

Looking for trust in all the wrong places: Territorial predictors of trust in local authorities during a crisis

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**Keywords:** trust in local authorities, freedom of speech, democracy,

Trust can be a powerful predictor of human behaviour in modern societies, as represents the glue that maintains long-term and beneficial social relationships between both individuals and groups. Trust in national and local authorities can differ based on several factors, such as the level of proximity between citizens and authorities, the scope of responsibilities of the authorities, and the complexity of issues they deal with. Research suggests that people tend to have higher levels of trust in local institutions compared to national institutions. For example, a study conducted in the US (Pew Research Center, 2020) found that 68% of Americans had a favourable view of local government, while only 31% had a favourable view of the federal government.

While local and regional authorities in many European countries were given more responsibilities, our understanding of the factors that shape citizens' support for these levels of government remains limited. As such, we were interested in examining the level of trust in local institutions in a representative sample of Romanian citizens and its potential historical, social, political, and economic predictors. We also focused on the territorial characteristics (rural versus urban, economic prowess, responsibilities of various territorial policymakers) that may explain the variations in trust.

Our sample included 1205 Romanian respondents (45.4% rural, 51.7% women,  $Mage = 48.35$ ,  $SD = 16.22$ ). Participants filled in a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) questionnaire. We measured overall trust in local institutions, perceived level of assistance during crises, satisfaction with local institutions, drivers of trust, and respect for rights and freedoms.

Our results indicated that trust in local institutions varied depending on factors, such as the geographical regions with trust being the lowest in the Bucharest-Ilfov region - the most developed economic region - compared to all other regions in Romania). Furthermore, the best predictors for trust

are linked to satisfaction with local institutions' decisions and the assistance provided during crises, e.g. sanitary crises such as Covid-19.