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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Linking socio-economic performance, quality of governance, and trust in the civil service: does culture intercede in the perceived relationships? Evidence from and beyond Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka

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Several non-OECD countries have relatively low socio-economic performance, poor governance, and a fair amount of corruption among civil servants, yet their citizens report higher trust in the civil services than do citizens in OECD countries. To understand this mismatch, this study provides an explanation, arguing that an authoritarian cultural orientation in some societies can contribute to citizens having relatively high institutional trust despite the poor performance and weak governance of public institutions. Based on country-representative survey data from three South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka), the argument is that because of such an orientation, a hierarchical relationship is developed with the authorities which generates natural obedience to them. This, in turn, contributes to their higher level of institutional trust.

**Keywords:** civil service; culture; performance; quality of governance; trust in civil services; Bangladesh; Nepal; Sri Lanka

## Introduction

A number of studies confirm that there is a positive correlation between citizens' satisfaction with civil services and citizens' trust in public institutions (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003; Salminen & Ikola-Norrbacka, 2010; Zhao & Hu, 2015). Increased institutional trust is an indicator of good governance (Miller & Listhaug, 1990). Better performance by public institutions attracts higher trust (Van de Walle, Van Roosbroek, & Bouckaert, 2008). This connection, however, is not automatic because the improved performance of public institutions does not necessarily result in the institutions receiving a higher level of trust from citizens. Despite improvements in socio-economic conditions in more societies than ever before, there is no indication of a long-term increase in institutional trust; rather, trust in public institutions in many countries is declining (Van Ryzin, 2011; Wong, Wan, & Hsiao, 2011; Zhao & Hu, 2015). This is why Van de Walle and Bouckaert (2003) question the possible causal link between trust in government and satisfaction with the quality of services provided by civil services.

Data from the latest World Values Survey (WVS, 2016: Wave 6, conducted during 2010–2014) and the European Values Study (EVS, 2016: Wave 4, conducted during 2008–2010) show an interesting trend concerning the level of public trust in the civil

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services of countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) compared to the level of such confidence in the civil services of non-OECD countries (77 countries in total). It appears that citizens in several non-OECD countries demonstrate higher confidence in the civil services than do citizens in OECD countries. However, in general, the OECD countries demonstrate better socio-economic performance than do non-OECD countries.

In understanding the relationship between levels of trust and socio-economic performance, insights can be drawn from the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2015). However, to explain the level of trust or confidence in a civil service by relying only on performance indicators may be insufficient for some non-OECD countries that show relatively high institutional trust despite lower institutional performance. Accordingly, it is relevant to explore certain other factors beyond performance (e.g., cultural factors) which might help explain the high trust. Hence, the value of data from the Governance and Trust Survey 2 (GoT2) which was conducted during 2014–2015 under the aegis of the Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development (Ishtiaq, 2015).

GoT2 included three South Asian countries – Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka – with data being collected from 6,800 respondents: Bangladesh 2,748, Nepal 2,404, and Sri Lanka 1,648 (Ishtiaq, 2015). The data suggest that the existence of an authoritarian cultural orientation among citizens in these countries may contribute to generating higher levels of institutional trust despite poor socio-economic performance and weak governance, as compared with that of developed countries. A statistically significant trend supports this suggestion. The trend might also indicate a similar situation in other countries where the relatively poor performance of the civil services combines with high institutional trust among citizens.

### **Theoretical insights**

In general, institutional trust is understood as the evaluations of whether or not public institutions are performing according to the expectations of the public (Campbell, 2004; Miller & Listhaug, 1990). The rationalist approach to institutional trust is based on this evaluative assumption, since institutional trust is supposed to be determined by the degree of institutional performance (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Rohrschneider & Schmitt-Beck, 2002; Wong, Wan, & Hsiao, 2011) and the extent of governance quality (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008). This is because the rationalist approach presupposes that institutional trust is a product of the calculation by actors of their material interest (Shi, 2001). Here, social transactions are evaluated by actors on the basis of a cost-benefits analysis (Campbell, 2004). If an institution performs better than it did previously, it should receive higher trust than previously; and if that institution fails to provide services, then citizens' trust in it may decrease. This logic reflects March and Olsen (1996, 1998) theorisation of the logic of consequences. In line with this argument, Van de Walle, Van Roosbroek, and Bouckaert (2008) mention that the most common explanation for declining institutional trust is the failure of public institutions to perform well.

Along with performance, rationalist theory indicates that behavioural factors of institutions can also be important to determine the level of trust they receive (Shi, 2001). According to Chang and Chu (2006), corruption and unfair treatment of citizens can have negative effects on trust. Rothstein and Teorell (2008) connect the issues of

fairness and corruption with the quality of governance. Thus, institutional performance and quality of governance appear to be important determining factors for institutional trust. However, as addressed below, it appears that in many countries institutional trust levels are not consistent with the theoretical arguments based on institutional performance and governance quality.

The fact that countries whose public institutions receive relatively low trust despite performing well and having better governance is possibly explained by pointing to post-materialism and the rise of critical citizen (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Norris, 2011). The rise of such citizens mainly indicates the great increase in self-expressive citizens who are critical of their government's performance. Citizens with post-materialist values increasingly challenge elitist rule and reject authority (Wang & You, 2016); they are less satisfied with the performance of public institutions than are the materialists (Han, 2004). When this happens, post-materialist citizens are not concerned about traditional socio-economic development, but tend instead to be interested in issues such as political and human rights, liberty, equality, tolerance, participation, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and environmental concerns (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Wang & You, 2016). Post-materialist values can, therefore, be a push factor for reducing the institutional trust in some countries, with Welzel and Dalton (2016) defining this phenomenon as an "assertive culture" and Dalton (2004) arguing that around 20–30% of the decline in institutional trust in advanced industrialised countries is due to such democratically-rooted aspirations.

In search of an explanation of higher institutional trust in under-performing countries, different cultural lenses may be helpful. Because the cost-benefit calculations do not take place on neutral and unmediated grounds (Wong, Wan, & Hsiao, 2011), it can be affected by cultural values. There are two important explanations for institutional trust being based on cultural lenses: an authoritarian orientation (Baniamin, Jamil, & Askvik, 2019; Ma & Yang, 2014; Shi, 2001) and social capital (Putnam, 2001). The authoritarian-orientation explanation points to hierarchical culture, which indicates unquestioning obedience and reliance on authority. This authority can be government, political leaders, teachers, elders, or anyone with a higher social rank and reputation than the person giving his or her trust (Ma & Yang, 2014). Welzel and Dalton (2016) define this as an "allegiant culture". Due to an allegiant cultural orientation, people's logic of consequences, meaning the cost-benefit analysis or critical assessment processes as described by rational choice theory, may be obstructed. This is because people's obedience to authorities can block their critical thinking about those authorities; and this can lead them to evaluate the authorities less objectively, or it may even lead them to avoid doing any evaluation at all.

In traditional societies, political leaders and governments enjoy an "important symbolic authoritative" status (Wong, Wan, & Hsiao, 2011). In such settings, citizens and the state apparatus have a hierarchical relationship, and civil servants, being part of the state apparatus, enjoy an advantageous position which comes with a fair amount of automatic respect from the public. Thus, the logic of appropriateness becomes important in determining the degree of trust which is "biased toward what social norms deem right rather than what cost-benefit calculation considers best" (Balsiger, 2016). Here, norms indicate internal standards that determine the proper behaviour of an actor (Shi, 2001). As a result, these people have a positive impression of institutions despite the institutions' poor performance and governance. These dynamics may thus help to create higher institutional trust.

In calculative rational analysis, the focus is on service providers (here, civil servants) and whether or not they provide expected services in a timely manner and according to regularised and just procedures. When there is a hierarchal relationship between service providers and citizens, the service providers are authorities who are in a more advantageous position than the citizens who are service recipients; the service providers judge the service recipients rather than being judged by them. In such a system, service recipients may have very little recourse, even when they do not get any service or are poorly treated by an authority. Nevertheless, showing respect and obedience may be useful to some citizens; if they can please the authority, they may receive help and favours. Thus, having trust in a civil service may even be a calculated strategy for gaining favour from the authority, rather than a judgement about the quality of service. This means that calculative decisions are different in a hierarchal society shaped by the logic of appropriateness and enforced by the rules of the game of that particular society.

An authoritarian cultural orientation in 13 East Asian countries is considered by Ma and Yang (2014) to be an important explanatory variable for institutional trust in these countries. They mention that the orientation is deeply rooted in Asian societies. In Bangladesh, for example, a bureaucratic head of a district or a sub-district is considered as the *ovibabok* or *bab-ma* (guardian or parent) of that area. Just as the trust of a child toward one's parents may not be dependent on the parents' financial ability to take care of the child, in a hierarchical society trust towards state authority may not reflect the state institutions' performance or governance quality. In a study on Taiwan and China, Shi (2001) shows that traditional values such as a hierarchical orientation are important for explaining institutional trust in both countries. Thus, the people with a hierarchical orientation have higher trust in public institutions than they would have if they relied only on rational cost-benefit analysis. This cultural orientation can act as a pull factor for generating higher institutional trust. As such, the hierarchical cultural orientation may offer a possible explanation to the main research puzzle: that is, a reason for having inflated trust in the civil service in different under-performing countries.

Another cultural dimension which is used to explain institutional trust is social capital (Putnam, 2001). This is mainly related to two factors: generalised trust and associationism (Newton, 2001). The people who have higher generalised trust may also have higher institutional trust because of their positive worldview. The second factor – associationism – indicates that citizens who feel themselves to be in a kind of partnership with public institutions may have an increased level of institutional trust. Both of these factors together reflect the degree of social capital in a society. Yet, the link between social capital and institutional trust is complex, for there can also be reverse causality: better institutions can also create social capital. This may be why some studies find support for the claimed link between social capital and institutional trust (e.g., Fukuyama, 2001; Newton & Norris, 2000; Putnam, 1993, 2001), while other studies find only a small or insignificant relationship (Askvik, 2007; Bäck & Kestilä, 2009; Newton, 2001). One study even finds a negative relationship (Kim, 2005).

### Background of the present study

Surveys such as the WVS (2016) and the EVS (2016) are conducted from time to time in different countries and allow researchers to map variations within and between countries. Using data from the WVS (2016) and EVS (2016), it is possible to measure the trust level in the civil services of different countries across the globe. The data show that

Table 1. Trust (from high to low) in the civil service (top 10 countries) and the human development index (HDI) in selected OECD and non-OECD countries (% showing a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the civil service).

OECD Countries	Trust (%)	HDI Rank	Non-OECD Countries	Trust (%)	HDI Rank
Switzerland	72	3	Uzbekistan	92	114
Estonia	72	30	Malaysia	78	62
Luxembourg	71	19	China	77	90
Denmark	67	4	Singapore	76	11
Sweden	63	14	Bahrain	73	45
France	63	22	Kazakhstan	68	56
Ireland	62	6	Ghana	67	140
Iceland	61	16	Azerbaijan	66	78
Turkey	59	72	Belarus	66	50
Latvia	58	46	Philippines	65	115

Sources: data on trust are from WVS (2016) and EVS (2016), and data on HDI are from UNDP (2015) .

citizens in quite a number of non-OECD countries have higher trust in their civil services than do citizens in OECD countries. The highest value for trust in the civil services in OECD countries is 72% for Switzerland and Estonia, while the highest value for non-OECD countries is 92% or Uzbekistan, followed by 78% for Malaysia and 77% for China: see Table 1.

All of these values are higher than those reported for OECD countries. This is surprising, given that many of these non-OECD countries rank lower in the HDI by the UNDP (2016) in comparison with OECD countries. The HDI is a measure “of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and [having] a decent standard of living” (UNDP, 2016). The health dimension is captured by life expectancy at birth, while the education dimension is measured by the average years of schooling for adults from 25 and upwards, and the expected years of schooling for children who are old enough to start school. The standard of living dimension is calculated by gross national income per capita (UNDP, 2016). Very few non-OECD countries rank higher in HDI than OECD countries: for example, Singapore (11), Hong Kong (12), Cyprus (32), and Bahrain (45). All other non-OECD countries rank much lower.

Table 1 is complemented by Table 2. Both tables gives a comprehensive picture of the dynamics between citizens’ level of trust in the civil service and a given country’s HDI ranking.

The relationship between the HDI and trust can be understood more clearly in Figure 1. The quadrangles Q1 and Q3 are more or less consistent with the performance theory that a higher HDI ranking is related to higher trust, and that a lower HDI ranking is related to lower trust. Quadrangle Q4 represents a higher HDI ranking with lower trust, which may be explained by the rise of critical citizens who tend to evaluate their government’s performance negatively (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Norris, 2011). Quadrangle Q2 is a puzzle because higher trust is associated with a low ranking on the HDI. Why would citizens who live in countries with a low HDI ranking tend to have relatively high trust in civil servants?

It is also relevant to consider the relationship of institutional trust with the degree of democracy and the intensity of corruption: see Figures 2 and 3. More or less the same

Table 2. Trust (from high to low) in the civil service (other top 25 countries) and the human development index (HDI) in different OECD and non-OECD countries (% showing a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the civil service).

OECD countries	Trust (%)	HDI rank	Non-OECD countries	Trust (%)	HDI rank
Norway	58*	1	India	63	130
Belgium	56*	21	Taiwan	63	-
Slovak Republic	55*	35	Kyrgyzstan	62	120
Germany	55	6	Rwanda	61	163
New Zealand	50	9	Thailand	60	93
South Korea	49	17	Hong Kong	60	12
Portugal	47*	43	Nigeria	59	152
United States	47	8	Kuwait	53	48
Finland	46*	24	Zimbabwe	53	155
Australia	45	2	Cyprus	53	32
Great Britain	44*	14	Brazil	51	75
Hungary	41*	44	Russia	51	50
Austria	41*	23	Morocco	51	126
Spain	40	26	Georgia	49	76
Japan	37	20	Jordan	46	80
Italy	37*	27	Libya	46	94
Netherlands	36	5	Ukraine	46	81
Czech Republic	34*	28	South Africa	45	116
Chile	33	42	Palestine	42	113
Poland	31*	36	Algeria	39	83
Greece	27*	29	Pakistan	37	147
Mexico	21	74	Armenia	37	85
Slovenia	10	25	Trinidad and Tobago	36	64
Canada	-	9	Lebanon	35	67
Israel	-	18	Egypt	35	108

Sources: data on trust are from WVS (2016) and EVS (2016), and data on HDI are from UNDP (2016).

trends are apparent as those addressed above. This means that there are some countries in which public institutions enjoy relatively high trust despite poor governance.

### Selection of cases and research design

An ideal sample for this study could have included all the countries in quadrangle Q2 of Figure 1 in order to test whether an authoritarian cultural orientation explains citizens' positive evaluation of public institutions despite those institutions' poor performance. Unfortunately, the analysis is restricted because of data for this cultural dimension only being available for Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka from the GoT2 survey (Ishtiaq, 2015). This limits the generalisability of the findings across the countries located in Q2 of Figure 1; but it at least provides an opportunity to understand why citizens evaluate public institutions (here, civil services) positively, despite their poor performance in the selected countries.

The GoT2 survey, which was conducted during 2014–2015, includes variables measuring both authoritarian culture orientation and trust in the civil service. The main dependent variable is the trust level in a civil service, which is measured by a 4-point Likert scale (1 = not at all confident, and 4 = a great deal of confidence). The concept of confidence is standardly used to measure institutional trust (Campbell, 2004; Wang, 2005).



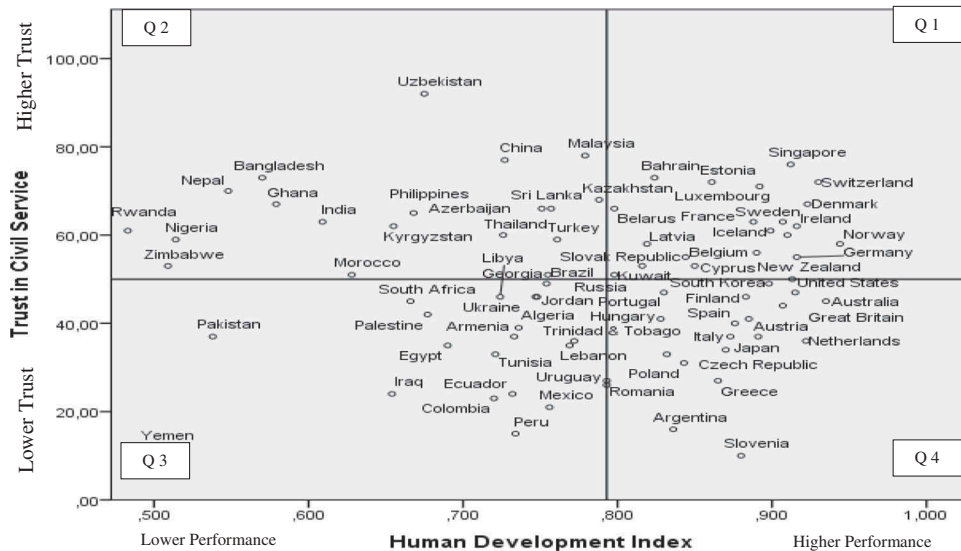


Figure 1. Relationship between the human development index (HDI) and trust in the civil service in many countries.

Sources: WVS (2016), EVS (2016) and GoT 2 (Ishtiaq, 2015).

Note: Both X and Y axis reference lines are drawn based on median values.

By contrast, some studies (e.g., Schnaudt, 2019) claim that there are differences between the concepts of confidence and institutional trust. However, since the data from standard surveys on institutional trust are based on the measure of confidence, the analysis here also uses the concept of confidence to measure institutional trust.

Table 3 shows the relatively high level of citizens' trust in the civil services of Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, as well as these countries' lower ranking in HDI, which puts them in Q2 of Figure 1. Also, while the Global Barometer (2005-2011) lacks measurements of trust in the civil services, it does include measurements of higher trust in other institutions in each of the three countries: for example, the national government, the parliament, and courts of law.

In order to measure the authoritarian cultural orientation in the three countries, an index is computed on the basis of three statements: "Even if parent's demands are unreasonable, children still should do what their parents ask/suggest"; "Top officials in government/private sector/NGOs are like the head of the family; their decisions should be followed by everyone"; and "It is natural that those with power and money and who belong to a family with high status should be respected and obeyed". The answer alternatives vary from 1 to 4, where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 4 "strongly agree", such that the higher the score in this index, the higher the respondent's authoritarian cultural orientation. Similar types of questions and answer alternatives have been used in other studies to measure similar cultural dimensions (see, e.g., Ma & Yang, 2014).

Along with this explanatory variable, two other cultural variables are also included: generalised trust and associationism. Generalised trust is measured by asking respondents whether they think most people can be trusted (coded as 1), or whether it is important to be careful when dealing with most people (coded as 2). This kind of measure of generalised trust is used by different studies such as Newton (2001) and Richey



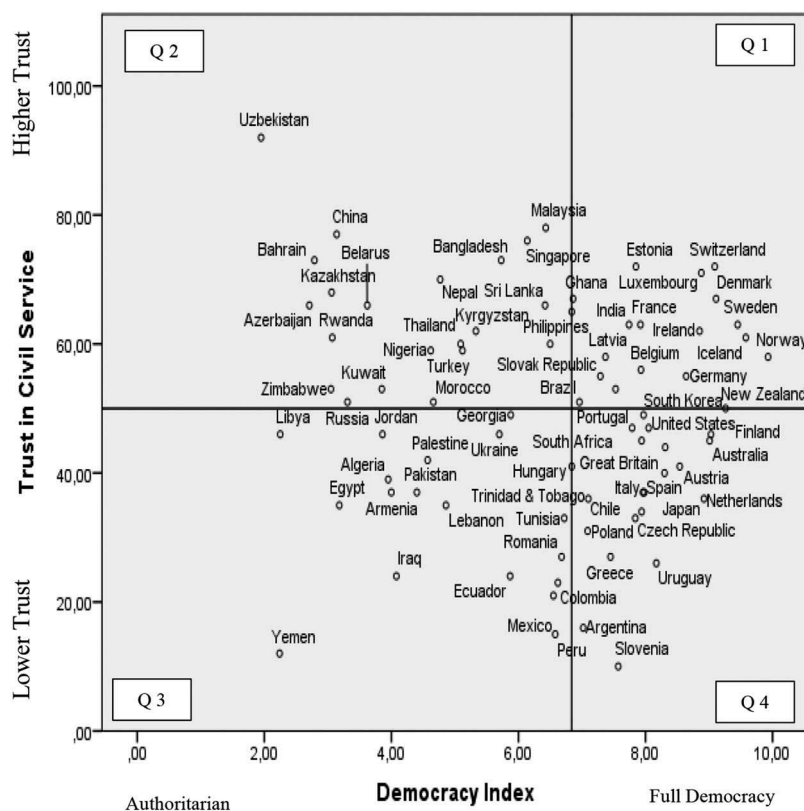


Figure 2. Relationship between the democracy index 2015 (by the Economist Intelligence Unit) and trust in the civil service in many countries.

Sources: WVS (2016), EVS (2016) and GoT 2 (Ishtiaq, 2015)

Note: Both X and Y axis reference lines are drawn based on median values.

(2010). This code is reversed for easier interpretation and understanding. Associationism is measured by asking respondents whether they are associated with any social, voluntary, civil society, and community organisations; “yes” is coded as 1 and “no” is coded as 2. This code is also reversed for interpretive convenience.

In order to map civil service performance, four basic areas of performance are used: economy, education, health, and law and order. To measure economic performance, two subjective measures are used: the degree of success in reducing poverty, and the degree of success in improving people’s general economic situation. Respondents were asked to rate these two categories using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates “succeeded very well” and 5 indicates “did not succeed at all”. For convenience and easy interpretation of the variable, the values are reversed, such that 1 represents “did not succeed at all” and 5 indicates “succeeded very well”. Thus, the high the rating, the higher the perceived performance of the civil service in reducing poverty and improving the general economic situation.

The second performance area is education, which is also measured by two indicators: the degree of development of primary schools, and the degree of development of secondary schools. The third performance area is health, which is measured by one indicator: development of the public healthcare system. The fourth performance area of

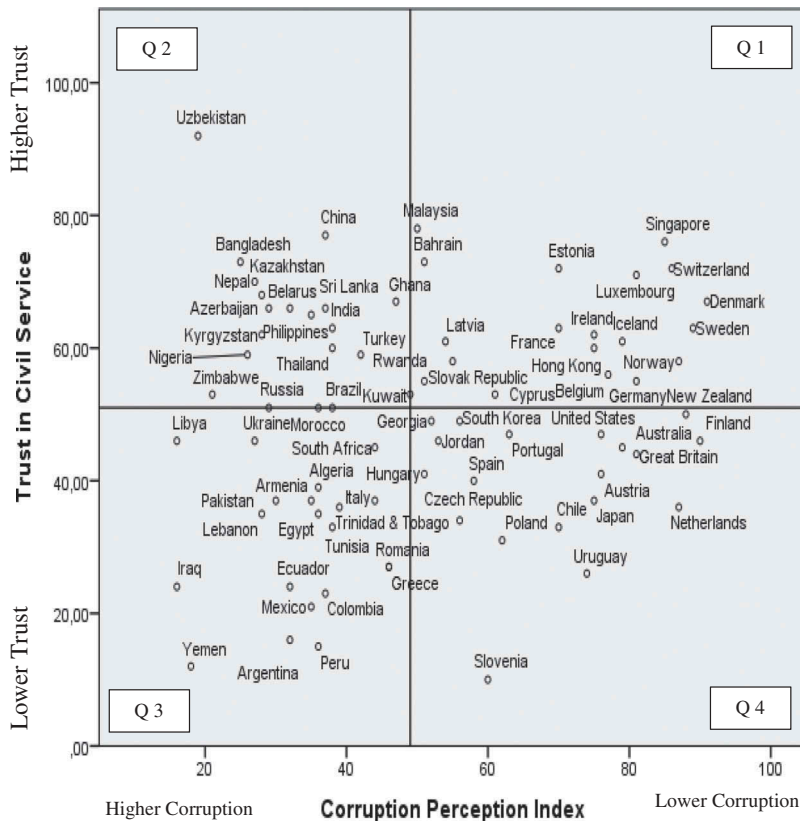


Figure 3. Relationship between the corruption perception index 2015 (by Transparency International) and trust in the civil service in different countries.

Sources: WVS (2016), EVS (2016) and GoT 2 (Ishtiaq, 2015).

Note: Both X and Y axis reference lines are drawn based on median values.

Table 3. Trust in the civil service and positions in the human development index (HDI) for the sampled South Asian countries.

Sample countries	Valid samples	Trust (%)	HDI rank among 188 countries
Bangladesh	2,477	73	142
Nepal	2,151	70	145
Sri Lanka	1,581	66	73

Sources: GoT2 (Ishtiaq, 2015) and UNDP (2016)

law and order is measured by the degree to which law and order is maintained. All these indicators are also measured by a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates “very bad” and 5 indicates “very good”. For all of these indicators, higher values indicate higher performance.

In order to measure the quality of governance, two indicators are used: corruption, and equal treatment. Both indicators are measured by a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates “strongly disagree” and 4 indicates “strongly agree”. Using these two

indicators, the respondents rated the degree to which civil servants are corrupt and the degree to which they treat recipients of their services equally. The higher the rating of the first indicator, the more corrupt the civil servants are; and the higher the ratings of the second indicator, the higher the degree of equal treatment.

Apart from these variables, different standard socio-economic variables such as gender, age, education, monthly income, and satisfaction with life (with a 1 to 10 scale where 10 represents higher satisfaction) are also included in the regression analysis. Life satisfaction is included because people with higher life satisfaction may have higher institutional trust due to their positive outlook (Delhey & Newton, 2003). To measure the country-level effects, Sri Lanka is considered as a reference category, since its civil service receives the lowest level of trust among the three countries.

### Findings of the study

Four sets of variables are used to explain trust in the civil service: performance, quality of governance, culture, and socio-economic factors: see Table 4. The regression models are divided into country-level and aggregate-level analyses. At the country level, indicators of economic and educational performance do not show any statistically significant relationships, with the exception of the development of secondary school indicator for Nepal. At the aggregate level, however, the economic performance indicator of reduction of poverty shows a positive effect, as  $\beta = .038$  ( $p < .05$ ). Similarly, the performance indicator of development of secondary school shows a positive effect, as  $\beta = .050$  ( $p < .05$ ) at the aggregate level. The performance indicator of development of the public healthcare system has a positive effect at the aggregate level, but only in Bangladesh at the country level (as  $\beta = .071$  and  $p < .001$ ; and  $\beta = .115$  and  $p < .001$  respectively). Also, at the country level, the indicator of maintenance of law and order seems to have a positive effect in both Bangladesh ( $\beta = .106$  and  $p < .001$ ) and Nepal ( $\beta = .117$  and  $p < .01$ ), but not in Sri Lanka where there is a positive effect at the aggregate level, as  $\beta = .119$  ( $p < .001$ ).

Regarding the two indicators of quality of governance (corruption and equal treatment): corruption has a negative effect, while equal treatment has a positive effect. The negative effect of corruption is visible at both the aggregate level and the country level, except in Sri Lanka. At the aggregated level, the negative effect of corruption can be understood from its negative ' $\beta$ ' value, as  $\beta = -.121$  ( $p < .001$ ). Such a negative effect is also visible in Bangladesh and Nepal, as  $\beta = -.101$  ( $p < .001$ ) and  $\beta = -.116$  ( $p < .001$ ), respectively. This is the indicator that has the highest negative effect on citizens' level of trust in the civil service. The indicator of equal treatment has a positive effect at the country level in all three countries, but not at the aggregate level. The effect of this indicator for the respective countries can be understood from the " $\beta$ " values: for Bangladesh,  $\beta = .074$  ( $p < .01$ ), for Nepal,  $\beta = .102$  ( $p < .01$ ), and for Sri Lanka,  $\beta = .135$  ( $p < .001$ ).

Among the three cultural indicators (an authoritarian cultural orientation, generalised trust, and associationism), generalised trust and associationism do not show any statistically significant relationships at the country level. However, generalised trust shows a positive effect at the aggregate level, as  $\beta = .044$  ( $p < .001$ ). This means that people who have generalised trust tend to have higher trust in the civil service. The third cultural indicator – authoritarian cultural orientation – has a positive effect in all three countries, and at the aggregate level as well. Among the main explanatory

Table 4. Summary of the linear regression models of trust in the civil services in three South Asian countries (standardised beta coefficients).

	Pooled sample	Bangladesh	Nepal	Sri Lanka
<b>Performances (low-high)</b>				
<b>Economy</b>				
Reducing poverty	.038***	.018	.034	.022
Improving general economic situation	.020	.046	-.050	.010
<b>Education</b>				
Development of primary school	.044	.040	-.006	.061
Development of secondary school	.050***	.041	.124***	-.043
<b>Health</b>				
Development of public healthcare system	.071*	.115*	.008	.008
<b>Law and order</b>				
Maintenance of law and order	.119*	.106*	.117**	.045
<b>Quality of governance (low-high)</b>				
Corruption of the civil servants	-.121*	-.101*	-.116*	-.046
Equal treatment by the civil servants	.020	.074**	.102**	.135*
<b>Culture</b>				
Generalised trust (1 = no and 2 = yes)	.044*	.041	-.038	.029
Associationism (1 = no and 2 = yes)	-.024	-.001	-.015	-.016
ACO (Low-High)	.090*	.256*	.091**	.131*
<b>Socio-economic factors</b>				
Gender (ref: male)	-.046**	.001	-.070***	.030
Age (low-high)	-.029	-.038	-.048	-.039
Educational qualification (low-high)	-.016	-.015	.001	-.028
Monthly income (low-high)	.022	.044	.003	.033
Satisfied with life (low-high)	.121*	.122*	.146*	.074**
Bangladesh	.048***			
Nepal	.101*			
Constant (Unstandardised coefficients)	2.181*	1.464*	1.806*	2.244
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.113	.237	.111	.057

Source: GoT2 (Ishtiaq, 2015).

Notes: Dependent variable: trust in civil service; \*  $p < .001$ , (two-tailed tests), \*\*  $p < .01$ , and \*\*\*  $p < .05$ .

variables (except the socio-economic variable), this is the only variable which shows a statistically significant positive effect in all three countries and also at the aggregate level: at the aggregate level  $\beta = .090$  ( $p < .01$ ); and at the country level,  $\beta = .256$  ( $p < .001$ ) for Bangladesh,  $\beta = .091$  ( $p < .01$ ) for Nepal, and  $\beta = .131$  ( $p < .001$ ), and for Sri Lanka.

Most of the socio-economic factors do not show any statistically significant relationships, apart from gender and satisfaction in life. It seems that women have less trust than men in Nepal, as  $\beta = -.070$  ( $p < .05$ ); but in the other two countries, there are no significant variations. At the aggregate level, there is also some indication that women have less trust than men. Life satisfaction seems to have a positive effect on trust in the civil service at both the country level and the aggregate level. At the country level, it shows a positive effect, as  $\beta = .122$  ( $p < .001$ ) for Bangladesh,  $\beta = .146$  ( $p < .001$ ) for Nepal, and  $\beta = .074$  ( $p < .01$ ) for Sri Lanka. The same trend is also visible at the aggregate level, as  $\beta = .121$  ( $p < .001$ ).

Also explored is the country-level effect, for which Sri Lanka is the reference country. It seems that both Bangladesh and Nepal have statistically significant higher levels of institutional trust than Sri Lanka, as  $\beta = .048$  ( $p < .05$ ) and  $\beta = .101$  ( $p < .001$ ), respectively.

### **Analysis of the findings**

According to rational choice theory, both institutional performance and quality of governance should play a role in determining the degree of trust in the civil service. When a civil service performs its duties properly (e.g., ensures good quality of governance such as fairness and corruption-free services) and provides the services efficiently (e.g., healthcare and education), it should receive higher trust. Here, the logic of consequences is supposed to work to determine the degree of trust. In this regard, the findings show there are some performance indicators such as reduction of poverty, development of the healthcare system, and maintenance of law and order that do contribute to determining the degree of trust in the civil service in the three countries. But there are variations of such effects among the different indicators: a few show a statistically significant effect in one or two countries, and some other indicators only show a significant effect at the aggregate level. Reduction of poverty, for example, seems statistically significant only for aggregated data, but not at the country level. This may be because at the country level, there is no significant variation in the perceived success of efforts to reduce poverty; whereas for the aggregated data, there is.

There are also variations among the countries in the effects of different indicators: for example, the maintenance of law and order has a significant effect in determining the trust level in the civil services of both Bangladesh and Nepal, but not of Sri Lanka. Some performance indicators do not have any statistical significance at any level: for example, improving the general economic situation and the development of primary school.

The quality of governance is also associated with the logic of consequences and appears to be important for determining the level of trust in the civil services of the three countries. When civil servants are perceived to be corrupt, people tend to have less trust in the civil service. Alternatively, when people think civil servants treat everyone equally, they have higher trust in the civil service. Thus, the logic of consequences seems to be important in determining the institutional trust level.

At the same time, the logic of appropriateness plays an important role because an authoritarian cultural orientation is shown to have a statistically significant effect in determining people's level of trust. This cultural variable indicates that people in authoritative positions will be respected and obeyed without question. Since the civil service has a strong institutional position in the three countries, it gains authoritative status and, accordingly, people's trust; thus, societal values and norms become important in defining the degree of institutional trust. This finding is consistent with the findings of Ma and Yang (2014) who seek to explain institutional trust in 13 East Asian countries.

Although further effects of an authoritarian cultural orientation are not identified here, there may be yet other ways in which this cultural orientation works. One possible mechanism can be that due to people's obedience to authorities, their critical thinking can be obstructed, and that may lead to less application of the evaluative logic when thinking about and assessing the performance of the authorities. This means they may apply the logic of consequences to a lesser extent than would people who think more critically. Such inaction or indifference in the evaluation of institutions may contribute to higher institutional trust.

Another possibility is that people may be calculative: their unwarranted trust may be a mechanism to combat their vulnerability due to poor governance. Because of poor governance, being critical of the authoritative persons or bodies will not help people; rather it may bring further troubles for them. If so, people have little choice other than to try to please the authorities by demonstrating obedience, respect, and loyalty, with the

hope of gaining sympathy and earning their approval. Such approval may help them gain favour and benefits of some sort. The demonstration of higher trust may, therefore, be an extension of such calculative behaviour. Or there can be a combination of mechanisms: people may be less assertive about raising questions and evaluating the activities of institutions and civil servants and, at the same time, may demonstrate loyalty to authorities to gain favour from them.

Both the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness have effects in determining the trust level in the civil services of the three countries. These dynamics help account for why the trust level is different from where it would be if people were acting only on the logic of consequences. The logic of appropriateness, due to an authoritarian cultural orientation, leads to a higher level of institutional trust, and this may provide a possible explanation for why there is inflated trust in the three countries.

Also significant is that people with a higher level of satisfaction in life have higher trust in the civil service than those who are generally unsatisfied with life. This can possibly be explained by their positive worldview; but a deeper analysis of the source of such a positive view may provide other related explanations for their increased institutional trust. Here, only the effect of the higher level of life satisfaction is shown, without its origins being investigated.

### **Concluding comments**

The findings indicate that, along with the logic of consequences, the logic of appropriateness also matters for determining people's level of trust in the civil services of the three countries. The logic of consequences is based on cost-benefit analysis as described by rational-choice theory. People apply this logic when assessing different institutional services (such as healthcare and law and order) and when mapping the quality of governance (such as when assessing the level of corruption and equal treatment). At the same time, the authoritarian cultural orientation, which leads to unquestioning obedience to authorities, also contributes to determining people's degree of institutional trust. This is consistent with the claim of Ruscio (1996) that people may use both calculative and non-calculative approaches to form their institutional trust level. This also provides support for March and Olsen's (1998) claim that an actor's actions cannot be explained by a single form of logic.

Since the findings are based only on data from three South Asian countries, they have limited external validity. Nevertheless, they can be indicative for other countries where there is relatively high institutional trust despite poor governance and low performance of public institutions.

An authoritarian cultural orientation can operate as a pull factor for inflating trust; while in many OECD countries, post-materialistic culture and the rise of critical citizens (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Norris, 2011) operate as a push factor to reduce the level of institutional trust. These pull and push factors may explain the gap in institutional trust between many developing countries (non-OECD countries) and developed countries (OECD countries). They may also provide a possible explanation concerning the main research puzzle of the study. Although the authoritarian cultural orientation is an explanatory factor for the three countries' institutional trust, it does not necessarily help to explain inflated institutional trust in other under-performing countries. For these countries, inflated institutional trust could relate to other cultural factors, along with or without authoritarian cultural orientation.

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countries' institutional trust, it does not necessarily help to explain inflated institutional trust in other under-performing countries. For these countries, inflated institutional trust could relate to other cultural factors, along with or without an authoritarian cultural orientation.

The findings indicate the importance of a contextual understanding of countries when using perception-based data to measure the performance of civil services and governance quality. This is particularly so when comparing measured data across different countries.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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