police. These institutions were chosen as instead of the governing body it is as interesting to see if trust has been affected by democratic backsliding when looking at institutions that are policy and law setting, interprets and administers the laws and enforces the laws. This shift in the aim of this essay will not be a problem either, it is only a shift in variables and will still prove how trust functions in post-communist countries with an autocratic past. To instead measure trust in government and ensure the data is collected correctly and uncontaminated by the interviewers I could have collected my own data on trust and then specifically trust in government. However, since this essay is written during a limited time period, constructing a survey and collecting enough data from the population in Poland and Hungary was too time demanding and was therefore not an option. Using the data on trust in institutions from QoG and ESS is neither a problem since these research institutions are recognized as trustworthy institutions and their data on trust will serve the purpose of this essay well.

Of course, both Poland and Hungary are experiencing an autocratization and have been downgraded from liberal democracy and electoral democracy to electoral democracy and electoral autocracy respectively according to V-Dem (V-Dem Twitter, 2021). The regimes might have tried to or been successful in influencing the results of the survey since they do not want to be seen to the rest of the world as untrustworthy. This would be very damaging to the findings of this essay as it would greatly affect the outcome of the study. However, QoG and the ESS are, as previously stated, seen as trustworthy and independent institutions and there is as such no reason to view their data as untrustworthy.

## **Analysis**

Since the fall of the Soviet Union many countries in the CEE have experienced democratisation. This culminated in a series of nations being granted European Union membership status. The democratic process has been relatively quick (Vachudova, 2021) and the collective memory of an autocratic regime should still be present in the population. Many still living in this part of the world were raised and lived in a totalitarian state (Rose & Mishler, 2010). This is what the base of this essay rests on, if a population collectively remembers an autocratic regime the trust in institutions should not be that affected when the country experiences a democratic backslide.

### **The democratisation and de-democratisation of Hungary and Poland**

What follows is a short description of Hungary's and Poland's autocratic history, democratic process and democratic backslide.

#### **Hungary**

In the post-WW2 era Hungary was occupied by the Soviet Union and were subject to the communist regime of Moscow. 1960 Hungary became different from other Soviet states when it became more independent from Russia and Moscow and became a one party socialist state. Hungary would continue on this path until 1989 when the country decided to dismantle the iron curtain which eventually led to the fall of the Soviet Union. In the time period shortly after, the Hungarian regime decided to put in place numerous economic, cultural and social reforms improving the country's democratic score. First and foremost Hungary's first free elections were held in 1990. A clear receipt on Hungary's democratisation process can be seen in the EU granting membership status to Hungary in 2004. In 2010, which clearly can be seen as the start of the democratic backsliding according to V-dem's Liberal Democracy Index, Viktor Orban and the Fidesz party came to power (Vardy, 2021). Since then Hungary has received a lower and lower score in said index each year. The regime has received criticism for restricting democratic freedom and rights, treatment of minorities and wielding it's power over state institutions and legal system. As of 2020, Hungary scores a 0.37 in V-dem's Liberal Democracy Index compared to the year before Fidesz came to power in 2010 when Hungary scored 0.78 (V-Dem: B, 2021).



## **Poland**

Similar to Hungary, Poland too became a Soviet state in the post-WW2 era, the country was a communistic peoples republic until it's liberation in 1990. During this Time period the country was governed by a single party, it had the same one party system as Hungary and most of eastern Europe during this time. Also similar to Hungary, Poland became an independent state in 1990 when the country became democratic and was also granted EU membership in the 2004 enlargement of the EU. This also goes to show how far the democratisation process went in Poland, being granted EU membership in 2004. V-Dems liberal democracy index shows that Poland kept on track in it's democratisation until 2015. This is when Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), translated to Law and Order, came to power in Poland (Roos, 2021), and the country largely went through the same democratic transition as Hungary did in 2010. Orban's Fidesz party is greatly accredited with having been the influence for PiS political agenda as it has drawn inspiration from the Hungarian party (Vachudova, 2020) Since 2015 Poland's liberal democracy index has been in a steady decline, not reaching the same levels as Hungary but a clear decline can still be observed. As of 2020, Poland's Liberal Democracy Index shows a score of 0.49 compared to the year before PiS came to power in 2015 when Poland scored 0.82 (V-Dem: B, 2021).

## What influences trust

### Economic performance

At first glance, the connection between economic performance and political trust seem to be fairly straightforward. The population evaluates the nation's economy and subsequently rewards or punishes the incumbent government. According to Tom W.G. Van Der Meer (2017) the relationship between these two variables is a lot more complex. He stipulates that the connection between macroeconomic performance and political trust is strong but at closer inspection it is difficult to state that it is in fact causal. Furthermore, he states that in fact in multilevel, cross-national research the relationship between the two is nonsignificant at a single point in time when differences in corruption is accounted for. However, in within-country, longitudinal analyses, even when corruption is accounted for, macro-economic performance seems to have a great affect on political trust. This in turn suggests that economy is very important for political trust because the population makes comparison between their current economic situation and their economic past. If their economy has improved, political trust will improve with it and if the economy has been impaired political trust is also likely to diminish. Although what must be accounted for is the fact that, as Van Der Meer (2017) calls it, the EU works as a *"lifebuoy"* in countries where institutions perform badly. Rather than losing trust in the government during an economic downturn, the population in these countries loses trust in the EU. This is what functions as a *"lifebuoy"* for the governing body as the mistrust is put elsewhere and thus saves the government and it's institutions in these countries from losing the populations trust. It must be said though that this has only been tested in the EU and that it is mainly central and eastern European countries that loses trust on a supranational level rather than national. However, this serves the purpose of this essay well as it is focused on post-communist countries in the CEE.

Another variable that influences trust is economic inequality. The idea that economic inequality affects political trust negatively is not new (Van der Meer, 2017) Van der Meer stipulates that economic inequality creates a society where the citizens view the economic and political system as constructed against them which in turn makes the citizens feel less inhibited to evade taxes and at the same time important institutions in society such as the courts would be more likely to ignore fairness. Political leaders in turn would be more susceptible to patronage and thus make them less accountable to their constituency.

Van der Meer (2017) further states that although studies have found that inequality is detrimental to political trust, when corruption is controlled for in surveys that measure economic inequality's influence on trust, trust is barely affected. This would mean that corruption, not economic inequality has the greatest influence on trust. Although there is an argument to be made that economic inequality and corruption go hand in hand (Van der Meer, 2017) and as such where there is inequality there is also corruption which would mean that inequality affects trust through corruption.

### **Institutional performance**

As stated earlier, time matters when it comes to trust. When a country develops from an autocracy to a democracy, the populations first instinct is to have a higher trust in the country's institutions than before. This trust will then decline as time passes and democracy and fair treatment becomes more and more expected until trust levels eventually even out and become more stable. Time also matters when it comes too remembering autocracy. A population that has recently been subjected too such a regime are more likely to remember what it was like to live under such conditions and thus influence their trust in institutions. If an institution always have treated a population unfairly, the population is less likely to trust said institution whether the country has gone through a democratization process or not. The memory of autocratic rule will also be present in government bureaucrats and workers, those that were taught doing a job and treating the population in a certain way to keep the people suppressed under autocratic rule. These workers will in many aspects still do their job as if autocratic rule were never abolished because they know of no other way to operate. This of course in turn also influences how the people perceive and trust their government institutions. If a country has been democratized but it's population is still treated unfairly by government institutions, trust in institutions will be low as the population experience no discernible change in how they are being treated (Rose & Mishler, 2010).

As Rose and Mishler (2010) says in their text *Political trust and distrust in post-authoritarian contexts* public officials and bureaucrats will continue performing their tasks as before a country was democratized, i.e., when the regime is still authoritarian, this inflicts the populations trust in institutions because if nothing changes in the institution's performance trust has no reason to increase. Institutional performance is vital to a population's trust in institutions as a well-functioning, well-performing institution is more likely to garner trust than an institution that treats the population unfairly and performs badly. The focus for this essay will however not be on how many public officials are still in office since Poland and

Hungary have been democratized as it is possible that some bureaucrats remain in their institutions, most will have been replaced by new workers or relearned to be a part of a better functioning institution.

What this study will focus on is the perceived corruption of the parliament, legal system and police and how this matters in determining institutional performance.

## Trust in Poland and Hungary

In the case of both Hungary and Poland, they both became democratic states in 1990, approximately 30 years ago and have remained so until 2010 and 2015 respectively. This is not the exact year the countries were labelled anything other than democracies, in fact Poland is still labelled an electoral democracy by V-Dem but has been demoted from a fully liberal democracy since the Liberal Democracy Index has fallen (V-Dem Twitter, 2021). This is well within the time span for a large amount of the population to have experienced autocratic rule in their lifetime. It is also well within the time span for government bureaucrats and workers to have been taught their job before the democratization process and still be in the same position and/or institution as before.

Looking at the graphs for Hungary a clear decline in Liberal Democracy Index can be observed since 2010, this correlates to when Fidesz first came to power in Hungary. This is not a surprise and has been shown and discussed in multiple essays and media platforms before. What is remarkable is how trust in institutions has developed since 2010.

Trust in police fell somewhat 2006 but not to a very great extent however, rose again in 2008 and would continue to rise even after 2010 when Fidesz came to power. The data indicates that the Hungarian population have greatly increased their trust in police compared to when ESS started measuring trust in the country. Trust has levelled out somewhat since 2015 but the data still shows an incline. When QoG started measuring trust in police in Hungary the numbers showed a result of 5 on a ten-point scale compared to the latest numbers in 2018 that reaches almost seven. Trust in legal system shows an almost identical development in Hungary with the one exception of taking an even deeper dive in trust in the middle of the 2000's. It starts at 2004 measuring 5 on a ten-point scale to fall as low as almost a three in 2008 and then rise again and, just as trust in police, level out to stop at a six in 2018. The same sort of development can be seen in trust in parliament where trust measures 5 on a ten-point scale, then drop down to almost two in 2008 and take a sharp turn, just as trust in police and trust in legal system. The increase in trust in parliament continues until 2018 when ESS stops measuring trust, the difference here compared to trust in police and trust in legal system being that trust in parliament never quite reaches the same level of trust as pre-Fidesz times. It almost reaches the same levels but not quite, ending in 2018 at 4.8. This is not the case for trust in police or trust in legal system where trust surpasses the pre-Fidesz numbers, this data raises a number of questions. Firstly, why did trust fall in 2004 and what made it rise again in

2008? It can not be the Fidesz party coming to power as this did not happen until 2010, although it is not unlikely that trust in institutions fell in 2004 because of the country being granted EU membership. This might have affected the populations trust negatively as EU membership might not have been what the population wanted alternatively the population did not receive what was promised in an EU membership and therefore losing trust in their parliament and subsequently other institutions. This also correlates with the idea of the autocratic rule of the Soviet Union being in the population's collective memory. The population might feel that the European Union is just another autocratic regime and that the country swaps one for another, the Soviet Union for the European Union. Especially since it has time and again been proven that the EU and it's legislative and judicial power is difficult to understand and very few know how the EU functions (European Parliament, 2021).

The rise in trust in Hungary in 2008 speaks against economic performance having an influence on trust. 2008 was in the middle of the financial crisis and many countries were hit hard including central and eastern Europe. Hungary's economy shrunk by 7% (Valentinyi, 2012) in the crisis and were very vulnerable as it were the only country with both external debt and government debt. If economic performance was having a detrimental effect on trust the graphs should be showing a decrease in trust in 2008 as well as the following years until the economy recovers. However, the graphs instead show an increase in trust which shows that trust something else has an effect on why the population keeps trusting their institutions even in a financial crisis. The economic inequality and wage gap has increased since 2000 as the top 10% earns more than the bottom 50%. The income inequality has increased by 9 percentage points between these groups (World Inequality Database: A, 2021). This also speaks to there being a different explanation for the increase in trust as theory states that there should be a decrease in trust when economic inequality grows. One must also take into account GDP per capita in Hungary and it's effect on trust. Between the years of 2000 to 2018 GDP per capita has increased quite substantially from 4624,28 USD to 16 411,44 USD (The World Bank: A, 2021). As the population is likely to evaluate the economic performance longitudinal rather than between countries (Van der Meer, 2017) this is what could keep trust stable in Hungary. The population believes that the economy is performing well as long as their own economic situation has improved compared to previous years. This would explain why trust in institutions has not fallen and instead risen despite economic hardships during the financial crisis.

What is most interesting with this data is however that even if the numbers go up and down from year to year they stay mainly consistent. The numbers do not shift so monumentally that they demand an explanation, of course there are some underlying reasons for these shifts in numbers. Although it is well within reason for these numbers to shift somewhat up and down as trust will never be 100 percent consistent but rather, as in this case, sway positively and negatively from year to year. This means that the data correlates with this essay's hypothesis, it is clear to see how Hungary's Liberal Democratic Index has fallen since 2010. The reasonable development for the population's trust in institutions would be to follow the same progression and fall alongside the Liberal Democratic Index. In Hungary though, this is not the case as trust in institutions stay relatively consistent and as in the case of trust in legal system and trust in police surpassing previous numbers and gaining more trust. This points to the hypothesis being correct, as a country with recent autocratic history experiences democratic backsliding the population's trust in institutions is not affected.

The one curve that differs from the others is trust in other people. This graph does not follow any of the other, It does not fall as the Liberal Democracy Index decreases neither does it fall and rise back up as the graphs showing trust in various institutions. However, as the other graphs the data over trust in people seem to sway normally and does not require any specific explanation.

Looking at the graphs for Poland the same sort of drop in Liberal Democracy Index can be observed in 2015 when PiS comes to power. As stated PiS draws inspiration from Orban and the Fidesz party and base their policy on the same ideas as Fidesz. The drop in Liberal Democracy Index is therefore not very odd, the same data can be observed in Hungary and it is only natural that Poland led by PiS would follow the same development as Fidesz and Hungary. This also explains the somewhat steeper curve for Poland's Liberal Democracy Index.

Looking at the graphs for trust in institutions in Poland they all follow the same outline. The lowest point for all these graphs all occurs in 2004 followed by a small increase in trust until 2010. This increase in trust is most likely explained by Poland's EU membership in 2004 which infused the population with a greater trust for their institutions. In 2010 trust again decreases, although very marginally. What is most interesting is what happens in 2015 when PiS comes to power, and Poland's Liberal Democracy Index starts falling. Just as in Hungary trust does not decrease as would be perceived but instead it increases, reaching higher levels than before.

Poland was not hit as hard as Hungary in the financial crisis of 2008 and was in fact by 2009 the only European country with a growing GDP. The repercussions of the financial crisis did not take form in Poland until a few years later but had by then been counteracted and only emerged in milder forms (Adamowicz & Adamowicz, 2019). This may explain why trust in institutions took a small dive in 2010 and does not discourage the idea of economic performance having an influence in trust in post-communist states with an autocratic history. If Poland did not experience the same financial crisis as other central and eastern European countries and suffered only minor economic setbacks because of it, no discernible change in trust should be able to witness and neither is it particularly witnessable. Therefore, one cannot rule out that economic performance has a role in influencing trust in institutions. However as in Hungary, economic inequality has risen since 2000 and the gap between the top 10% and the bottom 50% of income earners has increased by 7 percentage points (World Inequality Database: B, 2021). Just as previously stated this does discourage the idea of economic inequality having a greater influence on trust. GDP per capita for Poland has also increased in the years 2000 to 2018, in 2000 Poland's GDP per capita stood at 4501,45 USD compared to 2018 when it reached 15 468,41 USD (The World Bank: B, 2021). Just as in Hungary This may be an important factor to why trust in institutions stays stable despite a forceful democratic backsliding as again the people of Poland compare their economic situation to previous years and finds it to be better than before, hence experiencing economic growth and the government and it's institutions retains the population's trust.

The sway in trust in Poland is although also something that does not need explaining. The data does not display any odd numbers or a particular change in trust. Again, the data shows that trust is mostly stable despite democratic backsliding, the sway in trust is normal and nothing that needs to be discussed. However, these numbers also confirm the hypothesis of this essay. The steep decrease in democracy that Poland has experienced since 2015 does not affect the populations trust in institutions. Trust in police, legal system and parliament are all experiencing the same shifts in trust but neither of them show any outliers or greater increases or decreases, trust in institutions is stable despite the Liberal Democracy Index decreasing.

Institutional performance is theorized also to be an important factor influencing trust, if an institution performs badly population is likely to lose trust in institutions and vice versa. In Hungary a survey done by the European Research Centre for Anti-corruption and State Building (2014), shortened ERCASB, shows that as much as 43% often experience that public officials that provide services to the community does not act the way they should and 42%



experience that this is occasionally true. These numbers indicate that public officials in Hungary often perform badly and therefore should have a negative effect on trust in institutions. Still, the regression line points to trust in all institutions being stable despite theory stating that when institutions perform badly trust in institutions should decline. This could be an indication that when a population is used to badly performing institutions trust will not be as affected as a population that is used to institutions performing well. It must be said that these numbers do not point to any specific institution but is a general experience of all institutions. Although with such high numbers of the population being treated unfairly by public officials it should be safe to say that most institutions do not function as well as they could and/or should. Furthermore, in a survey conducted by Transparency International, compiled by QoG (QoG Dataset, 2021) it was found that 32% of the population perceived the policing force to be in some ways corrupt, comparing this to perceived corruption in the Hungarian judicial/legal system and parliament were respectively 28.6% and 33.5% of the population found that these institutions were in some ways corrupt.

The same survey in Poland found that 32.1% of the Polish population experienced that the policing force were corrupt. In the same survey it was also discovered that 32.6% thought the judiciary/legal system were in some way corrupt as well as 33.7% found the parliament corrupt.

Corruption in and of itself is not a measure of how well an institution performs or functions but is a very good indication of an institution's performance. More importantly perceived corruption should be a very good measure of how well a population thinks an institution performs because if an institution functions well the population should not see it as corrupt, but a badly functioning institution is more likely to be perceived as corrupt than a well-functioning institution. By this logic it can be derived that the institutions in Poland and Hungary are not very well functioning when a third of the population view them as in some way corrupt. This should also mean that trust in institutions in the respective countries should be declining as institutional performance should have a detrimental effect on the population's trust. However, yet again no particular sign of declining trust can be witnessed, instead trust is stable and slightly rising according to the regression line. This also points to there being more to analysing trust in post-communist countries with an authoritarian past than simply pointing to economic and institutional performance.

## Conclusion and Future Research

To summarize I will end this essay with a brief discussion of the findings of this study.

Looking at the graphs for both Poland and Hungary it is quite clear to see how the Liberal Democracy Index has fallen since the start of the PiS and Fidesz regime in their respective countries. Since Fidesz came to power in Hungary the Liberal Democracy Index has fallen from 0.78 to 0.37 and is now no longer classified as a democracy but an electoral autocracy according to V-dem. Poland in turn has seen a fall in Liberal Democracy Index from 0.82 to 0.49 and is still classified as a democracy but has been demoted to an electoral democracy rather than a liberal democracy, also according to V-dem. Common sense dictates that it should be able to witness is a fall in the population's trust in institutions however, looking at graphs describing trust in parliament, police and legal system, trust in these institutions seem to be low but fairly stable. Macro and micro level theories describe how institutional and economic performance affect trust in institutions. Economic theories explain how a country's economic performance affects the citizens trust in their institutions, however the comparison is not drawn between countries but rather historically as citizens compare their economic situation to previous years. Economic inequality also seem to have a great impact on a population's trust however this is more closely linked to corruption since when corruption is controlled for, economic inequality does not seem to have the same effect on trust.

Institutional performance, i.e., how well an institution functions also seem to influence trust. If an institution historically has been seen as badly functioning or treating citizens unfairly trust is likely to be lower than institutions that functions well. A fairly straightforward evaluation of an institution's performance will affect the population's trust in said institution. Perceived corruption is not a perfect way to measure how well an institution functions but is a good indication of how well a population thinks an institution functions as less perceived corruption can be constrained as a more well-functioning institution and more perceived corruption is an indication of a population that believes it to be a badly functioning institution. For Poland and Hungary economic inequality has widened and the wage gap between the top 10% and the bottom 50% of earners has widened since 2000. The financial crisis hit Hungary relatively hard and diminished the country's economy by 7%, Poland was not hit as hard and faced milder repercussions some time later than the rest of Europe and came out of the financial crisis somewhat unscathed. This should speak towards a decline in trust according to theories on economic performance although, the saving grace might be Poland's and

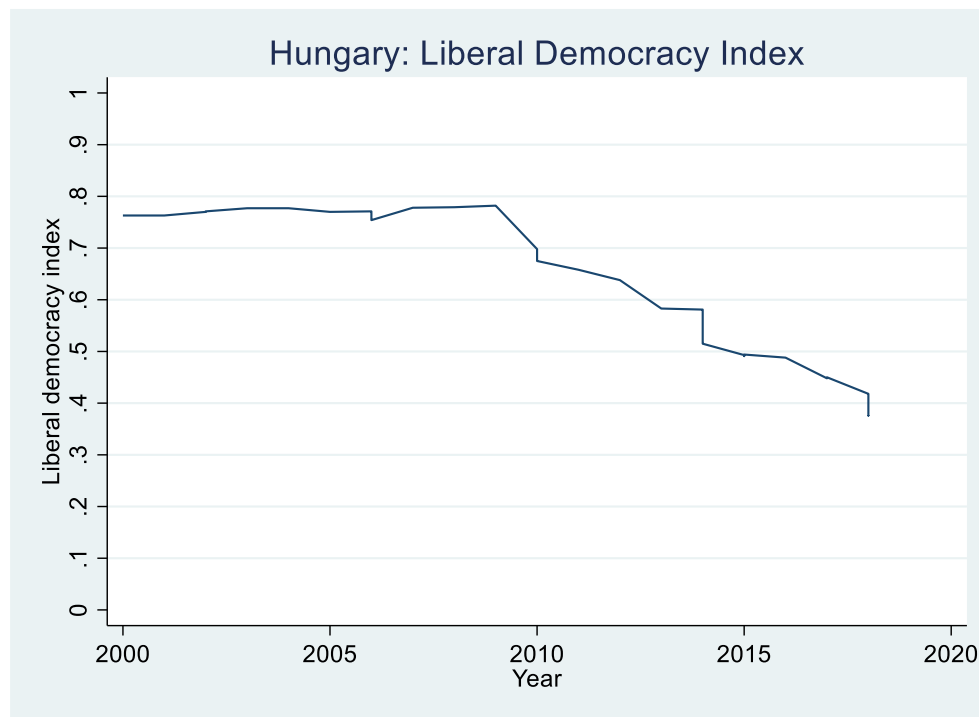
Hungary's growing GDP per capita which have seen a massive growth of about 300% for both these countries since 2000 and might be an explanation for the countries' stable trust.

Perceived corruption in both countries sits relatively high with about a third of the countries' population believing that the parliament, police and legal system are subject to corruption as well as 43% of the population in Hungary experiencing that public officials do not act the way they should. This is not a direct indication of badly functioning institutions in these countries but paints a picture of how the general public views institutional performance. Theories on institutional performance would describe this as detrimental to trust in institutions as when an institution performs badly, trust will fall accordingly. Despite this, trust in institutions is stable in both countries and even somewhat on the rise according to the regression line.

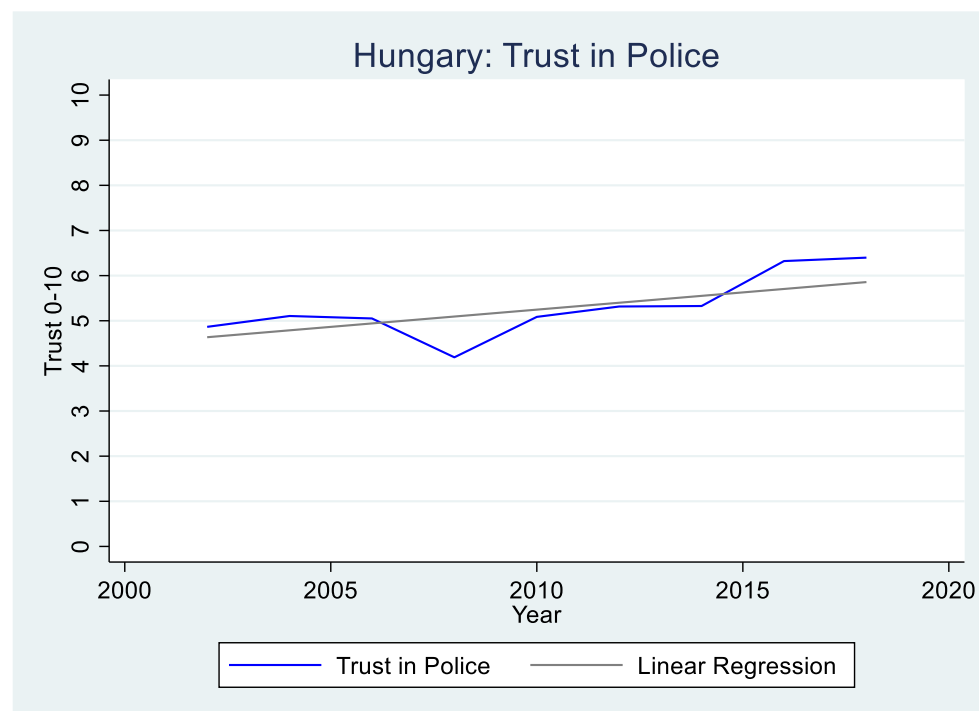
One cannot dismiss that institutional and economic performance is vital to trust, especially since this study cannot discourage the idea that Poland's and Hungary's GDP per capita has influenced trust in institutions keeping it stable. However, what should be clear is that post-communist countries with an authoritarian past does not function like western European nations. One must account for these countries' history in order to fully understand how trust functions and is affected by different variables. By that notion, this study does not discourage economic and institutional performance as variables affecting trust in post-communist countries. On the contrary, these theories have been proven earlier and seem to also hold true in this study. What this study should be seen as is a call for more extensive research on how a country's history might affect variables which in turn affects trust. The fact that Poland and Hungary are post-communist, post-authoritarian states is clearly not the only variable affecting trust but is very prevalent, working in tandem with other variables making the outcome more difficult to predict than in western democracies. Future research should be focusing on a more extensive and broader analysis on post-communist and post-authoritarian states, not necessarily limited to the European continent, to lay a foundation to better understand how a nation's past can influence how trust functions and extend our knowledge of social theory.

## Graphs

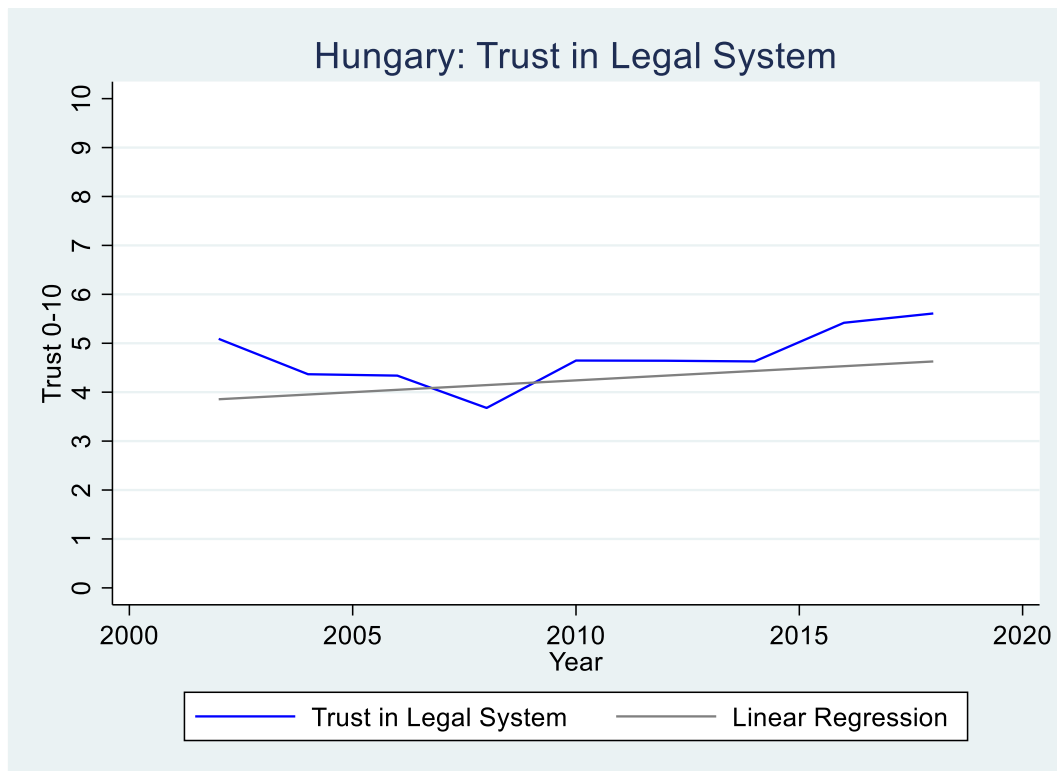
### Hungary



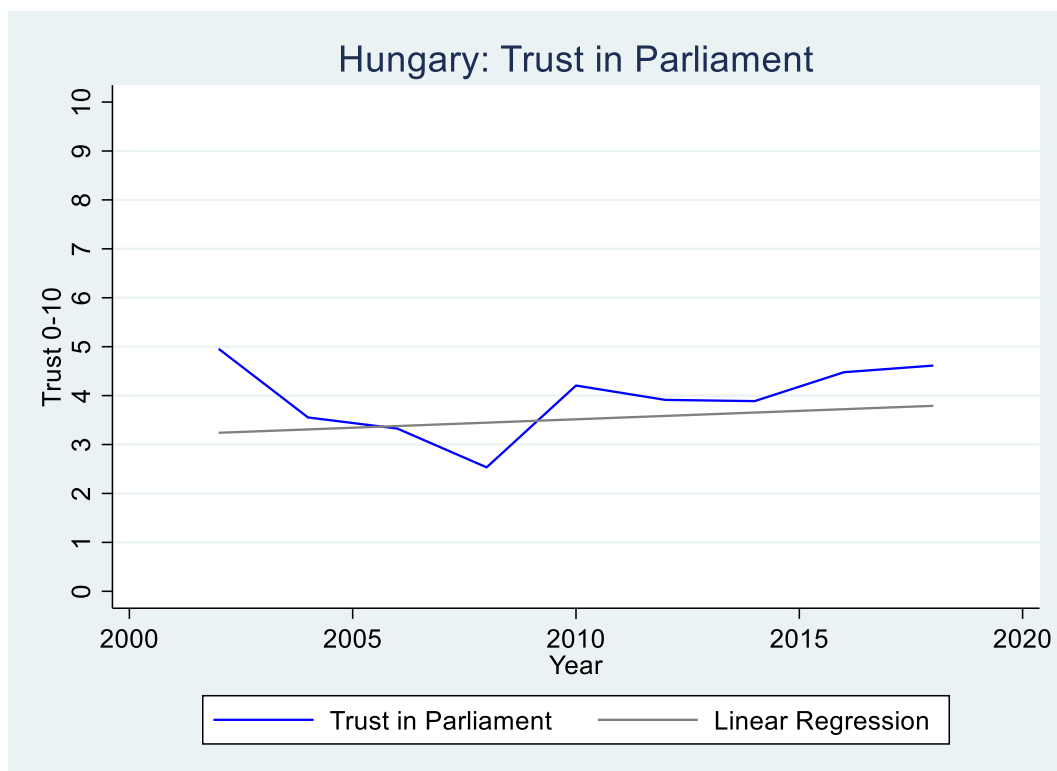
**Figure 1:** Hungary's Liberal Democracy Index from the year 2000 to the year 2018. Data from V-dem's database.



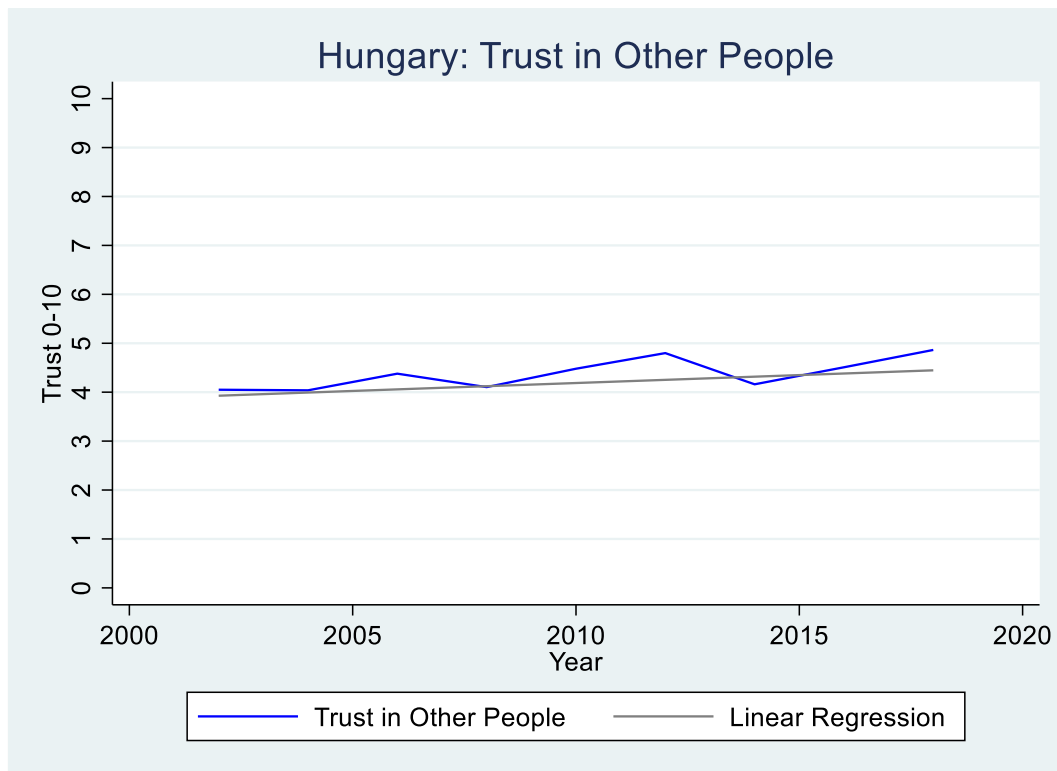
**Figure 2:** The Hungarian population's trust in police from the year 2000 to the year 2018. Data collected from QoG's database.



**Figure 3:** The Hungarian population's trust in legal system from the year 2000 to the year 2018. Data collected from QoG's database.

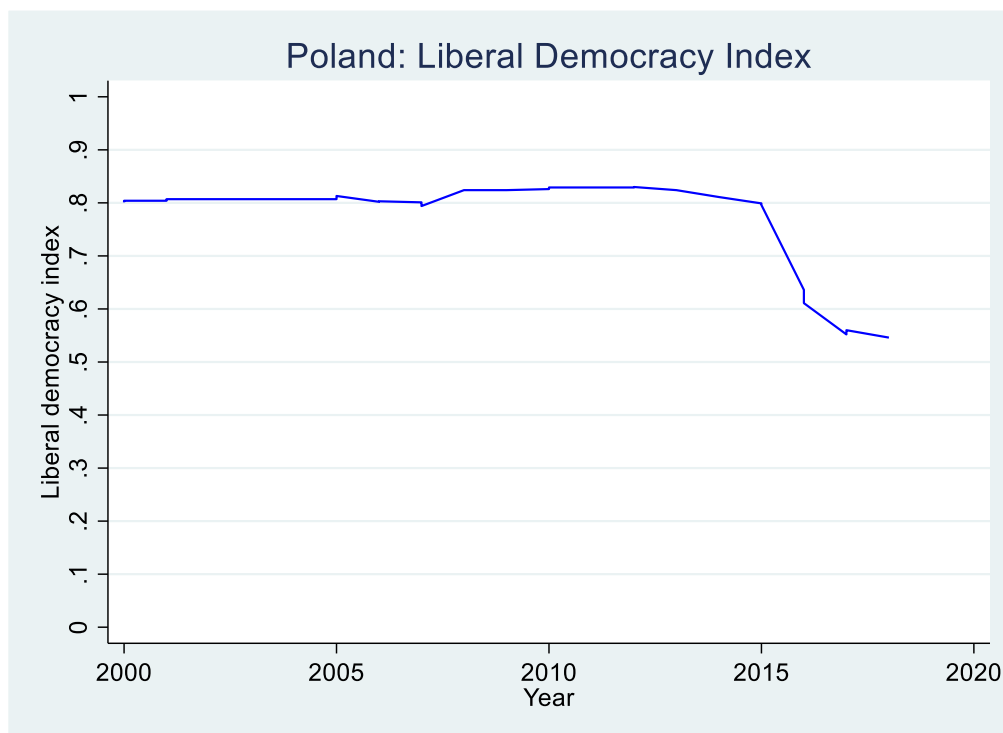


**Figure 4:** The Hungarian population's trust in parliament from the year 2000 to the year 2018. Data collected from QoG's database.

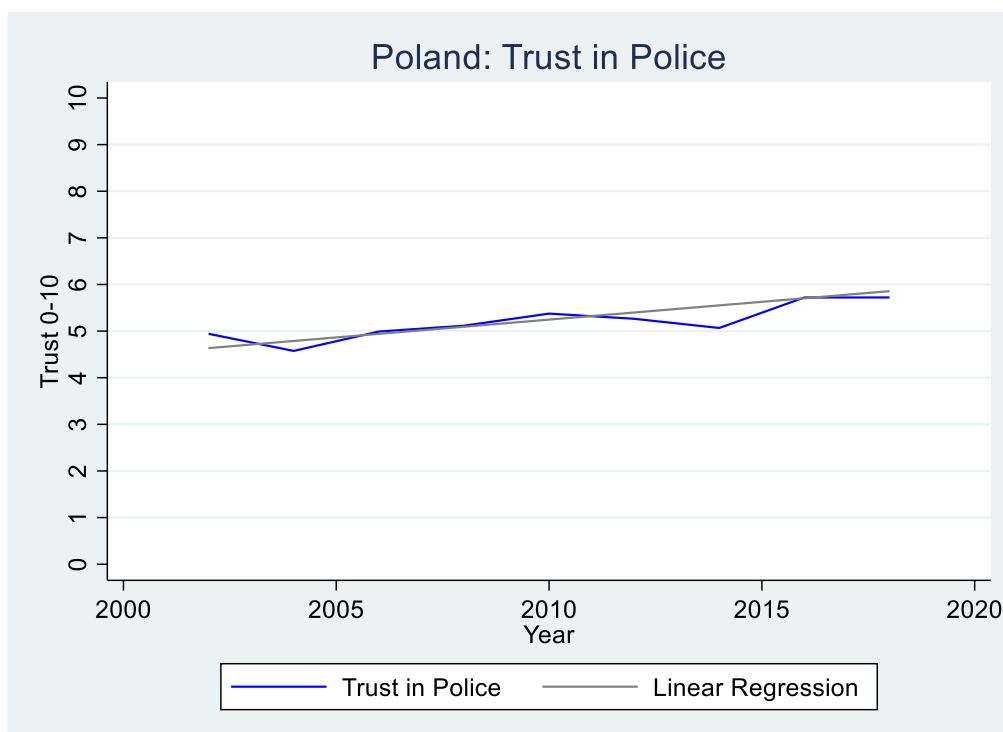


**Figure 5:** The Hungarian population's trust in other people from the year 2000 to the year 2018. Data collected from QoG's database.

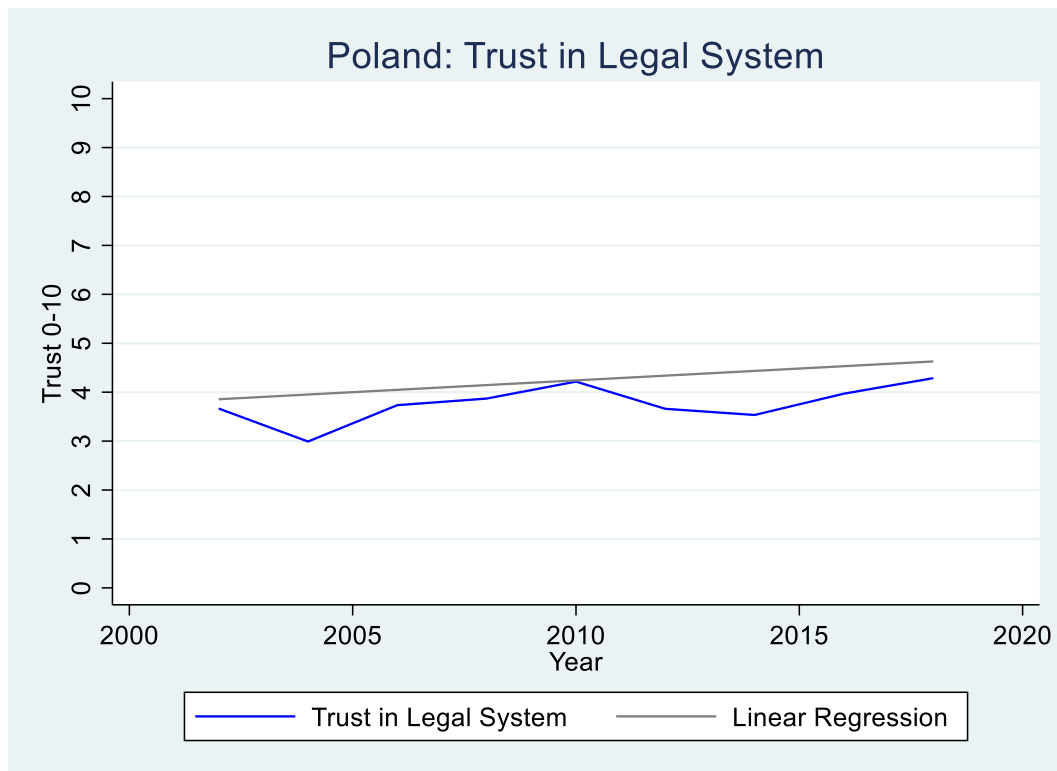
## Poland



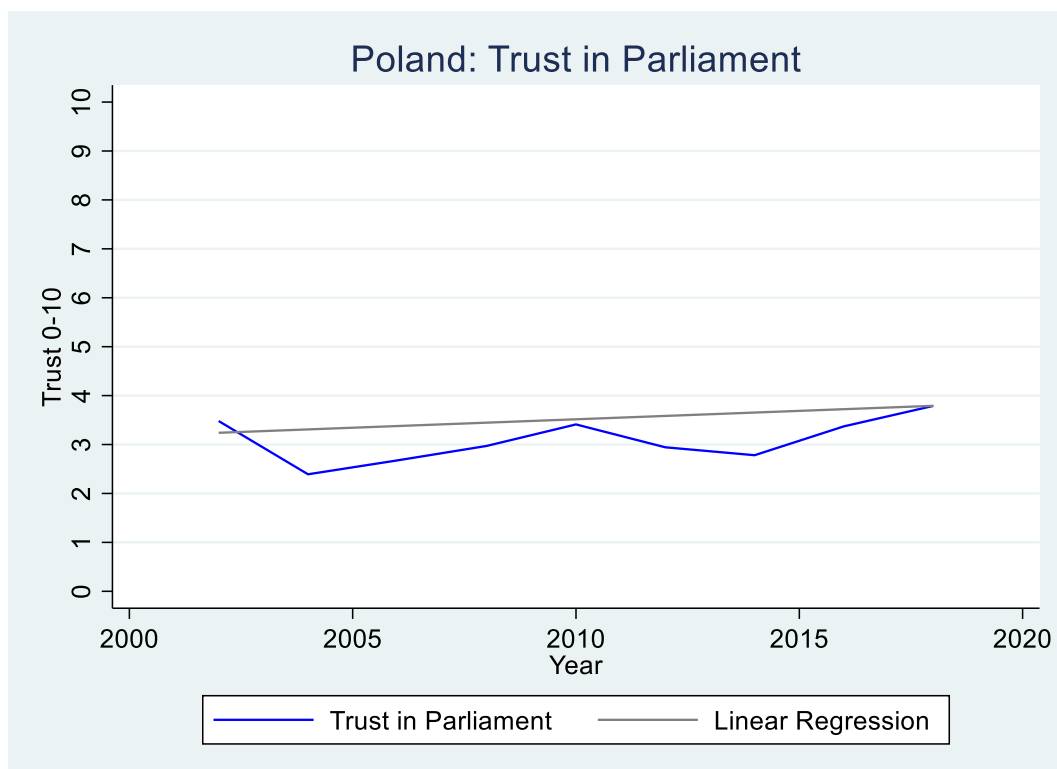
*Figure 6: Poland's Liberal Democracy Index from the year 2000 to the year 2018. Data collected from V-dem's database.*



*Figure 7: The Polish population's trust in police from the year 2000 to the year 2018. Data collected from QoG's database.*



**Figure 8:** The Polish population's trust in legal system from the year 2000 to the year 2018. Data collected from QoG's database.



**Figure 9:** The Polish population's trust in parliament from the year 2000 to the year 2018. Data collected from QoG's database.





**Figure 10:** The Polish population's trust in other people from the year 2000 to the year 2018. Data collected from QoG's database.

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