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Chapter · July 2019

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## Trust in Transition: Culturalist and Institutional Debate Reflected in the Democratization Process in the Czech Republic, 1991–2008

*Markéta Sedláčková and Jiří Šafr*

The communists knew well  
why they needed to control, manipulate  
and suppress all the beekeepers' associations.

VÁCLAV HAVEL



Democracy is more than just a well-built institutional system. Even a democracy which relies on functional institutions and on good systemic conditions, such as rule of law, a working bureaucracy and economic performance, would be merely an empty shell if citizens did not believe in the democratic regime and actively support it. At the beginning of the 1990s, Ralf Dahrendorf outlined the timeline for the transition to democracy and freedom for post-communist countries as follows: political or constitutional changes can be made in 6 months, economic reforms over 6 years, and solid democratic foundations, in the form of an active civil society in 60 years (Dahrendorf 1991: 92). This has come under much criticism from various sides – from those pointing to an excessively long period of civil society formation to those who have denied the importance of civil society for the functioning of the democratic system. Over a quarter of a century later, we are privileged to be able to take a look at this “laboratory of democracy” and, in the case of one of the post-communist countries, assess the state of democracy, focusing primarily on the roots of support for the regime and its stability, and on the functioning of civil society.

The democratic transition in Central and Eastern European countries has again raised the question of establishing a democratic system and of the conditions necessary for its stable functioning. On the one hand, there are those who claim that democracy is primarily a system of institutions. By introducing institutions, adopted from advanced democracies, democracy can be created

on practically a clean slate, provided it is supported by an effective economy. It is important to add that, by virtue of the fact that democracy and capitalism came to Central Europe at the same time, the economic and political systems were perceived as one. Consequently, a focus on economic performance prevailed in the region, supported by a radical economic thesis such as “the market precedes the law”. On the other hand, there were those who saw that “institutional xerox” was totally inadequate when it came to building a democratic society. They pointed to the need to transform citizens’ values, behavior and thinking, that is, to create a specific political culture – a civic culture.<sup>1</sup>

The process of democratization in the 1990s also reopened the debate about democracy and its political culture. A fundamental dispute had arisen in the 1960s between the so-called rationalist or institutional stream and the cultural stream. Rationalists claimed that the democratic system is based on the rational evaluation of its performance and that citizens support democratic institutions insofar as they are effective for them. On the contrary, culturalists argued that in order to function, the democratic system also needs to be embedded in a specific political culture based on a society’s general value system.

On the basis of this discussion between institutionalists and culturalists, as well as the explanation which takes into account the specific development in post-communist countries, we ask the following questions: What are the bases of diverse layers of trust in new democracy? Do they carry the remnants of the communist legacy? Does institutional and systemic trust mainly reflect the perceived performance of the system or is it grounded in civic virtues, specifically social trust and engagement? Has there been a change in the impact of these factors during the two decades of the democratization process in the new democracies in Central Europe?

This chapter examines the above questions in relation to the specific case of the Czech Republic in its transition and post-transition period after 1989. A country undergoing the process of transition from a totalitarian to a democratic regime presents a great opportunity to study the formation of the democratic system and analyze its key components and the way in which they are interrelated. Using data from the European Values Study, conducted in 1991, 1999 and 2008, we analyze the roots of institutional trust and systemic trust (i.e., popular support for democracy) in the three distinct stages of transition. Furthermore, we test a hypothesis based on the institutionalist approach that

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1 In the case of the Czech Republic the first stream was promoted by economist and then prime minister Václav Klaus, whereas the second stream was represented mainly by then president Václav Havel, some neo-institutionalist economists and sociologists (Mlčoch, Machonin and Sojka 2000).

public support for democracy is influenced by evaluations of the performance of the system and its institutions. On the contrary we assess the hypothesis based on cultural theories, namely that trust in institutions along with collective social capital, more specifically civic participation and social trust, contribute to public support of the democratic regime.

## 1 Trust and the Democratic System

Trust plays an important role in democratic societies as a medium of communication at all its levels: from mutual communication between citizens to their relations with different organizations, constitutional institutions and the democratic regime as such. We define three basic types of trust that exist in democratic systems: systemic trust (Sztompka 1999: 45), institutional trust and so-called social trust. Systemic trust, i.e., the legitimacy of a political regime, is a fundamental prerequisite for the existence of a democratic system because it represents people's trust based on their belief that a democratic regime is both just and beneficial to their society. The second pillar of the democratic system is built upon the relation of citizens to the democratic institutions representing them (the government, the parliament, courts, etc.). Experience with the functioning of the institutions either leads to citizen satisfaction or dissatisfaction which they express through trust or distrust. Long-term dissatisfaction can be reflected not only in distrust and a questioning of the existence of particular institutions, but can also influence the very perception of the rightfulness of the democratic system as such, i.e., its legitimacy. Third, social trust is defined as general trust in other people. While based on primary socialization within the family, this type of social trust goes beyond family or a small community because it is crucially associated with links between socially "distant" groups. Social trust together with an inter-group tolerance and respect for differences contribute towards creating a civic culture, and thus towards supporting democracy as such (Putnam 2000).

### 1.1 *Rationalist versus Culturalist Approach to Trust*

The debate about the role of trust in the democratic system takes place mainly between institutionalists and culturalists. It is important to note that each approach is based on very different assumptions about the nature of social systems and the behavior of actors in them.

Institutionalists follow the theory of rational choice, which considers man to be a rationally behaving actor, evaluating the costs and benefits of his conduct. Trust is defined as an encapsulated interest, which means that "I trust

if I believe that the other person's action is 'encapsulated' in an incentive structure by which it is in her interest to behave trustworthy" (Hardin 2001: 14). In the context of democracy, this means that citizens and government officials will trust each other if it is beneficial for both parties (Braithwaite and Levi 1998: 376). If the government builds trust by making credible commitments and declaring trust in citizens, citizens, in turn, can show a willingness to contribute to public well-being and behave in accordance with the law (Levi 1998; Daunton 1998). Contrary to the culturalist stream, which understands trust as a moral virtue, institutionalists more often point to the danger of unwarranted trust and to the potential positive function of distrust (Warren 1999). Hardin (2001) even claims that democracy is based not so much on trust but on institutionalized distrust.<sup>2</sup> The institutional framework plays a central role in this approach, as the institutionalists seek to describe what institutional arrangements can support the emergence of trust (Jackman and Miller 1998: 50).

In contrast, culturalists emphasize that people of different cultures evaluate information differently and their behavior is therefore different under the same institutional conditions. A culturalist approach assumes that societies have their own specific value systems and that these cultural patterns are somewhat permanent. Beyond that, specific cultural patterns are assumed to affect the political and economic system (following on from Weber's thesis on Protestantism and capitalism). There is a definite link to modernization theories (Parsons 1951; Almond and Verba 1963; Eckstein 1988), according to which democratic institutions can operate only in societies that have sufficiently undergone processes of industrialization, urbanization and education (Hanson 2001).<sup>3</sup> Trust, when considered as one of the culture traits, is important for democracy for three reasons: it contributes to public support for the democratic regime; it increases the tendency towards democratic values; and it positively affects political engagement.

Knowing the general perspective of these two theoretical approaches, we can now ask how they perceive the relations between systemic trust, trust in institutions and social trust. According to the institutional stream, trust has limited effects on democracy and the distinct types of trust are not related to one another, whereas the cultural stream argues not only that trust influences all levels of the democratic system but also that the different types of trust affect

2 The concept of institutionalized distrust can also be found in Piotr Sztompka's model "the social becoming of trust culture". He claims that the fundamental premises of the democratic system are in actual fact modelled on distrust: justification of all power, periodical elections and terms of office, the division of power, etc. (Sztompka 1999: 140–3).

3 At the same time, Lipset (1959) is also considered to be one of the first proponents of the "theory of modernization", which states that democracy is the direct result of economic growth.

one another. Institutional theories understand institutional trust as politically endogenous, i.e., unrelated to the interpersonal trust which we obtain in primary socialization, and instead locate its roots in people's rational evaluation of institutional performance (e.g., Dasgupta 1988; Hetherington 1998; Hardin 1998). In contrast, cultural theories understand trust in political institutions as exogenous, i.e., rooted outside the political realm. They see institutional trust as an extension of interpersonal trust, which in turn is based on cultural norms and emerges from social networks, and in particular from the networks of civic engagement, which are thus understood as a vital element for the functioning of the democratic system (Almond and Verba 1963; Inglehart 1997; Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti 1993).

Although at first glance these two schools of thought seem to be completely incompatible, Mishler and Rose construct a so-called life-time learning model, which partially integrates the two contrasting explanations of the origins of trust (Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1998). According to this model, social trust may develop initially as a result of youthful, pre-political experiences and may subsequently be projected onto institutions (cultural theories). However, this initial predisposition to trust or distrust institutions may be then reinforced or revised by later-life experiences, including adult evaluations of political performance (institutional theories).

The arguments put forward in support of the two above-discussed approaches can also be applied to systemic trust. For the purpose of our investigation of the associations between regime legitimacy and institutional trust, we have found it useful to apply Easton's distinction between specific support, which is based on citizen satisfaction with the current working of institutions, and diffuse support, which represents generalized loyalty to the regime (Easton 1965). This distinction is crucial because institutional trust has only limited influence on overall regime legitimacy in the former case (see e.g., Citrin 1974; Lipset and Schneider 1983; Rose, Haerpfer and Mishler 1997), while lack of trust in democratic institutions may destabilize the regime (Weatherford 1992; Miller and Listhaug 1999) and increase people's support for authoritarian alternatives in the latter case.

## 1.2 *Origins of Systemic Trust*

No political regime can last without legitimacy. While order can be procured by means of incentives and sanctions, social cooperation requires systemic trust (Misztal 1996: 245). Legitimacy can be understood as a bridge between an institutional system and cultural factors on which the political system is built. On what pillars is support for the democratic regime based? In other words what are the origins of systemic trust?

Economic effects are undoubtedly among the most frequently discussed factors influencing the legitimacy of any regime (including non-democratic ones). Regime legitimacy relies primarily on the long-term performance of the entire system which in turn relies on a working economy, as pointed out by Lipset more than fifty years ago ((1960) 1981).<sup>4</sup> The basic tenet is that as countries develop, social structures become increasingly complex, thus rendering authoritarian rule more and more difficult. Institutionalists emphasize that performance should not be understood just as economic efficiency but also as the real ability of the state to meet the basic needs and requirements of the population through institutions. Although the economic thesis is generally accepted, opinions differ on whether this is related to macroeconomic conditions (macro-theories) or, for example, personal financial situations (micro-theories). However, support for democracy is seen as endogenous, i.e., as political and economic performance feedback (Easton 1965). Thus, institutionalists are generally more optimistic about the implementation of democratic systems in various cultures.

While economic prosperity continues to be viewed as important, it is treated merely as one of the factors that influence legitimacy (Dogan 1997: 16; similarly, Maravell 1997). Many authors emphasize the fact that the influence of economic and political performance on the legitimacy of democracy is somewhat indirect, i.e., mediated by citizens' beliefs, attitudes and values (e.g., Diamond 1999; Lipset and Lakin 2004; Linz and Stepan 1996). Thus, people's evaluations not only reflect the objective economic and political situation but also subjective perceptions that are shaped by belonging to a particular social category (gender, age, social status) and relating to reference groups (relative deprivation), (micro-level socialization theories) (Almond and Verba 1963; Mishler and Rose 2001). According to theories of individual socialization, political attitudes and beliefs are based on pre-political attitudes already acquired in the socialization process in early childhood (e.g., Eckstein 1988).

Cultural theories emphasize the macro-context within which political learning occurs. People's political values, attitudes and individual activities are formed and strengthened in their interactions with other citizens, not only through informal networks but, importantly for the development of democratic values, through civic and voluntary associations (secondary socialization) (Almond and Verba 1963). Some proponents of cultural theories have adopted the concept of "collective social capital" (Putnam et al. 1993; Putnam 2000), the essence of which are two dimensions: a cultural one (mutual trust among

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4 Lipset's famous thesis: "The more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy" (Lipset 1981: 31).

people and groups, the values and norms of tolerance, cooperation and solidarity), which is generated and reinforced in the milieu of a structural dimension (links and social contacts that are open and horizontal and networks of public engagement such as participation and volunteering). According to this neo-Tocquevillian theory, it is believed that higher social capital – an active civil society, creating more social trust – leads people to be more active in politics and thus supportive of democracy.

The theories of trust and civic participation discussed above describe a typical pattern of stable democratic systems, where civil society delineates the area between the private interest sphere and that of the state. Internally, civic associations are believed to affect their members in such a way that they socialize them into a democratic culture and teach them the subtleties of trust and cooperation. Externally, different forms of civic participation link citizens to the political system and its institutions, aggregate and articulate interest, and provide a range and variety of competing and cooperating groups, which constitute a pluralist polity (Newton 1999: 11). However, the validity of this theory is criticized from different angles.

### 1.3 *Critique of Collective Social Capital Theory: Civic Engagement and Democracy*

Despite the strong influence of the neo-Tocquevillian theory, there is little evidence that there is much of a correlation between membership in voluntary organizations and individual attitudes of trust (Newton 2001; Jackman and Miller 1998); and it is worth questioning whether voluntary organizations do, in fact, play a major role in this respect. The problem is that we do not know the extent to which membership affects trust creation in comparison with other possible sources of trust – such as family, personal experiences, or the impact of national institutions (Stolle 2001: 118; Levi 1996: 50). Moreover, as it is difficult to figure out the complicated cause-and-effect relationships between memberships in voluntary associations and trust, when “the possibility remains that people who are more trusting self-select into associations” (Stolle 2001: 120; van Deth 1997). In addition, these people, who are more likely to find others as well as society trustworthy and to express life satisfaction and happiness, very often represent a specific social group characterized by higher social status, income, and education (Newton 2006: 93). Thus, this exclusivity of voluntary groups, neglected by culturalists, can, instead of building social trust, lead rather to the erosion and division of society (Jackman and Miller 1998: 59).

The critique also points out that, on closer inspection, the effect of participation on social trust depends on the type of organization, the heterogeneity of membership, as well as the objective of the association, e.g., whether it can



be characterized as an altruistic or egoistic association, and also on the degree of the (in)formality of engagement. Even if at first glance it seems that Putnam fails to make a distinction between types of associations in terms of their effect on trust, upon closer examination one has to admit, however, that he describes some specific traits of associations which are conducive to trust: horizontality, face-to-face interaction and the overcoming of subcultural barriers (Wollebaek and Selle 2002: 39). Therefore, cultural and community associations (such as church groups, arts societies, local action groups, health care groups, etc.) are supposed to be more strongly linked to generalized trust and to democracy than, for example, political associations (unions, political parties, environmental and feminist organizations) (Stolle and Rochon 1998). Contrary to this theory, many scholars refute that these internally-focused local associations can foster civic skills and values. It is even less probable that they can act as a counterweight to the state, as is the case with political associations and social movements (Quigley 1996; Foley and Edwards 1998; Wollebaek and Selle 2002). More specifically, political associations and movements can foster debate, which is a cornerstone of social trust and democracy (Herreros 2004). However, it should be noted that not all civic or political movements have democratic goals and express their preferences and beliefs from the perspective of the common good. On the contrary, they can threaten the democratic system (extremist groups, anti-establishment movements). Another factor to consider is the association's degree of professionalization. With the rise in power of professionals, the importance of volunteers is decreasing, which changes the nature of relationships and thus the social functioning of the organization as a whole (Štovičková Jantulová 2005: 144).

Moreover, it is often argued that the form of civic participation has changed since the 1990s, and as citizens have become increasingly critical of politicians and political parties, they are more likely to engage in more non-conventional forms of political activism. However, culturalists particularly emphasize membership in traditional associations and communities, while, in their opinion, membership in new mass organizations and movements (e.g., pro-environmental and feminist), where people do not meet regularly face-to-face in a community and do not share common interests does not contribute to trust and, following on from that, to democracy (Putnam 2000). Contrary to these arguments, there are alternative explanations for the link between trust and participation. Max Kaase (1999) argues that if theories of social capital stress the link between trust and cooperation, then non-institutionalized participation based on collective action (such as demonstrating, taking part in boycotts, etc.) should be linked to social trust more strongly than in the case of conventional participation. However, empirical research in the post-communist

countries of Central and Eastern Europe also questions this source of trust (Vráblíková 2009).

#### 1.4 *Specifics of Legitimacy of Democracy in Transitioning Societies of Central and Eastern Europe*

As we have just shown, according to culturalists, a vibrant civil society is an essential prerequisite of a stable democracy. From the rationalist perspective, democracy is consolidated when political institutions are evaluated by citizens as just, reliable and effective, and ideally supported by good economic performance (Przeworski 1991).

However, new democratic regimes in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe tapped into other sources of legitimacy, at least in the initial stages of their transition. Since the democratization process was accompanied by economic change from planned to market economy, the sense of insecurity was high. Therefore, Mishler and Rose explain the legitimacy of democracy through the “fear and hope” model, arguing that support for the new regime relied primarily on a rejection of the old regime and confidence in future economic prosperity (Mishler and Rose 2002). Similarly, Marková points out that post-communist societies had to go through a mental shift from authoritarian legitimacy based on trust as the opposite to fear to democratic legitimacy based on trust as a free choice, as a risk (Marková 2004: 11).<sup>5</sup> In general post-communist societies are considered rather as distrustful in terms of social, institutional as well as systemic trust (Vlachová 2001; Badescu and Uslaner 2003; Delhey and Newton 2003; Kornai, Rothstein and Rose-Ackerman 2004).

Although economic determinists feared that an economic crisis might bring back the previous regime, other scholars emphasized that while economic variables explain a large amount of the variance in regime support, the effects of political performance grow over time, which is a key stabilizing factor for democracy (Mishler and Rose 2002: 26). Lipset talks about so-called negative legitimacy based on “an inoculation against authoritarianism in reaction to the viciousness of the previous dictatorial regimes” (Lipset 1994: 8). Nevertheless, political attitudes are already acquired during early socialization, and those effects are not necessarily negative. In contrast, residues of positive sentiment may be exhibited by those who grew up in the nascent stages of the socialist

5 The method of legitimation based on fear in today's world is once again on the rise whereby citizen choices are motivated by fear. This time not directly by the political representatives of the regime, but by what they declare to present a threat to society, a threat that only they can supposedly safeguard society from.

regime and were influenced by the propaganda-fuelled optimism. In sum, people's evaluations of the current regime from the 1990s to the 2010s are shaped by generation-specific attitudes and experiences.

This view is confirmed by the results of long-term research conducted in the Czech Republic, which shows (based on ISSP data for 2004, 2006, 2014 and regular public opinion polls) that legitimacy is somewhat stable and factors influencing it are deeply rooted, as they are "shaped primarily by political socialization during the communist regime" (Linek 2010: 141) and by social status. In particular, people who vote for the communist party and partly also individuals with low social status still identify themselves less with the democratic system than those who are right-wing. Based on their research in post-Communist societies, Mishler and Rose confirm the influence of the previous political system and its institutions on individual attitudes and behavior (Mishler and Rose 2001: 41). Consequently, all types of trust seem to be lower than in consolidated democracies: culturalists base their arguments on the legacy of distrust from communist times and the culture of authoritarianism, while institutionalists point to the performance deficit of new institutions, as well as the problems arising from the transformation of society.

On the other hand, it is important to note that democracy means not only the freedom to trust but also the freedom not to trust (Dunn 2004: 204). The aim is not the highest measure of trust, since the level of trust should critically reflect the quality of democratic institutions. Thus, the low rating of institutions and somewhat sceptical attitude toward the democratic system in the 1990s can be seen rather as proof of the political wisdom of the people in post-communist countries (Rose, Haerpfer and Mishler 1997: 30). Nevertheless, legitimacy does not exclusively emerge from the ways citizens evaluate political institutions' performance. Indeed, systemic trust means that citizens may stay loyal to the democratic regime even if they are dissatisfied with the current functioning of political institutions; they do not resort to passive criticism but actively use their civil rights. And that is something post-communist societies are still learning, and they are not alone.

## 2 The Czech Republic: Rebuilding Democracy despite the Path Dependency of the Communist Mentality

Democratic institutions and trust relationships do not exist in a vacuum. Political systems are always embedded in some culture and influenced by the specificity of a historical period. To set the scene it is important to review a brief history of the democratization process in the Czech Republic after 1989,

accompanied by a look back at the previous circumstances of society, something that can be described as the legacy of communism.

### 2.1 *The Legacy of Communism*

In 1989 the new democratic states did not start with a clean slate; there was a historical burden from the previous forty years of communism. This communist heritage was present in institutions, rules, symbols and beliefs. The Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka (1996) distinguishes three main sources of specific culture in socialist societies: The first was bloc culture, characterized by primitive equality, paternalism, anti-elitism and anti-intellectual and anti-capitalist stereotypes. The second source was represented by domestic culture but suppressed by bloc culture and the third influence came from Western culture, bringing modernization to Eastern Europe. These three influences together created an incoherent system of values which led to value confusion in the 1990s. Accordingly, many Czech social scientists saw the biggest obstacle towards building a democratic society to be a moral crisis within the Czech nation (Musil and Linhart 1990; Mlčoch 2006). They pointed out that totalitarianism was not just a political system but was also a system of human relations, of specific values, which lasted after the fall of the political system (Ilner 1996). Social trust was damaged by the abusive practices of the secret police which had disseminated distrust among members of society. Living in a period of double standards in terms of information – official and unofficial – produced a rift between thinking and acting. This contradiction created uncertainty and thus people were socialized into fear and distrust (Watier and Marková 2004: 45), learning to be on their guard and reserved in their dealings with others. Manifestations of this mentality of distrust seem to persist in post-communist societies and still influence the atmosphere in society.

Another distinct cultural feature in the “real socialism” countries was the ubiquitous opposition between the private and the public as the domains of good and evil. This dichotomy together with a double standard of truth in both thought and action had a significant impact on trust as well (Sztompka 1999: 153). Everything somehow related to the state became untrustworthy; one could only trust information acquired personally or information coming from “abroad”. The public sphere was dominated by autocratic rules, political despotism and paternalism which produced apathy and passivity. Political authorities did not enjoy the trust of the wider public; the government was regarded by many as treacherous and incapable. It could be said that pathological distrust towards the state and all kinds of authorities undermined trust in the whole social order. In a certain sense, this accumulated experience persisted in the institutions, rules, symbols, beliefs, as well as in the minds of people.

In the beginning of the 1990s this experience complicated the building of the democratic public sphere as well as learning to trust state institutions.

Another issue that frequently comes up in the context of post-communist societies is clientelism, which played a major role in the functioning of communist systems. Clientelistic networks did not collapse with the fall of communism; on the contrary, it appears that these networks were further strengthened during the transformation process, since it opened up very wide opportunities both in business and in politics. The legacy of the past, which was characterized by a greater than usual interconnection of the political and economic sphere, the absence of a division of power, the persistence of a subject political culture and the continued importance of personal connections, led to a system which not only saw the interconnection of political parties and non-transparent business, but also of non-transparent business and the state administration (Klíma 2015: 37). According to Klíma, this brought about a so-called clientelistic democracy, which has the characteristics of a broader term known as “defective democracy” (Merkel 2004). This describes a system in which formal democratic procedures are fulfilled, but in reality, there is a deliberate weakening of the safeguards of power-sharing, of the legal environment through the unenforceability of law, as well as a weakening of the rules of fair competition within politics and the economy (Klíma 2015: 28). The result of this was the so-called “capture of the state”. The revelation of these practices later led to the discrediting of traditional political parties, growing distrust, and subsequently to the emergence of new, mostly more radical movements and, with them, to the challenging of some of the basic principles of parliamentary democracy.

## 2.2 *Political and Economic Development 1989–2009*

As we pointed out in the theoretical part, support for the regime can be greatly influenced both by the economic and the political situation. Therefore, we consider it important to briefly outline the conditions under which democracy was shaped in the Czech Republic in the first twenty years.

For clarity, we can divide the development of Czech society over the past almost twenty years into several phases, which mainly follow the logic of economic and, to a certain extent, political cycles. The first phase (1990–1993) can be historically defined as being from regime change to the split of Czechoslovakia. At that time, the prevailing attitude among the population was one of trust in the new political system and in its goals and values while, at the same time, there was no significant evidence of a link between these attitudes and the socio-economic characteristics of people. During that stage, the perception of democracy in public opinion was connected with the dreamed ideal of a

free society rather than an awareness of the pitfalls and problems involved in the real democratic system. Moreover, the confidence in the power of the democratic system during this period was further reinforced by the “uniting of citizens against the negative phenomena of the past” (Tuček et al. 1999).

The second phase (1993–1996) was initially dominated by the optimistic notion of smooth economic development, and after the elections in 1992, there was also an increase in the level of confidence in the professional qualifications and moral reliability of the new government. This was followed by a steady increase in negative attitudes, which was also related to the split of Czechoslovakia into two separate countries. Given that this was a political decision taken from above and that the possibility of a referendum was dismissed, this step greatly contributed to the feeling that even in a democracy “those in positions of power are not very interested in the opinions of the people”. Opinions on democracy and social development slowly diverged, and increasingly reflected the population’s actual experiences and specific living conditions. People also began to realise the negative aspects of and risks associated with life in a free democratic society and at the same time started to feel the threat of social inequality, which had slowly but surely been developing in the country. Public opinion started to indicate a lower level of satisfaction with developments in the political arena (Tuček et al. 1999).

There was a significant decrease in the positive assessment of the democratic regime for the first time in 1997 (phase three 1997–1999). This decrease was connected with the so-called “crisis of trust” in Czech society which followed the overall disillusionment with the outcomes of economic reform. This was marked by privatization, often accompanied by corruption and a credit crunch caused by major banks, and was reinforced by the international financial crisis (1997–1998). These factors resulted in growing unemployment, increasing social insecurity and fears of future development. All this led to early elections in 1998, which the former ruling political party lost and as a result was forced to sign the so-called “opposition agreement” with the left-wing Czech Social Democratic Party. This step was perceived by a large part of the public as a betrayal to voters. This resulted in disenchantment with politics, and thus a loss of confidence in the government and parliament. President Václav Havel symbolically characterized this period and the atmosphere in Czech society at the time as a “bad mood”. By doing so, Havel was primarily pointing out the disillusionment of the people not only with the economic and political situation, but also with the moral development of society after 1989, as well as a growing passivity, bitterness, civic apathy and distrust.

The fourth phase (after 2000) was a period of economic growth, characterised by a slow return of optimism, also reflected in a growth in confidence in

constitutional institutions. The Czech Republic became integrated into international structures, joining NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004. Nonetheless, despite continuing positive economic development, 2003–2005 saw a decline in public satisfaction and confidence due to a series of corruption scandals on the part of the Social Democrats (ČSSD), the party in government at the time. The period of rapid growth came to an end with the global economic crisis that had a relatively mild effect on the Czech economy in 2009. The financial crisis that followed had a negative impact, not only on public confidence in financial institutions but also in political institutions.

### 2.3 *Democratic Attitudes in the Czech Republic*

This political and economic course of events was manifestly reflected in the development of the level of support for democracy in the Czech Republic. As we said earlier, the assessment of democracy in the newly established countries draws on a comparison between the former regime and the current one. In the years that immediately followed the Velvet Revolution, a significantly positive assessment of the current regime, as compared to the former one, prevailed in Czech society, while great expectations of a further improvement in the state of democracy in the Czech Republic predominated until the mid-1990s.<sup>6</sup> Extensive privatization fraud, which came to light in 1997, followed by the conclusion of the previously mentioned opposition agreement led to a loss of confidence in both the economic and political development of the country and therefore to a decline in confidence in the entire democratic system. One of the consequences was a moderate increase in the number of people who positively evaluated the Communist regime. It seems, however, that this was more a reflection of nostalgia for the certainties provided by the socialist state rather than a real wish to “return to the old order”. This is also evidenced by the fact that although there was a drop in the positive perception of the further development of democracy, the vision remained optimistic. Public opinion research results from the 1990s show that even after the crisis year of 1997, two-thirds of citizens were invariably inclined to believe that the current political regime would bring a better future for their children than the former regime would have done (Kudy kam 2000: 67).

If we examine public opinion regarding the state of democracy in the last ten years, polls show that although between two-fifths and half of the population expressed their satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in the

<sup>6</sup> According to the data from the international research project New Democracies Barometer II (1992), IV (1995) and V (1998), the research of CVVM (Public Opinion Research Centre) and ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) 2006.

Czech Republic (Kunštát 2010), more than two-thirds are convinced that the change in regime in 1989 was positive. By contrast, in 1999 only approximately half the population assessed regime change as being beneficial (Veselský 2009). Although support for democracy in the Czech Republic seems to be quite high in the context of post-communist countries – in Hungary the level of support is similar and in Slovakia and Poland it is somewhat lower. Nonetheless, compared to the old democracies of Western Europe, up to 20% fewer people say they are in favour of democracy in the Czech Republic (Linek 2010: 66). Although we can regard democracy as relatively well rooted in Czech society, it seems that we are midway towards building a democracy rather than at the end – if there is any such thing at all as an end.

#### 2.4 *The Renewal of Czech Civil Society*

Civil society played a significant role in the building of democracy in the Czech Republic, as it brought about the fall of the communist regime. The non-profit sector did not emerge from scratch after 1989, since even during the communist regime there were some officially recognized organizations. Yet, it is arguable to what extent they served as ideological tools for controlling the population rather than as a means of free participation. At the same time, there were also illegal or semi-legal civic (dissident) initiatives. Together with renewed traditional organizations rooted before the Communist takeover in 1948, these initiatives played an important role in the process of transition to democracy. Brand-new organizations and associations emerged during the 1990s and they contributed significantly to easing the social and economic impact of reforms, for example, by providing charity (Angelovská, Frič and Goulli 2009: 62–6). Many of these new civic movements later transformed into professional non-profit organizations (e.g., some environmental movements), thus, as we mentioned, their potential for fostering civic skills could diminish over time. The non-profit sector in the Czech Republic has managed to reach a relatively decent level of development, especially compared to other post-communist countries (Rakušanová 2005; Vlachová and Lebeda 2006). According to survey data (ISSP 2004), almost half the people in the Czech Republic (46%) were members of some type of voluntary association, with almost one-third of them involved in more than one organization. Most frequently, Czechs are members of sports and recreational organizations and leisure-time associations (hobby associations, fishing, hunting societies) (Rakušanová 2005).

As conventional participation was typically discredited by the communist regime, the newly permitted forms of non-conventional participation may have seemed more attractive. However, it is also argued that the acquired freedom was perceived by some as freedom “not to participate”, compared to obligatory participation during communism (Rose 1995). Another issue is that



since non-conventional participation seems to be quite a recent phenomenon in western democracies, post-communist countries could have skipped the conventional participation phase and immediately adopted the newer forms of civic engagement instead. In reality, unconventional participation in the Czech Republic is somewhere around the average among other post-communist countries (Vráblíková 2009). Roughly half of Czechs have, at some time, taken part in some form of political or social activity, with almost three-fifths of them participating in more than one (ISSP 2004). Compared to the level of membership in voluntary organizations, this percentage is slightly higher, but not sufficiently so to claim a predominant tendency among Czech citizens to be politically and civically active. Signing petitions, making donations and attending political meetings or demonstrations are only relatively common (Sedláčková and Šafr 2008). Although Czechs are more likely to express their discontent on a daily basis in the pub than out on the streets, the country's short democratic history shows that they are ready to mobilize when the principles of democracy are threatened (movements such as Impulz 99, Thank You and Leave 1999, Yes for Europe, etc.)

### 3 Three Layers of Trust: Trends and Explanations

#### 3.1 *Data and Research Questions*

Based on the debate between the cultural and institutional paradigms and taking into account the specifics of post-communist transformation of Czech society, we analyse the factors that influence institutional and systemic trust and debate the way in which they are interconnected with social trust in the Czech democratic system. We address the following questions: Does civic participation foster general social trust, institutional trust and legitimacy of democracy? What is the relationship between institutional and social trust? Is trust in institutions dependent on public evaluation of governing system performance, whereas the legitimacy of democracy is based on somewhat more stable factors? Is public support for the democratic regime somehow influenced by the legacy of the communist past?

The present study aims to answer these questions using data from the European Values Study waves II, III and IV carried out in the Czech Republic during the transition period in 1991, 1999 and 2008, respectively.<sup>7</sup> Our main objective is

7 The samples of respondents are representative of the adult population of Czech citizens living in households (i.e., not in social care institutions, etc.). Based on random stratified sampling, the following numbers of standardized interviews were collected during the respective waves: 2109 interviews in 1991, 1908 in 1999 and 1821 in 2008. The data are not

to assess whether factors such as collective social capital, the evaluation of political system performance, as well as the specific legacy of post-communism shed light on the level of institutional trust and support for democracy, respectively, and whether and how the effects of those factors change over time.

On the basis of the cultural theories presented above, we expect both the structural and the cultural layer of collective social capital, i.e., civic participation (both conventional and unconventional) and social trust, to have an impact. We also examine the relationship between the three levels of trust – social, institutional and systemic. Another possible explanation for both institutional and systemic trust is the evaluation of the performance of the political system as assumed by institutional theory. Finally, we consider the factors related to the communist legacy as expressed, in addition to generational differences, also through the declared election of the Communist Party by respondents.

### 3.2 Measures

The first outcome variable in the model measures *institutional trust*. During the three waves of the EVS, institutional trust was measured by a battery of questions from which we have selected the following items that reflect trust in state institutions: the armed forces, the education system, the police, the Chamber of Deputies (the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly in 1991), the civil service, the social security system, the justice system. The summary index of institutional trust is constructed using the standardized (mean 0, variance 1) values of the individual items.<sup>8</sup>

The second dependent variable in the model measures the level of agreement of an individual with four statements depicting *support for democracy*, and so it focuses on one of the key aspects of the legitimacy of the democratic regime.<sup>9</sup> Respondents were regrettably only asked these questions in the third and fourth EVS wave. As a result, we are missing important information on the level of trust in the democratic regime at the very beginning of the transformation

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weighted. However, the percentages are representative of the Czech Republic's population. Cases with missing values were excluded from these analyses using listwise deletion. With regard to the possibility of completing secondary education, we restricted the sample only to the population aged 21 and over.

8 Respondents rated each item on a four-point scale, with one indicating trust and four distrust. The item reliability of the scale in terms of Cronbach's alpha is 0.84 for 1991, 0.81 for 1999 and 0.85 for 2008, respectively.

9 These are the following statements: "Democracy may have problems but it is better than any other form of government", "In democracy, the economic system runs badly", "Democracies are indecisive and have too much squabbling", "Democracies aren't good at maintaining order"; with answers on a 4-point scale; where 1 represents strongly agree and 4 represents strongly disagree (the scale was reversed).

process. Again, the summary index of support for democracy is constructed using the standardized (mean 0, variance 1) values of the individual items.<sup>10</sup>

*Social trust* is measured by a one-item standard question regarding interpersonal trust, with a dichotomous answer.<sup>11</sup> *Membership in voluntary associations*. On the bases of internal logic, as well as preliminary analyses, we decided to divide NGOs into two types. The first type aim their activities *internally* – at their own members (e.g., cultural, sports or professional associations) – and second type *externally* i.e., at society at large (e.g., social services). The dummy variable<sup>12</sup> for membership in NGOs with internal goals – was constructed as an indicator of belonging to at least one of five types of organisations: educational and cultural activities; trade unions; political parties; professional associations; sports and recreation organizations. The second type membership – in NGOs with external goals – includes nine types of organisations: social welfare services; religious organisations; local community activities to combat poverty and unemployment; human rights; ecology; youth work; women’s groups; peace movements; health organisations. Further, to capture active members of civil society we use an additional measure of *voluntary work in NGOs*. Active members were defined as those who stated that they were currently performing an unpaid volunteer job in at least one of the above mentioned voluntary organization.<sup>13</sup> For *unconventional participation* we use the summary index comprising five different forms of political action ever taken by the respondent: signing a petition, joining in boycotts, attending lawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes, occupying buildings/factories.<sup>14</sup>

For *rating the political system of governing the country*, we have chosen a single survey question (available only in 1999 and 2008) concerning evaluating

10 The item reliability of the scale in terms of Cronbach’s alpha is 0.73 for 1999 and 0.73 for 2008, respectively.

11 The EVS question is worded as follows: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?”, with dichotomous answer options of “most people can be trusted” or “you can’t be too careful”.

12 We also constructed these measures as summary indexes. They feature very low internal consistency. However, it is hard to assume that membership in (different) voluntary associations would have, in essence, a cumulative character and therefore the index would measure one lucid latent attribute. Also dichotomy indicators make much more sense when interpreting the results (it is tricky to interpret the effect of a unit change in the “volume” of an organization of which a person is a member). Nevertheless, using this alternative operationalization, the results in all analyses were the same.

13 Again, due to high positive skewness (5.03 for pooled data) we prefer using dichotomized version of this variable.

14 The reliability of the resulting scale in terms of Cronbach’s alpha is 0.76 for 1991, 0.69 for 1999 and 0.81 for 2008, respectively.

how well the political system is functioning.<sup>15</sup> However, a separate assessment of economic system performance is not available in EVS data. Last but not least *Intention to vote for the Communist Party* is derived from the question: Which political party would the respondent vote for in a general election tomorrow, with one of the answers being the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia.

In addition to these predictors associated with the key concepts, our models comprise a number of socio-demographic background variables designed to serve as controls in the models: gender, age (birth cohorts), educational attainment (two categories),<sup>16</sup> household income (recorded in quintiles and centered). Of these, age is especially important since basic beliefs are impressed on an individual's mind already at a young age and therefore different age cohorts who socialized in a different historical/political period will have a different perception of the world because of differences in the political and economic setting. We distinguish between three basic cohorts: the World War II and building of communism generation, the "normalization" generation (after the Russian occupation in 1968) and the new democracy generation (cf. Linek et al. 2018). The table in the appendix contains information about all the variables in the models.

To explain the variance in levels of the two outcome variables, we apply ordinary least squares regressions. In order to address the neo-Tocquevillian assumption in particular we assess the interaction effect of social trust and civic participation. The results we present are in unstandardized form accompanied by effect size measure (partial  $\eta^2$  with values expressed as percentages).

### 3.3 *Social Trust and Civic Participation*

The level of social trust in the Czech Republic has been relatively stable during the past twenty years, with a slight increase in the first decade of the new millennium (26% in 1991, 25% in 1999, and 30% in 2008). Over the long term, about one-fourth of Czechs stated that they had generalized trust in other people, which – considering the results of the fourth EVS wave of 2008 in which 39 countries participated – appears to be average in terms of level of social trust. Compared to the Nordic countries, such as Denmark, Norway and Finland, the level of trust is somewhat lower. Nonetheless, in relation to Central and Eastern European countries, the Czech Republic is among those with the highest level of trust in other people.

15 The question was: "People have different views about the system for governing this country. Here is a scale for rating how well things are going: 1–very bad; 10–very good".

16 Secondary level of education with school leaving diploma, and university degree; the reference category is lower education.

As argued by the cultural theories, the character of social networks of NGOs facilitates the building of social trust. This mechanism cannot be tested directly with cross-sectional data which means we can only compare the level of general trust between members and non-members. As seen in Figure 6.1,<sup>17</sup> no difference in the level of trust between non-members and members in both types of NGOs (internal, external) was identified, even when only active members (voluntary work) were compared to non-members.<sup>18</sup>

In a similar way we looked at an alternative explanation for the relationship between social trust and civic participation. The argument is that unconventional participation based on collective activity facilitates the building of social trust based on mutual cooperation better than classic NGO membership (Kaase 1999). We believe that this alternative explanation might be further supported by the fact that whereas the communist regime discredited formally-organized mass participation for many people, unconventional forms of participation might represent a new democratic setting for civic participation. Although in 1991 a fairly negligible relationship between unconventional participation and trust was identified, in general this alternative explanation of trust building cannot be considered as plausible. When we take into account that civic activities (such as demonstrations, petitions) measured in EVS surveys are primarily one-off activities, creating mutual trust among participants is fairly unlikely.

Regardless of the mechanisms which create social trust, the key issue addressed in this chapter is the way in which social trust influences institutional confidence and systemic trust, in other words, supports democracy. In the next section, this topic will be dealt with in detail.

### 3.4 *Institutional Trust: Social Capital versus Political Performance*

The level of trust in government institutions varies with the country's political and economic developments. Czech EVS data fits this trend only in part: the initial optimism of the early 1990s was confirmed by high trust in 1991, the generally low trust in 1999 coincided with a political and economic crisis and the similarly low level in 2008 reflected dissatisfaction with politics despite the period of economic growth (see Figure 6.2). These trends practically confirm the shared assumption of both cultural and institutional theories that after

17 The graph in Figure 6.1 is based on predicted values calculated from logistic regression model controlling for individual characteristics (gender, age cohort, education, household income) since both civic engagement (NGO membership, volunteering and nonconventional activities) and social trust vary in relation to key socio-demographic variables.

18 A very weak statistically-significant association between volunteering and trust was identified in 1991, but this association was not statistically significant in other years.

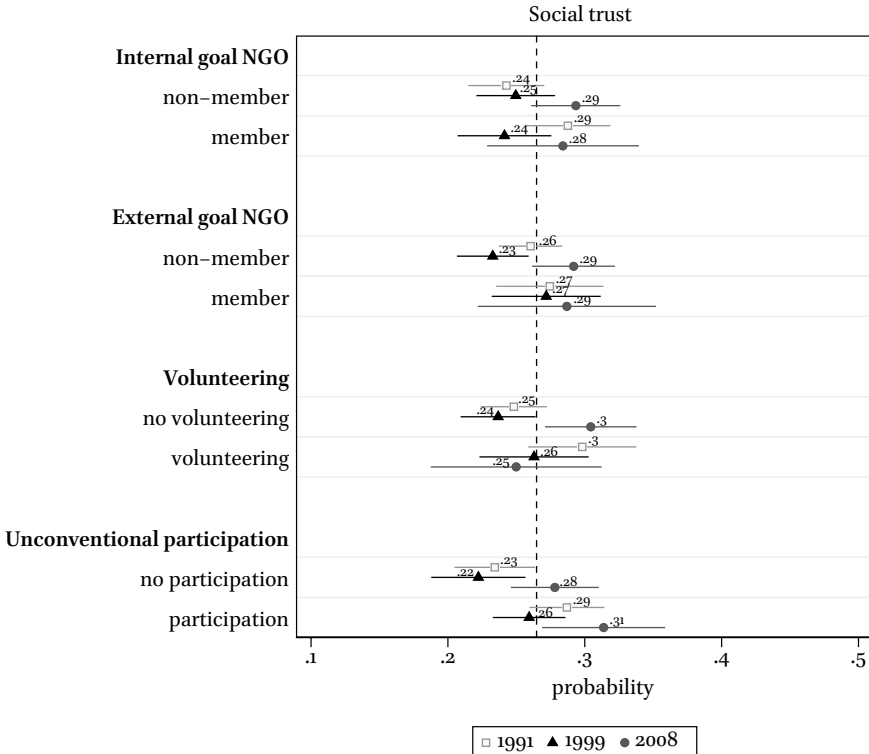


FIGURE 6.1 Social trust and civic participation, predicted values, Czech adults, 1991, 1999 and 2008

SOURCE: EVS 1991, 1999, 2008

Note: † = estimated mean probability on pooled data all covariates (gender, age cohort, education, household income) as observed

the initial wave of enthusiasm following the establishment of a free democratic regime, citizens of post-communist countries are unlikely to declare a high level of trust in government institutions for some time as a result of both transitional difficulties and an inherited general lack of institutional trust (Mishler and Rose 2001). Of all the institutions observed (and which make up the index), the education system alone enjoyed the long-term trust of more than half of Czechs, while approximately two-fifths declared trust in the police and the social security system in 2008. Trust in the police and the justice system can be considered as a litmus paper for the level of trust in society, as demonstrated for example by Newton and Norris (2000). The most significant decline in trust was recorded for the Chamber of Deputies, with less than one-fifth of the population declaring confidence in that institution in 2008,

reflecting the above-mentioned developments on the domestic political scene. As practically the most important institution within the parliamentary system, this is certainly not a good sign regarding the state of democracy.

It is almost impossible to explain the variance in the institutional trust index by means of sociodemographic characteristics alone (see OLS model results in Figure 6.3). In 1991 and 1999 (but not in 2008), institutional trust was most frequently declared by the “post-war/dawn of communism” generation (born before 1954). In the early stages of the new political system, people with tertiary education were more sceptical, but this difference has disappeared in recent years.

As for the central assumption of cultural theories that social trust is related to institutional trust, a very weak but stable positive relationship between the two types of trust can be observed. The association between institutional trust and civic participation is weak and contradictory. Membership in NGOs with an external orientation (social services, youth work, human rights, etc.) slightly increases institutional trust but it is weakened over time, whereas this did not

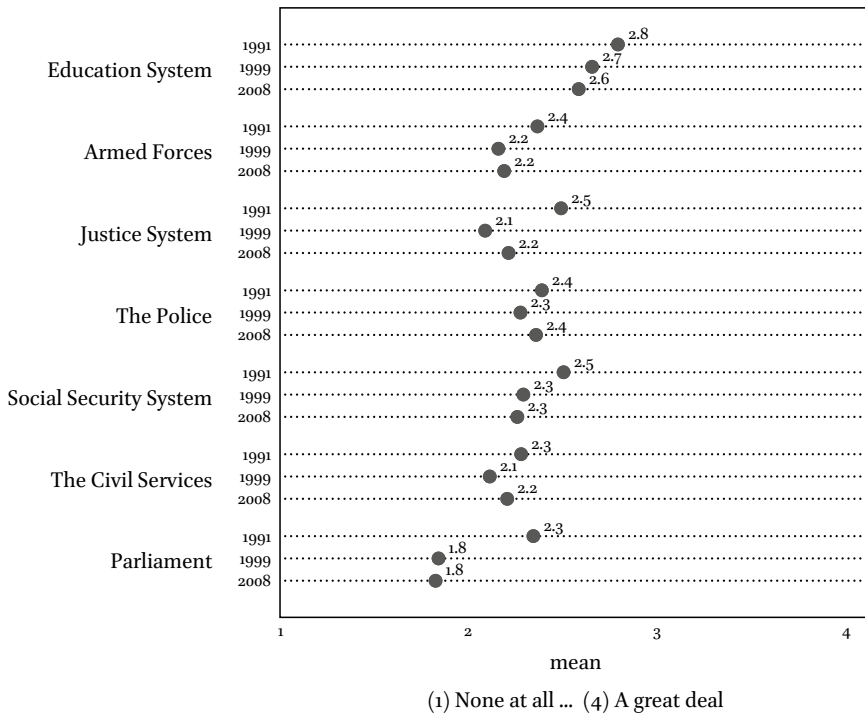


FIGURE 6.2 Development of trust in selected institutions (means) in 1991, 1999 and 2008, Czech adults  
 SOURCE: EVS 1991, 1999, 2008

apply to internal types of NGOs whose activities are aimed towards their own members (trade unions, sports clubs, artists' organizations, etc.). Unconventional participation (taking part in a rally, signing a petition, etc.) had practically no effect on the level of institutional trust. A very weak and, moreover, negative effect was only observed in 1991. This reflects the specific political events of 1989 that brought many people to the streets in mass demonstrations, led them to strike and sign petitions in protest against the Communist regime. Paradoxically, people who voted for the Communist Party were also more reserved with regard to institutions, but their level of distrust has weakened in recent times. We can only guess that whereas the first group perceived state institutions as being still burdened by the communist legacy, the second group expressed their distance toward the institutions of the new democratic system.

Hence institutional trust was boosted virtually only by people's positive evaluation of the functioning of the system of governing the country in the Czech Republic. This effect – remember it was only measured in the 1999 and 2008 surveys – even grew between 1999 and 2008. It can be assumed that this occurs in cases where individual assessments of political (and economic) performance contribute to institutional confidence since during this decade the

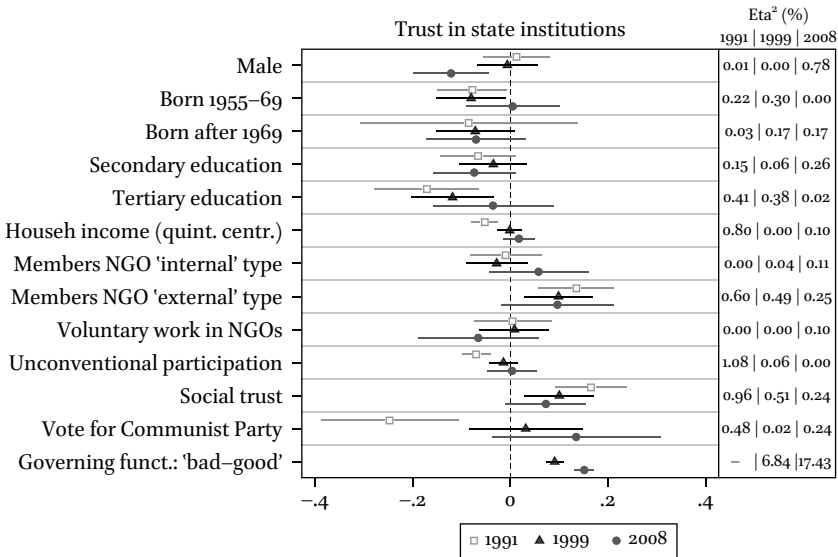


FIGURE 6.3 Trust in institutions, estimated unstandardized coefficients from the OLS model with 95% confidence intervals, effect-size (partial Eta<sup>2</sup>) on the right, Czech adults, 1991, 1999 and 2008

SOURCE: EVS 1991, 1999, 2008

Note: Adj. R-squared 0.046 (1991) | 0.082 (1999) | 0.187 (2008)



Czech Republic has experienced a period of both economic growth and significant achievements in the area of international integration.

### 3.5 *Support for Democracy*

Support for the democratic regime, measured by the pro-democratic attitudes index, fell slightly between 1999 and 2008. In international comparisons (both in the 3rd and 4th EVS waves), the Czech Republic was among the countries with slightly below-average public support for democracy. However, when substantively considering the most representative item in the index, in 1999 as many as 92% of the population agreed with the statement that “democracy is better than any other form of government” (40% strongly agreed, 52% agreed), whereas only 84% agreed with this statement in 2008 (31% strongly agreed, 52% agreed). Thus, although in 1999 the Czech Republic was among Western countries, such as France, Ireland, Portugal and Belgium in terms of support for democracy, albeit with a somewhat lower level of legitimacy, in 2008 it was among mainly post-communist European countries such as Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia.

What factors affect legitimacy and in what way has the impact of these factors possibly changed? Results of the OLS model for support for democracy index are shown in Figure 6.4. Democracy was most frequently declared legitimate by those with secondary and tertiary education and by those with higher household incomes, while the impact of these two variables became stronger in 2008.

As regards the cultural theory explanation, the legitimacy of democracy is increased only by cultural layers of social capital, i.e., social trust. As in the case of institutional trust, structural layer – conventional civic participation – does not have any effect. Thus, mere membership in voluntary organizations does not increase support for democracy. Indeed, only those who play an active role (voluntary work for an NGO) find democracy more legitimate. In order to address the neo-Tocquevillian assumption more directly, we further tested the interaction between social trust and associational life and found no significant effect. This means that there is no indication that people who are members of NGOs or do voluntary work for them and are simultaneously trusting of other people, demonstrate a higher level of support for democracy. As for unconventional participation, involvement in political activities had only a weak positive effect on people's support for democracy.

Similar to social trust, trust in institutions indicates a fairly weak, positive effect on the level of legitimacy, even becoming statistically insignificant in 2008. Communist party voters express less support for democracy. Whereas this proved to be the strongest factor influencing legitimacy in 1999, ten years later the effect of the evaluation of the functioning of the governing system

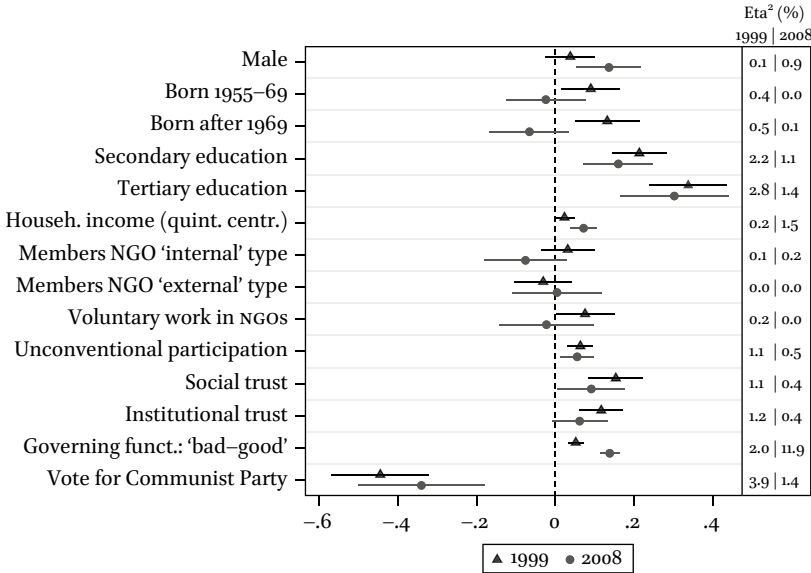


FIGURE 6.4 Support for democracy, estimated unstandardized coefficients from the OLS model with 95% confidence intervals, effect-size (partial Eta<sup>2</sup>) on the right, Czech adults, 1999 and 2008  
 SOURCE: EVS 1999, 2008  
 Note: Adj. R-squared 0.197 (1999) | 0.242 (2008)

massively increased and became by far the most decisive factor affecting legitimacy.

#### 4 Discussion

In this study, we focused on three elements of the democratic system in the Czech Republic over the twenty-year period of transition – specifically, social trust, institutional trust, and systemic trust (legitimacy of democracy). By asking questions about their roots as well as the way in which they are related, we based our analysis on cultural and institutional theories.

First, our analysis demonstrated no significant relationship between social trust and civic participation (both conventional and unconventional). This somewhat confirms the critique of the contemporary neo-Tocquevillian theory of social capital (e.g., Newton 2001; Jackman and Miller 1998; Edwards and Foley 1998). Similarly, no substantial relation was proven for institutional confidence, nor was it verified for support for democracy. If trust is generated in associational life, or according to an alternative hypothesis, people with a

higher level of trust in others tend to join voluntary organizations. Therefore, those engaged in NGOs who, at the same time, display higher levels of social trust are more likely to be more trusting of institutions as well as having greater support for democracy. But again, this has not proven to be true. We believe that this lack of relationship might be partially caused by the specifics of NGO membership in post-communist countries, which often takes the form of membership in the so-called old types of organizations. Given the heritage of the past with its frequent mass, formal or otherwise instrumental membership (e.g., labour unions or some leisure clubs), the character of such organizations does not *de facto* correspond with the character of NGOs as understood by classical theories of civic culture (Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam 2000).<sup>19</sup>

The cultural theory argument that institutional trust is exogenous is somewhat valid because the data showed at least a weak relationship between social trust and institutional trust (cf. Čermák and Stachová 2010; Sedláčková and Šafr 2008). However, this weak relationship supports more the so-called institutional theories which understand institutional trust as politically endogenous, i.e., shaped primarily by political factors. Mishler and Rose (2001) reached a similar conclusion in their studies of post-communist countries: in societies which had undergone fundamental social transitions and changes to the entire political regime, institutional trust is more variable and is determined primarily by the perceived performance of economic and political institutions. All in all, our findings corroborate more the micro-institutional theories.

We believe that the association between legitimacy and the two other types of trust is a crucial one: if institutional trust or social trust affects overall regime legitimacy then low levels of institutional trust or an overall lack of trust among the population might undermine the very stability of the democratic regime. The results of our findings demonstrate that both social and institutional trust slightly affect legitimacy. Thus, regime legitimacy in the Czech Republic does not seem to be affected by specific support based on people's satisfaction with the current functioning of institutions. This is also indicated by certain differences between the determinants of institutional trust and legitimacy, and especially by the fact that institutional trust has a substantially stronger relationship with political performance, compared to regime legitimacy.

Our results prevent us from either definitively confirming or fully rejecting the cultural hypothesis that trust plays a role in the democratic system in the Czech Republic. We conclude that links between the different elements of the Czech Republic's democratic system can be better explained using institutional

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19 Another explanation can be methodological, since we ask about membership and trust at the same time with the result that the effect of time spent as a member of an association on the level of trust cannot be measured.

theories, according to which the functioning of democracies does not essentially depend on a high level of institutional trust (similarly Sedláčková 2012). Such theoretical implications can be somewhat encouraging, given the generally rather low level of institutional trust in Czech society.

When interpreting support for the regime in transition democracies, it can be explained to some extent by examining path-dependency, i.e., by the generational differences in experience with the former regime (socialization theory). Even though we did not prove cohort differences, our results at least show that Communist voters, in particular, expressed lower levels of support for democracy in the period under review. This was only true for institutional trust in 1991, however. Considering rather low levels of social, institutional and systemic trust in Czech society, in this respect similar to most of the post-communist societies, the legacy of distrust from the previous regime still seems to play a definite role.

The fact that the declared legitimacy of the democratic regime is somewhat unrelated to current political affairs was suggested by the effect of people's evaluations of the system of governing in the Czech Republic compared to their impact on the level of institutional trust. Thus, political performance contributes, as Lipset ((1960) 1981) argues, to regime legitimacy, but our analysis of Czech society reveals that this influence is far from decisive. This theory further assumes the effect of economic performance. However, we could not verify this assumption in our analysis because the EVS did not include any question evaluating economic development. Nonetheless, we do observe a slight fall in regime legitimacy in the period under review, although the Czech Republic was in the midst of an economic crisis in 1999 and even the year 2008 represented the peak of several years of economic prosperity. A plausible explanation is that the corruption environment in the Czech Republic deteriorated significantly during the same time period, as demonstrated by the Corruption Perceptions Index, and this had a negative impact on people's evaluation of democracy in the country.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the public were reacting to the interconnection of political parties, non-transparent business and state administration (clientelistic democracy) (Klíma 2015).

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20 In an EU comparison of the level of corruption in the member states, the Czech Republic was behind not only western states but also some central and eastern European countries. Among 180 countries for which the level of perceived corruption was rated by Transparency International, the Czech Republic ranked 52nd in 2009, with 4.9 points out of 10 (where 0 means a high level of corruption and 10 refers to an almost corruption-free country) (Transparency International 2010).

To sum up, new regime legitimacy is somewhat affected by performance, mainly political, which affects citizens' satisfaction with the working of the system, but this fact does not automatically depreciate the political system as such.

#### 4.1 *Postscript*

Although our research has not demonstrated any measurable impact of engagement in civic associations or unconventional participation on social, institutional or systemic confidence, this definitely does not have to weaken the role of civil society in the democratic system. Civil society networks bridge the gap between the individual and political institutions (Tocqueville (1835) 1990), whereby they can act as a safeguard against both an over-expansive state and despotism by the majority. Nowadays, however, this pillar of democracy is somewhat overlooked in post-communist countries, and the majority of people consider a prosperous economy and the effectiveness of state governance to be the main pillar. Therefore, in recent years, entrepreneurs and managers have taken leading positions in government and they look on the state as a business and democracy as a system of institutions that merely need to be effectively managed. Instead of supporting civil society, people's participation in politics is addressed through the promise of direct elections, which, at first glance, gives the impression of an increase in the influence of citizens in politics, but in practice often means the formation of voters' opinions under the strong pressure of populist campaigns. As we said in the introduction, building a civil society takes decades and is not always that socially evident at first. Nevertheless, we should not forget that the democratic system cannot only rely on visible political and economic performance, but in order for it to be consolidated, civil society networks and an atmosphere of trust are also necessary.

### Acknowledgements

For the first author the study is supported by the Charles University programme Progres Q15 "Life course, lifestyle and quality of life from the perspective of individual adaptation and the relationship of the actors and institutions" and for the second author it is supported by European Structural and Investments Funds, Operational Programme Research, Development and Education, project reg. no. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16\_013/0001796, institutional support (RVO 68378025), and is part of Strategy AV21 (Society and Communication).

## Appendix

## Descriptive statistics

	1991				1999		2008	
	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Support for democracy	-2,37	2,03			0,038	0,686	-0,108	0,798
Institutional trust	-1,73	2,19	0,200	0,734	-0,118	0,619	-0,073	0,736
Social trust	0	1	0,261	0,439	0,245	0,430	0,300	0,458
Male	0	1	0,487	0,500	0,476	0,500	0,472	0,499
Born before 1955	0	1	0,660	0,474	0,550	0,498	0,429	0,495
Born 1955–69	0	1	0,280	0,449	0,255	0,436	0,253	0,435
Born after 1969	0	1	0,059	0,237	0,195	0,396	0,318	0,466
Secondary education	0	1	0,294	0,456	0,329	0,470	0,395	0,489
Tertiary education	0	1	0,089	0,285	0,141	0,348	0,092	0,290
Househ. income (quint. centr.)	-2	2	-0,169	1,350	-0,241	1,307	-0,271	1,362
Members NGO “internal” type	0	1	0,448	0,497	0,413	0,492	0,295	0,456
Members NGO “external” type	0	1	0,260	0,439	0,320	0,467	0,219	0,414
Voluntary work in NGOs	0	1	0,297	0,457	0,333	0,472	0,254	0,436
Unconventional participation	0	5	0,988	1,148	1,015	1,033	0,538	0,899
Governing funct.: bad–good	1	10			4,350	1,800	4,571	2,052
Vote for Communist Party	0	1	0,043	0,203	0,090	0,286	0,062	0,242
N (listwise)			1967		1650		1234	

Source: EVS 1991, 1999, 2008

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