

Jovana Zafirović¹

Institute of Social Sciences

Branka Matijević²

Institute of Social Sciences

Božidar Filipović³

University of Belgrade

Faculty for Special Education and Rehabilitation

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INSTITUTIONAL TRUST, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, AND CORRUPTION – A EUROPEAN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Institucionalno poverenje, politička participacija i korupcija – evropska komparativna perspektiva

ABSTRACT: *Despite the theoretical and political importance of the relationship between institutional trust and different forms of political participation in Europe, theoretical and empirical focus on post-industrial economies leave the literature wanting of explanations of cross-national variation in political participation. In this article, we test whether levels of corruption influence the relationship between institutional trust and participation. We rely on the 9th wave of the European Social Survey results for an in-depth analysis of the relationship between institutional trust, political participation, and perceived corruption in 27 countries. The multilevel regression analysis results show that the effect of institutional trust on institutionalised political participation (including voting) is moderated by corruption. However, corruption does not moderate the relationship between institutional trust and non-institutionalised forms of participation.*

KEYWORDS: *institutional trust, political participation, corruption, European Social Survey*

APSTRAKT: *Uprkos teorijskoj i političkoj važnosti odnosa između institucionalnog poverenja i različitih oblika političke participacije u Evropi, teorijski i empirijski fokus na postindustrijske ekonomije ostavlja literaturu u potrazi za objašnjenjima transnacionalnih varijacija u političkoj participaciji. U ovom članku testiramo da li na odnos institucionalnog poverenja i participacije utiče nivo korupcije. Za detaljnu analizu odnosa između institucionalnog poverenja, političkog učešća i percepcije korupcije u 27 zemalja, oslanjamo se na rezultate devetog*

1 jzafirovic@idn.org.rs

2 bmatijevic@idn.org.rs

3 filipovic.bozidar1@gmail.com

talasa Evropskog društvenog istraživanja. Rezultati multilevel regresione analize pokazuju da korupcija moderira odnos između institucionalnog poverenja i institucionalizovanog političkog učešća (uključujući glasanje). Međutim, korupcija ne utiče na odnos između institucionalnog poverenja i neinstitucionalizovanih oblika učešća.

KLJUČNE REČI: *institucionalno poverenje, politička participacija, korupcija, Evropsko društveno istraživanje*

Introduction

It could be argued that every state relies on each individual's rights and duties to be engaged in different aspects of political life. Many contemporary philosophers, social scientists, and politicians consider political participation as a subject of utmost importance. Any attempt to address such phenomenon has many facets that must be taken into account. Without a doubt, it is impossible to consider all meanings and uses of this notion. It is to an even lesser extent possible to explore all reasons and causes behind someone's readiness to be a part of a specific political process. Simultaneously, taking political participation as a relevant subject of research has theoretical and political implications, making any endeavour of such kind even more challenging. Political participation as such is part of many ongoing debates today. For example, insufficient political participation as an indicator of democratic deficit is often the question that many researchers want to tackle. Political participation is an integral part of the ebullient debate about populism (Zaslave et al., 2020; Pirro and Portos, 2021).

In order to be successful or at least meaningful, every political action must contain a certain level of trust in relevant political actors (individuals or groups). Still, contemporary liberal democracy is centred around institutions rather than mere groups and individuals (Hay, 2006: 3). Every major political crisis is at the same time a crisis of trust in political institutions. So, an optimal balance between institutionalised and non-institutionalised political participation is a certain way to measure the stability and functionality of the whole political system. "Several authors have claimed that both formal and informal types of political activity are crucial dimensions of citizenship, as well as basic conditions for sustainable democratic decision-making and viable political institutions (Ejrnæs, 2016: 2). A strong presence of different forms of non-institutionalised political participation, by itself, should not be seen as a sign of weakness or malaise.

On the contrary, acts of public protest, boycott, and petition signing are important for liberal democracy as much as institutionalised political participation (fieldwork and activism through a political party or non-government organisation). "Actively participating citizens who are involved in political decision-making processes are often seen as essential in ensuring a vibrant democracy, societal prosperity and stable social development" (Ejrnæs, 2016: 2). The exact role of trust in the political institutions and different sorts of political participation in a liberal democracy is still open for debate. Another

phenomenon that is detrimental to the functioning and stability of this political system is corruption. “But most who study corruption now argue that it is symptom as well as a cause of dysfunctions within democracies (de Leon, 1993; della Porta and Vannucci, 1999; Elster, 1989, 263–72; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Thompson, 1995). Corruption, it is increasingly noted, breaks the link between collective decision-making and people’s power to influence collective decisions through speaking and voting, the very link that defines democracy” (Warren, 2004: 328). The analysis of how corruption can mediate between institutional trust and political participation can provide new insights or call into question existing ones. It is challenging to grasp the interplay between trust in political institutions, (non) institutionalised political participation and corruption. There are so many ways in which mutual influences can be studied. In this paper, we will try to base our conclusion on empirical evidence produced by elaborate international research – European Social Survey.

Theory and Previous Research

Political Participation

According to Olsson, political “participation lies at the heart of democracy,” and it is a “key mechanism for a functioning democracy” (Olsson, 2014: 2, 4). However, as one author states, “there is of course no ‘true’ definition of political participation, but rather definitions have to be appropriately adopted so as to suit the research context” (Fox, 2013: 2). This statement is relevant in the case of our work as well. Generally speaking, Fox defines *political participation* as an “always active behaviour” that can be performed “by an individual or a group, with the aim of affecting individual or group concerns” (Fox, 2013: 6). The author also highlights that political participation must be voluntary (Fox, 2013: 6). However, since voter turnout, party membership, and other more conventional forms of political participation seem to be in a downturn, different “innovative ways of civic engagement seem to be on the rise in most liberal democracies” (Marien et al., 2010).

In this respect, Barnes and Kaase (1979) introduced a distinction between conventional and unconventional participation, which “relates to differences between acts, in relation to the formal political system” (Olsson, 2014: 10). However, more recent literature usually opts for a distinction between institutionalised and non-institutionalised forms of political participation (Olsson, 2014; Hooghe and Marien, 2013). As Hooghe and Marien eloquently summarise: “while institutionalised participation refers to all acts directly related to the institutional process (campaign activity, contacting elected officials, ...), non-institutionalised forms have no direct relation with the electoral process or the functioning of the political institutions” (Hooghe and Marien, 2013: 133–134). They also state that in fact “confirmatory factor analysis demonstrates these are distinct dimensions” (Hooghe and Marien, 2013: 139). Additionally, institutionalised forms of “participation are defined and organised by members

of the political elite (most notably political parties), while non-institutionalised forms of participation in practice are being used predominantly by non-elite actors” (Hooghe and Marien, 2013: 139).

Political participation is an act in which both higher-level contextual factors at the macro level and the actors’ individual resource endowments at the micro level have to be taken into account. Thus, political participation is the result of an individual assessment by an actor embedded in a number of different environments. Some of the individual factors which have proven as significant predictors of political participation in many countries are gender, age, educational level, employment status and union membership (Turner et al., 2020; Marien et al., 2010; Hooghe and Stolle, 2004; Milbrath and Goel, 1977). Moreover, recent studies have discussed both corruption and institutional trust as crucial factors influencing political participation (Sundstrom and Stockemer, 2015; Olsson, 2014; Hooghe and Marien, 2013). Yet, there have been no studies to the best of our knowledge that have attempted to carry out a differentiated country comparison of political participation concerning corruption and institutional trust.

When studying participation we rely on classical democratic theory. Kostadinova (2009: 692) defines democracy “as a pluralist competitive political system” where citizens through the voting process engage in decision-making. As stated before, accepting democracy as “rule by the people”, political participation is a “key mechanism for a functioning democracy” (Olsson, 2014: 3,4). Rooted in this is the idea of political equality where „every citizen, potentially affected by a decision, should have equal opportunities to affect it“ (ibid.) More precisely, democracy is attained by having a maximum participation of all people. However, according to Warren, situations where citizens start to lose belief in their ability to participate in decision-making, lead to democratic deficit of governments (Warren, 2009: 17). In our work we assume that citizens’ inability to participate could be caused by perceived corruption and lack of trust.

Corruption

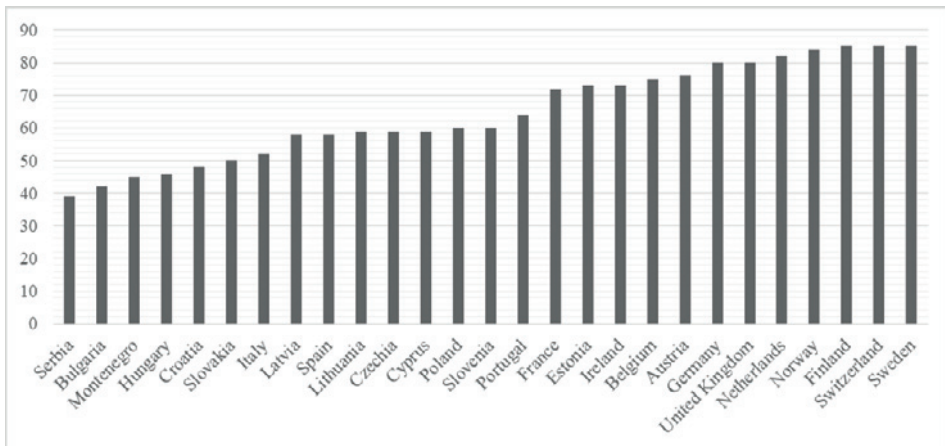
Corruption is another concept of central importance for our study. As in the previous cases, it can be said that it is the subject of numerous debates and disputes, “although is it difficult to agree on a precise definition, there is consensus that corruption refers to acts in which the power of public office is used for personal gain in a manner that contravenes the rules of the game” (Jain, 2001: 73). Corruption is generally perceived as detrimental to the stability and proper functioning of various public institutions since it “feeds upon economic inequality, low trust, and poor government performance” (Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005: 71). Furthermore, besides having “damaging effects on a country’s social, economic, and political development” corruption also undermines the values and legitimacy of democracy (Olsson, 2014: 8).

Corruption acts as a process of exclusion manifesting through reducing responsiveness, voting etc., thus demolishing the process of inclusion and democratic values (Olsson, 2014). Olsson argued that if perceived corruption

undermines democratic values, it inevitably impacts citizens' political behaviour hence shaping the will of political participation (ibid.). Except for undermining democratic values, through affecting citizen's responsiveness and will to participate, perceived corruption has one more important effect – creating “suspicion and eroding trust” (Warren, 2004: 329). The focus of our paper is corruption on a societal level since we are interested in corruption that concerns a particular state society relationship (Amundsen, 1999).

There are many cross-national differences in corruption levels across Europe (Maras and Tanzler, 2012). However, it is not possible to cover the political and social context of corruption in all European countries. Nevertheless, we can briefly offer an overview to highlight the complexities of the studied phenomenon. As can be noticed in Figure 1, according to Corruption Perception Index 2018 (the index scores on a scale of zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean)), some of the highest levels of corruption can be found in Serbia (39), Bulgaria (42), Montenegro (45), while some of the lowest can be found in Scandinavian countries such as Norway (84), Finland (85), Sweden (85) etc. Right behind them are the so-called “old democracies” of Western Europe, such as the United Kingdom (80), Germany (80), Netherlands (82) etc. We are interested in how these differences in corruption levels affect political participation and its relationship with institutional trust.

Figure 1. Corruption Perception Index in Europe, 2018



Source: Transparency International

Corruption and political participation

To fully understand the relationship between corruption, institutional trust, and political participation, it is appropriate to examine previous contributions on this topic. Recent studies have discussed corruption as an important factor influencing political participation, which resulted in two competing views on

the observed relationships (Sundstrom and Stockemer, 2015; Olsson, 2014). On the one hand, according to democratic theory, there is a claim of a “negative relationship between corruption and political participation [...]. Here, corruption is believed to decrease citizen’s willingness to engage in the political process and thus have a demobilising effect” (Olsson, 2014: 9). On the opposite side, “corruption is thought to have a mobilising effect in encouraging citizens to use their right to participate as a way to act against political actors’ abuse of power” (Stenberg, 2019: 9). This approach usually points out that citizens are engaging in the political process to change the existing situation about corruption.

At the same time, some studies show the ambiguity of the effect corruption has on political participation. For example, Kostadinova (2009) performed a study on the subject in post-communist East European countries, where results suggested that corruption may affect participation in opposite ways, directly – mobilising angered citizens to vote, while at the same time undermining trust in the power of voting (indirectly). Olsson pointed out that in mentioned studies, authors “only looked into voter turnout and research allowing stronger generalisations are still missing, for other types of political participation” (Olsson, 2014: 9).

Since we rely on democratic theory, we consider corruption as a demotivating factor. In other words, we share “the view that corruption is a plague that directly diminishes citizens’ participation in elections” (Sundstrom and Stockemer, 2015: 159). “But citizens who interpret corruption as an indication that they cannot trust their leaders may be less likely to participate because corruption signals to them that the government will not respond to their concerns” (Inman and Andrews, 2009: 7). Moreover, Olsson (2014) analysed the relationship between corruption perception (using both individual and country-level perceptions of corruption) and all three types of political participation. She used data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) data for 38 countries in the 2003–2006 period. The main finding of her study was the negative impact of societal corruption on all three types of political participation: non-institutionalised, institutionalised and voter turnout. Thus, relying on democratic theory and previous studies, we start from the following hypothesis:

H1: *Perceived corruption is negatively associated with all observed types of political participation.*

Institutional trust

Similarly, there is no clear consensus when it comes to the definition of institutional trust. Some authors define it as a measure of confidence in institutions (Rousseau et al., 1998), reduction of risk, voluntary state of vulnerability, etc. (Sønderskov & Dienesen, 2016). Regardless, *institutional trust* represents a “crucial element for the legitimacy of a democratic government” (Stenberg, 2019: 7) since it raises “questions about the receptivity of existing political public spheres, including parties and electoral systems, to the civic engagement of citizens” (Secor and O’Loughlin, 2005: 69). Some authors argue

that trust in institutions has declined in recent years (Twenge, Campbell, & Carter, 2014)⁴. Therefore, it is interesting to see how this decline, in turn, affects political participation.

Institutional trust and political participation

According to the literature, there is also a budding debate on the effect of trust in institutions on political participation. “While some authors claim that political trust is a prerequisite for any form of political participation to occur, others assume that a lack of trust can lead to a more intensive form of citizens’ participation” (Hooghe and Marien, 2013). Following the democratic theory of trust, Warren highlights “that trust thrives when institutions are structured so as to respond to communication. This requires (a) access to information and institutions structured so as to provide the necessary transparency, and (b) institutional means for challenging authorities, institutions, and trusted individuals” (Warren, 1999: 338).

Warren outlines a democratic theory of trust, where a certain level of distrust is seen as a needed element for democracy and its progress (Warren, 1999) since not all kinds of trust are good for democracy. Nevertheless, “it is increasingly clear”, he argues, that “certain kinds of trust are necessary to its stability, viability, and vitality” (Warren, 1999: 310). The challenge is in “conceiving of those kinds of trust that are good and necessary for democracy” (Warren, 1999: 310). According to this theory, trust represents a social base for different types of political participation to occur.

Relying on European Social Survey (2006) data including 25 countries, Hooghe and Marien (2013) confirmed that trust in institutions is positively associated with institutionalised forms of participation (including voting) and negatively with non-institutionalised forms. Somewhat in line with the proposed democratic theory of trust, “trust seems to boost institutionalised participation and voting in particular but reduces non-institutionalised participation” (Hooghe and Marien, 2013: 145). Hooghe and Quintelier (2014) make similar findings in this aspect, showing that non-institutionalised participation negatively correlates with institutional trust, although the effect of institutional trust on institutionalised participation was non-significant. Also, relying on European Social Survey data, observing four years (2002–2008), the negative impact of trust on non-

4 Here we can briefly recall one research on this topic: “While Scandinavian states display high trust, several EU member state countries like France and Poland display surprisingly low levels. At first glance, social trust might appear to be determined by geography or history (e.g. West vs. East Europe for example), yet we observe that countries like France, Greece, Portugal and Belgium have a majority of respondents under 0.5 (e.g. the dashed-line in Figure 1). At the country level, the vast majority of respondents in Sweden and Denmark, and also UK, Finland, Austria, Ireland and Netherlands say that they ‘trust others’, yet social trust is extremely low in many other European states. For example, in Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria and most regions in France, less than 30% of the citizens there say they can ‘trust others’, while in Czech Republic, Slovakia and Serbia, the number drops below 20%. These findings are consistent with recent empirical analyses” (Charron and Rothstein 2014:11). However, the limited scope of this work does not leave much room for more extensive analyses (see also: Smilov and Toplak 2007, Baldock 2016).

institutionalised participation was in line with previous research results, but the main difference was its non-significant impact on institutionalised participation. This finding might be due to different contexts: Hooghe and Quintelier's study focused only on Central and Eastern European countries. Anyhow, these results indicate a need to have a better understanding of the relationship between trust and political participation. According to Warren's democratic theory and previous research, we construct the following hypotheses:

H2a: Institutional trust is positively associated with institutionalised political participation (including voter turnout).

H2b: Institutional trust is negatively associated with non-institutionalised political participation.

*Why bother to participate? – the interplay of corruption,
trust and political participation*

Although we consider both corruption and institutional trust as important political factors influencing political participation, we suspect that those two factors are interrelated. Some authors state that corruption is “eroding the public's trust in government while damaging both the legitimacy and efficiency of the regime” (Stenberg, 2019: 8). Previous research demonstrates that perceived corruption diminishes confidence in institutions in particular (Kostadinova, 2009; Clausen et al., 2011, according to Ciziceno and Travaglino, 2019: 687). For example, “when individuals perceive institutions as corrupted, such institutions lose credibility in the eyes of the people and are seen as inefficient” (Pellegata and Memoli, 2016, according to Ciziceno and Travaglino, 2019: 687). Thus, a better understanding of the interplay between corruption, institutional trust and political participation is of great importance.

As mentioned before, societal context is essential for the functioning of trust since “trust manufactured within contexts where there are, in fact, conflicts of identity and interest is prone to disillusionment, precisely because [...] one of the conditions of warranted trust – namely, shared interests or identities between the truster and the trusted – is ambiguous, fragile, or simply missing” (Warren, 1999: 315). Or as Luhmann (1979: 54) puts it “in politics the lack of clarity in the mechanisms for the formation of trust is based, first of all, on the fact that [...] the impetus towards commitment – the investment beforehand – by the person trusting, and whatever he is putting his trust in, both evaporate into a cloud of uncertainty “. In other words, without a secure social basis, as is the case in highly corrupt societies, trust cannot thrive.

Additionally, Ciziceno and Travaglino (2019) investigated how perceived corruption impacts individuals' life satisfaction and “hypothesised that the more individuals perceive their environment as corrupt, the less they trust institutions” (Ciziceno and Travaglino, 2019: 698). The results showed an “indirect effect of perceived corruption on life satisfaction through institutional trust” (Ciziceno and Travaglino, 2019: 685). Sønderkov and Dinesen pointed out that “levels of social trust not being set in stone, but rather something that can be built up by

means of combating corruption and other institutional malfunctions that lead citizens to distrust institutions and, subsequently, other people” (Sønderskov and Dinesen, 2016: 197).

Relying on previous research and democratic theory, we suggest an indirect mechanism of corruption on political participation. This mechanism can be specified as corruption eroding individuals’ levels of trust since “corruption creates mistrusting citizens, who question their own capacity and potential to act politically” (Olsson, 2014: 13). As a consequence, corruption diminishes the motivation for citizens to participate politically. To put it in a nutshell, we wonder: if one cannot influence the result – why bother to participate? Bearing this possible mechanism in mind, we construct our novel hypothesis:

H3: *The relationship between institutional trust and observed types of political participation is mediated by the level of corruption.*

Data and methods

Data

In an attempt to investigate the relationship between institutional trust and political participation, the ninth wave of European Social Survey⁵ was employed. We use comparative data since there are considerable dissimilarities among countries regarding different forms of political participation. The survey contains a series of questions about political participation of respondents and their trust in different institutions. Data were collected in 2018–2020 through face-to-face interviews in 27 European countries. Additionally, we employ the Corruption Perception Index formulated by Transparency International for the year 2018.

Dependent Variable(s)

The European Social Survey provides a substantial list of political activities in which respondents can participate. *Institutionalised forms of participation* include working in a political party or action group at least once during the last 12 months and contacting government officials at least once during the last 12 months. Additionally, we analysed voting separately as another type of institutionalised political participation,⁶ thus following previous literature (Hooghe and Marien, 2013). Respondents were asked the question: “Some people don’t vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year]?” On the other hand, *non-institutionalised forms* include signing petitions, boycotting products, and attending public demonstrations.

In sum, our study investigated three dependent variables: institutionalised participation, non-institutionalised participation and voting. These variables are coded as binary variables with values: 0 – not done; 1 – done.

5 <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/download.html?r=9>

6 For the 27 countries of the ninth wave (ESS), the average year of elections is 2016.48 (question B13 in the ESS questionnaire). The calculation is based only on the years of the elections (months were not taken into account).

Independent variables

*Corruption Perception Index*⁷ is published by Transparency International and draws upon different data sources that capture the assessment of experts and business executives on corrupt behaviours in the public sector, including bribery, diversion of public funds, use of public office for private gain, nepotism in the civil service, and state capture. We used a measure of perceived corruption since, according to Kaufmann, “perceptions matter because agents base their actions on their perceptions, impressions and views” (Kaufmann et al., 2008: 3). Furthermore, sometimes “it is not the actual level of corruption that matters, but rather, it is how individuals perceive corruption that shapes our behavior” (Olsson, 2014: 18).

Institutional trust has been measured in different ways in prior studies. Some authors have looked at trust in political institutions/government, and some have focused on more broadly defined trust in institutions (Sønderskov and Dinesen 2014; Rothstein and Stolle, 2008). We follow the latter approach and measure institutional trust by questions on an eleven-point scale (0–10) on how much trust the respondents put in national institutions, more precisely in the parliament, the legal system, the police, the politicians, the political parties. Consequently, we constructed a simple additive scale of institutional trust (ranging from low trust – 0 to high trust – 10) based on trust in the five noted institutions (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$).

Control Variables

The age of respondents has been provided in the dataset of the European Social Survey. *The sex* of respondents is transformed into a dummy variable, and the reference category was set to females. *Household monthly income* per person is calculated by taking the total gross household monthly income divided by the total number of family members living under one roof. This variable is divided into ten deciles, where the 1st decile is the poorest and the 10th the richest. *Educational level* was measured by the question “About how many years of education have you completed, whether full-time or part-time?” and thus treated as a continuous variable. *Employment status* was a binary variable measured by the question “Can I just check, did you do any paid work of an hour or more in the last seven days?” where the reference category was set to employed people. *Union membership* was a binary variable measured by the question “Are you or have you ever been a member of a trade union or similar organisation? IF YES, is that currently or previously?” where respondents who reported that they are currently union members were coded as 1, and all others as 0. *Social trust* is measured by three items with answer categories based on an eleven-point scale (0–10); 1) ‘Would you say that most people can be trusted (10), or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people (0)?’; 2) ‘Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance (0), or would they try to be fair (10)?’; and 3) ‘Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful (10), or that they are mostly looking out for themselves (0)?’. A summary measure for these three items is constructed by calculating the mean sum score (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$).

7 <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2018/index/dnk>

Results

In order to analyse our cross-sectional data, we run several multilevel fixed effects models. Since all of our dependent variables are binary, multilevel logistic regression models are conducted in the R programming language. Therefore, the effects of independent variables are computed as odds ratios. An odds ratio is used to capture the effects in terms of a probability statement and interpret the results easily (Berglund, Kleven, and Ringdal, 2008).

Institutionalised Participation

To start with, our first regression model deals with institutionalised political participation. The null model shows that around 6% of the variation can be situated at the country level, judging by the Intra-Class Correlation Coefficient (ICC). Most of our indicators have a significant effect on the dependent variable. Corruption has a negative effect on institutionalised political participation, thus confirming our first hypothesis (H1). As corruption increases by one standard deviation, the odds of institutionalised participation decrease by a factor of 0.81. In other words, people who live in more corrupted societies are approximately 20% less likely to participate in politics through institutions. Institutional trust has a positive effect on institutionalised political participation. In other words, as institutional trust increases by one standard deviation, the odds of institutionalised participation increase by a factor of 1.07. More precisely, people who trust institutions are approximately 7% more likely to participate in politics through institutions. This result is meaningful since it is significant after controlling for income, employment, age, sex, education, and social trust and confirms our second hypothesis (H2a).

Table 1. Predictors of Institutionalised Political Participation

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Age	1.70***	(0.11)	1.77***	(0.11)	1.76***	(0.11)
Age Squared	0.69***	(0.11)	0.66***	(0.11)	0.67***	(0.11)
Male	0.80***	(0.03)	0.80***	(0.03)	0.80***	(0.03)
Union membership	1.59***	(0.05)	1.58***	(0.05)	1.58***	(0.05)
Education	1.38***	(0.02)	1.37***	(0.02)	1.37***	(0.02)
Income	1.17***	(0.02)	1.15***	(0.02)	1.16***	(0.02)
Unemployed	0.96	(0.04)	0.95	(0.04)	0.95	(0.04)
Social Trust			1.05**	(0.02)	1.05**	(0.02)
Institutional Trust			1.07***	(0.02)	1.11***	(0.02)
Corruption			0.81***	(0.06)	0.81***	(0.06)
Institutional Trust: Corruption					1.09***	(0.03)
AIC	23,293.84		23,230.00		23,221.20	
BIC	23,370.54		23,332.25		23,331.97	
ICC	0.035		0.018		0.018	
Observations	n	37,074	37,074	37,074	37,074	
	N	27	27	27	27	

Note: Entries are odds ratios and standard errors (between brackets) of a multilevel logistic regression.

Source: ESS 2020, 27 countries, weighted by anweight.

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

We run an additional model with the interaction term (Model 3) to determine how corruption moderates the relationship between institutional trust and institutionalised political participation. The results demonstrate that this interaction is significant and that corruption moderates the relationship between trust and participation. More precisely, when corruption increases for one standard deviation, the effect of institutional trust on institutionalised political participation also increases by a factor of 1.09. Judging by AIC and BIC values, the interaction term improves the model fit; therefore, we confirm our third hypothesis (H3).

Turning to control variables, age, education, income, being a trade union member, and social trust positively affect institutionalised participation. Age is the strongest predictor in terms of the magnitude of influence. In other words, older people, more educated, union members, and higher-income people are more likely to participate in politics through institutions. Men are more likely to participate in institutionalised participation compared to females.

Non-institutionalised participation

Our second regression model deals with non-institutionalised political participation. The null model shows that around 15 % of the variation can be situated at the country level, judging by the ICC. Most of our indicators have a significant effect on the dependent variable.

Corruption has a negative effect on non-institutionalised political participation. As corruption increases by one standard deviation, the odds of non-institutionalised participation decrease by a factor of 0.61. Namely, people who live in more corrupted societies are approximately 40% less likely to participate in politics in a non-institutionalised way. These findings confirm our first hypothesis (H1).

Another important indicator is institutional trust. Institutional trust has a negative effect on non-institutionalised political participation, confirming our second hypothesis (H2b). In other words, as institutional trust increases by one standard deviation, the odds of non-institutionalised participation decrease by a factor of 0.93. Specifically, people who trust institutions are approximately 7 % less likely to participate in politics in a non-institutionalised way. They are less likely to sign petitions, participate in public demonstrations or wear a campaign badge. This result is meaningful since it is significant after controlling for income, employment, age, sex, education, and social trust.

Table 2. Predictors of Non-institutionalised Political Participation

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Age	1.63***	(0.08)	1.67***	(0.08)	1.67***	(0.08)
Age Squared	0.56***	(0.08)	0.54***	(0.09)	0.53***	(0.09)
Male	1.09***	(0.03)	1.09***	(0.03)	1.09***	(0.03)
Union membership	1.53***	(0.04)	1.54***	(0.04)	1.54***	(0.04)
Education	1.55***	(0.01)	1.52***	(0.02)	1.51***	(0.02)
Income	1.22***	(0.01)	1.21***	(0.01)	1.21***	(0.01)
Unemployed	0.85**	(0.03)	0.83***	(0.03)	0.83**	(0.03)
Social Trust			1.24***	(0.02)	1.24***	(0.02)
Institutional Trust			0.93***	(0.02)	0.94***	(0.02)
Corruption			0.61***	(0.10)	0.61***	(0.10)
Institutional Trust: Corruption					1.03	(0.02)
AIC	33,659.52		33,429.72		33,429.25	
BIC	33,736.21		33,531.94		33,539.99	
ICC	0.136		0.064		0.064	
Observations	n	36,996	n	36,996	n	36,996
	N	27	N	27	N	27

Note: Entries are odds ratios and standard errors (between brackets) of a multilevel logistic regression.

Source: ESS 2020, 27 countries, weighted by anweight.

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

We run an additional model with the interaction term (Model 3) to determine how corruption moderates the relationship between institutional trust and non-institutionalised political participation. The results demonstrate that this interaction is not significant and that the interaction term does not substantially improve the model. Contrary to previous findings, this result does not confirm our third hypothesis (H3).

When it comes to control variables, age, education, income, being a trade union member, and social trust positively affect non-institutionalised participation. Age is the strongest predictor in terms of the magnitude of influence. To put it another way, older people, more educated, employed, union members, and higher-income people are also more likely to participate in politics in a non-institutionalised way. In contrast to institutionalised participation, females are more likely to participate in politics through non-institutionalised means.

Voting

Finally, our third regression model deals with voting as another form of institutionalised political participation. In this case, the null model shows that around 5% of the variation can be situated at the country level, judging by the ICC. Again, most of our indicators have a significant effect on the dependent variable. When it comes to corruption, it does not significantly affect voting. This finding is not in line with our first hypothesis (H1).

Institutional trust, as our dependent variable, has a positive effect on non-institutionalised political participation. In other words, as institutional trust increases by one standard deviation, the odds of non-institutionalised participation increase by a factor of 1.33. Specifically, people who trust institutions are approximately 33% more likely to vote. This result is meaningful since it is statistically significant after controlling for income, employment, age, sex, education, and social trust and confirms our first hypothesis (H2a).

We run an additional model with the interaction term (Model 3) to determine whether corruption moderates the relationship between institutional trust and voting. The results indicate that this interaction is significant and that the addition of the interaction term does substantially improve the model. More accurately, when corruption increases for one standard deviation, the effect of institutional trust on voting decreases by a factor of 0.90, and therefore our third hypothesis (H3) is confirmed.

Table 3. Predictors of Voting Turnout

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Age	2.44***	(0.10)	2.87***	(0.10)	2.92***	(0.10)
Age Squared	0.79***	(0.11)	0.66***	(0.11)	0.65***	(0.11)
Male	0.97	(0.03)	0.97	(0.03)	0.96	(0.03)
Union membership	1.54***	(0.06)	1.53***	(0.06)	1.53***	(0.06)
Education	1.45***	(0.02)	1.39***	(0.02)	1.39***	(0.02)
Income	1.40***	(0.02)	1.35***	(0.02)	1.35***	(0.02)
Unemployed	1.08	(0.04)	1.07	(0.04)	1.07	(0.04)
Social Trust			1.16***	(0.02)	1.16***	(0.02)
Institutional Trust			1.33***	(0.02)	1.29***	(0.02)
Corruption			0.98***	(0.10)	0.96***	(0.09)
Institutional Trust: Corruption					0.90***	(0.03)
AIC	23,126.97		22,717.54		22,701.47	
BIC	23,203.03		22,818.92		22,811.30	
ICC	0.064		0.057		0.054	
Observations	n	34,494	n	34,494	n	34,494
	N	27	N	27	N	27

Note: Entries are odds ratios and standard errors (between brackets) of a multilevel logistic regression.

Source: ESS 2020, 27 countries, weighted by anweight.

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

Addressing the control variables, age, education, income, being a trade union member, and social trust positively affect voting. Age is the strongest predictor in terms of the magnitude of influence. In other words, older people, more educated, union members, and higher-income people are also more likely to vote. There are no statistically significant differences when it comes to sex and employment.

Overall, Corruption Perception Index proved to be a significant predictor in both institutionalised and non-institutionalised forms of participation, negatively affecting both variables. On the other side, it does not affect voter turnout and, in that regard, does not wholly confirm our first hypothesis. Additionally, our results show that institutional trust is an essential predictor of all studied forms of political participation, which ultimately confirms our second hypothesis. When it comes to our third hypothesis, results demonstrate that corruption moderated the effect of trust in the case of institutionalised forms of participation and not in the case of non-institutionalised participation. For this reason, we can confirm it only partially.

Discussion

In this article, we examined whether corruption moderates the relationship between institutional trust and different types of political participation in Europe. In the case of corruption, the results of our analysis are not entirely consistent with previous findings. Corruption has proved to be another dominant predictor of political participation, therefore partially confirming our hypothesis. The effect of corruption on political participation was demobilising in respect of institutionalised and non-institutionalised participation, but with no effect on voter turnout in elections. This finding is to a certain degree in line with democratic theory that takes corruption as a demotivating factor for any type of participation (Sundstrom and Stockemer, 2015). These authors highlight the dangers of corruption to various public institutions' stability and proper functioning (Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005: 71). However, the findings prove that there is an ambiguity of the effect corruption has on political participation, given that there is no effect of corruption on voter turnout in elections. This particular result is not in line with democratic theory and our assumptions since corruption does not appear like "a plague that directly diminishes citizens' participation in elections" (Sundstrom and Stockemer, 2015: 159). As Kostadinova (2009) showed, this ambiguity might be explained by the fact that corruption affects participation in opposite ways.

Moreover, our findings demonstrate that trust in institutions has a positive (mobilising) effect on institutionalised participation (including voting and other forms), while in the case of non-institutionalised participation, the impact is negative (demobilising effect). These results confirm our hypothesis that institutional trust is another significant predictor of political participation. Additionally, they are in line with previous literature, which suggests that trust enhances institutionalised participation and voting in particular but reduces non-institutionalised participation (Hooghe and Marien, 2013: 145). However, it has to be acknowledged that the effect of trust was the strongest for the act of voting. As Hooghe and Marien (*ibid.*) state, the decline of trust might be an important causal factor for the observed voter turnout in a number of liberal democracies.

The main contribution of this paper is in the observed interplay between institutional trust and all types of political participation, which we find to be mediated by perceived corruption. From the onset, we suggested an indirect mechanism of corruption on political participation. As mentioned before, the democratic theory of trust highlights that trust cannot thrive without a strong social basis. In other words, highly corrupt societies cannot produce and sustain a stable social base for trust to proliferate. So, considering that corruption creates mistrusting citizens, they start questioning their potential to act politically. More precisely, corruption diminishes the motivation of citizens to act politically. The present analysis reveals that both variables are important and interact with each other. More precisely, our findings detected that perceived corruption mediates the relationship between institutional trust and political participation when it comes to institutionalised political participation and voting, but not in the case of non-institutionalised participation. The evidence presented in this article only partially confirms our third hypothesis. The higher the level of corruption in a country, the stronger the impact of trust on institutionalised participation is. For voting, however, in more corrupt countries, the impact of trust is weaker. This result might suggest that in highly corrupt countries, citizens who trust their institutions will usually opt for other forms of institutionalised participation. In this case, corruption and trust combined represent a strong mobilising force. For voting, the results indicate that the more trust people have in their institutions, they are more likely to vote. Even so, it seems that corruption demobilises those individuals who trust the system. Finally, even though trust and corruption, on their own, are related to non-institutionalised participation, for this type of participation we did not find any significant interaction effect. The ambiguity might be explained by a weak impact of trust on non-institutionalised participation altogether.

Perspective on studied problems is limited by the data we used in our analysis. The survey's methodological quality is beyond dispute (ESS), but it does not provide a comprehensive view on all the topics we analysed in this paper. Certainly, comprehensive surveys such as this cannot be focused on only one research problem or aspect. Moreover, both this study and previous studies call for more levels of analysis. In this paper, we dealt with corruption on a societal level, however, combining corruption on an individual and societal level might lead to more robust results.

The results of our analysis give us some significant insights into the relation of the phenomena mentioned above. Besides the importance of treating political participation as a complex phenomenon affected by numerous factors, our study contributes to probing the interrelated and complex relationship between institutional trust, perceived corruption, and various forms of political participation. However, future longitudinal studies might give us more insight into the studied interplay.

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Appendix:

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of dependent and independent variables

	Mean	SD	Range
Institutionalised political participation	0.16	0.37	0–1
Non-institutionalised political participation	0.35	0.48	0–1
Voting	1.78	0.42	1–2
Institutional Trust	5.48	2.19	1–11
Corruption	35.04	6.90	22–45