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## Changing fortunes and attitudes: what determines the political trust in modern Russia?

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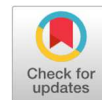
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**Changing fortunes and attitudes: what determines  
the political trust in modern Russia?**

**JEL Classification:** B52; D63; D73

**Keywords:** *political trust; levels of authority; subjective decile of wealth; interpersonal trust; mass media*

**Abstract**

**Research background:** We are guided by concepts linking political trust with the perceived rank of people in the wealth hierarchy, their confidence in other people, and the means they use to learn about events at home and abroad.

**Purpose of the article:** The aim of the article is to assess and analyse at the micro level the impact of subjective welfare, interpersonal trust and the intensity of usage of television & radio or the Internet to search for news on political trust in four levels of Russian government.

**Methods:** The study is based on microdata from the Life in Transition Surveys provided by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Ordinal logit regressions are constructed to

evaluate the impact of test and control variables on political trust in the Russian president, federal, regional, and local governments in 2010 and 2016.

**Findings & value added:** We identify a reverse of political trust in the upper levels of the Russian government between 2010 and 2016, when the impact of perceived welfare level changes from positive to negative. This phenomenon is explained by the focus of the policy of the federal centre on supporting the poor groups of the population, as well as its distancing from business. In contrast, the positive, albeit inconsistent, effect of subjective wealth on trust in lower-level governments is due to the benefits that businesses can gain from interaction with local authorities. We find the positive impact of controlled television and radio on trust in the upper echelons of power, along with the negative impact of the freer Internet on political trust in regional and local authorities. We also confirm the hypothesis of a positive and significant relationship between interpersonal and political trust, highlighting the role of social capital. Finally, our research shows that in systems of the hierarchical type, such as Russia, specific mechanisms for maintaining political trust are established. They are associated with the redistribution of public expectations and claims to different branches of government. The results obtained are applicable for managing political trust through building a democratic state and civil society.

## Introduction

Political trust is a guarantee of economic, social, and legal stability in a country, which significantly affects its economic development. Researchers investigated various factors of political trust at the macro and micro levels and developed a number of related theories and concepts.

A comprehensive socio-economic portrait of citizens who trust or distrust various authorities to some extent, is of particular research interest. This portrait covers their gender, age, education, level of income and welfare, as well as the way they receive information, their attitude towards other people, etc. One of the most important factors of political trust is the real or perceived rank of people in the income and wealth hierarchy, which depends both on their efforts and circumstances, and on the peculiarities of the country's economic policy. Sometimes, economic policy can be beneficial to certain groups of the population, which ultimately leads to their favourable attitude towards the authorities. The media also play an important role in managing political trust, shaping the image of a particular level of government. Apparently, their news agenda depends on who is controlling them.

In our study, we proceed from the assumption that the degree of political trust of specific groups of the population to various levels of government depends both on their subjective characteristics, their perception of the impact of economic policy on their own fortunes, and on their susceptibility to certain targeted manipulation. The research is based on data from Russia, where political trust is hierarchical and dynamic. We examine how changes in the economic and institutional environment in the country, affecting the structure of wealth and attitudes, lead to shifts in political trust

at different levels of power. This may be of interest for researchers and governments of other countries with similar socio-economic and institutional trends.

The purpose of our study is to empirically assess and analyse the influence of socio-economic factors on the trust of the Russian population in the federal, regional, and local authorities in context of changing economical and institutional environment. We investigate whether and to what extent the perceived level of welfare, the trust in other people, and the way people get information about events at home and abroad (television and radio versus the Internet) affect political trust in Russia. We also examine shifts in the structure of political trust between 2006 and 2016 and associate them with changes in governmental economic policy.

Our research is based on microdata from the Life in Transition Survey provided by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development for 2006, 2010, and 2016 (LiTS-I, II, and III, respectively). In order to assess the impact of socio-economic factors on political trust, we construct ordinal logit regressions.

The rest of the study is organised as follows. The Literature review section provides an overview of the relevant concepts of political trust. The Data and Methods section contains a detailed outline of the data used, their descriptive statistics, a general analysis of the changes in the structure of political trust in Russia, and the exposition of reasons for these shifts. There we also put forward research hypotheses and disclose the specifications of the models being evaluated. In the Results section, we provide estimates of all the developed models, analyse the results obtained, and draw conclusions regarding the confirmation or refutation of hypotheses. In the Discussion section, we assess our results and compare them with results of other authors. Conclusions summarise our research findings, reveal the limitations of the conducted analysis, and outline the prospects for its further development.

## **Literature review**

Trust is an interdisciplinary category that is studied by sociologists, economists, political scientists, and psychologists using their own tools. Therefore, even though we favour economic approaches in our research, we cannot ignore the multifaceted origins of trust. According to Levi and Stoker (2000, p. 476), a judgment of trust involves a belief in the reliability of a certain person, group or institution and in their competence in the relevant field. Political trust, being one of the types of trust, includes both people's

trust in political organisations (institutional political trust) and their trust in specific government officials (interpersonal political trust).

Lee *et al.* (2020) distinguish two approaches to political trust. According to the first approach, political trust is an assessment of how well the government performs its functions and how the political system responds to the needs of the people. The government's economic success in the economy can be evaluated both at the macro-level — through indicators of economic growth or unemployment rate, and at the micro-level — through indicators of personal economic welfare.

Within this approach, Malkina *et al.* (2020) examine the relationship between political trust and perceived efficiency and integrity (involvement in corruption) of Russian authorities. The authors conclude that the factor of efficiency prevailed in the model of political trust in the Russian president and federal authorities (people are ready to put up with alleged corruption at the top, as long as the authorities effectively solve their problems). However, in the model of political trust in local authorities in Russia, the influence of the corruption factor turned out to be predominant.

According to the second approach, outlined by Lee *et al.* (2020), political trust depends on social inequality. This approach also assumes two levels of analysis: the macro-level, when a generalised indicator of inequality, such as the Gini or Theil coefficient, is used to make cross-country or cross-time comparisons, and the micro-level, where the position of an individual in the income hierarchy is viewed as a factor of political trust. Moreover, some authors working with microdata provided evidence that subjective welfare is a more reliable and direct indicator of political trust than objective welfare (Zmerli & Castillo, 2015; Medve-Bálint & Boda, 2014; Loveless, 2016). At the same time, the ambiguous relationship between subjective wealth and political trust is attributed to the influence of other country — and individual — specific factors.

A number of researchers find that the effect of subjective wealth on political trust depends on the overall level of inequality. For example, in the study based on the European Social Survey 2010 (Medve-Bálint & Boda, 2014), the authors conclude that in Western European countries, governments enjoy more support from wealthy households, while in Central and Eastern Europe, governments are more trusted by the poor households. A comprehensive analysis based on data from World Values Surveys (Braun & Fatke, 2019) shows that in countries with low inequality, perceived belonging to a higher social class is positively associated with political trust, while in countries with high inequality this does not work. Finally, a number of researchers provide evidence that political trust is not only

affected by the level of inequality but also by the attitude towards it, as well as the perception of justice (Zmerli & Castillo, 2015; Chi & Kwon, 2016).

The researchers also investigated the relationship between interpersonal (social) and political trust, suggesting that both are associated with personality traits, perceptions, assessments and orientations of people in the social and political world (Cawvey *et al.*, 2018). Despite general agreement on the positive relationship between the two types of trust, the authors do not come to an unambiguous conclusion about their causal relationship (Newton *et al.*, 2018). On the one hand, in a society with a high level of social trust, representatives of the political elite can also enjoy it: interpersonal trust contributes to trust in the “system”. On the other hand, the adequacy and clear specification of the formal rules, as well as the effectiveness of sanctions for non-compliance, strengthen trust in society, that is, trust in the “system” enhances interpersonal trust.

The influence of mass media on political trust is the subject of particular interest. A number of studies focused on the impact of television on people’s trust in government, highlighting the importance of government control of major channels (Li, 2016). Some authors come to the conclusion that trust in government depends on which TV programs users prefer. In particular, consumers of entertainment channels appear to be more loyal to the government than consumers of TV news (Moy & Scheufele, 2000).

Regarding the influence of the Internet, some authors concluded that its proliferation had a negative impact on political trust and the level of citizens’ compliance (Im *et al.*, 2014; Guriev *et al.*, 2019). Porumbescu (2017) using a 2012 survey of Seoul citizens find that increased use of online media to obtain information about government reinforces the negative relationship between public sector performance expectations and satisfaction with public services and trust in government. In contrast, Lu *et al.* (2020) find a significant positive effect of Chinese citizens’ use of the Internet on their assessments of government performance, internal efficacy, and respect for government authority. This phenomenon is associated both with the specifics of Chinese culture and with state control over the Internet, internal censorship, and restriction of access to some foreign resources. Finally, authorities can build political credibility through online participation, increasing their transparency and responsiveness, and engaging the general public in important policy debates (Arshad & Khurram, 2020).

From the perspective of the current research, special attention should be paid to works devoted to the peculiarities of political trust in Russian society. The most important factors influencing the level of political trust in modern Russia (Terin, 2018) are the effectiveness of political institutions, personal experience of interaction with them and the perception of justice

in society. Some authors (Kozyreva & Smirnov, 2015), using data from a survey by the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, found a positive relationship between political (institutional) confidence and interpersonal trust in Russia.

Avdeeva (2019) shows that while Russia is inferior to the advanced economies in terms of social trust, some institutions, such as the armed forces, the church, and especially the president, enjoy the highest trust in the country. Moreover, trust in the head of state reached its peak in March 2014 — May 2018, which was due to political rather than economic factors (the Crimean campaign, opposition to the West, and the growth of patriotic sentiments). However, in June 2018, after the adoption of unpopular social measures (raising the retirement age and value added tax), confidence in the president, prime minister, and government in Russia dropped sharply. Thus, the study shows the sensitivity of political confidence in the president to those changes in economic policy that affect the living standards of Russians. In addition, Ananyev and Guriev (2017) find that political and social trust in Russia is influenced by economic cycles, which also affects living standards.

With a fairly wide coverage of the problem of political trust in the literature, we did not find comprehensive studies showing what factors and to what extent affect political trust in Russia, as well as how their influence changes over time. Our research should also shed light on what model of political trust is developing in Russia, and whether it has something in common with other countries.

The purpose of our current research is to assess at the micro-level the impact of subjective welfare, the way people seek information, and interpersonal trust on political trust in various levels of executive power in Russia: the president, federal, regional, and local governments.

## **Data, hypotheses development and methods**

Our study is based on data from the Life in Transition Survey (LiTS) provided by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development for the Russian Federation, namely on the LiTS-I (2006), LiTS-II (2010), and LiTS-III (2016) polls (<https://www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/economic-research-and-data/data/lits.html>). In each of the LiTS surveys, one or two adult household members (over 18 years of age) were interviewed in geographically stratified localities.

The advantage of this database is the representativeness of its sample data at the national level. In addition, it allows to link the socio-economic

characteristics of respondents to their institutional and political preferences. The third big advantage of the source is that it is external towards the national statistical bodies, which makes it more impartial and, therefore, more valuable from the standpoint of political independence of the current research. At the same time, for greater cogency, we compare this information with the data of national surveys. However, an important drawback of LiTS data is incomplete comparability of its questionnaires for different surveys, which limits our analysis.

The dependent variable in our study is the degree of respondents' trust in various government institutions (*political\_trust*). The respondents' answers were ranked on a Likert scale from 1 ("complete distrust") to 5 ("complete trust"). They could also refuse to answer this question ("not applicable").

The LiTS-I survey (2006) measured only trust in the Presidency and the government / cabinet of ministers (hereinafter referred to as *the president* and *the federal government*). In LiTS-II (2010) and LiTS-III (2016), the list of assessed authorities was expanded by including also *regional and local governments*. Therefore, our econometric models are built only on LiTS II and III data, which provide information about trust in all four levels of government.

The assessments of the Russian population's trust in various political institutions in dynamics are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Their analyses lead to several conclusions.

First, it is obvious that the Russian president, regardless of the chosen period, was trusted more than other authorities covered by this study. Moreover, trust in the president (complete or some) has increased from 54% in 2006 to 67% in 2016, with 10 percentage points accounted for completely trusting respondents. Second, trust in the federal government can be depicted by a bell-shaped curve: initially, it grew significantly from 27% in 2006 to 41% in 2010, and then slightly declined (to 39% in 2016). These dynamics can be explained by the rotation of key figures in public administration. Namely, in 2008–2012, the Russian president temporarily served as prime minister, which caused a shift of personal trust into the trust of the relevant government agency. Third, in contrast to the high trust in the federal authorities, respondents expressed much less confidence in regional and local governments. For example, in 2016, only 30% of respondents trusted sub-federal authorities, while the share of those who completely distrusted them amounted to about 40%. Moreover, between 2010 and 2016, the level of confidence in the regional and local governments in Russia even slightly decreased.



It should be emphasised that political trust scores based on the LiTS surveys are quite comparable with the national public opinion polls. For example, according to the Russian public opinion research centre VCIOM's political trust rating, in December 2006, 54% of respondents named the president of the Russian Federation as one of the most trustworthy politicians, and in December 2016, his trust rating rose to 62%. In addition, Fry *et al.* (2016) concluded that the national ratings of the Russian president are unlikely to have significant bias.

Our empirical study examines a number of factors influencing political trust in the four levels of government. The test variables in our study are:

- *wealth\_decile* – subjective level of wealth, measured on a decile scale;
- *TV* and *Internet* variables – frequency of using television and radio, as well as the Internet and e-mail to search for news in Russia and abroad, which is ranged from 1 “never” to 7 “daily”;
- *social\_trust* – the level of interpersonal trust, varying from 1 (“complete distrust”) to 5 (“complete trust”).

Their preliminary analysis allows us to put forward some research hypotheses.

In the mid-2000s, the Russian economy encountered with a moderate decline in the level of inequality and poverty. Indeed, according to the World Bank, the Gini coefficient for income inequality in Russia decreased from 0.410 in 2006 to 0.400 in 2010 and further to 0.368 in 2016. According to Rosstat data, this coefficient declined from 0.421 in 2010 to 0.412 in 2016. This could be a consequence of a number of social initiatives of the federal centre and an active redistribution policy in favour of low-income groups of the population and lagging regions (Zubarevich, 2017). As a result, the share of social transfers in the personal incomes in Russia increased from 13% in 2008 to 19% in 2016. This could provide the support of the central government from the poor. At the same time, the policy of distancing the federal centre from business, announced in the early 2000s, and the subsequent pressure on business, could reduce the credibility of the federal government from wealthier households.

Based on this, we can state *the first research hypothesis*: Since central government policies increasingly fueled income growth for poor households and limited opportunities for the rich, in the model of political trust in the president and the federal government, the effect of *wealth\_decile* should have declined significantly in 2016 compared to 2010. We even expect that the influence of this variable can change its sign from positive to negative.

However, low-income groups of the population often faced failures of the federal social initiatives in its implementation at the regional and local levels. While these failures were partially due to “unfunded mandates,” people could also associate them with the inefficiency or corruption of local leaders (Malkina *et al.*, 2020; Latov, 2019). This could have eroded the confidence of low-income households in regional and local authorities. At the same time, it is reasonable to assume that wealthy households were more loyal to regional and local governments, since through direct communication with them they could receive economic and institutional privileges. Based on this, we can state *the second research hypothesis*: in 2010 and 2016, the household wealth variable could have a positive effect on trust in regional and local governments.

The next hypothesis is related to the influence of *TV* and *Internet* (intensive use of the correspondent media to search for news) on the political credibility of various authorities.

Since the federal centre controls the main Russian TV and radio broadcasting channels, their news agenda is aimed at forming a positive image of the current government and maintaining the *status quo*. Therefore, we expect to find a positive correlation between the active use of television and radio to search for news and political trust in the upper echelons of power in Russia. At the same time, the Internet in Russia is a less regulated information space with a diversity of opinions and news, and its audience usually consists of people who have an active citizenship and consciously choose more credible sources. It should be noted that currently the Internet users are predominantly young, and usually more critical of the government around the world, albeit this is not typical for Russia (Gudkov *et al.*, 2020, p. 38). However, as the time passes by, the society of the Internet users becomes older and wider. Therefore, we expect that widespread utilisation of the World Wide Web as a search engine may affect the critical attitude of its users towards national and global affairs. In particular, it can undermine their confidence in the competence and integrity of the authorities and negatively affect the political credibility and reputation of some officials.

Thus, *the third research hypothesis* asserts that the active use of TV and radio broadcasting channels for receiving news positively affects the trust of Russian citizens in the federal centre, while the active use of the Internet for a similar purpose negatively affects their confidence in the authorities.

The last hypothesis of the study is related to interpersonal trust, which has undergone significant changes within the period under review. Figure 3 shows that between 2006 and 2010, the interpersonal trust in the Russian Federation — approximated by the sum of answers “complete trust” and “some trust” — rose substantially. However, by 2016, trust had dropped to

the level close to 2006. At the same time, the share of respondents who did not have a clear position (“neither trust, nor distrust”) increased sharply, by about 11 points, due to a decrease in both trusting and distrusting persons.

*The fourth research hypothesis* argues that shifts in interpersonal trust in Russian society may have an impact on political trust. We have to determine how this influence changed from 2010 to 2016.

In addition to test variables, we introduce a number of control variables in our models:

- *gender* is a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 for male and a value of 0 for female;
- *age* are two dummy variables that take a value of 1 for respondents aged 30–55 and over 55, respectively, and a value of 0 otherwise;
- *education* is an ordinal variable with 5 levels, where 1 is lower secondary education and below, and 5 is bachelor’s or master’s degree and above.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for all model variables (dependent, tested and control). For LiTS III data, they are weighted to reconstruct the general population, taking into account both the demographic structure of the population and its geographic stratification. For LiTS II data, weights are not available, which somewhat reduces the accuracy of the 2010 results. Dependencies are estimated using ordinal logit regressions, which can be represented as follows:

$$\text{logit}[P(Y \leq j)] = \log \left[ \frac{\pi_1 + \dots + \pi_j}{\pi_{j+1} + \dots + \pi_J} \right] = \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_k \cdot X_k \quad (1)$$

where the left-side part of this equation is the logarithm of the cumulative odds ratio;  $\pi_j$  is the probability that the dependent variable takes the value of  $j$ , and  $P(Y \leq j) = \pi_1 + \dots + \pi_j$  is the cumulative probability.  $Y$  is the dependent variable (*political\_trust*), while  $X_1, X_2, \dots, X_K$  are explanatory variables (*wealth\_decile*, *TV*, *Internet*, *social\_trust*, *gender*, *age*, *education*), and  $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_K$  are the  $K$  parameters of the model to be estimated.

In specifications of this type, either ordinal variables (Marien & Hooghe, 2011; Zhou & Jin, 2018; Wu & Wilkes, 2017) or a pool of binary variables (Lei, 2020) are used to transform all qualitative factors (such as education, the level of trust in other people, the frequency of using a particular source of information) into quantitative ones. We prefer the first approach because it is generally accepted in the literature and based on the Likert scale embedded in the surveys we use. In addition, the resulting es-

timates appear to be less information overloaded and easier to interpret. Finally, when evaluating the models for 2016, we again use the survey weight of each observation to improve the accuracy of the estimates.

## Results

Table 2 presents the results of modeling the influence of socio-economic factors on trust in the four investigated levels of Russian government (president, federal, regional, and local authorities) in 2010 based on LiTS-II data.

First, as we expected, in 2010 the subjective decile of household wealth (variable *wealth\_decile*) had a positive and statistically significant effect on political trust in all levels of government under consideration. The wealthier households signalised more loyalty to both the federal centre and regional and local authorities. Second, the *social\_trust* variable also had a positive and statistically significant effect on political trust: the more people trusted each other, the more they trusted the authorities. Third, citizens with a higher level of education showed less trust in all authorities than citizens with a lower level of education. This conclusion is consistent with results previously obtained for other countries (Seligson, 2002). Fourth, the older generation of Russians (over 55) generally showed greater confidence in the authorities (with the exception of local administrations). This is again quite an expected result: people with more life experience, on average, are less prone to express dissatisfaction with the current government. In addition, this group includes retirees whose wellbeing is highly prioritised by the declaration of the state social system. Fifth, the preference for television and radio as a source of information about events in the country and abroad had a positive effect on trust in the federal authorities — both the president and the cabinet of ministers. On the contrary, the intensive use of the Internet to search for news reduced trust in all levels of government without exception, albeit the estimated coefficients of the *Internet* variables in the logit regression were insignificant.

Table 3 presents the results of modeling the impact of socio-economic factors on trust in the four levels of government in 2016 based on LiTS-III data.

First, a comparison of the data in Tables 2 and 3 reveals a change in the direction of the relationship between the subjective decile of wealth and trust in the Russian president from positive to negative. Whereas in 2010 the president enjoyed greater trust by richer households, in 2016 relatively poorer households became the main loyalty group of the Russian leader.

Similar changes are observed in the model of trust in the federal government, although the impact of the welfare variable is much smaller and insignificant. Thus, we partially confirmed *the first research hypothesis* about a shift in public trust in the Russian leader from the rich to the poor.

Second, the effect of the subjective decile of household wealth on trust in regional and local administrations is still positive, meaning that sub-federal governments continue to inspire more confidence among the rich than the poor. However, the insignificance of the corresponding coefficients in the models for 2016 did not allow us to fully confirm *the second research hypothesis* (about the loyalty of wealthier households to local authorities).

Third, the influence of different media on trust in the authorities in 2016 has not fundamentally changed since 2006. The preference for television and radio to receive news continues to significantly and positively influence the credibility of the Russian leader. At the same time, the intensive use of the Internet to search for news is negatively and significantly associated with trust in regional and local authorities. Thus, we proved *the third research hypothesis*. Confidence in the Russian president is underpinned by the exposure to news through television and radio channels, while using the Internet for the same purpose undermines trust in all authorities, especially regional and local ones.

Finally, in 2016, the positive relationship between political trust in all levels of government and interpersonal trust in the country has become even stronger than in 2010, although we have not yet identified their causation. This confirms and clarifies *the fourth research hypothesis*.

## Discussion

Our research shows that political trust in modern Russia is differentiated depending on the level of government bodies. The Russians are more inclined to trust in the upper echelons of power. Moreover, the credibility of the president has even grown over the period under study.

Previously, this phenomenon was explained (Kiselev, 2014; Davyborets, 2016; Hutcheson & Petersson, 2016) by an exclusive role of Russian leader in ensuring internal order, achievements in solving citizens' problems, demonstrating the superpower status at the international level, the public activity of the president, control of federal centre over the main media, political culture and mentality of Russians (gullibility and paternalism). In our study, we look at this phenomenon from the perspective of changing fortunes and attitudes.

First of all, we found a shift in the structure of trust in the president in favour of the poor households. The policy pursued in the 2000s by the federal centre was increasingly focused on the active support of low-income groups of the population and depressed regions, which fueled paternalistic sentiments in the society. The support often took the form of “manual control”, which reinforced the role of the leader. This has gradually shaped the president’s image as a principal steward of public resources. The controlled media also portrayed him as the chief executive officer of the national economy.

Institutions aimed at creating wealth have been gradually supplanted by institutions aimed at redistributing wealth. The beneficiaries of this policy turned out to be quite large segments of the population with lower middle income, which increased confidence in the federal centre. At the same time, they often faced failures in the implementation of presidential decrees and government orders at subnational levels, which naturally reduced their confidence in regional and local authorities.

Thus, we have evidence of a hierarchical model of political trust built in Russia. A similar model is inherent to China, where public confidence in the central authorities is systematically higher than the confidence in municipal authorities (Li, 2016). Researchers have attributed this Chinese phenomenon to the political control accompanied by people’s fear of association and self-expression (Wu & Wilkes, 2017), the use of key media, including the Internet, for propaganda campaigns, and channeling claims and grievances from the centre to local authorities (Su *et al.*, 2016). The opposite of the hierarchical model is the pyramidal model of political trust, which is the characteristic of some advanced democracies. According to this model, the population trusts in local authorities more than in federal authorities because of the greater accessibility of the former (Frederickson & Frederickson, 1995; Chang & Chu, 2006).

The growing trust of low-income households in the federal centre supports the assumption of a hierarchical model of trust in Russia. However, the downside of this process is the relatively low confidence of the wealthy strata of the population in the supreme power. We attribute this to the distancing of the central government from business and the tightening of their relations. Meanwhile, businesses appear to continue to benefit from close engagement with local authorities (Malkina & Ovchinnikov, 2020). However, the trust of the wealthy in regional and local governments turned out to be less pronounced and stable, which does not compensate for the general loss of trust on the part of the poor.

The pronounced contribution of media control to confidence in government also supports a hierarchical model of political trust in Russia (Lu *et al.*,

2020). Finally, the significant and persistent positive relationship we found between political and interpersonal trust confirms the importance of social capital for trust (Keele, 2007). Thus, political trust is the subject of managing fortunes and attitudes.

## **Conclusions**

We have investigated the impact of socio-economic factors such as perceived wealth, interpersonal trust, and preference for different media (television and radio vs. the Internet) for news searches on political trust in various levels of the Russian government in 2006–2016. The study is based on micro-data from EBRD Life in Transition Economies Surveys (LiTS I, II, III).

As a result of the study, we have confirmed three of the four tested hypotheses and found evidence of a hierarchical model in Russia. First, we have proved that in 2010–2016 there occurred a reversal of the influence of the perceived level of wealth on political trust in the highest level of power in Russia. We explain this by the active redistributive policy of the state, as well as the distancing of the federal government from business. Second, on the contrary, we find a positive effect of subjective wealth on local government trust and attribute this to the benefits that business representatives can gain from a close cooperation with local authorities. However, the low robustness of this relationship did not allow us to fully confirm the second research hypothesis. Third, we demonstrate the positive impact of the controlled TV and radio on trust in the president and federal government and the negative impact of the freer Internet on political trust in regional and local authorities. Fourth, we confirm at the micro-level a positive and significant relationship between interpersonal and political trust in the country, and thus the role of social capital in building relationships between the authorities and the population.

In general, the study shows how changing institutional environment and economic policy affect political trust through their impact on the structure of wealth and attitudes. It testifies to the peculiarities of the hierarchical model of political trust in Russia, which is also characteristic of China and some other countries, where it may have its own characteristics.

The results obtained allow us to make a number of recommendations for the authorities. Importantly, political trust is fostered by economic policies aimed at reducing income inequality, but also by efficient and equitable management of public resources at all levels of government. The shaping of a healthy image of the authorities in the country plays an important role in

maintaining political trust. However, participation of the authorities in independent media is equally important for a more candid and impartial discussion of the issues the society faces.

Despite the correspondence of the obtained results to the logic of the political process in modern Russia, the study has some limitations. First, we linked the trust structure to the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents themselves. However, we left aside the question of how this trust is related to the characteristics of power, namely, the perceived efficiency of different governments and their involvement in corruption. Second, the proposed model specifications are still subject to further refinement to enhance the significance of the results obtained. Third, it would appear relevant to check how the use of other databases (in particular, World Values Survey) will affect the results of the study. We leave the solution to all these questions for the future.

Further development of the study is also envisaged in the coverage of more recent years, when notable events in the country (imposition of sanctions and counter-sanctions, toughening of the policy of protectionism and state dirigisme in the Russian economy, control over the mood of society) were supposed to affect political trust. The new study may also broaden the list of investigated bodies by including the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. All of these questions suggest a more profound research in the future.

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## Annex

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of variables

Variable	Designation	LiTS-2010		LiTS-2016	
		MV	SD	MV	SD
Dependent variable: trust in...					
- president	<i>political_trust</i>	3.43	0.08	3.88	0.07
- federal government	<i>political_trust</i>	3.12	0.08	3.08	0.08
- regional government	<i>political_trust</i>	2.86	0.08	2.82	0.09
- local government	<i>political_trust</i>	2.79	0.09	2.69	0.09
Explanatory variables					
Gender	<i>gender</i>	0.31	0.02	0.45	0.01
Age	<i>age</i>	46.57	0.74	46.00	0.97
Education	<i>education</i>	4.89	0.04	5.05	0.06
Subjective decile of wealth	<i>wealth_decile</i>	3.93	0.11	4.45	0.22
Interpersonal trust	<i>social_trust</i>	3.40	0.09	2.77	0.11
Use of TV and radio to search for news	<i>TV</i>	6.35	0.05	6.00	0.08
Use of the Internet and e-mail ...	<i>Internet</i>	3.01	0.11	4.39	0.16

Note: MV is the mean value, SD is the standard deviation.

Source: authors' own calculations based on LiTS-II (2010) and LiTS-III (2016).

**Table 2.** Results of modeling trust in various levels of Russian government in 2010 (ordinal logit regression)

Explanatory variables:	Dependent variable: <i>political_trust</i>			
	Coefficient (linearized standard error)			
	president	federal government	regional government	local government
<i>gender</i>				
man	-0.085 (0.109)	-0.004 (0.109)	-0.184* (0.100)	-0.124 (0.113)
woman (base)	-	-	-	-
<i>age</i>				
30-55	-0.052 (0.147)	-0.063 (0.138)	-0.113 (0.151)	-0.234* (0.141)
>55	0.565*** (0.185)	0.555*** (0.197)	0.437** (0.203)	0.251 (0.188)
<30 (base)	-	-	-	-
<i>education</i>	-0.204*** (0.065)	-0.164*** (0.066)	-0.143** (0.065)	-0.131** (0.058)

**Table 2.** Continued

Explanatory variables:	Dependent variable: <i>political_trust</i>			
	Coefficient (linearized standard error)			
	president	federal government	regional government	local government
<i>wealth_decile</i>	0.230*** (0.054)	0.199*** (0.049)	0.208*** (0.042)	0.186*** (0.037)
<i>social_trust</i>	0.371*** (0.073)	0.339*** (0.076)	0.329*** (0.070)	0.369*** (0.069)
<i>Internet</i>	-0.020 (0.031)	-0.024 (0.027)	-0.013 (0.029)	-0.025 (0.029)
<i>TV</i>	0.161*** (0.060)	0.172** (0.068)	0.021 (0.059)	0.025 (0.057)
Number of observations	1471	1422	1374	1431

Note: \*\*\* – the coefficient is significant at the level  $p < 0,01$ ; \*\* –  $p < 0,05$ ; \* –  $p < 0,1$ . The base is a dummy variable that takes a value of zero.

Source: authors' own calculations based on LiTS-II (2010).

**Table 3.** Results of modeling trust in various levels of Russian government in 2016 (ordinal logit regression)

Explanatory variables:	Dependent variable: <i>political_trust</i>			
	Coefficient (linearized standard error)			
	president	federal government	regional government	local government
<i>gender</i>				
man	-0.242 (0.256)	-0.254 (0.210)	-0.211 (0.148)	-0.174 (0.142)
woman (base)	-	-	-	-
<i>age</i>				
30-55	-0.271* (0.172)	-0.245 (0.248)	-0.280 (0.197)	-0.260 (0.176)
>55	0.012 (0.249)	-0.158 (0.246)	-0.306 (0.229)	-0.251 (0.209)
<30 (base)	-	-	-	-
<i>education</i>	-0.023 (0.075)	0.096 (0.069)	0.042 (0.069)	0.056 (0.069)
<i>wealth_decile</i>	-0.027 (0.057)	-0.002 (0.059)	0.047 (0.076)	0.103 (0.072)

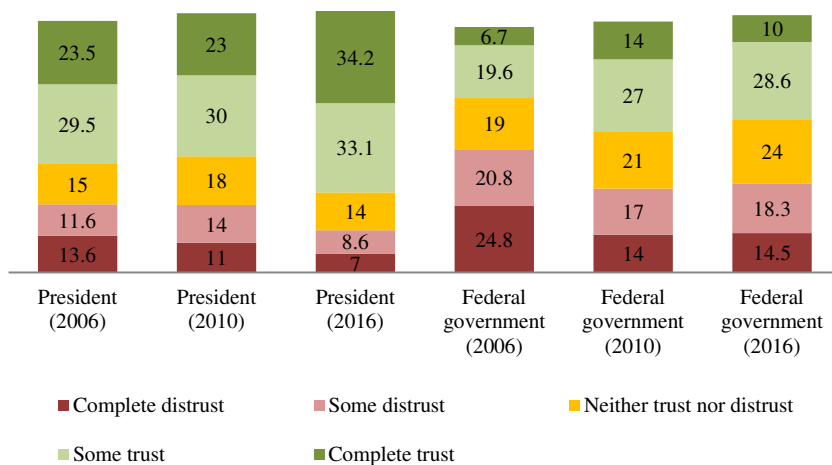
**Table 3.** Continued

Explanatory variables:	Dependent variable: <i>political_trust</i>			
	Coefficient (linearized standard error)			
	president	federal government	regional government	local government
<i>social_trust</i>	0.550*** (0.100)	0.508*** (0.138)	0.532*** (0.135)	0.448*** (0.130)
<i>Internet</i>	-0.065 (0.047)	-0.065 (0.048)	-0.123*** (0.039)	-0.108*** (0.034)
<i>TV</i>	0.135** (0.070)	0.025 (0.056)	-0.009 (0.054)	0.019 (0.044)
Number of observations	1353	1344	1337	1331

Note: \*\*\* – the coefficient is significant at the level  $p < 0,01$ ; \*\* –  $p < 0,05$ ; \* –  $p < 0,1$ . The base is a dummy variable that takes a value of zero.

Source: authors' own calculations based on LiTS-III (2016).

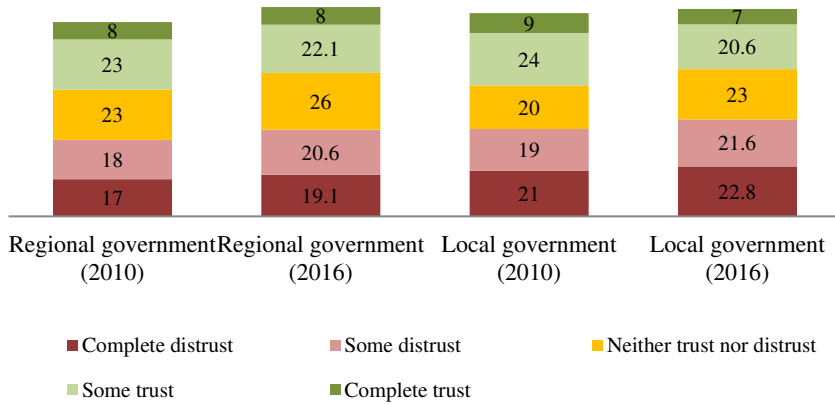
**Figure 1.** Trust in the highest levels of government in the Russian Federation



Note: excluding the answers “not applicable”.

Source: authors' own calculations based on LiTS-I (2006), LiTS-II (2010), LiTS-III (2016).

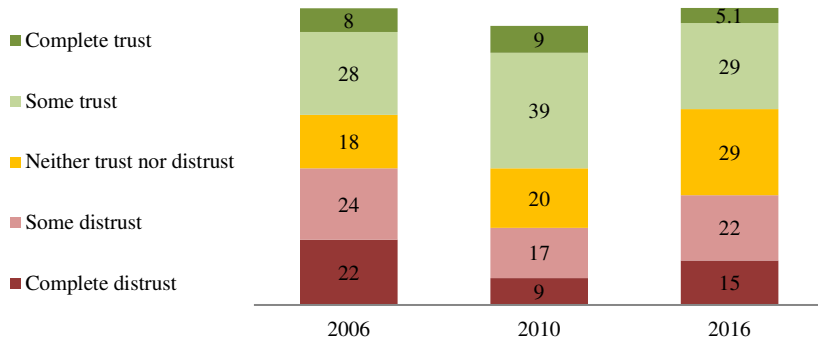
**Figure 2.** Trust in the lower levels of government in the Russian Federation



Note: excluding the answers “not applicable”.

Source: authors’ own calculations based on LiTS-II (2010), and LiTS-III (2016).

**Figure 3.** Interpersonal trust in the Russian Federation



Note: excluding the answers “not applicable”.

Source: authors’ own calculations based on LiTS-I (2006), LiTS-II (2010), and LiTS-III (2016).