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Developing political trust in a developing country: the impact of institutional and cultural factors on political trust in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Political distrust is often widespread in African countries, but the prospects for increasing trust are uncertain given the lack of research on the origins of political trust in the region. Using the 2013 NSS Survey in Ghana and employing hierarchical regression analyses, we develop a model of institutional trust based on insights from both cultural and institutional performance theories. The results clearly support the superiority of institutional performance theories while at the same time providing limited support for cultural explanations. National pride, however, does also substantially encourage institutional trust. This asks for future, cultural-specific studies on trust-building in developing countries trying to establish working institutions using more representative, cross-national, and longitudinal data.

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KEYWORDS Ghana; institutional trust; government performance; cultural factors; national attachment

Introduction

Institutional trust is considered to be a cornerstone of democracy,[1] enhancing the legitimacy, efficiency, and sustainability of governments by linking citizens to the institutions created to represent them. In particular for new democracies – such as the post-colonial regimes in Africa – institutional trust is an important democratic asset: increased levels of institutional trust could facilitate democratic consolidations, whereas a decreased level of trust may result in a democratic breakdown and even a return to authoritarianism.[2] However, these developing countries are often facing a cultural and institutional context that inhibits rather than stimulates the creation of trust. First, in several post-colonial countries, ethnic division lines tend to cross-cut feelings of national identification – according to cultural theorists, an important precondition for institutional trust.[3] Second, in accordance with institutional theories,[4] (relatively) poor performance of national institutions tends to create a vicious cycle of decreasing trust in institutions.

Despite the paramount importance of the issue, the structure and genesis of institutional trust in developing countries has received hardly any scholarly attention. As a first step to fill this academic void, this study analyses institutional trust in Ghana – a country identified as one of the least-trusting societies worldwide,[5] but at

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the same time "a beacon of hope for democracy in Africa".[6] For this purpose, we analyse data from the National Service Scheme Survey (N3S)[7] by means of multiple regression analyses. The contribution is twofold. First, we develop an integrated model of institutional trust, drawing on cultural theories and social capital ideas as well as on institutional performance literature. Second and most importantly, we test whether these theories – developed from a Western perspective – are portable to the context of a developing country with substantially different societal characteristics. The article starts with a literature review, synthetizing different existing perspectives on the origins of institutional trust. Subsequently, we describe the data and methods used and discuss the results of the empirical analyses. Finally, we round off with concluding remarks including policy implications and suggestions for future research.

Theory

Making nations, creating trust!

Institutional trust is assumed to be vital for a liberal democracy.[8] It has generally been defined as "the trust individuals have in their state-wide legal-political institutions and actors".[9] Scholars largely agree that political trust should be conceptualized by distinguishing among various objects of trust (that is, different legal and political actors and institutions). However, less agreement exists on the dimensionality of political trust. Easton,[10] for instance, introduced the seminal distinction between diffuse support (that is support for the larger system) and specific support (that is support for incumbent authorities). Other scholars argue to disentangle all objects of political trust and study citizens' trust in specific actors, organizations, and institutions separately as these particular authorities drive people's political behaviour more than generalized trust in government.[11] Empirical studies using factor analyses on items assessing trust in various political actors, organizations, and institutions, however, do not support these differentiated approaches towards trust. People's perceptions of different political actors clearly cluster into one factor, meaning that their judgement of one actor influences judgements of others. Moreover, scholars have argued that such an all-encompassing political trust may be the most consequential as it influences large-scale changes in a polity or society.[12] It serves as the "creator of collective power"[13] and the essential element "to the proper functioning of democracy",[14] thereby enhancing both the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic regimes.[15] Trust is especially important for democratic governments since they cannot rely on coercion to the same extent as other, more authoritarian, regimes.[16] Nonetheless, institutional trust is double edged: although cynical distrust signals the disintegration of civil society, "blind trust" also fosters political apathy and diminished citizens' control of government.[17]

Origins of institutional trust: cultural versus institutional performance theories

In a Western context, several theoretical frameworks have been developed that provide insights into the roots of (lacking) institutional trust. First, various *cultural theories* assume that institutional trust is exogenous to the political sphere rooted in cultural values and normative beliefs, such as national identification and interpersonal trust. Since J.S. Mill, it has been assumed that trust has a basis in a common national identification.[18] In the same vein, Easton claimed that "there must be some cohesive cement – a sense of feeling of community amongst the members. Unless such identity emerges,

the political system (…) may not survive."[19] The rationale behind this idea is that a common national identity overrides subgroup interests.[20] This territorially restricted "we-feeling" or national attachment serves in its turn as a facilitator for institutional trust by making people more willing to cooperate with each other, to unite themselves under the same government and to be governed exclusively by a representative portion of themselves.[21] Besides national in-group identification, interpersonal trust is considered to be an important cultural antecedent of institutional trust.[22] Institutional trust is seen as an extension of interpersonal trust projected onto the political institution, thereby creating a civic culture. People who have more trust in each other are also more likely to support both formal and informal institutions.[23] This cultural framework implies that the origins of institutional trust cannot be fully understood without paying attention to socialization processes through which political beliefs are passed on. Trust is a developing feature linked to basic forms of social relations and communicated through early-life socialization. Because socialization patterns and early-life experiences differ greatly across gender, cohorts, and socio-economic groups, institutional trust can vary widely according to these individual characteristics.[24]

Another main strand of research suggests that institutional trust reflects the objective conditions of government performance rather than cultural values.[25] These *institutional performance theories*[26] are founded in the rational choice perspective: trust in legal-political institutions and in actors is based on rational evaluations of the design and performance of institutions.[27] When public institutions are successful in delivering the goods and services they were designed to, institutional trust is expected to thrive. Failing government institutions, on the other hand, prove themselves unworthy of trust and are confronted with low levels of institutional trust among their citizens. Institutional performance theories thus assume institutional trust is endogenous to the political sphere.[28] Because of differences in the extent to which government institutions are consolidated, trust-generating mechanisms can operate differently in established and developing democracies. In the former, where the structure and character of political institutions are already strongly established, policy performances are of decisive importance: institutions are (dis)trusted to the extent that they produce the preferred, mainly economic, outcomes. In new democracies, on the other hand, the institutional design (in terms of perceived fairness and transparency) matters as much as the policy outputs, and political outputs matter as much as economic and social ones. Consequently, new democracies have numerous opportunities to increase trust by ameliorating several of these aspects: from system and party reforms to policy initiatives increasing human well-being. By improving institutional design – which takes months or years but not decades or generations, such as changes in cultural factors – new democratic institutions have ample opportunities to increase trust relatively quickly.[29]

Several empirical studies have investigated the impact of cultural and institutional determinants of institutional trust. Focusing on national identity, Berg and Hjerm[30] have concluded that a strong civic national identity has a positive impact on institutional trust, whereas a strong ethnic national identity has a negative impact on institutional trust. In support of the institutional performance perspective, Catterberg and Moreno[31] as well as Hutchison and Johnson[32] have demonstrated that trust in the political system is closely tied to government performance and the system's capability to increase or maintain well-being. However, not all empirical evidence is unambiguous. The assumed linkage between interpersonal and institutional trust – as well as its

causal direction – has been criticized empirically.[33] Whereas Newton,[34] for instance, repeatedly failed to find a relationship between political and interpersonal trust, Putnam[35] convincingly claimed that interpersonal trust increases political trust. Regarding the impact of socio-demographic variables, previous studies have found positive effects of gender, age, education, and occupational status on institutional trust,[36] whereas others have found negative[37] or non-significant[38] associations. Thus, strong empirical evidence for the existence of a "trusting personality" influenced by socialization or demographic variables seems largely absent.

Consolidating developing nations, raising trust?

The bulk of research on political trust and its determinants has been developed in advanced, Western, industrialized democracies (with the exception of a few studies focusing on post-communist or Asian communities). As a result, little is known about the factors influencing political trust in developing countries with substantially different societal characteristics. Good government, ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, and wealth as well as protestant religious traditions and economic, political, and social equality have all been found to simulate trust – although the evidence is not unambiguous.[39] However, numerous African countries are more poor and ethnically heterogeneous, have more intensely and recently struggled with high levels of state failure and corruption, and have higher levels of (perceived) social, economic, and political inequalities compared to the countries on which the bulk of studies have been conducted.[40] In other words, these developing countries are often facing a cultural and institutional context that inhibits rather than stimulates the creation of trust. As a result and strengthened by large-scale survey data (such as the World Values Surveys, WVS), various authors conclude that contemporaneous trust (generalized, interpersonal, and political) in African nations is lower compared to industrialized nations.[41] Scholars further argue that raising trust among these populations would raise the credibility and stability of the government, facilitate peace in the previously fractured and divided societies, and avoid (a recurrence to) conflict.[42] Thus, in order to establish legitimate, long-lasting institutions and avoid vicious cycles of declining trust which fosters a climate for violent mobilization,[43] the governments need to override "abiding distrust".[44] Indeed, based on the WVS (wave 6), it seems true that people in the included sub-Saharan African countries[45] have comparatively low levels of trust in "most people", while four out of the five African countries also fall into the lower half when looking at their levels of political trust (average scores of confidence in parliament, courts, police, political parties and government on a four-point Likert scale) (see Appendix A).

Despite the importance for the consolidations of these democracies, empirical evidence about the underlying causes of (dis)trust in African societies is largely lacking. Therefore, it remains unclear to what extent both cultural and institutional theories are portable to the context of a developing country. Ghana is an interesting case in this respect. On the one hand, Ghana has been identified as a "least-trust society"[46] and "mistruster".[47] Based on our preliminary screening of the WVS (wave 6), Ghana indeed exhibits extremely low levels of generalized and relatively low levels of political trust (see Appendix A). Moreover and compared to countries previously included in studies on political trust, Ghana has relatively high levels of ethnic fractionalization and tensions,[48] low levels of human development (ranked 140 out of 188 countries)

and high levels of inequality.[49] On the other hand, when putting the country in an African perspective, Ghana has been seen as a "beacon of hope for democratization in Africa" since its early independence in 1957 because of path-breaking political and economic reforms[50] – a claim strengthened by its considerably high score on the Polity IV index.[51] As a result, it is argued that the political dynamics in Ghana have implications for the entire (West-African) region and are, hence, important to understand.[52]

Research questions and hypotheses

We set out to answer the following three research questions: (1) What is the level of trust in a series of national institutions in Ghana?; (2) What is the structure of institutional trust, that is, is trust in different national institutions aligned along a single dimension?; and, most importantly, (3) What are the individual determinants of institutional trust? Based on the abovementioned theoretical framework, various hypotheses regarding the drivers of institutional trust can be derived. First, in line with cultural theories, national identification is expected to strengthen institutional trust (H1), while ethnic identification is assumed to weaken trust in public institutions (H2). Although the evidence is not all supportive, we expect interpersonal trust to have a positive influence on levels of institutional trust (H3). Next, in accordance with institutional performance theories, we hypothesize that the perceived government's effectiveness to implement policies is positively related to levels of institutional trust (H4). Importantly, we consider expectations based on institutional and cultural theories as complementary instead of mutually exclusive, as is sometimes assumed.[53] The two perspectives clearly operate in a different time frame. The cultural theories emphasize the primacy of early-life socialization and group formation, while the institutional performance theories focus more on recent and contemporary experiences with government policies. As a result, both frameworks are experience-based theories that can be integrated into what Mishler and Rose[54] have called a "developmental or lifetime learning model" in which institutional trust starts to develop in early life and evolves continuously thereafter through subsequent experiences. Finally, the impact of several individual – mainly socio-demographic – characteristics is scrutinized. Concretely, we include gender, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religiosity, and degree of urbanization in the model.[55] Because previous research regarding these variables, which can be seen as indicators of socialization practices, has led to contradictory findings, we refrain from formulating concrete hypotheses. All determinants of institutional trust included in this study are conceptualized in Figure 1.

Methodology

Social survey data from Ghana containing the necessary measurements remains very scarce. In this study, we make use of data from the N3S.[56] This student survey was designed to analyse to what extent the National Service Scheme (NSS) programme improves inter-group relations and fosters stronger national identities among its participants, but also contains measurements of the key concepts of our theoretical model.[57] The survey was fielded in three major Ghanaian universities in 2013. The three universities were carefully selected in order to ensure that the survey had a proper ethno-regional and religious mix of respondents. Participants were recruited in a first

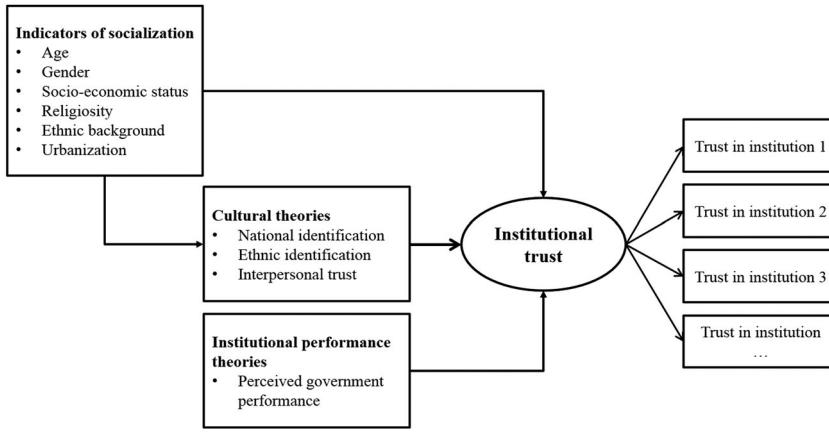

Figure 1. Conceptual model of determinants of institutional trust.

stage by means of a short in-class, paper-and-pencil self-administered questionnaire and subsequently invited to participate in a web survey (participation rate: 54.9%). In total 3,264 students (67.6% male; 32.4% female) participated in the study with an age range of 18 to 46 ($M = 23.21$, $SD = 2.59$). It is important to note that university students are a particular subgroup of the population in terms of educational level, literacy, financial resources, mobility, and access to new technologies, which obviously limits us to generalize our results to the wider Ghanaian population. Nevertheless, we argue that university students are an extremely interesting research population in itself, because today's students are tomorrow's societal and political elites. Where possible, results will be compared with the Afrobarometer (Round 6, Ghana) to see whether and how students might differ from the more general Ghanaian population.

Indicators

Dependent variable: institutional trust

In accordance with most survey-based research on the subject, institutional trust was operationalized in this study by means of a battery of items gauging trust in six national political actors or institutions (with no assumptions about the kinds of consideration that may enter into judgements of trust which leaves the interpretation of trust fully to the respondents). The question was worded as follows: "On a 0 to 10 scale, how much do you personally trust each of the following institutions?" Subsequently, the following national institutions were mentioned: parliament, legal system, police, politicians, NSS administration, and the president. Respondents could rate those items on an 11-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" (=0) to "very much" (=10). An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) examining the dimensionality and reliability of this institutional trust scale is presented in the results section.

Independent variables

In accordance with previous research,[58] an item referring to national pride was used as an indicator for national identity or *attachment to the nation*: "How proud are you of being a Ghanaian?" Besides the attachment to the nation, the N3S also

questioned the *attachment to the ethnic group* by asking "How proud are you of being a member of your ethnic group?" For both items, answers were recorded using an 11-point Likert scale ranging from "not proud at all" (=0) to "very proud (=10)". *Interpersonal trust* is operationalized by six items measuring trust in people with diverse characteristics. The question was phrased: "How much trust do you have in people with the following characteristics?" The following groups of people were mentioned: people from your ethnic group, different ethnic groups, your religion, a different religion, your region of origin, and different regions. Respondents could rate those six items on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "not effective at all" (=1) to "a lot of trust" (=4). Perceptions of government performance were measured by means of two different scales. First, the Ghanaian students were asked to rate *government effectiveness* in five different domains on an 11-point scale ranging from "not effective at all" (=0) to "very effective" (=10). The policy domains mentioned were: combating poverty, creating employment opportunities, providing education, supporting poor and deprived people, and promoting national unity. Second, the N3S also provides insight into respondents' evaluation of a specific policy that pervades their lives, namely the NSS.[59] People's perceptions of trust are influenced by positive experiences with the formal working of the government. The NSS is one of the closest, most specific experiences Ghanaian students have with their government. By including this variable, this study can differentiate between perceptions of the government's effectiveness in general and experience with an explicit policy. In the survey, the students were asked about their perceptions of the contribution of the NSS programme: "The NSS has several objectives, indicate for each of them to what extent you think the NSS programme makes a substantial contribution." Respondents were asked to rate five policy objectives: improving national unity, diminishing poverty, diminishing illiteracy, diminishing unemployment, and delivering essential amenities to the rural areas in Ghana on an 11-point scale ranging from "not at all" (=0) to "very much" (=10). EFA (see Table 1) evidences that these 16 items measure three separate constructs and, hence, three composite indices were constructed by averaging the scores on the corresponding items with higher scores indicating higher levels of interpersonal trust ($M = 6.53$, $SD = 1.49$),[60] perceived government effectiveness ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 2.03$), or perceived NSS effectiveness ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 2.21$).

The following *control variables*[61] are included in the model as proxies for political socialization: gender (male, female), age (in years), socio-economic status measured by the educational background of both parents (on a scale from 1 to 6), religious denomination (Christian, Muslim), subjective religiosity ("How religious would you say you are?" on a scale from 0 to 10), town size (grown up in a small village-1, medium-sized city-2 or a big city-3) and ethnicity (distinguishing between the major ethic groups in Ghana: Akan, Ga-Adangbe, Ewe, Guan, Gurma, Mole-Dagbani, Grusi or Mande). Descriptive statistics for all variables can be found in Appendix B, whereas a correlation matrix for the independent variables can be found in Appendix C.

Analyses

In a first step, EFA is performed to assess the dimensionality of the items measuring institutional trust. Subsequently, regression analysis is used to test the hypotheses

Table 1. Exploratory factor analysis of independent variables.

	Interpersonal trust	Perceived government effectiveness	Perceived NSS contribution
Trust in people from your ethnic group	0.845		
Trust in people from different ethnic group	0.843		
Trust in people from own religious group	0.833		
Trust in people from different religious group	0.820		
Trust in people from your region	0.786		
Trust in people from different region	0.758		
Combatting poverty		0.913	
Creating employment opportunities		0.900	
Providing education		0.889	
Supporting poor and deprived people		0.846	
Promoting national unity		0.784	
Improving national unity			0.844
Diminishing poverty			0.830
Diminishing illiteracy			0.817
Diminishing unemployment			0.805
Delivering essential amenities to rural areas			0.778
Eigenvalue	5.827	3.709	1.626
Explained variance (%)	36.42%	23.18%	10.16%
Chronbach's alpha	0.898	0.916	0.876

Note: Entries represent factor loadings obtained principal component analysis with Promax rotation (in SPSS 23). Total variance explained = 69.76%. Factor loadings below 0.400 are not reported. All factor loadings are significant at 5% level.

regarding the impact of the diverse explanatory variables.[62] A step-wise modelling strategy is used. First, a model containing the control variables only is estimated (Model 1). Next, the individual effects of national/ethnic identity (Model 2), interpersonal trust (Model 3), and perceived government performance (Model 4) are analysed while controlling for the socio-demographic variables. Finally, a comprehensive model of institutional trust tests the robustness of all variables included (Model 5). It is important to note that, due to the cross-sectional nature of our research design, our conclusions necessarily refer to the relationships between variables, without being able to provide empirical evidence of the causality of these relationships.

Results

Level and structure of institutional trust among Ghanaian students

Before scrutinizing the structure and underlying causes of trust, we present descriptive statistics for the six items in the institutional trust battery (see Table 2). In spite of the highly educated profile of our sample, the average trust is well below the midpoint of the scale for each of the institutions. This is in line with previous studies identifying Ghana as low-trust society based on other survey data.[63] When looking at four identical (but measured on a four-point Likert scale) items of the Afrobarometer (round 5), it appears true that political trust is considerably low in the whole of Ghana even when compared with other African nations (see Figure 2). Hence, these data suggest that our

Table 2. Levels of trust in diverse nationwide, legal-political institutions and actors.

	n	Mean	SD	Ranking
Trust in parliament	3012	3.12	2.40	5
Trust in the legal system	3011	4.09	2.59	1
Trust in the police	3009	3.13	2.47	4
Trust in politicians	3011	1.43	1.86	7
Trust in the NSS administration	3013	3.61	2.43	2
Trust in the president	3014	2.64	2.63	6

Notes: Entries represent average score. 0 = *no trust at all*; 10 = *very high level of trust*. Each item is preceded by the phrase: "On a scale from 0–10, how much do you personally trust each of the following institutions?"

students do not differ much from the rest of the Ghanaian population as to their level of institutional trust. Although levels of trust are low across all institutions, there are some notable differences between the actors and institutions. Ghanaian students have least confidence in the politicians ($M = 1.43$; $SD = 1.86$) and president ($M = 2.64$; $SD = 2.63$) whereas trust in the legal system ($M = 4.09$; $SD = 2.59$) is the highest. This indicates that the institutional distrust among Ghanaian students is not so much related to the system as such but more to the central actors who are active within it.

To investigate the latent structure of institutional trust among Ghanaian university students, we conduct an EFA (principal axis factoring) on the six items of the institutional trust battery. Only one extracted factor has an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 (3.87), explaining almost 65% of the variance. The scree plot also clearly suggests a one-factor solution. All institutional trust items load higher than 0.70 on this single factor (see Table 3), indicating that items are sufficiently valid and reliable indicators of institutional trust (Cronbach's alpha = 0.887). These results indicate that Ghanaian students' trust in government is general: a high level of trust in one institution or actor extends to other institutions and actors. Moreover, it is argued that such an all-

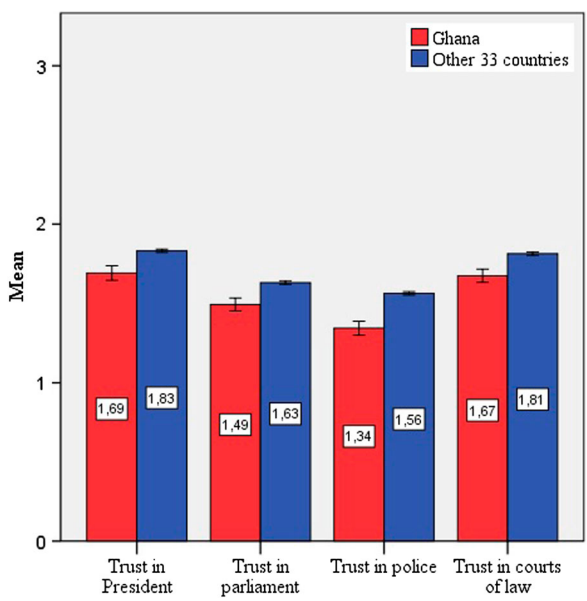

Figure 2. Institutional trust in Ghana versus rest of Africa (Afrobarometer round 5, $N = 34$).

Table 3. Exploratory factor analysis of institutional trust items.

Institutional trust items	Factor(s)
Trust in parliament	**0.84**
Trust in the legal system	**0.82**
Trust in the police	**0.80**
Trust in politicians	**0.80**
Trust in the NSS administration	**0.79**
Trust in the president	**0.77**

Notes: Entries represent factor loadings obtained with principal component analysis with Varimax rotation (in SPSS 23). The figures in bold represent the factor loadings of the institutional trust items. All factor loadings are significant at the 5% level.

encompassing trust in government is less susceptible to anomalous conditions affecting trust in one sector of government[64] and more important in determining large-scale changes in a society or polity.[65]

Origins of institutional trust

Table 4 displays the results of the five multiple linear regression analyses explaining institutional trust (that is, the average of the scores on the six trust items). In a first model, the background variables (indicators of socialization) are included in the model. Gender, subjective religiosity and ethnicity are significantly related to institutional trust. Males and more religious students show significantly higher levels of institutional trust, whereas Ghana's main ethnic group, the Akan, significantly distrusts politics more. Neither age, SES, town size, or religious denomination are significant predictors of institutional trust. Together, the socialization variables account for a little 8.8% of the total variance in institutional trust.

A second model investigates the impact of national and ethnic identification under control for the background characteristics included in the previous model. The results are supportive of the theory that institutional trust is rooted in national identification. The more respondents are proud of being a Ghanaian, the higher the level of trust in national institutions they report (which confirms hypothesis 1). Feelings of ethnic identification, on the other hand, do not have a significant impact on institutional trust. Although the anticipated negative effect of ethnic identification is absent (hypothesis 2), the finding of an effect of national but not ethnic pride strengthens the theory that it is *national* identification rather than identification per se that fosters institutional trust. The impact of national identification is not only statistically but also substantively significant. The effect is moderate to strong (standardized parameter: 0.319) and identification accounts for an additional 9.8% explained variance over and beyond the background variables.

Model 3 assesses the relationship between a second cultural factor, namely interpersonal trust, and institutional trust (again controlling for the background variables). Students with more trust in the other report significantly more confidence in governmental institutions, which confirms hypothesis 3. In substantive terms, however, the contribution of interpersonal trust is limited. The effect is rather small (standardized parameter: 0.130) and introducing interpersonal trust in the model only leads to a minuscule increase in explained variance of 1.6% points.

In model 4, the claims of institutional theories are put to the test. Controlling for individual background, both the perception of government effectiveness in general as well as the evaluation of the NSS programme are positively and significantly related

Table 4. Determinants of institutional trust: multiple regression analyses.

Variable	Model 1 B(b)	Model 2 B(b)	Model 3 B(b)	Model 4 B(b)	Model 5 B(b)
Intercept	*1.063**	*−0.208*^{ns}	*.106*^{ns}	*−0.349*^{ns}	*−0.956***
Gender (female=1)					
Female	−0.536(−0.129)***	−0.512(−0.124)***	−0.544(−0.130)***	−0.241(−0.058)***	−0.252(−0.060)**
Male (ref.cat.)					
Age	0.027(−0.036)^{ns}	0.016(0.021)^{ns}	0.015(0.021)^{ns}	0.026(0.033)*	0.021(0.027)^{ns}
SES	−0.004(−0.003)^{ns}	0.009(0.006)^{ns}	−0.001(0.000)^{ns}	−0.008(−0.005)^{ns}	−0.017(−0.011)^{ns}
Town size	−0.016(−0.005)^{ns}	−0.044(−0.015)^{ns}	−0.001(−0.000)^{ns}	0.008(0.003)^{ns}	0.015(0.005)^{ns}
Religion denomination					
Muslim	−0.041(−0.005)^{ns}	−0.108(−0.0.13)^{ns}	−0.166(−0.020)^{ns}	−0.035(0.004)^{ns}	−0.156(−0.019)^{ns}
Christian (ref.cat.)					
Subjective religiosity	0.188(0.212)***	0.099(0.111)***	0.196(0.216)***	0.051(0.058)***	0.036(0.040)**
Ethnicity					
Ga-Adangbe	0.374(0.059)**	0.318(0.050)**	0.377(0.060)**	−0.098(−0.015)^{ns}	−0.109(−0.017)^{ns}
Ewe	0.476(0.090)***	0.395(0.075)***	0.514(0.095)***	−0.204(−0.039)**	−0.191(−0.035)*
Guan	0.510(0.046)*	0.353(0.032)^{ns}	0.529(0.048))**	−0.043(−0.004)^{ns}	−0.019(−0.002)^{ns}
Gurma	1.001(0.090)***	0.746(0.067)***	1.008(0.092)***	−0.125(−0.011)^{ns}	−0.173(−0.016)^{ns}
Mole Dagbani	0.479(0.066)**	0.352(0.048)*	0.507(0.070)**	0.001(0.000)^{ns}	−0.001(0.000)^{ns}
Grusi	−0.252(−0.015)^{ns}	−0.422(−0.026)^{ns}	−0.112(−0.007)^{ns}	−0.552(−0.034)**	−0.424(−0.026)^{ns}
Mande	0.724 (−0.032)^{ns}	0.571(0.025)^{ns}	0.920(−0.041)*	−0.055(−0.002)^{ns}	−0.059(−0.003)^{ns}
Akan (ref.cat.)					
National pride		0.261(0.319)***			0.076(0.092)***
Ethnic pride		0.018(0.023)^{ns}			−0.013(−0.017)^{ns}
Interpersonal trust			0.170(0.130)***		0.074(0.056)***
Perceived government effectiveness				0.636(0.665)***	0.610(0.640)***
Perceived NSS contribution				0.112(0.127)***	0.104(0.118)***
R^2	*8.80%*	*18.10%*	*11.00%*	*57.70%*	*59.30%*

Note: B, unstandardized coefficients; b, standardized coefficients; ns, non-significant.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.
Source: National Service System Survey. Ghana. 2013 (N = 3,264).

to trust in institutions (which confirms hypothesis 4). Especially, general perceptions of government effectiveness turn out to be crucial to understand institutional trust, as the standardized parameter equals 0.665. But even under control of this very influential factor, evaluations of the contribution of the specific NSS programme have a small effect (standardized parameter: 0.127). Including the two institutional predictors together increases the explained variance by 49.2 percentage points.

In the final model, the explanatory power of the various cultural and institutional variables is assessed simultaneously. Generally speaking, the effects remain relatively stable when indicators of the different theoretical frameworks are combined. This illustrates that institution and culture are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. The comprehensive model is able to account for an impressive 60% of the total variation in institutional trust. Compared to the previous models, some small changes are noteworthy. First, the effects of the background variables become even weaker when cultural and institutional variables are included in the model. This is especially true for ethnicity, as its impact on institutional trust becomes insignificant. Apparently – and in line with mechanisms of differential socialization – the impact of background is mediated by national identification, interpersonal trust, and perceived government performance. The most important conclusion of model 5, however, remains that the overall sense of institutional effectiveness is by far the most important determinant of institutional trust in the Ghanaian context. National pride, interpersonal trust, and perceptions of a specific policy are substantially weaker predictors compared to evaluations of institutional performance (standardized parameters of 0.092, 0.056, and 0.118 compared to 0.640 respectively).

Discussion and conclusion

Trust in political institutions and actors is crucial to democracy. A certain degree of institutional trust is a prerequisite for effective, legitimate, and efficient governance. In numerous African countries facing relatively high levels of fractionalization, corruption, and inequality scepticism and distrust in legal-political institutions and actors are thought to be widespread. Cultural and institutional theories propose alternative explanations for the formation of institutional trust. Cultural theories offer affective explanations grounded in early-life experiences and socialization, while the institutional approach emphasizes experiences with the government in a later stage. Accordingly, both theories are not mutually exclusive and can reinforce each other in developing more institutional trust. However, empirical, individual-level information on the power of each perspective in explaining popular trust in political institutions and actors within an African context remains largely absent.

This article used unique data from the recent N3S to examine the level and structure of institutional trust among Ghanaian students as well as the possible effects of various cultural (that is, socio-demographics, national identity, and interpersonal trust) and institutional factors (that is, perceived policy performance and NSS contribution) to find out which approach is more powerful in explaining institutional trust. Ghanaian students are the leaders of tomorrow, but it appears that they have lost faith in politics as shown by the extremely low levels of institutional trust. This is in line with previous findings[66] as well as with a preliminary screening of Afrobarometer data showing that trust in legal-political institutions and actors is low in Ghana even when compared to other African nations. This suggest that the lack of institutional trust exceeds our student sample. Although variations in trust among the different institutions and

actors are relatively small, it seems that Ghanaian students are mostly disappointed in their politicians and president while trust in the legal system is somewhat higher.

Our results suggest that institutional trust is both exogenous and endogenous, influenced to a certain extent by cultural values and normative beliefs as well as perceptions of institutional effectiveness. Regarding the impact of background variables, male students exhibit slightly but significant higher levels of trust in institutions than their female counterparts and more religious students are more trusting as well. This is at odds with previous studies claiming that women have somewhat higher institutional trust[67] and that religiosity decreases trust in institutions.[68] At first glance, Ghana's ethnic majority (that is, the Akan group) exhibits lower levels of institutional trust, but this effect disappears when cultural and institutional predictors are included in the model. Although education, age, and town size are often acknowledged as predictors of institutional trust in previous studies,[69] they are not significant within our Ghanaian university context and neither is socio-economic status or ethnicity. In other words, results of our background variables suggest that the Ghanaian context is not comparable to Western[70] or post-communist societies[71] and, therefore, needs a more specific, cultural-sensitive investigation. Concerning the cultural explanations, a stronger national attachment fosters a substantially higher level of institutional trust, while ethnic feelings appear to be irrelevant for the development of institutional trust. Interpersonal trust seems only weakly related to institutional trust. With regard to the institutional explanations, the individual evaluations of policy performance and of the specific NSS policy are significant and substantial predictors of institutional trust.

The most important contribution of our analysis is that it shows that evaluations of government effectiveness in general are by far the most crucial factor to understand institutional trust in the Ghanaian context. In line with previous studies on different regions,[72] the institutional approach appears to be much more powerful than the cultural approach in explaining institutional trust in an African country. Short-term specific experiences with good governance seem more important than long-term general identities. This finding should be placed in the context of the Ghanaian public sector, which has a relatively low level of performance and affirms the importance of policy performance in strengthening institutional trust in societies. Consequently and logically, governments should always respond punctually and effectively to public priorities in order to raise trust. By combatting poverty, creating employment opportunities, providing education, and supporting poor and deprived people, politicians could gain more confidence from their constituents. Thus, expanding the economic and administrative apparatus of Ghana and promoting government involvement in the daily lives of the population can help politicians in culminating political development. For instance, the regulation of primary commodity exports and taxes together with the strengthening of the accompanying administrative structure could positively contribute to state–society relations. Nonetheless, one cannot easily conclude that cultural factors are irrelevant. Especially, promoting a national identity and national unity – through, for instance, nation-building programmes – can help raise institutional trust.

Obviously this study has some limitations. First, this cross-country study is only focused on Ghana, which makes generalizations to the larger African public difficult. However, one should not forget that the determinants of institutional trust are extremely context-specific and can only be fully unfolded and understood in relation to the specific institutions and context of a particular society. In other words, social science research always needs case and country-specific studies in order to achieve a

full understanding of socio-political phenomena in general and of institutional trust in particular.[73] Second, the sample was originally selected to investigate the impact of the NSS on students' opinions regarding national unity. Hence, our study is based on a non-representative sample of university studies which could, among other things, distort the effects of the socio-democratic variables. Moreover, some micro-level variables possibly influencing institutional trust are not questioned in this survey, such as opinions regarding corruption in Ghana. Third, the cross-sectional nature of this study makes firm causal inferences impossible. Clearly, scholars need to conduct more comparative, representative, comprehensive, and longitudinal studies beyond the established democracies in order to examine causal mechanisms of cultural and institutional factors on institutional trust in Africa. Nevertheless, the present findings point to several plausible windows for interventions aiming to improve levels of trust in Ghana and possibly the wider African region.

Notes

1. Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*; Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*.
2. Wong, Wan, and Hsiao, "The Bases of Political Trust in Six Asian Societies."
3. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*; Berg and Hjerm, "National Identity and Political Trust."
4. Abramson, "Political Efficacy and Political Trust among Black Schoolchildren"; Hutchison and Johnson, "Capacity to Trust?"; Mishler and Rose, "Trust, Distrust and Skepticism."
5. Delhey, Newton, and Welzel, "How General is Trust in 'Most People'?"; Norris, "Making Democracies Work."
6. Gyimah-Boadi, "Another Step Forward for Ghana," 138.
7. Langer et al., "Can Student Populations in Developing Countries Be Reached by Online Surveys?"
8. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*.
9. Berg and Hjerm, "National Identity and Political Trust," 391.
10. Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis*.
11. Levi and Stoker, "Political Trust and Trustworthiness"; O'Neill, "What We Don't Understand about Trust"; O'Neill, "Trust, Trustworthiness and Transparency."
12. Levi and Stoker, "Political Trust and Trustworthiness."
13. Gamson, *Power and Discontent*, 42.
14. Hetherington, "The Political Relevance of Political Trust," 792.
15. Mishler and Rose, "What Are the Origins of Political Trust?"
16. Catterberg and Moreno, "The Individual Bases of Political Trust"; Mishler and Rose, "Trust, Distrust and Skepticism"; Mishler and Rose, "What are the Origins of Political Trust?"
17. Gamson, *Power and Discontent*; Mishler and Rose, "Trust, Distrust and Skepticism," 419; Norris, "Introduction," 16.
18. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*; Löden, "Citizenship Education, National Identity and Political Trust"; Berg and Hjerm, "National Identity and Political Trust."
19. Easton, "A Re-assessment of the Concept of Political Support," 176.
20. Hjerm, "National Identity"; Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*; Berg and Hjerm, "National Identity and Political Trust."
21. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*.
22. Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*.
23. Ibid.; Putnam, "Bowling Alone"; Mishler and Rose, "What are the Origins of Political Trust?"
24. Mishler and Rose, "Trust, Distrust and Skepticism."
25. Newton, "Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy," 205.
26. See for example: Citrin, "Comment"; Miller, "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964–1970"; Williams, "Systemic Influences on Political Trust"; Mishler and Rose, "Trust, Distrust

and Skepticism"; Mishler and Rose, "What are the Origins of Political Trust?"; Hutchison and Johnson, "Capacity to Trust?"
27. Huseby, "Government Performance and Political Support."
28. Mishler and Rose, "What Are the Origins of Political Trust?"
29. Ibid.; Miller, "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964–1970."
30. Berg and Hjerm, "National Identity and Political Trust."
31. Catterberg and Moreno, "The Individual Bases of Political Trust."
32. Hutchison and Johnson, "Capacity to Trust?"
33. Mishler and Rose, "What Are the Origins of Political Trust?"; Kaase, "Interpersonal Trust, Political Trust and Non-institutionalised Political Participation in Western Europe."
34. Newton, "Social and Political Trust in Established Democracies"; Newton, "Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy"; Newton, "Social Trust and Political Disaffection."
35. Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work*; Putnam, "Bowling Alone."
36. Christensen and Lægreid, "Trust in Government"; Schoon and Cheng, "Determinants of Political Trust."
37. Döring, "Higher Education and Confidence in Institutions."
38. Newton, "Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy"; Newton and Norris, "Confidence in Public Institutions."
39. Delhey and Newton, "Predicting Cross-national Levels of Social Trust"; Anderson and Paskeviciute, "How Ethnic and Linguistic Heterogeneity Influence the Prospects for Civil Society"; Uslaner, "Segregation and Mistrust."
40. Kuenzi, "Social Capital and Political Trust in West Africa."
41. Delhey, Newton, and Welzel, "How General is Trust in 'Most People'?"; Catterberg and Moreno, "The Individual Bases of Political Trust"; Inglehart and Welzel, "Changing Mass Priorities"; Norris, "Making Democracies Work."
42. Hutchison and Johnson, "Capacity to Trust?"; Mishler and Rose, "Trust, Distrust and Skepticism."
43. Miller, "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964–1970."
44. Mishler and Rose, "Trust, Distrust and Skepticism," 419.
45. The WVS consists of nationally representative surveys conducted in a large number of countries and aimed at examining values and beliefs of the general public and their impact on social and political life in a large number of countries; for more information, see World Values Survey, "Who We Are – WVS Database." The WVS (Wave 6), however, only includes five sub-Saharan African countries: Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, South-Africa, and Zimbabwe.
46. Delhey, Newton, and Welzel, "How General is Trust in 'Most People'?" 796.
47. Norris, "Making Democracies Work."
48. Kuenzi, "Social Capital and Political Trust in West Africa."
49. UNDP, "Human Development Report 2015: Ghana."
50. Gyimah-Boadi, "Another Step Forward for Ghana," 138.
51. Based on the Polity IV Project (2015) and using the Polity2 score – which ranges from −10 (most autocratic) to +10 (most democratic) – Ghana obtains an 8 which puts it in the same category as, for instance, Belgium. Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers, "Polity IV Project."
52. Kuenzi, "Social Capital and Political Trust in West Africa," 3.
53. For example: Schoon and Cheng, "Determinants of Political Trust."
54. Mishler and Rose, "What are the Origins of Political Trust?"; Mishler and Rose, "Trust, Distrust and Skepticism."
55. Party affiliation was included in previous analyses but the variable seemed to have a slightly different impact on the different items of our institutional trust variable. Although it does not significantly explain the common denominator of institutional trust, it remains significant and substantial in explaining trust in the president. As this inconsistency requires further indepth research, we decided to exclude the party-variable in all analyses in the article.
56. It could be argued that the Afrobarometer also contains the necessary variables as the Afrobarometer conducts surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in more than 35 African countries; for more information, see Afrobarometer, "About Us – Afrobarometer." However, we contend that these variables are not as fine-grained as the ones of the N3S. First, some of the used answer categories are rudimentary, leading to, for instance, almost 90% being "very proud" to be a national citizen. One of the advantages of the N3S is its

application of 11-point scales without naming the scales, which substantially increases scale sensitivity and reduces skewness without systematically influencing scale reliability; see Cummins and Gullone, "Why We Should Not Use 5-Point Likert Scales"; Leung, "A Comparison of Psychometric Properties and Normality." Second, Afrobarometer Round 6 (Ghana) or Afrobarometer Round 5 ($N = 34$) lack some crucial explanatory variables such as subjective religiosity, ethnic pride, diverse dimensions of interpersonal trust, or the contribution of a specific policy. We therefore opted to use the N3S which is a sound data source although it greatly diminishes the representativeness of the data. We will, however, where possible compare our conclusions with Afrobarometer data (Round 6, 2015) to see whether and how students might differ from the rest of the Ghanaian population.

57. Langer et al., "Can Student Populations in Developing Countries be Reached by Online Surveys?"
58. Boxhill et al., *The Political Culture of Democracy in Jamaica, 2006*.
59. Ghana, as several other African countries, adopts a national youth service programme that obliges all Ghanaian students who have completed their Bachelor's degree to do a full year of community service. At the time of responding, all participants of the N3S were expected to leave for national service in between a couple of weeks and a year.
60. In order to enhance the comparability with the other variables, the interpersonal trust index was rescaled with 0 as minimum and 10 as maximum.
61. See note 55 above.
62. Field, *Discovering Statistics using SPSS*.
63. Delhey, Newton, and Welzel, "How General is Trust in 'Most People'?"; Norris, "Making Democracies Work"; Kuenzi, "Social Capital and Political Trust in West Africa."
64. Hutchison and Johnson, "Capacity to Trust?" 744.
65. Levi and Stoker, "Political Trust and Trustworthiness," 494.
66. Delhey, Newton, and Welzel, "How General is Trust in 'Most People'?"; Kuenzi, "Social Capital and Political Trust in West Africa"; Norris, "Introduction."
67. Berg and Hjerm, "National Identity and Political Trust"; Christensen and Lægreid, "Trust in Government"; Schoon and Cheng, "Determinants of Political Trust."
68. Ben-Nun-Bloom, Zemach, and Arian, "The Religious Experience as Affecting Ambivalence."
69. Berg and Hjerm, "National Identity and Political Trust"; Catterberg and Moreno, "The Individual Bases of Political Trust"; Christensen and Lægreid, "Trust in Government"; Mishler and Rose, "What are the Origins of Political Trust?"
70. Christensen and Lægreid, "Trust in Government."
71. Mishler and Rose, "What are the Origins of Political Trust?"
72. Wong, Wan, and Hsiao, "The Bases of Political Trust in Six Asian Societies"; Mishler and Rose, "What are the Origins of Political Trust?"
73. Wong, Wan, and Hsiao, "The Bases of Political Trust in Six Asian Societies."
74. During the peer review process, Amélie Godefroidt obtained a scholarship of the Research Foundation – Flanders. Her new title: PhD Fellow of the Research Foundation-Flanders at the Centre for Research on Peace and Development (CRPD) at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven), Belgium.

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Appendix A: Trust variables in World Values Survey 2010–14 ($N = 60$).

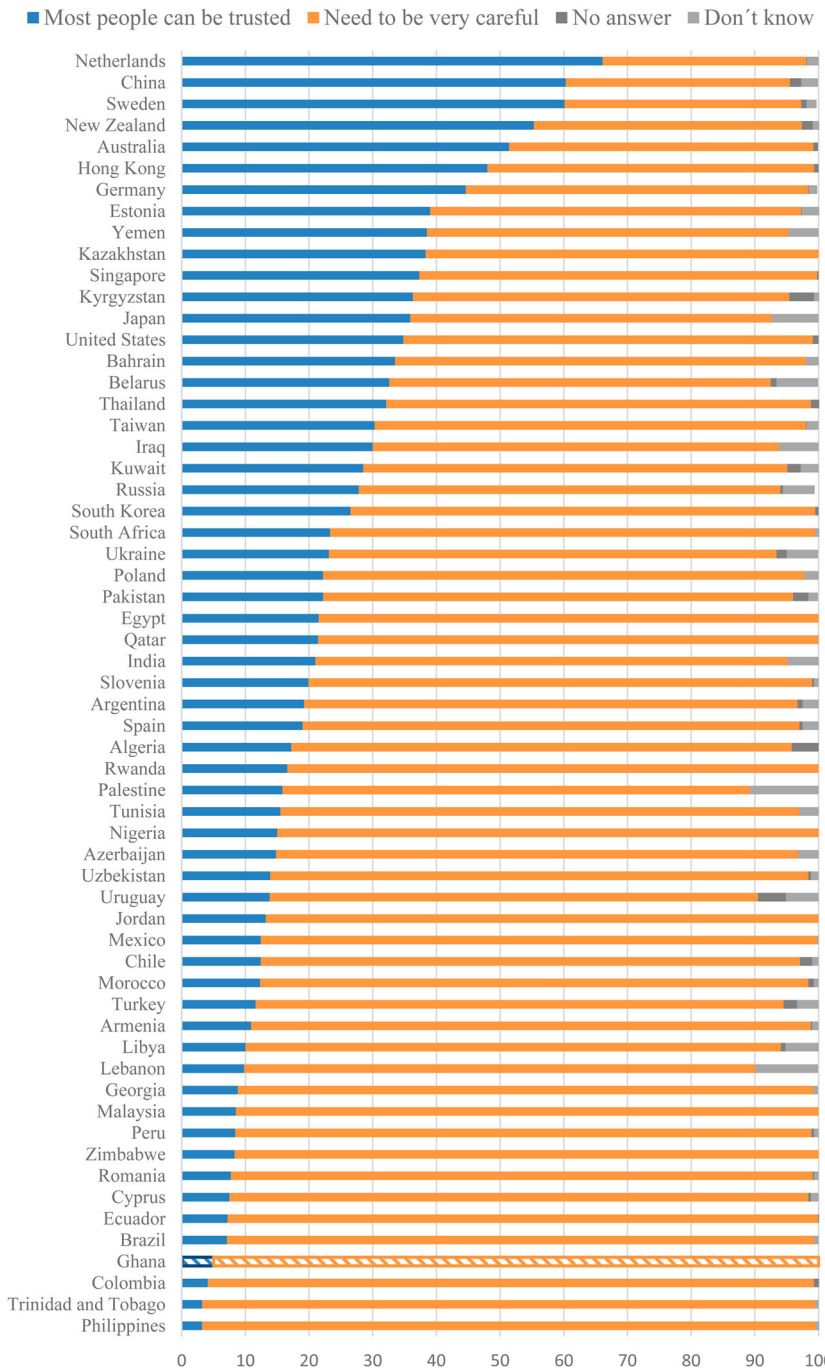

Figure A1. Generalized trust based on World Values Survey 2010–14 ($N = 60$).

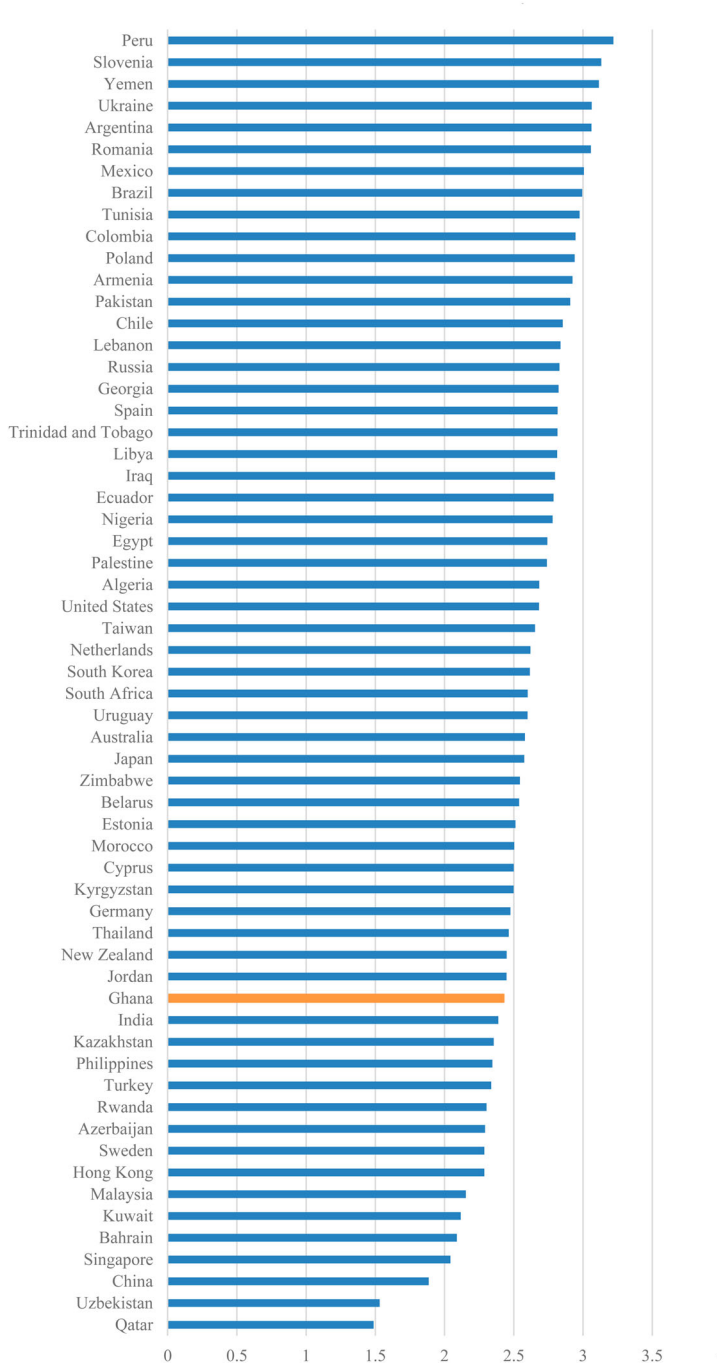

Figure A2. Institutional trust based on World Values Survey 2010–14 ($N = 60$).

Appendix B. Descriptives of key variables.

Table B1. Descriptives of continuous variables.

Continuous variables	*n*	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Dependent variable					
Institutional trust	3022	0	10	3.00	1.93
Independent variables					
Background variables					
Age (in years)	3183	18	46	23.21	2.59
SES	2902	1	6	3.30	1.27
Subjective religiosity	2939	0	10	7.36	2.22
Attachment to a community					
National pride	3012	0	10	7.98	2.42
Ethnic pride	3023	0	10	7.89	2.46
Interpersonal trust	**2983**	**1**	**10**	**6.53**	**1.49**
Q83_1	2611	1	4	2.74	.73
Q83_2	2584	1	4	2.49	.69
Q83_3	2669	1	4	2.93	.77
Q83_4	2586	1	4	2.44	.74
Q83_5	2591	1	4	2.62	.74
Q83_6	2547	1	4	2.44	.70
Government effectiveness	**3019**	**0**	**10**	**3.28**	**2.03**
Q42_1	3012	0	10	2.72	2.15
Q42_2	3013	0	10	2.50	2.11
Q42_3	3009	0	10	4.13	2.44
Q42_4	3007	0	10	2.92	2.26
Q42_5	3003	0	10	4.14	2.69
NSS Contribution	**2928**	**0**	**10**	**3.76**	**2.21**
Q28_1	2901	0	10	4.54	2.92
Q28_2	2895	0	10	3.05	2.35
Q28_3	2889	0	10	3.84	2.69
Q28_4	2890	0	10	3.79	2.60
Q28_5	2891	0	10	3.67	2.78

Table B2. Descriptives of categorical variables.

Categorical variables		Percentage	Frequency
Background variables			
Gender	Male	67.6	2205
	Female	32.4	1059
	Total valid	*100.00*	*3264*
Town size	Small village	10.3	336
	Medium sized town	39.3	1284
	Big city	40.8	1331
	Total valid	*100.00*	*3264*
Religion	Christian	84.2	2748
	Muslim	5.8	190
	Total valid	*90.0*	*2938*
Ethnicity	Akan	57.2	1866
	Ga-Adangbe	10.0	326
	Ewe	17.7	577
	Guan	2.8	92
	Gurma	7.0	229
	Mole-Dagbani	1.3	41
	Grusi	0.7	23
	Total valid	*96.6*	*3154*
University	UG – Accra	21,8	712
	KNUST – Kumasi	43,0	1403
	UDS – Tamale	35,2	1149
	Total valid	*100.0*	*3264*

Appendix C. Correlation matrix of independent variables.

Table C1. Correlation matrix of independent variables.

	National pride	Ethnic pride	Interpersonal trust	Perceived government effectiveness	Perceived NSS contribution
National pride	1	0.575*	0.071*	0.390*	0.332*
Ethnic pride	0.575*	1	0.068*	0.266*	0.257*
Interpersonal trust	0.071*	0.068*	1	0.122*	0.102*
Perceived government effectiveness	0.390*	0.266*	0.122*	1	0.532*
Perceived NSS contribution	0.332*	0.257*	0.102*	0.532*	1

*Significant at 0.001 level (two-sided).
Source: National Service System Survey. Ghana. 2013 ($N = 3,264$).