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### When government fails us: trust in post-socialist civil organizations

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## When government fails us: trust in post-socialist civil organizations

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The research for this article was motivated by a noticeable discrepancy between levels of participation and trust in post-socialist civil organizations. While civic participation in Central and Eastern Europe is almost nonexistent, levels of trust in post-socialist civil organizations compare favourably to those in Western Europe. The first aim of this article is to understand why citizens place relatively high trust in post-socialist civil organizations. The political context, within which civil organizations operate, reveals one explanation for the high levels of trust in civil organizations: government corruption dissuades citizens from relying on state institutions and creates a void that is filled by informal networks of association and civil organizations. Empirical evidence demonstrates that trust in civil organizations focused on socioeconomic and political development is higher among citizens who express concern about corruption in their country. The second aim of this article is to understand the discrepancy between levels of trust and civic participation. A novel interpretation of past findings suggests that civil organizations' effectiveness, professionalization, transactional capacity and orientation toward service provision may garner citizens' trust while parallel neglect of grassroots mobilization leaves civil organizations short of capitalizing on that trust. Civil organizations' limited focus on interest aggregation, mobilization and representation raises doubts as to whether observers of civil society in the region should look to these organizations as its core component.

**Keywords:** civil society; nongovernmental organizations; trust; organizational membership; post-socialist Europe

The past two decades of academic research on post-socialist Europe have offered a bleak outlook for the development of a vibrant civil society in the region. Relative to advanced industrialized nations as well as other developing regions of the world, the post-socialist bloc ranks consistently lower on indicators commonly used to gauge the progress of civil society: associational membership, volunteerism and protest action.<sup>1</sup> Another indicator of civil society development, *trust* in civil

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institutions,<sup>2</sup> such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and charity organizations, has largely escaped academic attention.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this neglect is due to academic engrossment with negative trends in the region, including scant trust in political institutions and minimal organizational membership, and a corresponding inattentiveness to positive developments.<sup>4</sup> Unlike organizational membership and trust in political institutions, levels of trust in Central and East European (CEE) civil organizations are high relative to other regions of the world. A majority of CEE citizens report trust in charitable, voluntary and religious organizations, and over 40% express trust in nongovernmental organizations – figures that are as high as or higher than the corresponding levels of trust reported by citizens of West European nations.<sup>5</sup> Because trust in civil organizations is a rudimentary ingredient of civic engagement, its study can be helpful for understanding civil society development in CEE countries. This article makes an effort to understand the basis for citizens' trust in civil organizations in the region and, more specifically, why this trust is relatively high. Closely related to this is the article's second aim, namely, to explain why citizens express a fair amount of trust in civil organizations yet are reluctant to join them. Exploring the sources of trust and reconciling high levels of trust with low associational membership rates in post-communist civil organizations will offer a more nuanced and even-handed account of the development of civil society in the region.

A significant finding of this research is that, when government is perceived as corrupt and untrustworthy, citizens in CEE countries tend to place higher trust in civil organizations. In other words, in CEE countries, relatively low levels of trust in political institutions (for example, parliament, the judicial branch, the civil service, etc.) are coupled with comparatively higher trust in civil organizations (for example, NGOs, voluntary organizations, charity organizations, etc.): in CEE countries it appears that widespread corruption drastically decreases trust in political institutions while at the same time helps generate trust in organizations outside of government. In correspondence with the second aim of this study, these findings also shed new light on the reasons for low organizational membership and scant grassroots activity across the region. Namely, the main function of many civil organizations in the region has been the provision of welfare services to citizens, in a manner that compensates for the deficiencies of the state. The role of civil organizations in CEE nations, then, stands in contrast to their more traditional role of interest representation.<sup>6</sup> While successful interest mediation necessitates large-scale voluntary participation, which affords civil organizations the political weight to influence national governments and European institutions, effective service provision in contrast requires that civil organizations maintain a centralized, efficient bureaucratic agency with the capacity to provide services. Evidence from the region suggests that civil organizations have adapted the latter organizational style and are oriented toward effective service provision rather than interest mediation.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the effectiveness of civil organizations in CEE countries – as surrogates to the state in performing social welfare functions when the state is incapable of doing so – and a lesser stress on civil organizations as channels for

interest representation, offer a possible explanation of the discrepancy between ample trust in civil organizations and concurrent disinclination to join NGOs in order to voice political beliefs.

In order to disentangle the various indicators of civil society, I begin by defining institutional trust and conceptually positioning trust in civil institutions among other markers of civil society development; this section qualifies the findings of the article within the bounds of what trust means for the growth of a healthy civil society. Next, the article builds preliminary expectations about the causal mechanisms of allocating trust in three types of organizations: NGOs, charitable or voluntary organizations and religious organizations. These expectations rely on a well-developed body of literature on institutional trust in post-socialist countries as well as on theories of exchange systems of transaction, which have been previously applied to understand institutional trust. The former body of research brings to light the causal mechanisms of allocating trust but focuses mainly on trust in political institutions<sup>8</sup>; the latter body of literature examines the behaviour of individuals under conditions of uncertainty, for example, as was created by government corruption in some CEE countries, and individuals' propensity to trust networks and organizations outside of government, including civil organizations.<sup>9</sup> The empirical section tests competing theoretical frameworks with a suitable, cross-national survey instrument; correlational analyses of country-level data are also presented. The findings from these analyses indicate that perceived corruption tends to boost levels of trust in civil organizations associated with socioeconomic and political development. The final section reconciles these results with past findings of dismal associational membership by re-examining the functions, organizational structure and effectiveness of civil institutions in the region. A novel interpretation of these past findings suggests that civil organizations' effectiveness, professionalization, transactional capacity and orientation toward service provision may garner citizens' trust while parallel neglect of grassroots mobilization leaves civil organizations short of capitalizing on that trust. Organizations' limited focus on interest aggregation, mobilization and representation raises doubts as to whether observers of the region should look to membership in formally established civil institutions as the core component of post-socialist civil society. In a region where many civil organizations have instead focused on service provision and issue-advocacy, more spontaneous, but less frequently studied, forms of civic engagement may be a more appropriate standard for evaluating the development of civil society.<sup>10</sup>

### **Civil society and trust in civil organizations**

Trust in civil institutions<sup>11</sup> is among many indicators of the development of civil society, which is commonly operationalized as a set of civil organizations operating in a given country.<sup>12</sup> Trust can be best characterized as a measure of cognitive engagement, which is sometimes classified as a form of political participation.<sup>13</sup> When compared with other indicators of civic engagement, trust in civil

organizations is a necessary but insufficient condition for joining a voluntary organization.<sup>14</sup> In other words, it is unlikely for an individual to join an organization s/he does not trust, yet expressing trust in the organization is insufficient stimulus for becoming a member. A case in point is Central and Eastern Europe where the aggregate percentages of people who report trust in civil organizations are larger than the portions of the population that report associational membership in those same entities.<sup>15</sup> The literature on social capital posits that for a vibrant civil society, citizens must become involved in public life rather than merely express trust in organizations.<sup>16</sup> Trust in NGOs is therefore merely the first step, albeit an indispensable one, for joining these organizations and developing a healthy civil society.

Conceptually, scholars distinguish between two strains of trust, both of which are relevant to trust in civil organizations. The *strategic* conceptualization of trust stems from the rational choice school of thought while the *normative* variant of trust has its roots in theories of socialization and culture. Rational choice theorists view trust as a strategic behaviour: it originates in an individual's positive evaluation of an agent's interest in fulfilling the individual's trust.<sup>17</sup> Individuals calculate the risk and uncertainty created by external conditions, such as government corruption, and form expectations of whether or not an agent is likely to perform a particular action under these conditions.<sup>18</sup> Strategic trust is also based on individuals' past experiences with agents and organizations; individuals place trust in people and organizations that have performed to their satisfaction in the past.<sup>19</sup> This conceptualization of trust posits that high levels of citizen trust in institutions are more likely under positive systemic outputs, such as satisfactory economic performance, government transparency, successful policy implementation and respect for civil and political rights.<sup>20</sup> Alternatively, theories of political socialization and culture suggest that trust is the product of structural-historical factors, socialization experiences and personal origin and differ from the rational choice framework, which posits that trust is earned.<sup>21</sup> These causes are argued to be exogenous to the political system at a particular time, and hence systemic outputs have little influence on citizen levels of trust in institutions. Instead, structural historical factors, such as, in the case of the CEE region, the legacy of communism, and individual characteristics, including gender and level of education, are suggested to influence an individual's propensity to trust institutions.<sup>22</sup>

This study examines citizen trust in CEE countries in three types of civil institutions, for which survey data was available: nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), charity and voluntary organizations and church and religious organizations. Nongovernmental organizations are third-sector groups, which are formally established, specialized and often professional non-profit organizations that interact with government institutions.<sup>23</sup> Their functions include the provision of welfare services, the promotion of political and socioeconomic development, advocacy activities and development education.<sup>24</sup> Third-sector groups are dominant in Central and East European civil societies relative to other organizations outside of government.<sup>25</sup> In contrast with NGOs, voluntary and charity organizations, often labelled as service organizations, non-profit organizations or civic groups,

tend to have a much narrower orientation. They are organizations specialized in a single policy area or issue, and they promote voluntarism and serve as intermediaries for philanthropic work.<sup>26</sup> Examples of voluntary and charity organizations include fundraising organizations and grant-making foundations.<sup>27</sup> Like voluntary and charity organizations, church and religious organizations also have a fairly specialized set of functions when compared to NGOs – namely, they promote religious beliefs and administer religious services.<sup>28</sup> Unlike NGOs and voluntary and charity organizations, religious organizations have not been historically associated with political and socioeconomic development.<sup>29</sup> Due to this fundamental difference in function, some scholars separate religious organizations from the broader class of NGOs and from voluntary and charity organizations.<sup>30</sup> This difference is important, and its consequences for trust will become apparent throughout this study.

It is also important to note that indicators of civil society development span beyond trust and participation in formally established civil organizations. Transactional activism, protest mobilization, transnational movements and Do-It-Yourself activism are expressions of civil society outside of formal organizations and are thought by some scholars to compensate for the low levels of associational membership in the region.<sup>31</sup> However, even proponents of alternative indicators of civil society acknowledge that formal organizations ‘have come to dominate East-Central European civil societies’,<sup>32</sup> and indeed the common use of associational membership as an indicator of civil society strength has been well justified. Effective transnational activism, as exemplified by well-connected networks of organized interests and ties between civil organizations and state actors, *may* have the capacity to strengthen civil society, but its impact is not well understood; transnational activism in the region has not been empirically linked to desirable democratic outcomes, and in fact it may have an anti-democratic potential.<sup>33</sup> The spontaneous mobilization of citizens, through transnational movements or in acts of protest, lacks many of the advantages of organized interest mediation: the effective delivery of technical information to state actors, moderation in demands and ultimately democratic policy making.<sup>34</sup> Thus it is important to acknowledge that while civil society encompasses more than civic engagement in formally organized civil organizations, this particular indicator of civil society is the most commonly used, well understood and robustly linked to desirable democratic outputs.

### **Placing civil institutions in context: exchange systems of transaction**

Civil organizations operate within political and socioeconomic contexts partly shaped by national governments. The interaction between civil organizations and states is complex and multifaceted. The legal system, bureaucratic regulations and the degree of administrative centralization can be seen to impact on the structure and size of non-state civil organizations.<sup>35</sup> Political elites who seek to maintain their influence in particular policy areas often confine the powers of civil

organizations.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the state may limit or boost the growth of civil organizations by controlling the amount of information available to the third sector.<sup>37</sup> Civil organizations usually depend on state funding, contracts and tax breaks.<sup>38</sup> In turn, the degree to which governments rely on the third sector to deliver state-funded services greatly impacts on the scope and size of this sector and contributes to a dependency of civil organizations on the state. However, empirical evidence has shown that civil organizations generally maintain the ability to self-govern despite their financial dependence on the state.<sup>39</sup> Notwithstanding their ability to preserve their autonomy, civil organizations are likely to be influenced by governments in indirect and less obvious ways, as the state shapes the political and socioeconomic contexts, within which non-state actors operate. Indeed, a number of studies have shown that the nature of the policy environment can directly or indirectly shape the activities of NGOs, including their accountability and efficacy.<sup>40</sup> Theories of exchange systems of transaction offer one window, through which we can examine the complex interaction of political context and public trust in civil institutions.<sup>41</sup>

In general, the literature on exchange systems of transaction encompasses the types of economic and social exchanges that are embedded in social networks.<sup>42</sup> Of particular interest to the argument here is a subfield of this body of literature which provides insights into the connections between linked sets of exchange networks, whereby the frequency of exchange in one network increases or decreases the frequency of exchange in another.<sup>43</sup> Empirical research has shown that when government is perceived to be corrupt and incapable of providing services, informal networks of exchange are much more prevalent than during times when formal institutions function properly to enforce the law and provide needed services.<sup>44</sup> This indicates that the performance of political institutions is linked to other formal and non-formal organizations, comprising connected sets of exchange networks. Hence, the underlying assumption of this study is that civil institutions do not exist in a political vacuum but rather are embedded in a political context of government performance and accountability. Corruption, then, creates high levels of uncertainty, which dissuade strategic actors from placing trust in political institutions, and which create a void that may be filled by other organizations and networks. Past research has demonstrated that Central and East Europeans have coped with economic difficulties under socialism and during the transition to democracy by relying to a greater extent on informal networks of exchange.<sup>45</sup> In addition to economic failures, government corruption, too, has been documented to contribute to uncertainty and to prompt some individuals to place trust in formal organizations outside of government.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to informal networks of exchange, civil organizations as a group are one possible recipient of citizen trust when government is corrupt and untrustworthy.<sup>47</sup> Citizens tend to turn to civil organizations due to their function as effective providers of social welfare services in ways that compensate for the weaknesses of the state. In Central and Eastern Europe and beyond, one of the most important functions of civil organizations has been the provision of social welfare services to citizens, in conjunction with the state, and hence citizen reliance

on these organizations to provide services, when government institutions are too corrupt to do so, is legitimate.<sup>48</sup> The idea of a partnership between voluntary organizations and the state in providing social welfare services developed in the United States, where it has been the subject of extensive research.<sup>49</sup> Rather than expanding existing programmes, the US government funds non-state actors, which provide services in policy areas where government intervention is considered ineffective or politically objectionable.<sup>50</sup> Similar ideas of the third sector acting as provider of social welfare services have disseminated throughout CEE countries.<sup>51</sup> Western donor agencies have introduced this idea, and CEE politicians and NGO leaders have not only supported this notion but also circulated it through public dialogue.<sup>52</sup> But rather than providing services in policy areas where government intervention would be inefficient or controversial, as is the case in the United States, in CEE countries the involvement of NGOs is desired because government agencies lack the resources to address worrisome social problems; and, this is especially applicable to government bureaucracies plagued by corruption.<sup>53</sup>

In recent years, NGOs and voluntary organizations have been described as 'alternative policy makers' because they have had a hand in the liberalization and restructuring of the market, the redistribution of wealth, the provision of services and in public policy formation.<sup>54</sup> Some organizations were created early in the transition process to amend the structural problems in the social welfare state.<sup>55</sup> Because dealing with some disadvantaged groups of society, such as the homeless and the elderly, can prove 'complicated' for a newly emerged government, voluntary and charity organizations have carved out a niche for themselves in the area of social welfare services.<sup>56</sup> Partnerships between organizations and the state have emerged, and municipalities, for instance, have contracted NGOs to operate libraries and community centres, care for the elderly and screen environmental pollution.<sup>57</sup> Although there is no direct attitudinal data available on citizen perceptions of NGO functions, additional evidence suggests that this view of civil organizations' function in society – to provide social welfare services in lieu of the state – is cultivated by domestic political discussions in the mass media.<sup>58</sup> Due to the tradition of welfare service provision, it is inherent that citizens look to civil organizations as effective providers of services when the government is incapable of doing so reliably. Citizens of new democracies plagued by corruption are often not able to rely on the state to provide needed services, and over time this dynamic has likely generated trust in civil institutions.

Following theory and previous empirical research on exchange systems of transaction, it is reasonable to expect that citizens who perceive government corruption to be a salient problem are more likely to endow civil institutions with trust. In line with the theory of exchange systems of transaction, this relationship will hold particularly for civil organizations with an established role in service provision, political and socioeconomic development. This article then puts forth two related hypotheses, one at the state and one at the individual level of analysis. At the state level, this article posits that higher levels of government corruption will in all likelihood correlate positively with the percentage of the national population



which perceives corruption to be a salient problem and expresses trust in civil organizations. At the micro level, this article argues that citizens who perceive corruption to be a salient problem in their country will be more likely to trust civil organizations with a role in political and socioeconomic development. National statistics on corruption and survey data on trust in civil organizations have been used to put these hypotheses to empirical testing.

### **Empirical results: national and survey evidence**

The survey instrument used to test the hypothesis outlined above is the Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2003.4, which was carried out from October to November, 2003 in 10 post-socialist Central and East European countries.<sup>59</sup> On balance, this survey was the most appropriate for testing the main hypothesis of this study. No other publicly available survey included questions about both trust in civil organizations and perceptions of corruption, and therefore it was ideal for testing the theory of exchange systems of transaction. However, the survey also had some limitations. This set of questions is only available for the year 2003, as it was not repeated in following years, and thus replication of the results is not possible at this time. Questions about interpersonal trust, which is often hypothesized to be related to trust in institutions, were not included in this survey; however, many scholars who have studied the relationship between interpersonal trust and trust in institutions at the micro level of analysis have expressed doubts that it exist at the individual level.<sup>60</sup> The present survey includes a larger number of post-socialist countries<sup>61</sup> than previous studies of trust in civil organizations.<sup>62</sup>

First, it is useful to examine preliminary, correlational evidence at the macro level of analysis. Figure 1 plots the relationship between country-level corruption and levels of trust in civil institutions: in countries where corruption is an acute problem, do citizens tend to trust civil organizations more than in countries where government is transparent? The y-axis represents the percentage of citizens who report trust in the three types of organizations – charitable or voluntary organizations, NGOs and religious organizations – and perceive corruption to be a salient problem facing their countries. This percentage is mapped against country-level scores of corruption. The bivariate plots demonstrate a strong correlation between levels of corruption and trust, and the direction of the relationship offers support for the theory of exchange systems of transaction. A higher percentage of citizens reports trust within countries where corruption is most acute; the percentage tends to be lower in less corrupt countries. The association is strongest for charitable/voluntary organizations and NGOs although some notable outliers remain: Polish people tend to be more loyal across the board while Bulgarians tend to be less trusting overall. Cross-nationally, the relationship is weaker for religious organizations, suggesting that trust in religious organizations is unrelated to the political context of corruption, due to these organizations' lesser role in socioeconomic and political development.<sup>63</sup> In the following paragraphs, survey evidence will demonstrate that historical and cultural legacies are better able to

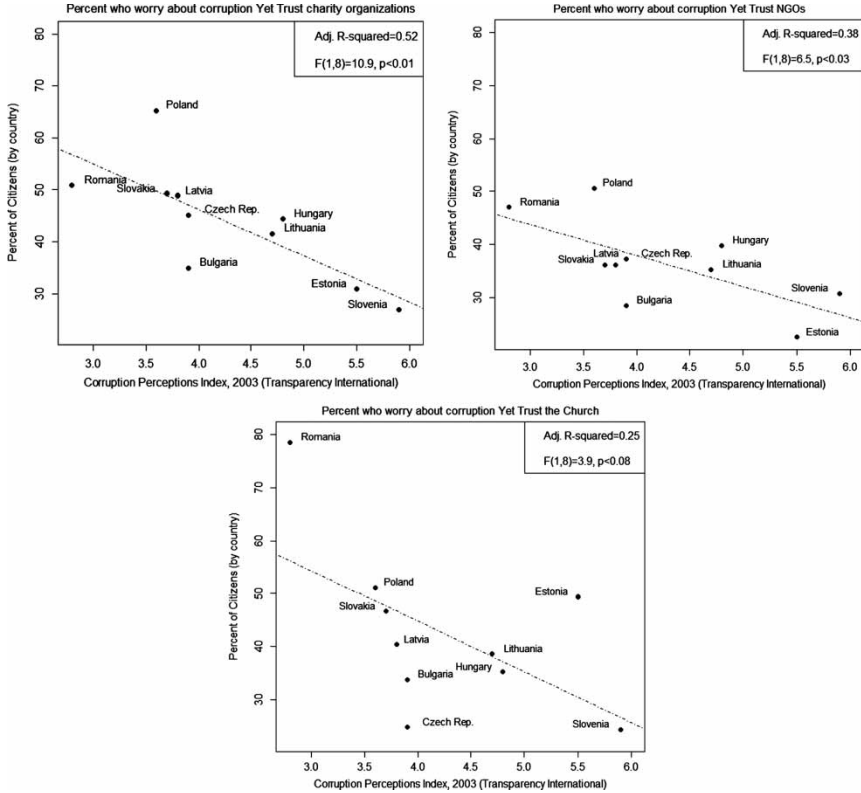


Figure 1. Corruption's effect on trust in civil organizations: charitable or voluntary organizations, NGOs and the church.

*Note:* The Corruption Perceptions Index (2003) indicates a score of 0 for highly corrupt countries and 10 for highly clean countries (Transparency International 2002). The y-axis plots the percentage of citizens in each country who conjunctly tend to trust one of the three civil organizations and perceive corruption to be one of the most important issues facing their countries (Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2003.4).

explain trust in the church than are present levels of corruption because trust in the church is more closely linked to socialization experiences than policy outputs.

Next, let us turn to evidence at the micro level. The first battery of independent variables gauges individual evaluations of economic performance.<sup>64</sup> Respondents judged whether the economy is doing worse, the same or better than in the past. In addition, the survey instrument assesses the salience of corruption as a problem facing the country: individuals were asked whether or not they worry about corruption, among other social and political problems. The set of indicators captures national performance in terms of economic outputs and government performance, hence allowing for an ample measure of individual perceptions of systemic performance.

The second set of independent variables tests whether individual traits and ideological convictions impact trust in civil organizations, consistent with the normative understanding of the origins of trust. Level of education, age, gender, the type of community where one lives and church attendance are variables typically specified under the socialization framework.<sup>65</sup> Higher levels of education are likely to improve individual chances of access to nongovernmental organizations, thereby strengthening the familiarity and social bond between those individuals and institutions. Conversely, rural residence is indicative of an 'idealized, traditional community' with norms that may favour trust in the church and religious organizations.<sup>66</sup> Church attendance is often used as a manifestation of religiosity.<sup>67</sup> In addition, national pride is an indicator of attachment to the nation, and childhood socialization into national attachment may lead to a lesser propensity to be critical of institutions and greater propensity to be patient when they underperform.<sup>68</sup>

The dependent variables in the analysis are dichotomous (tend to trust, coded as 1, or tend not to trust an institution, coded as 0), and hence the models estimate unconditional logistic regression coefficients with robust, clustered standard errors and fixed effects for country.<sup>69</sup>

Table 1 presents regression results for trust in the three types of organizations. From an initial examination of the results, it immediately becomes clear that perceptions of corruption, along with individual evaluations of the economy and national pride, are one of the strongest predictors of trust in civil organizations. Perceptions of corruption *boost* the average propensity to trust non-profit organizations and thus offer further empirical support for the theoretical relationships specified by the literature on exchange systems of transaction. In addition to evaluations of the economy and perceptions of corruption, ideological convictions – including one's national pride and church attendance – increase trust in institutions. To understand these results fully, we examine the predicted probabilities of the coefficients.<sup>70</sup>

Table 2 shows the predicted probabilities of trust given individual perceptions of corruption. The survey question is a measure of saliency, as respondents were asked to identify the problems that worry them the most (multiple answers were possible). The relationship between trust and perceptions of corruption is positive: individuals who perceive corruption to be a salient problem are on average more likely to trust NGOs and charitable and voluntary organizations. The results displayed in Table 2 offer support for the theoretical propositions of exchange systems theory: on average, citizens who worry about corruption in their nation are more likely to trust NGOs and charitable and voluntary organizations.

The relationship between perceptions of corruption and trust does not hold for religious organizations, which, unlike NGOs and charity or voluntary organizations, have not been associated with socioeconomic and political development.<sup>71</sup> Trust in churches and religious entities, as argued before, is instead predicted by socialization variables, including age, gender, education and level of national pride. Elderly females with low levels of education are most likely to express trust in the church. Individuals who express pride in their nationality are also

Table 1. Micro-level predictors of trust in civil organizations.

Predictors	Charitable or voluntary organizations	Non-governmental organizations	Church or religious organizations
<i>Perceptions of corruption</i>	0.165** (0.016)	0.181** (0.028)	-0.042 (0.628)
<i>Relative economic situation</i>	0.310*** (0.000)	0.366*** (0.000)	0.271*** (0.000)
<i>National pride</i>	0.215*** (0.000)	0.141*** (0.005)	0.131** (0.041)
<i>Church attendance</i>	0.142*** (0.000)	0.087* (0.090)	0.769*** (0.000)
<i>Age when stopped education</i>	0.006 (0.380)	0.026*** (0.000)	-0.040*** (0.000)
<i>Political awareness</i>	-0.030 (0.592)	-0.040 (0.477)	-0.013 (0.614)
<i>Type of community</i>	0.031 (0.497)	0.106 (0.162)	-0.105 (0.177)
<i>Gender</i>	-0.076 (0.357)	0.008 (0.890)	-0.218** (0.024)
<i>Age</i>	0.001 (0.405)	-0.002 (0.502)	0.015*** (0.000)
<i>Constant</i>	-1.668*** (0.000)	-2.138*** (0.000)	-1.881*** (0.000)
<i>Country fixed effects</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	5784	5268	6267

Notes: \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Table 1 presents unstandardized coefficients and p-values (in parentheses) from unconditional logistic regression with clustered standard errors and fixed effects for country.

Source: Reported estimates rely on data from the Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2003.4. All analyses were performed in Stata 10.

Table 2. Predicted probabilities of trust in civil organizations by perceptions of corruption: among problems facing your country, which worry you the most?

Organization	Predicted Probability (%)		
	Corruption mentioned	Corruption not mentioned	Increase in trust
Charitable or voluntary NGOs	50 38	54 43	+4 +5

Source: Estimates of predicted probabilities are based on the results reported in Table 1. All predicted probabilities were estimated in Stata 10 with the package SPost.

more likely to trust churches, testifying to the powerful relationship between nationalism and religiosity found elsewhere in the literature.<sup>72</sup> The strongest predictor of trust in the church is church attendance, which is a proxy for individual levels of religiosity.<sup>73</sup> Respondents who reported frequent church attendance were

25% more likely to express trust in the church than respondents who attend once a year and 60% more likely to express trust in the church than respondents who never attend religious services. Hence, socialization greatly influences trust in the church, as exemplified by one's ideology and personal characteristics. These results correspond to the preliminary findings at the macro level: evaluations of policy outputs are only a weak predictor of trust in religious organizations, and perceptions of corruption tell us little about trust in the church. This null finding corroborates the theory of exchange systems of transaction; as churches and religious organizations do not have established roles in socioeconomic or political development, a political context of government corruption and uncertainty does not boost citizens' trust in churches and religious organizations.

### **Trust but low participation**

Beyond understanding the basis for relatively high trust in civil organizations, the second aim of this article is to reconcile the mixed signals of civil society development: high levels of trust in civil organizations yet a dearth of associational membership. Two decades of civil society research have shown that civil organizations in CEE countries have fallen short of capitalizing on the trust citizens garner toward them.<sup>74</sup> Post-socialist civil organizations have low rates of membership in both absolute and relative terms to post-authoritarian regimes and industrialized democracies.<sup>75</sup> Membership in political and religious organizations is universally low and has been decreasing since the collapse of the socialist regimes.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, the civil society sector in CEE countries employs two to four times fewer percent of the population than the civil society sectors in industrialized democracies.<sup>77</sup> Civil organizations are considered generally ineffective, as citizens are rarely even aware of their activities.<sup>78</sup>

Multiple studies have offered theoretical explanations of scant participation levels in civil organizations from both the perspectives of citizens and organizations.<sup>79</sup> This article will not delve into the subject anew, except to relate past findings to the present theoretical argument and empirical results. Specifically, this section reviews findings from case studies, which have brought to the surface the hierarchical, bureaucratic structure of civil organizations and their adherence to a Western, service-oriented model among the explanations for effective performance. These organizational structures and *modus operandi* however do not aim at grassroots recruitment and fail to convey to citizens that civil organizations may also be agents of interest representation. Because interest representation is not the central function of civil organizations in CEE countries, grassroots following is almost nonexistent and membership rates are low. Therefore the concurrence of civil organizations' well-documented professionalization and effectiveness at service provision, on one hand, and a minimal focus on grassroots mobilization, on the other hand, may offer an explanation for the high trust but low participation in civil organizations.

Civil organizations experienced a boom shortly after the collapse of the communist regimes.<sup>80</sup> Repressed under the old regime,<sup>81</sup> hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of organizations sprang up within a few years of the regime change.<sup>82</sup> However, their sheer number is not necessarily a sound indicator of their strength because many organizations exist merely on paper and their numerical strength was in fact a sign of fragmentation and weakness.<sup>83</sup> In the early years after the transition to democracy, two of the primary obstacles to effective recruitment were professional and financial.<sup>84</sup> In a case study of Polish NGOs, the lack of professional and managerial skills was one of the problems plaguing third-sector organizations.<sup>85</sup> As a result, NGOs were unable to recruit new members or effectively delegate responsibilities within civil organizations. Financial troubles also disrupted the functioning and often the existence of civil organizations because donors were very selective in allocating resources and too often channelled funds to a handful of organizations. These problems were more acute for organizations located in rural areas where access to financial resources and information is limited.<sup>86</sup>

A more recent assessment of the third sector in the region takes stock of the monetary resources and organizational expertise channelled to CEE organizations from Western donor agencies, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Union.<sup>87</sup> The abundance in financial and professional resources and organizations' ties to foreign agencies and international interest groups is argued to have contributed to effective transactional activism, as exemplified by well-connected networks of organized interests and ties between civil organizations and state actors. Indeed these transparent, well-managed organizations are capable of forming coalitions to lobby, monitor and offer their expertise to national governments and European institutions.<sup>88</sup>

While these positive developments are likely to have generated trust in civil institutions, they may have simultaneously hampered the participatory capacity of organizations by creating a vertical relationship of dependency between local organizations and funding agencies. Evidence from case studies suggests that, at least in some countries, this dependency has shifted civil organizations' focus from grassroots mobilization to cultivating favourable relationships with Western donor agencies.<sup>89</sup> Within the Russian third sector, foreign funding has created a vertical relationship of dependency between local organizations and Western funding agencies whereby concern over continued funding surpasses efforts at recruitment and grassroots activities.<sup>90</sup> In order to secure foreign funding, local organizations tend to mimic their Western counterparts by building 'centralized and bureaucratized "corporate"' structures, which are better managed with a small membership base and take away from their grassroots functions.<sup>91</sup> What is even more problematic is that many funding agencies and civil organizations have exported their Western ideology, such as post-materialist values, to the East, thus ignoring the historical legacies of socialism and the socioeconomic and political concerns of CEE citizens during the transition to democracy.<sup>92</sup> To attain funding from abroad, some CEE organizations have adopted Western strategies of appealing to norms and societal problems prevalent in the West, and this

strategy has been unsuccessful in recruiting a membership base in CEE countries.<sup>93</sup> Consequently, the functions and organizational structures of CEE civil institutions have taken away from their capacity to aggregate and articulate political interests. The neglect of membership recruitment but concurrent effectiveness in providing services, networking and lobbying governments may offer one explanation of the discrepancy between low associational membership rates and correspondingly high levels of trust in civil institutions.

## Conclusion

Why do citizens in Central and East European countries express a fair amount of trust in civil organizations yet are reluctant to join them? This study links findings from past research to country-level data and survey evidence in an attempt to disentangle this puzzle. The research makes a contribution to our understanding of institutional trust by testing the theory of exchange systems of transaction. In support of the theory, evidence from the macro level indicates that trust in civil institutions is higher in countries where corruption is an acute problem and lower in relatively transparent political contexts. At the micro level, citizens who perceive corruption to be one of the most worrisome problems facing their country are on average more likely to trust NGOs, charity and voluntary organizations. Past research on exchange systems of transaction helps explain these findings: citizens tend to rely on informal networks and organizations outside of government, including civil organizations associated with socioeconomic and political development, when corruption is an acute problem and government is incapable of addressing worrisome social problems. This conclusion does not hold for churches and religious organizations, thus further corroborating the theory on exchange systems of transaction. As churches and religious organizations do not have a role in socioeconomic or political development, citizens are unlikely to rely on them for fulfilling those roles, and as a result trust in religious organizations is unrelated to government corruption.

To further understand the contextual sources of trust in organizations, the second aim of this article was to reconcile the dearth of organizational membership in post-socialist countries with the new insights on the predictors of trust in civil organizations. The simultaneous occurrence of civil organizations' professionalization, effectiveness at service provision and transactional activism, on one hand, and their nominal focus on interest aggregation, articulation and grassroots mobilization, on the other hand, may offer an explanation for the high trust but low participation in civil organizations. Instead of their traditional role as channels for interest representation, which depend on mass membership and grassroots activity, organizations in CEE provide social welfare services in areas where government is deficient.

These findings present opportunities for innovative research in the field of civil society. First, when assessing empirically the development of civil society, research should take into account that many organizations are not oriented toward interest representation or the recruitment and mobilization of a large membership base,

and therefore the lack of such following is not necessarily a sign of organizations' failure or civil society weakness. Indeed, recent literature has stressed the *strength* of well-connected networks of civil organizations in the region.<sup>94</sup> A more nuanced measure of civil society would investigate the success of organizations specializing in advocacy and interest representation as well as the effects of the prevalent roles of many organizations as service providers or advocacy-oriented groups. Secondly, observers of civil society should look beyond formally established organizations for signs of a vibrant civil society in the region. Some research has already reported positive developments among transnational movements, civic associations and Do-It-Yourself activism while others have pointed toward informal networks of association as the foundation of civil society in the region.<sup>95</sup> Though still in a nascent stage, new research promises that the effective transactional capacity of trusted civil institutions can successfully link with spontaneously mobilized grass-roots groups.<sup>96</sup> These new findings, along with past findings on the development of civil institutions' functions and organizational structure, should encourage future research to seek signs of civic engagement outside the realms of civic membership in formally established civil organizations. Evaluating CEE civil organizations based on their actual functions and looking for signs of a vibrant civil society beyond associational membership rates will likely characterize the development of post-socialist civil society in more nuanced, balanced and promising ways.

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### Notes

1. See Greskovits, 'Is East-Central Europe Backsliding?'; Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society*; Sissenich, *Building States without Society*, 163.
2. The terms civil institution, civil organization, interest organization, organized interests, interest groups and third sector are used to refer collectively to third-sector organizations and civic groups and to differentiate them from governmental institutions.
3. For an exception, see Mishler and Rose, 'Trust, Distrust and Skepticism'.
4. For example, Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society*.
5. Gallup Organization, 'Candidate Countries Eurobarometer', 28–31.
6. Sissenich, *Building States without Society*; Hall and Trentmann, *Civil Society: A Reader in History, Theory and Global Politics*.
7. See Henderson, 'Selling Civil Society'.
8. One notable exception is Mishler and Rose, 'Trust, Distrust and Skepticism'.
9. See Rose-Ackerman, 'Trust and Honesty in Post-socialist Societies'.
10. See Carmin and Jehlicka, 'Navigating Institutional Pressure'; Cisar, 'Between the National and Supranational?'; Cisar and Koubek, 'Do-It-Yourself Activism'; Gibson, 'Social Networks, Civil Society'.
11. Trust in civil organizations should not be confused with political trust or social trust. Political trust is between citizens and politicians or between citizens and governmental institutions and is believed to increase political capital. Social trust, or also



- interpersonal trust, is among citizens and is hypothesized to increase social capital. Among the proponents of these relationships is Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*. For a critique, see Newton, 'Trust Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy'; Stolle, 'Clubs and Congregations'; Whiteley, 'The Origins of Social Capital'.
12. Green, 'A Cross-regional Analysis of Civil Society and Democratic Development', 219.
  13. See Galston, 'Civic Knowledge, Civic Education and Civic Engagement'.
  14. Trust in civil society organizations is both a necessary condition for joining organizations and a byproduct of membership in civil organizations. The research paper emphasizes the former relationship due to the factual reality in CEE nations: organizational membership is so low as to be unlikely to contribute to trust in organizations to a significant degree.
  15. Gallup Organization, 'Candidate Countries Eurobarometer', 28–31; Sissenich, *Building States Without Society*.
  16. See Hyden, 'Civil Society, Social Capital, and Development'; Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*; Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*; Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*.
  17. See Dunn, 'Trust and Political Agency'; Hardin, 'Trust in Government'; Luhmann, 'Familiarity, Confidence, Trust'.
  18. Luhmann, 'Familiarity, Confidence, Trust', 94–107.
  19. See Uslaner and Badescu, 'Honesty, Trust, and Legal Norms'.
  20. Mishler and Rose, 'Trust, Distrust and Skepticism', 445.
  21. See Rothstein, 'Social Trust and Honesty in Government'; Braithwaite, 'Communal and Exchange Trust Norms'.
  22. Mishler and Rose, 'Trust, Distrust and Skepticism'.
  23. Richter, *Promoting Activism or Professionalism in Russia's Civil Society?*, 1.
  24. Vakil, 'Confronting the Classification Problem', 2063.
  25. Petrova and Tarrow, 'Transactional and Participatory Activism', 78.
  26. Vakil, 'Confronting the Classification Problem', 2063; Korten, *Getting to the 21st Century*; Salamon and Anheier, *Defining the Nonprofit Sector*, 88; Petrova and Tarrow, 'Transactional and Participatory Activism', 78.
  27. Salamon and Anheier, *Defining the Nonprofit Sector*, 88.
  28. *Ibid.*, 89.
  29. Vakil, 'Confronting the Classification Problem', 2060.
  30. *Ibid.*
  31. See Carmin and Jehlicka, 'Navigating Institutional Pressure'; Cisar, 'Between the National and Supranational?'; Cisar and Koubek, 'Do-It-Yourself Activism'; Ekiert and Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society*; Petrova and Tarrow, 'Transactional and Participatory Activism'.
  32. Petrova and Tarrow, 'Transactional and Participatory Activism', 78.
  33. *Ibid.*, 79, 88.
  34. Ekiert and Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society*, put forth the argument that protest mobilization compensates for low associational membership, but Sissenich, *Building States without Society*, 160, finds evidence against this claim.
  35. Salamon and Anheier, *Defining the Nonprofit Sector*, 501–3; Green and Verkuilen, 'Democracy, Non-profits and Information', 4.
  36. Salamon and Anheier, *Defining the Nonprofit Sector*, 501–3.
  37. Green and Verkuilen, 'Democracy, Non-profits and Information', 4; Green, 'A Cross-regional Analysis of Civil Society', 220, 229.
  38. Green, 'Comparative Development of Post-Communist Civil Societies', 466.
  39. Salamon and Anheier, *Defining the Nonprofit Sector*, 501–3; Green, 'Comparative Development of Post-Communist Civil Societies', 466.

40. Vakil, 'Confronting the Classification Problem', 2067; Brown and Covey, 'Development Organizations and Organization Development'; Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar*.
41. Emerson, 'Exchange Theory Part I'; Emerson, 'Social Exchange Theory'; Cook and Rice, 'Social Exchange Theory'; Cook and Emerson, 'Power, Equity and Commitment in Exchange Networks'; Cook, Cheshire, and Gerbasi, 'Power, Dependence and Social Exchange'.
42. Cook, Rice, and Gerbasi, 'The Emergence of Trust Networks under Uncertainty'.
43. Emerson, 'Exchange Theory Part I'; Emerson, 'Social Exchange Theory'; Cook and Rice, 'Social Exchange Theory'; Cook and Emerson, 'Power, Equity and Commitment in Exchange Networks'; Cook, Cheshire, and Gerbasi, 'Power, Dependence and Social Exchange'.
44. Cook, Rice, and Gerbasi, 'The Emergence of Trust Networks under Uncertainty', 199–200.
45. Kornai, 'Paying the Bill for Goulash Communism'; Rose-Ackerman, 'Trust and Honesty in Post-socialist Societies', 417.
46. Torney-Purta, Henry Barber, and Klandl Richardson, 'Trust in Government-related Institutions', find that students in CEE democracies place higher levels of trust in schools than students in established democracies and a corresponding higher level of distrust of corrupt, governmental institutions than their counterparts in established democracies; the authors argue for a tradeoff between trust in schools and government.
47. See Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society*.
48. See Lagerspetz, Rikmann, and Ruutsoo, 'The Structure and Resources of NGOs in Estonia'.
49. See Gidron, Kramer and Salamon, *Government and the Third Sector*; Salamon, *Partners in Public Service*.
50. Flanigan, 'Paying for God's Work', 158; Lagerspetz, Rikmann and Ruutsoo, 'The Structure and Resources of NGOs in Estonia', 75.
51. Lagerspetz, Rikmann, and Ruutsoo, 'The Structure and Resources of NGOs in Estonia', 75.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Flanigan, 'Paying for God's Work', 140; Széman, 'The Role of NGOs in Social Welfare Services in Hungary'.
55. Jenei and Kuti, 'Duality in the Third Sector', 140; Széman, 'The Role of NGOs in Social Welfare Services in Hungary'.
56. Jenei and Kuti, 'Duality in the Third Sector', 146.
57. Ibid.; See also Sebesteny, *Relations Between the Local Governments and Nonprofit Organizations*; Sudbery, 'Europeanization From the Bottom Up?'
58. Lagerspetz, Rikmann, and Ruutsoo, 'The Structure and Resources of NGOs in Estonia', 73.
59. Along with 10 post-socialist countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia), the survey also includes Turkey, Malta and Cyprus. These three countries were excluded from the analysis due to their vastly different political, historical and socioeconomic legacies.
60. See Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*; Newton, 'Trust Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy'; Stolle, 'Clubs and Congregations'; Whiteley, 'The Origins of Social Capital'; Uslaner, *The Moral Foundations of Trust*.
61. The countries included in the survey are Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.
62. Mishler and Rose, 'What are the Origins of Political Trust?'
63. Trust in religious organization is unrelated to the aspects of the political context of interest to this study. However, the degree of oppression of religious entities by the

- communist state, as well as the present political influence of the church, vary considerably across the region and may affect levels of trust in religious organizations. The limited nature of the data does not allow for the exploration of this question. On the political influence of the churches in the post-communist period, see Darleth, *Transition in Central and Eastern European Politics*. For specific countries, see O'Mahony, 'The Catholic Church and Civil Society'; Eberts, 'The Roman Catholic Church'; Wolf, 'Measuring Religious Affiliation'; Johnson and Young, 'A Profile of the Non-profit Sector in Romania'; Flanigan, 'Paying for God's Work'; Stan and Turcescu, 'The Romanian Orthodox Church'; Rogobete, 'Some Reflections on Religion'.
64. The description and coding of all variables is in the appendix, Table A1.
  65. Mishler and Rose, 'Trust, Distrust and Skepticism'.
  66. See Kunioka and Woller, 'In (a) Democracy We Trust'.
  67. See Kunioka and Woller, 'In (a) Democracy We Trust'; Boisjoly, Duncan, and Hofferth, 'Access to Social Capital'.
  68. Norris, *Critical Citizens*, 11.
  69. A methodological issue that may be of concern in this analysis is that the unconditional logistic regression with dummy variables for the cross-sectional units often produces inconsistent estimates (see Green, *Econometric Analysis*, 900). However, this is not the case when the number of observations per group is large, and this is certainly true for the present dataset. Previous research using simulated data has established that the unconditional logistic regression is preferable to the conditional logistic with fixed effects when the number of cross-sectional units ranges between 8 and 16 (Katz, 'Bias in Conditional and Unconditional Fixed Effects Logit Estimation', 384; Coupé, 'Bias in Conditional and Unconditional Fixed Effects Logit Estimation'). To be sure, I estimate conditional logit with fixed effects by country and compare my results to estimates from the unconditional logit using the Hausman test (as recommended by Green, *Econometric Analysis*, 900). For all six models, the Hausman test fails to reject the null hypothesis that there exist systematic differences between the estimates from the two models. This further strengthens my confidence in the consistency of the results from the unconditional logit. To further assess the fit of the estimated models, I plot lowess graphs that compare the predicted probabilities to a moving average of the proportion of cases that are one. These graphs indicate very good fits for all models because the predicted probabilities match the fraction of observed cases that equal one nearly perfectly. These graphs are presented to the anonymous reviewers and are available upon request from the author.
  70. Predicted probabilities below are estimated while holding all other variables at their means.
  71. Vakil, 'Confronting the Classification Problem', 2060.
  72. Stan and Turcescu, 'The Romanian Orthodox Church', 1472; Verkhovsky, 'The Role of the Russian Orthodox Church', 334.
  73. See Kunioka and Waller, 'In (a) Democracy We Trust'; Mishler and Rose, 'Trust, Distrust and Skepticism'.
  74. See Fagan, 'Taking Stock of Civil Society Development'.
  75. See Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society*.
  76. Ibid.
  77. See Rose-Ackerman, 'Trust and Honesty in Post-socialist Societies'.
  78. See Crotty, 'Managing Civil Society'.
  79. See Arato, 'Revolution, Civil Society, and Democracy'; Bernhard, 'Civil Society after the First Transition'; Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society*; Kornai, 'Paying the Bill for Goulash Communism'; Nelson, 'Civil Society Endangered'; Regulska, 'NGOs and Their Vulnerabilities'; Petrova and Tarrow, 'Transactional and Participatory Activism'; Sissenich, *Building States Without Society*.

80. See Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*.
81. One notable exception is Polish Solidarity, which attained political privileges before the collapse of the communist regime.
82. Over 4000 NGOs were registered in Bulgaria (1998) and Estonia (1998), 5000 in Romania (1997), 20,000 in Poland (1998), over 47,000 in Hungary (1997) and 60,000 in Russia (1997). Data obtained from Darleth, *Transition in Central and Eastern European Politics*, 177–8; Henderson, 'Selling Civil Society'; Lagerspetz, Rikmann, and Ruutsoo, 'The Structure and Resources of NGOs in Estonia', 76; Johnson and Young, 'A Profile of the Non-profit Sector in Romania'.
83. See Harter, 'Stretching the Concept of "Social Capital"'; Mislivetz, 'Participation and Transition'.
84. See Fagan, 'Taking Stock of Civil Society Development'.
85. Regulaska, 'NGOs and Their Vulnerabilities', 63–4.
86. Regulaska, 'NGOs and Their Vulnerabilities', 62; Lagerspetz, Rikmann, and Ruutsoo, 'The Structure and Resources of NGOs in Estonia', 73–88.
87. Fagan, 'Taking Stock of Civil Society Development', 529; Ghodsee, 'Feminism-by-Design', 731.
88. Petrova and Tarrow, 'Transactional and Participatory Activism', 84.
89. Henderson, 'Selling Civil Society', 140; Ghodsee, 'Feminism-by-Design'.
90. The goals of donor organizations were identical in Central and Eastern Europe. See Henderson, 'Selling Civil Society', 140, 154.
91. *Ibid.*, 143.
92. *Ibid.*, 142; Ghodsee, 'Feminism-by-Design'.
93. *Ibid.*
94. Petrova and Tarrow, 'Transactional and Participatory Activism'.
95. See Carmin and Jehlicka, 'Navigating Institutional Pressure'; Cisar, 'Between the National and Supranational?'; Cisar and Koubek, 'Do-It-Yourself Activism'; Gibson, 'Social Networks, Civil Society'.
96. See Petrova and Tarrow, 'Transactional and Participatory Activism'.

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## Appendix

Table A1. Coding of variables.

Variable	Coding scheme
<b>Dependent variables</b>	
<i>For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it: Charitable or Voluntary Organizations; Church/Religions Organizations; NGOs.</i>	0 – tend not to trust 1 – tend to trust
<b>Independent variables</b>	
Age	15–98
Gender	0 – female 1 – male
Age when stopped full-time education: <i>How old were you when you stopped full-time education?</i>	6–67
Type of community: <i>Would you say you live in a rural area or village, small or middle sized town or large town?</i>	1 – rural 2 – small town 3 – large city
National pride: <i>Would you say you are very proud, fairly proud, not very proud or not at all proud to be [NATIONALITY]?</i>	1 – not proud at all 4 – very proud
Church attendance: <i>Do you attend religious services other than weddings or funerals several times a week, once a week, a few times a year, once a year or less, or never?</i>	1 – never 5 – several times per week
Political awareness (news on TV): <i>About how often do you watch news on television: every day (1), several times a week (2), once or twice a week (3), less often (4), never (5)?</i>	1 – every day 5 – never
Relative economic situation: <i>What are your expectations for the year to come: will 2004 be better, worse or the same, when it comes to the economic situation in your country?</i>	–1 – worse 0 – same 1 – better
Perceptions of corruption: <i>From the following list of problems, which worries you the most: (several answers possible) Counterfeiting of goods, hacking, commercial fraud, fraud relating to quality of food, defrauding the state, defrauding the EU and its budget, money laundering, circulation of counterfeit money, work in the black economy, smuggling, corruption, wrongdoings in government and institutions, wrongdoings in EU institutions, other problems or none?</i>	0 – corruption is not mentioned 1 – corruption is mentioned

Source: Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2003.4.