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What is This?

Citizens' trust in public and political institutions in Nepal

**Steinar Askvik, Ishtiaq Jamil and
Tek Nath Dhakal**

Abstract

This article examines patterns of popular trust in political and public institutions in Nepal. We ask to what extent such trust is linked, on one hand, to citizens' social and political identities, and on the other hand, to citizens' perceptions of institutional performance. Our findings demonstrate that trust in public institutions varies extensively. Trust is high for a number of professional institutions, such as schools and hospitals. It is also quite high for local government institutions. Trust in the parliament and the government is much lower. Furthermore, the analysis reveals a weak relationship between institutional trust and identity variables. Demographic and social characteristics of participants, such as caste, and religious and political affiliations, have little significance in explaining the level of citizens' trust in political and public institutions. Such trust primarily depends upon how citizens assess the performance of these institutions. Hence, patterns of institutional trust depend on how participants evaluate the current macro-political situation in Nepal, whether recent political changes are judged to have gone in the right direction. In a more general and comparative perspective our findings from Nepal fit with a performance-based theory of institutional trust, while, to a large extent, they disconfirm identity-based explanations.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine patterns of popular trust in Nepalese public institutions.[1] We explore the extent to which such trust is linked, on one hand, to Nepalese citizens' perceptions of institutional performance, and on the other hand, to citizens' social and political identities. The study is based on the assumption that the more trust citizens have in public institutions and the process of governance, the closer the relationship will be between the state and society. A close relationship may enhance partnership between government and civil society, foster democratic practices and facilitate better provision of public services (Bak and Askvik, 2005; Bouckaert et al.,

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2005: 460; Evans, 1996; Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1993). In fact, trust in public institutions can be interpreted as a basic requirement for the proper workings of a democratic political regime; trust tends to promote popular support and reduce resistance to the regime.

Why is trust a relevant issue in Nepal? After recent political turmoil, Nepal has now opted for a democratic constitution and is undergoing reforms in order to reduce the influence of monarchism and elitism in the government. This (new) Nepal is promising to be more democratic, on the basis of greater inclusion and representation of all sections of the community. Trust is a key factor in achieving this. Trust is required to create consensus about the type of government people desire, the process of governance and enhancing collective action. Trust lowers transaction costs, it reduces risks and uncertainties in choosing between options, and it makes the actions of individuals and organizations more predictable and legitimate.

Concept of Institutional Trust

Our focus is on trust in public institutions. We assume that people may extend trust to organizations and institutions (Sztompka, 1999: 41–45). Such institutions are combined structures of rules, roles and human actors who generate activities, and people may trust or distrust such entities, depending upon how they perceive them and assess their actions. The kinds of institutions we focus on in this article include the key public and political institutions, that is, the parliament, the central government, the civil service, the judiciary and the police. When we asked to what extent did Nepalese citizens trust these institutions, we presupposed that they conceive of each institution as a combination of people, positions, procedures and processes. Such conceptions may be more or less stable and distinct, and they may be more or less anchored in valid information. In order to construct their pictures of government institutions, Nepalese citizens do not need to know in detail how various institutions are designed. Yet their conceptions of the parliament or the civil service imply that participants develop some expectations about the institutions in question, in particular how the institutions will act, and whether their actions will be beneficial to different social groups. A recent study from Bangladesh, for example, demonstrates that poor people may have quite elaborate conceptions of the history and structure of the national government; their sources of information may be mass media, exposure to election campaigns and personal experiences of civil servants (Ali and Hossain, 2006).

When citizens indicate that they trust certain institutions, we interpret this to mean that they find these institutions trustworthy; their opinion is based on the relevant institutional images they have constructed, and it accords with whatever criteria they use to decide whether an institution can be deemed trustworthy. Such criteria may come to expression as generic, normative expectations, but judgements of trustworthiness may also be based on whether institutions are seen as acting in the interest of specific groups. Thus members of an ethnic minority may distrust the civil service because they feel their interests are not properly represented by that institution. Yet the ethnic majority may find the same civil service quite trustworthy because they perceive it to be responsive to their needs. Such judgements of trustworthiness will, of course, depend upon the character of the institution in question and the specific, popular expectations directed towards each institution. More generally, Rothstein (2004) has proposed linking conceptions of trustworthiness to a distinction between two main types of democratic, political institutions. On one hand, he claims, institutions on the representational side of the political system, such as the parliament and the cabinet, will be assessed as being trustworthy when they properly represent the interests of the electorate. On the other hand, institutions such as judicial bodies and the civil service are expected to be impartial and fair in order to be considered trustworthy.

We distinguish between two main forms of institutional trust: trust judgements based on the social identity of groups; and trust judgements based on institutional performance. *Trust based on social identity* refers to a relationship in which trust primarily is extended to members of a group with a particular social identity. We assume that people tend to trust those they perceive to be bearers of a commonly shared identity, be it through extended family, social class, ethnicity, religion, geography and so forth. Such identity-based trust may be extended to public and political institutions when the institutions in question are seen as representing the interests and values of certain identity groups. In Nepal, for instance, these may be defined by social position, caste, or regional and religious affiliation. To what extent, we ask, are social identities affecting Nepalese citizens' trust in public institutions?

Performance-based trust denotes trust based on how citizens assess the current policy achievements of public institutions (Van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003). The main idea is that when citizens are satisfied with the output of relevant institutions, they will tend to trust and support them. Thus, from a performance perspective we ask: to what extent is institutional trust in Nepal linked to performance evaluations? Institutional performance may be evaluated from different perspectives. Political assessments may focus upon how democratic principles are developed and implemented, whether human and political rights are respected, whether elections are free and fair, and so on. Economic evaluations concern how government institutions contribute to economic growth and development, and whether they promote economic well-being. From their study of political support in post-communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union, Mishler and Rose (2002) conclude that assessments of political performance have had a greater impact than economic performance. However, as Pharr et al. (2000) observe, it is important to keep in mind that citizens' performance evaluations reflect subjective perceptions rather than objective measurements, and as such they are dependent upon access to information through mass media and other sources.

Institutional trust is treated as a dependent variable in our study because we argue that it is *democratic capital* (modern political institutions, electoral processes, social and economic structural reforms, and accountability) and not social capital (as argued by Putnam [1993]) that fosters democratic transition in post-colonial societies (Mitra, 2008: 557). According to the main argument of social capital, cultural attributes such as trust, civic associationism, shared norms and social networks in society trickle up to the political institutional level and make democracy work. Yet in contrast to this, in societies such as Nepal, where caste, religion and linguistic groups remain unchanged, it is the political structure rather than the social structure that is the main driving force behind social change. The same argument is presented in studies on Scandinavian countries – namely, that the performance and organization of democratic and bureaucratic institutions generate trust (Kumlin and Rothstein, 2005: 343; Rothstein, 2004).

Political Development and Cultural Diversity in Nepal

The issue of trust in public and political institutions is highly relevant in the Nepalese context due to varied and sometimes volatile political developments (Whelpton, 2005). The country in its present form was established as a kingdom more than two hundred years ago. Since then it has experienced the rule of at least a dozen kings, the Rana regime (1846–1951), the 'party less' Panchayat system (1960–1991), and now, through the Constituent Assembly, an elected government. After having been a Hindu kingdom, Nepal has now become a secular state; following the abolition of the monarchy it has become a federal democratic republic with a coalition government.

Nepal's experience with multi-party democracy has been mixed. In 1959, Nepal had an elected government for the first time, but this government was soon dissolved and replaced by Panchayat rule. In 1990, the Panchayat system was overthrown and multi-party democracy was established amid a strong people's movement. Within a year a democratic constitution was introduced, rendering the people sovereign for the first time.[2]

In 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal (a Maoist political party) started an armed insurgency in the quest for more justice, fairness and inclusion in governance, which almost destabilized the state. A lack of consensus among the political parties enabled King Gyanendra to seize power in 2005. Meanwhile, the mainstream political parties formed an alliance with the Maoist rebels and ended the decade-long violence and insurgency. As a result of the popular uprising, the king eventually relinquished power and an interim government, the major task of which was to hold elections to the Constituent Assembly, took over in 2006. The election was held in 2008. The Assembly was mandated to draft a new constitution for a so-called 'new Nepal'. Nevertheless, diverse regional interests, ethnic groups and hitherto neglected castes saw the process of democratization as an opportunity to put forward their demands. In the transition to democracy, numerous games of tug-of-war and horse-trading between political parties occurred.

Along with its political divisions and cleavages, the small Himalayan state can be described as being divided into castes, religions and ethnic groups (Berreman, 1979; Sharma, 1977). Hindu customs, values and traditions are deeply ingrained in the Nepalese society and are also nurtured in the various state institutions. The caste system constitutes an enduring form of social inequality despite national legislation outlawing caste discrimination (Stash and Hannum, 2001: 354). It is an integral part of the social structure, dividing people into different ranks and status, with different religious privileges and civil rights (Hardgrave, 1968: 1065).

By privileging the language and culture of high-caste Hindus, the state has marginalized non-Hindu and low-caste groups. Historically, members of the highest castes have owned the majority of land and enjoyed greater political and economic privileges. Members of lower castes have been excluded from political representation and economic opportunities. The untouchable castes were not permitted to own land, and their civil liberties were circumscribed by law. Today caste discrimination is officially illegal but it has not disappeared. In 1991, 80 per cent of positions in the civil service, army and police were filled by members of the two highest castes, namely Brahmins and Chettris, even though they comprise only 29 per cent of the total population. In 2004, 90 per cent of all higher positions in the civil service were still occupied by these same two castes (Jamil and Dangal, 2009: 201; http://www.everyculture.com/Ma-Ni/Nepal.html, accessed 27 November 2009; Population Census of 2001).

Given the diverse political development and cultural and ethnic variations, and in the context of a new political scenario with a newly elected Constituent Assembly, the issue of trust in public and political institutions may be crucial to the establishment of democracy and fair and just governance. If socio-economic and ethnic identities affect the level of trust in political and public institutions, then Nepal may have a long way to go to establish a legitimate form of governance acceptable to all its citizens. In a situation where trust tends to be limited to one's own caste, class and ethnicity, civic associationism and solidarity beyond group boundaries may be difficult to achieve, and may in turn inhibit democratic norms from gaining a firm foothold. Conversely, if trust in institutions is contingent on how policies reflect people's needs and demands, then political stability and proper functioning of democratic institutions are necessary to enhance trust.

Methodology

Our study is based on a country-wide, door-to-door questionnaire survey in which 1836 households participated (originally the intention was to survey 2000 households). The questionnaire was

developed in Belgium on the basis of the World Values Survey, European Social Survey and Citizen Governance: Quality and Trust in Government.[3]

In order to achieve a representative sample size from all Nepal's regions, we used the ecological and developmental criteria generally used to divide Nepal geographically: from east to west and from north to the south. In addition, a rural–urban classification was used to represent both urban and rural areas. Households were randomly selected.[4]

Nepal has three natural ecological regions but, for administrative purposes, is divided into five 'development regions'. The ecological divisions run from east to west, creating the Terai region (the southern plains bordering India), the Hill region (where the capital Kathmandu is located) and the Mountain region (a high mountainous area in the north bordering China). The Terai and Hill regions are densely populated, while the northern mountainous region is the least populated. The country's five development regions run north–south. These are the Eastern, Central, Western, Midwestern and Far Western regions.

By using these three ecological and five development regions to form a grid we end up with 15 divisions; for administrative purposes, these were further subdivided into 75 districts. Our survey's participants were randomly selected from 17 of the districts. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the sample according to ecological, developmental and rural–urban classifications.

According to the 2001 census, Nepal's population is around 75 per cent rural. In our survey, however, the ratio of urban to rural participants is almost even, meaning that urban areas are more heavily represented in our sample. After the selection of districts, households were selected from municipalities and village development committees (districts are further divided into village development committees, which are rural local governments; municipalities are urban local

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents According to Ecological Regions, Development Regions and Rural–Urban Classification

	Development regions	Districts	Ecological regions			Number of respondents
			Mountain	Hill	Terai	
Rural	WDR	Gorkha		100		100
		Mustang	45			45
	M/FWDR	Kalikot	46			46
		Darchula		71		71
		Kailali		103		103
		Banke			175	175
	CDR	Udaypur		100		100
		Mahottari			100	100
	EDR	Ilam			100	100
Urban	CDR	Kathmandu		197		197
		Lalitpur		99		99
		Bhaktapur		100		100
		Dolakha	100			100
	WDR	Kaski		200		200
		Kapilavastu			100	100
	M/FWDR	Dang			100	100
	EDR	Morang			100	100
Total	5 development regions	17 districts	191	970	675	1836

Note: EDR = Eastern Development Region, CDR = Central Development Region, WDR = Western Development Region, M/FWDR = Mid and Far Western Development Regions.

governments). Respondents from each household were selected on the basis of age (18 and above) and gender in order to obtain a representative sample of the population. In order to obtain a representative sample, every fifth household was selected and asked to answer the questionnaire. In the case of mountain districts such as Kalikot, Mustang and Darchula, every second household was selected because the population is sparse and scattered across a large geographical area.

Table 2 describes the demographic characteristics of our sample compared with the Population Census Data of 2001, carried out by the Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal. In spite of our intention of obtaining a representative sample, our sample is biased towards men, educated people and urban dwellers. The main reason is the ease of access to urban and educated male participants compared with rural participants. Moreover, urban and educated men are more politically aware, and hence are more willing to respond to a questionnaire than those living in rural areas. The survey was carried out in the period February–April 2008.

Patterns of Institutional Trust

As noted above, the dependent variable of our analysis is trust in public and political institutions. Table 3 presents the distribution of responses to the main question of how much confidence people have in the various institutions. Altogether 18 institutions were listed. In the table we have dichotomized the responses. For instance, for political parties, when adding together the two last categories

Table 2. Socio-demographic Distribution of Respondents Compared with the Population Census Data for 2001

Socio-demographic features	Respondents (our sample) (%)	Population Census Data of Nepal 2001[a] (%)
Gender		
Female	45	50
Male	55	50
Education		
Master degree or higher	5	54
Graduate	23	
Secondary	42	
Primary	5	
Literate	12	
Illiterate	12	46
Age groups		
61 and above	5	10
46–60	19	15
31–45	38	31
18–30	38	44
Religion		
Hindu	87	81
Buddhist	8	10
Muslim	3	4
Kirat	7	4
Christian	7	4
Others	4	4
Total	1836	Ca. 23 million

Note: [a]Population Census Data 2001, Central Bureau of Statistics, Kathmandu, Nepal (http://www.cbs.gov.np/national_report_2001.php, accessed 20 November 2008); (http://www.cbs.gov.np/statistical_year_book_content.php, accessed 7 August 2009).

Table 3. Trust in Nepal's Public Institutions

	'None at all' and 'Not much confidence'	'Quite a lot' and 'A great deal'
Political parties	74	27
King	70	29
Central government	55	45
Parliament	54	46
Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA)	51	49
Police	48	53
NGOs	44	56
Army	41	58
Civil service	41	59
Judiciary/courts	33	66
District development committee	31	70
Trade unions	29	71
Chief district administration office	28	72
Village/town development committee	24	76
Media	18	82
Hospital	14	85
University	10	89
School/college	9	91

Notes: N = 1418 (minimum) to 1775 (maximum).
The question asked was: I am going to name a number of organizations and institutions. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in it: Do you have a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?
'Don't know' respondents are defined as missing and excluded (for details, see Table A6 in the Appendix).

of responses, the sum indicates that 27 per cent of participants have 'positive' confidence in the political parties. We use this sum as an indicator of the overall amount of trust in each institution. In Table 3, institutions have been ordered from lowest trust at the top (political parties) to highest trust at the bottom (school/college).

We observe that there is great variation in people's trust of various institutions. The most popular institutions are schools and colleges, universities, hospitals and mass media. Local institutions such as village/town development committees, chief district administration offices and district development committees also attract extensive trust. Less popular are central national institutions such as the judiciary/courts, the civil service, the army and the police. Among civil society organizations, trade unions are more popular than NGOs. The central government and parliament also attract less trust than most other institutions. The king and political parties appear at the very bottom of the institutional trust ranking.

In general we interpret the high degree of trust in education and health institutions to be an expression of trust in professional knowledge systems, and the rankings mirror the international results from the World Values Surveys (Inglehart et al., 2004: E69–E80). The low level of trust in the political parties also mirrors the international rankings, in that parties appear at the very bottom of the institutional ranking list in the World Values Surveys. The positions of the central government and parliament are slightly above the international average; higher yet is the civil service. The media and the trade unions in Nepal, in contrast, apparently have a significantly higher standing than is the case internationally. Presumably this is a result of their recent activity.

The low degree of trust in political parties raises a serious question regarding the creation and maintenance of democracy. Low trust in political parties may be attributed to the democratic vacuum created by political infighting among the major political parties that has led to 13 governments in the period between 1991 and 2004. In addition, there has been 'intense dissatisfaction with the hegemonic rule of the caste and elite' (Adams, 2005: 124). The Maoist insurgency movement may be a result of such a political vacuum, elite hegemony, and exclusion of the rural poor, Dalits and indigenous communities. 'Intra-elite wrangling has undermined the legitimacy of the entire national-level political process' (Gordon, 2005: 586). Even after the fall of the monarchy, political leadership has been weak, divided and indecisive. People have now become disillusioned because the parties have become polarized and have failed to deliver either political stability or peace. This may explain why citizens exhibit such low levels of trust in politics: almost one and half years after the constituent assembly election held in April 2008, the assembly has failed to agree on basic features of governance and the state in 'new' Nepal.

The results presented in Table 3 may be compared with another public opinion poll carried out in Nepal some months before our own survey (Sharma and Sen, 2008: 22). Although the wording and the institutions included in this study are slightly different the reported responses to a similar question about institutional trust suggested that media were the most trustworthy institution, the cabinet and parliament were the least trustworthy, while the civil service, the police, the army and the judiciary fell in the middle group. Although this ranking is similar to our findings, the percentages are somewhat different. Unfortunately, this study did not include political parties and the king among relevant institutions. Nor did it include a number of the local government and professional institutions listed in Table 3.

More generally, the survey suggests that some institutions are less contested than others. Institutions relating to education, health, mass media and local government attract extensive trust. Our focus, however, is on confidence in the key political institutions of Nepal and we have concentrated on the following: the parliament, the central government, the civil service, the judicial branch of government and the police. These are less trusted than some of the professional and local institutions included in Table 3, yet they are probably more important. They are critical, we believe, for Nepal's nascent political regime. In the data analysis we assume that trust in these key governing institutions may be interpreted as having a strong common component, which provides the basis for constructing an index of institutional trust. This common component relates to the whole set of key institutions that is critical to the development of the new Nepal.

Originally we considered including the king and the army in the list of key national institutions, but an examination of the correlation matrix of institutional trust (see Appendix Table A1) and an exploratory principal components analysis (presented in Appendix Table A2: the two-factor model), suggested otherwise. If these two institutions were included, a two-factor model would be more appropriate for explaining variations in the data. Most probably, because they are seen as belonging to the old, toppled political regime, trust and distrust in these two particular institutions are not part of the common institutional trust pattern we seek to identify. The data indicates that this may also be the case with the police and the judiciary to some extent, but since they score high on both dimensions, we infer that they are also perceived as part of the new political system. Hence we have decided to include them in our index despite their association with the king and the army. Furthermore, in support of such a decision, when we include the five previously cited institutions, principal component analysis produces a one-factor model, which explains more than 50 per cent of the total variation in trust (Appendix Table A2: one-factor model). The high factor scores of the police and the judiciary definitely suggest that they are influenced by the common factor.

We interpret the above analysis as supporting our assumption that we can use the responses to the five institutions as indicators of a generalized, common trust in central governance institutions in Nepal's emerging political regime at the time of the data collection. On the basis of the analysis, we have created an index of trust in the core institutions (see Appendix Table A2). The index will be used as a measure of our dependent variable. The index varies between 0 and 15, where 0 means that a participant has no confidence at all in any of the five mentioned institutions, and 15 means that a participant has a great deal of confidence in all five institutions. Of the total distribution, 2.6 per cent of participants have a minimum score of 0, and 4 per cent have a maximum score of 15 (mean = 7.23).

At this point we should also note two potential problems with the results presented in Table 3. One arises from the biased sample and an overrepresentation of educated participants (mentioned in the methodology section). In so far as we may want to generalize our findings to all of Nepal, the institutional trust pattern may be distorted as a result of such overrepresentation. However, a weighting of the sample (not documented here) in order to increase the proportion of uneducated participants from 24 per cent to almost 50 per cent renders no significant impact on the trust pattern presented above. This is probably due to the lack of significant correlation between education and institutional trust (documented in the next section).

Another statistical challenge is posed by the large number of missing participants, classified as 'don't know', and excluded from the data analysis. We interpret 'don't know' to mean that participants feel they lack sufficient information to assess the trustworthiness of an institution. An inspection of the 'don't know' category reveals that significant variation exists among the different institutions in this regard (see Appendix Table A6). While less than 5 per cent of participants did not know whether they trusted such institutions as hospitals, schools and the police, more than 20 per cent indicate similar uncertainties with regard to the CIAA and NGOs. For the trust index, 27 per cent fall into this category, meaning that such participants have failed to reveal their trust in at least one of the five relevant institutions. Furthermore, our inspection of the 'don't know' participants also suggests significant variation based on gender and education. Women and those without formal schooling are clearly more inclined to fall into this category; whereas the proportion of men who don't know is 20 per cent, it is 36 per cent for women. Education is also highly influential. Whereas the proportion who don't know is 48 per cent for uneducated participants, it is 20 per cent for educated persons. There seems to be no such differences between participants coming from urban and rural areas.

In retrospect we are inclined to think of 'I don't know' as a legitimate and highly relevant response in a context where people lack information about the institutions in question. When a significant proportion of participants do not know whether they find an institution trustworthy, this represents an important observation about institutional trust in Nepal, and it is interesting to note that education and gender seem to be strongly linked to variations in such response rates. With that said, we exclude the 'don't know' group from further analysis in the present article and concentrate on those who explicitly express trust or distrust of various public and political institutions. This implies, of course, that we should be careful not to generalize our finding beyond the latter group. We acknowledge that the group of people who feel that they are not in a position to make trust judgements may comprise as many as one out of three of the adult population.

Sources of Identity-based Trust

In this section, we will explore how potential identity factors may affect trust in public institutions. The general hypothesis is that membership in various social groups may affect such trust because

Table 4. Regression Analyses of Identity Variables on Trust in Public Institutions

	Demography, education, social position	Caste and religion	Political identities	Combined model
Age: high	0.035			0.006
Gender: female	0.034			0.075
Area: rural	0.206***			0.167***
Region: Terai	0.111**			0.084*
Formal education	−0.009			−0.030
Civil servant	0.046			0.047
Social class	−0.034			−0.006
(Brahmin)		–		–
Chettri		0.006		−0.058
Baysha		−0.051		−0.063
Sudra		−0.059		−0.080*
(Hindu)		–		–
Buddhist		−0.043		0.010
Muslim		−0.007		–
Religious		0.090**		0.096*
Nationalism			0.164***	0.121**
Political interest			0.095**	0.120**
Congress			0.080**	0.085*
UML			0.075*	0.076
Maoist			0.006	0.025
Explained variance (R^2)	0.057	0.011	0.047	0.096
N	926	1155	1208	713

Notes: *$p < 0.05$, **$p < .001$, ***$p < 0.000$.
Dependent variable = trust index. Method = enter. Missing = listwise. Standardized beta coefficients.
The Brahmin caste and the Hindu religion are excluded from the analyses because they were used as reference categories. Also, with respect to religion, a small non-uniform group (1.8%) of Christians, Kirats and others were removed from the analyses. Multicollinearity among independent variables was not a problem since the highest Pearson's r was 0.31.

these groups for some reason identify with the institutions in question. Employing regression analysis techniques, we distinguish between three main potential sources of identity-based trust:

(1) One group of sources encompasses variables related to demography, education and social position. We have examined to what extent variables such as age, gender, area in which the participant lives, region, formal education, employment sector and social class affect trust in public institutions. When we combine these independent variables together in one regression model, it appears that this model can only explain 5.7 per cent of the total variation in the institutional trust index (see Table 4). Most of the individual variables in the model do not have a significant impact. Yet the two variables indicating rural/urban living suggest that people living in rural (as opposed to urban) areas and the population of the Terai region are more inclined to trust public institutions.

(2) The second group of independent variables we have examined in relation to identity-based trust encompasses caste and religion. We have examined to what extent Chettris, Bayshas and Sudras deviate significantly from other castes in terms of trust scores, and whether Buddhists or Muslims differ from Hindus. The amount of explained variance is again very limited: only 1.1 per cent. Table 4 suggests that there are no significant differences among

different castes and among the main religions. How participants view public institutions is only marginally affected by which specific caste or religion they belong to. The only exception is the more generic religiosity of participants: whether they see themselves as religious or not. The data suggest that people who see themselves as religious, regardless of which belief system they adhere to, are more inclined to trust the public institutions than, for instance, atheists or persons lacking strong religious belief. Yet the correlation is very small and the overall finding is that the impact of caste and religion is very limited.

(3) The third group of variables that may be linked to identity is labelled 'political identities'. In Table 4 we have used this to denote whether participants are proud of their Nepalese citizenship, whether they are interested in politics and which political party they support. From the results it appears that, altogether, this model explains 4.7 per cent of the variation in trust. Four variables render significant beta coefficients, and the interviewees who support the Maoists are the only ones who differ systematically from the other political parties in terms of institutional trust. Thus, if a citizen considers him- or herself proud to be Nepalese, they are more inclined to trust public institutions. This is also the case if they are a political activist. Likewise, if a participant supports the Congress Party or the Unified Marxist Leninist Party (UML) they are probably more prone to trust public institutions. Although the total amount of explained variance is rather limited, the number of significant coefficients suggests that political identities may affect institutional trust patterns in certain ways, and more than caste and religion do.

(4) In a combined model we have included all the identity variables in one regression equation. This model explains almost 10 per cent of the total variation, which is clearly more than any of the other models. From Table 4 it appears that most of the coefficients stand out as statistically significant even when we expand the number of independent variables. Thus, following from demographic identity characteristics, if participants are living in a rural area, and/ or if they are from the Terai region, they are more inclined to trust public institutions. With respect to religious identity characteristics, in the combined model there is also an indication that participants viewing themselves as religious are more trusting, while those who classify themselves as Sudra are slightly less trusting of public institutions. From the political identity characteristics we can infer that taking pride in being a Nepalese citizen and/or expressing interest in politics contribute positively to institutional trust. So also does political support of the Congress Party.

In general, however, we may conclude from this part of our analysis that the impact of identity variables on institutional trust is limited. Although we do find some correlation, the overall impression is that none of them is very strong.

Sources of Performance-based Trust

We shall now pursue the other main perspective on trust in public institutions, namely, that such trust primarily results from popular performance appraisals of government institutions and policies. We again begin by identifying different models in order to evaluate the extent to which they are able to explain variance in institutional trust. The five relevant models are presented in Table 5. We are aware, of course, that the regression techniques we use cannot prove the direction of causality between our dependent and independent variables. In many cases we could also construct explanatory models where institutional trust acts as an independent variable impacting performance evaluations (Van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003). The purpose of this article, however, is

Table 5. Regression Analyses of Performance Variables on Trust in Public Institutions

	Personal well-being	Democratic development	Views on politicians	Views on civil servants	Policy evaluations	Combined model
Satisfied with life as a whole	0.084*					0.047
Satisfied with life 5 yrs ago	−0.018					−0.014
Satisfied with present financial situation	0.085*					0.037
How well is political system today		0.076*				0.042
How well was political system 5 yrs after		0.104***				0.094**
Democracy developing		0.140***				0.106**
People at national office handling country		0.309***				0.228***
This country is run for benefit of all people		0.145***				0.086**
Most politicians are competent and know what they are doing			0.126***			0.007
Politicians do what is right most of time			0.207***			0.087**
Civil servants – prompt and efficient				0.260***		0.114****
Not helpful				−0.146***		−0.084**
Reliable				0.146***		0.030
Service delivery index					0.278***	0.117***
Policy performance Index					−0.102***	0.019
Explained variance (R^2)	0.017	0.263	0.070	0.151	0.108	0.309
N	1202	1054	1263	1234	1338	884

Notes: *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.000$.
Dependent variable = trust index. Method = enter. Missing = listwise. Standardized beta coefficients.
Multicollinearity among independent variables was not be a problem since the highest
Pearson's r equalled −0.43 and the lowest tolerance statistic was 0.60.

primarily to study institutional trust as a dependent variable, and to see how far different explanatory models can take us when we use regression techniques.

(1) The first model is a straightforward attempt to examine whether the personal well-being of participants influences their trust in public institutions. The underlying assumption is that if people feel satisfied with life or their financial situation, they may attribute such satisfaction to public policies and thus be more inclined to trust the institutions responsible for those policies. Although two out of three effects are statistically significant and suggest some support for the hypothesis, the amount of explained variance (1.7 per cent) is limited.

(2) The second model focuses on how participants view the current and previous political systems of Nepal and how they assess the development toward full democracy. From Table 5 it appears that positive evaluations of the political system, both of today and yesterday, are clearly linked to participants' trust judgements. All the coefficients are statistically significant, and one coefficient in particular suggests a strong relationship

between institutional trust and to what extent the people now holding public office are satisfactorily handling the country's affairs. For the five variables taken together, the amount of 26 per cent of the variance is explained. This demonstrates that assessments of political system performance and democratic development constitute an important component of institutional trust evaluations.

(3) A third model taps into the impact of popular attitudes toward politicians. To what degree are politicians perceived as competent? Do they know what they are doing? Are they, in fact, doing what is right most of the time? Although the survey questionnaire contains a number of questions about politicians, these three questions seem to be the ones that most clearly link attitudes toward politicians to institutional trust judgements. For both variables the coefficients reveal significant statistics. From Table 5 it appears that the amount of explained variance is about 7 per cent, thus indicating that popular attitudes toward politicians' behaviour are relevant for the overall interpretation of how institutional trust evaluations vary.

(4) The fourth performance-based model we test in trying to explain variations in institutional trust judgements approaches trust from the perspective of the populace's views of civil servants. From several questions about civil servants, we have identified three variables that seem to influence our dependent variable more than others: whether civil servants are perceived to be prompt and efficient, whether they are experienced as unhelpful and whether they are seen as reliable. The resulting statistics demonstrate that all of these variables are linked to evaluations of institutional trust. The explanatory power of this model is about 15 per cent, suggesting that performance evaluations of civil servants are more important than similar appraisals of politicians.

(5) The fifth model introduced in Table 5 considers how participants indirectly assess policy performance in different areas. We constructed two indexes from two batteries of questions: the first index is based on how participants judge the delivery of certain services (for example, education, health, law and order, electricity supply and so on), altogether 21 service areas were included. The second is based on how participants assess policy performance in eight areas: poverty reduction, anti-crime measures, promoting security, generating employment, controlling pollution, family planning, controlling corruption and controlling human trafficking. For each battery of questions we have adopted the average score as an index of service delivery and policy performance. Once again, the results show that performance evaluations do explain significant variations in participants' institutional trust. The total amount of explained variance is almost 11 per cent. The impact of service delivery is the more powerful of the two indexes.

(6) In the final model we have combined all performance variables in one regression analysis. The combined model explains almost 31 per cent of the variation. Although this is barely 5 per cent greater than the democratic development model, it is greater than any of the other models. Most of the original beta coefficients are reduced in the combined model and some are no longer statistically significant. Thus, the variables measuring personal well-being become insignificant in the combined model. So also do variables such as satisfaction with the present political system, politicians' competence, civil servants' reliability and the policy performance index. Satisfaction with incumbents of government offices stands out as the most important single variable of the combined regression model. Four out of seven significant coefficients are linked to development towards greater democracy, suggesting that assessments of democratic performance probably are the most important components of trust in public institutions in Nepal.

Conclusion

Our analysis has addressed the issue of popular trust in Nepalese public institutions at a time when the political regime is changing and efforts are being made to strengthen democracy. Starting from an assumption that political trust is critical for the survival of any democratic regime, we wanted to examine to what extent Nepalese citizens trust public and political institutions, and how such trust judgements are affected by identity- and performance-based evaluations.

Our findings demonstrate, first, that trust varies extensively from one public institution to another. Trust is high for a number of professional institutions, such as schools and hospitals. It is also quite high for local government institutions such as the village/town and district development committees. Trust in the courts, the civil service, the parliament and the government is lower. Political parties and the monarchy garner markedly little trust, since less than one out of thee participants indicate that they trust these institutions. We also noted that the large proportion of participants who 'don't know' suggests that many Nepalese probably have very vague images of the institutions in question.

In a second step we analysed how institutional trust patterns differ among different social and political groups. Asking whether various types of group-based identities affect trust patterns, we compared the power of three different regression models for explaining variance in institutional trust. Model 1 was based on the demographic and social characteristic of participants, model 2 was linked to caste and religion as sources of identity and model 3 used political identities as its starting point. For all three models the explanatory power was rather limited, and the combined model, which included all the relevant independent variables, explained less than 10 per cent of the total variance in institutional trust. In general, we conclude that identities do not appear to be prominent factors for explaining variations of institutional trust in Nepal.

In a final step we pursued an alternative set of explanations based on what we labelled the 'performance hypothesis', that is, that trust in public institutions primarily depends upon how citizens assess the performance of such institutions. We also compared the explanatory power of different models such as participants' assessments of personal well-being, democracy development, politicians, civil servants, and policy performance in different areas. Our findings suggest that all types of performance assessments, except those linked to personal well-being, are relevant. Yet the model which best fits the data is the one that tries to explain institutional trust based on assessments of development toward democracy.

The weak relationship between identity variables and institutional trust is to some extent surprising. Other observers has emphasized that Nepal's political institutions have until recently been excluding significant socio-cultural groups from democratic participation (for example, Lawoti, 2007). Hence, we could have expected more differentiation between advantaged and disadvantaged groups in terms of institutional support. This seems not to be the case. Our findings probably represent good news for Nepal, suggesting that trust is not dependent on ethnic, religious and social identities. In contrast, the greater explanatory power of the performance model indicates that better performance of political institutions enhances citizens' trust in these institutions. Positive interaction and experience with public institutions builds confidence among people in these organizations, which may in turn foster the development of democratic institutions in Nepal. Thus, in regard to the consolidation of the nascent democratic system in Nepal, our findings emphasize the significance of building trustworthy and sustainable institutions that observe democratic principles and acknowledge all citizens' democratic rights. A new Nepal is more likely to take shape when people's confidence in public and political institutions is enhanced through inclusion and trust building.

Situating our findings from Nepal within a more theoretical and comparative perspective, the results of our research strengthen a performance-based theory of institutional trust and to a large extent disconfirm identity-based explanations. In particular, our findings may be compared with the results presented by Mishler and Rose (2002) from their study of post-communist regimes in the period 1991 to 1998 (see also Lühiste, 2006). They claim that political support for any new democratic regime will be volatile since a new regime will not be in a position to draw on the diffuse political support that characterizes an established democracy. In the latter type of political system citizens have been exposed to long-term socialization processes from early childhood. In a new democracy, past socialization may be of less relevance. Instead citizens will build their initial trust on high expectations of future institutional achievements and gradually such expectations will be replaced by assessments of actual institutional performance.

Presenting survey data from a number of new political regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union, Mishler and Rose conclude that the impact of early socialization is insignificant, and economic and political performance explains the most variance in political support. Assessments of political performance appear as an especially important source of such support. Although our observations from Nepal are not directly comparable, they do support this main conclusion in so far as participants' evaluations of democratic performance and their attitudes toward people holding national office also explain the most variance in our analysis. In a similar way the limited explanatory power of what we have referred to as our identity variables is somewhat parallel to the insignificant impact of the socialization variables in the post-communist regimes (that is, age, gender, town size and church attendance).

The latter conclusion, however, is the opposite to observations from the regime change in South Africa (Askvik, 2008). Here racial identity and party identification have appeared as stable, independent sources of trust in government over a period of more than 10 years after the fall of apartheid. Regardless of how they otherwise evaluate the performance of political institutions, members of the black majority have been significantly more inclined to trust such institutions than members of the white minority. As we noted above, the weak relationship between identity variables and institutional trust in Nepal is to some extent surprising. In fact, we could imagine an alternative scenario, similar to the situation in South Africa, in which historically advantaged and disadvantaged groups more clearly differed in their trust attitudes. In a hierarchical society such as Nepal, where the caste system is so central and where historically the state has systematically marginalized non-Hindu and low-caste groups, we would anticipate that institutional trust, to a large extent, varied along such lines. Yet, this is not the case, and the effect of caste and a number of other identity variables such as social class and education is insignificant. The excluded and underprivileged demonstrate no less trust in public and political institutions than those who dominate those institutions, that is, educated, Hindu, upper-caste men (Jamil and Dangal, 2009; Lawoti, 2007).

One explanation of the different roles played by identity in South Africa and Nepal may be that the divisions resulting from race in South Africa are more fundamental than those following from caste and ethnicity in Nepal. Although caste and ethnicity may be important for understanding how people interact in general in Nepal, seemingly they do not influence how various identity groups relate to public and political institutions.

Another tentative explanation could be that South Africa and Nepal represent two different cases of political regime change. Although both stand out as cases of democratization, the first one was about the right to vote for a majority of the people, while the second one is about removing an authoritarian monarchy and establishing a republic with a democratically elected government. In South Africa, many white people have opposed the enfranchisement of black people and viewed

the new political regime as a threat to their privileges. Black people, conversely, identify strongly with the new regime institutions. Hence, the two groups tend to approach the new institutions in opposing ways. In Nepal we observe a different type of political change. At the time of the survey in 2008, the main challenge to democracy-building was the abolition of a very unpopular monarchy. A broad alliance of various political parties and representatives of most castes and ethnicities were in favour of such a move. Contrary to the political transformation in South Africa, there seems to have been an agreement among different groups that the national political institutions of the new Nepal can be trusted in so far as they are interpreted as contributing to democratization. The theoretical implication of this latter interpretation would be that the role of identity-based trust under a transforming political regime will be contingent upon how relevant identity groups assess their position, and how they feel affected by the political changes taking place.

Notes

1. The trust survey is conducted as part of the project 'Governance Matters: Analysing, Diagnosing and Addressing Challenges of Governance in Nepal', a five-year (2007–2011) project under the Norwegian Program for Development and Education (NUFU). Thanks are due to Paul Roness and Per Lagreid of the University of Bergen for giving valuable comments on an earlier version of the article.
2. See http://www.nepalelectionportal.org/EN/political-development/political-history.php (accessed 27 November 2008).
3. See websites http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/ and http://soc.kuleuven.be/io/trust/eproject.htm (accessed 6 August 2009), http://nesstar.essedunet.nsd.uib.no/webview/index.jsp?study=http%3A%2F%2F129.1 77.90.160%3A80%2Fobj%2FfStudy%2FTRD1&mode=download&analysismode=table&v=2&top=y es (accessed 31 August 2009). See Table 3 for the question on trust in public institutions. Questions highlighting independent variables are presented in the Appendix (Tables A4 and A5).
4. Even though we administered a structured questionnaire, in many instances, in order to collect information, we had to establish a dialogue with participants who were illiterate, less educated or living in rural areas. As a result, some interviews took about three hours. A normal interviewee used around 40 minutes.

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Appendix

Table A1. Correlation Matrix of Trust in Nepalese Key Governance Institutions

	Parliament	Central government	Civil service	Judiciary/ courts	Police	King
Parliament	1.000					
Central government	0.572	1.000				
Civil service	0.402	0.451	1.000			
Judiciary/courts	0.299	0.353	0.382	1.000		
Police	0.243	0.295	0.331	0.419	1.000	
King	(0.060)	(0.086)	0.120	0.150	0.245	1.000
Army	0.148	0.188	0.255	0.317	0.483	0.379

Note: All coefficients significant at $p < 0.000$, except those in parentheses.

Table A2. Dimensions of Trust in Nepalese Key Governance Institutions: Principal Component Analyses of Two Alternative Models

	Rotated Two-factor model including seven institutions		Unrotated One-factor model including five institutions
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Single factor
Parliament	0.808	−0.016	0.725
Central government	0.826	0.059	0.775
Civil service	0.700	0.220	0.737
Judiciary/courts	0.539	0.418	0.683
Police	0.367	0.664	0.628
King	−0.075	0.726	
Army	0.147	0.809	
Eigenvalue	2.277	1.849	2.531
Percentage of variance	32.5	26.4	50.6

Notes: Extraction method: principal component analysis; rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization.

Table A3. Index of Institutional Trust

Index value	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Total
Percentage	3	1	3	5	6	10	12	11	14	11	14	6	3	1	0	1	101

Note: $N = 1343$; $M = 7.23$; $SD = 2.92$.

Table A4. Descriptive Statistics of Identity Variables

	n
Age 1 = up to 30 2 = 31 to 45 3 = 46 to 60 4 = 61 and above	1821
Gender: female 0 = male 1 = female	1827
Area: rural 0 = urban 1 = rural	1836
Region: Terai 0 = Mountain/Hill 1 = Terai	1836
Formal education 0 = no formal education 1 = primary to tertiary	1828
Civil servant 0 = no 1 = yes	1277
Social class Scale: 1 = upper class 5 = lower class	1721
Brahmin 0 = no 1 = yes	1566
Chettri 0 = no 1 = yes	1566
Baysha 0 = no 1 = yes	1566
Sudra 0 = no 1 = yes	1566
Hindu 0 = no 1 = yes	1831
Buddhist 0 = no 1 = yes	1831
Muslim 0 = no 1 = yes	1831
Religious Q: Would you say you are a religious person? 0 = no 1 = yes	1779
Nationalism: Q: How proud are you to be a Nepali? Scale: 1 = not at all proud 4 = very proud	1808
Political interest: Q: How interested would you say you are in politics? Scale: 1 = not at all 4 = very interested	1633
Congress 0 = no 1 = yes	1757
UML 0 = no 1 = yes	1757
Maoist 0 = no 1 = yes	1757
Valid N (listwise)	875

Table A5. Descriptive Statistics of Performance Variables

	N
Satisfied – life as a whole	1739
Q: All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole	1699
these days?	1773
Satisfied – 5 yrs ago	
Q: And how satisfied were you five years ago?	
Satisfied – Financial Situation	
Q: How satisfied are you with the financial situation of your household?	
Scale: 1 = Dissatisfied – 10 = Very satisfied	
How well – political system today	1694
Q: Where on this scale would you put the political system as it is today?	1481
How well – political system 5 yrs after	
Q: Where on this scale would you put the political system as you would	
expect it to be 5 years from now?	
Scale: 1 = Very bad – 10 = Very good	
Democracy Developing	1664
Q: Are you satisfied with the way democracy is developing in our country?	1634
People at national office handling country	
Q: Are you satisfied with the way people now in government office are	
handling the country's affairs?	
Scale: 1 = Not at all satisfied – 4 = Very satisfied	
This country is run for the benefit of all people	1650
Q: What is your opinion?	1615
Most politicians are competent and know what they are doing	1711
Q: What is your opinion?	1643
Politicians do what is right most of time	1692
Q: What is your opinion?	1673
Civil servants: Prompt and efficient	
Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree	
Civil servants: Not helpful	
Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree	
Civil servants: Reliable	
Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree	
Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree – 4 = Strongly agree	
Service performance index	1825
Q: How would you describe the delivery of the following services today?	
Average of 21 service areas.	
Scale: 1 = Very bad – 5 = Very good	
Policy performance index	1819
How well has the Nepalese government succeeded in the following areas?	
Average of 8 policy areas.	
Scale: 1 = Succeeded very well – 5 = Did not succeed at all.	
Valid N (listwise)	1001

Table A6. Proportion of 'Don't Know' Respondents for Institutional Trust Question: Distributed by Gender, Living Area and Education

	Total n = 1836	Male n = 1015	Female n = 812	Urban n = 896	Rural n = 940	No education n = 441	Formal education n = 1387
Parliament	16	10	24	18	14	35	10
Central government	14	9	20	14	15	32	9
Civil service	14	9	19	14	14	29	9
Political parties	8	5	11	9	7	15	6
Judiciary/courts	9	6	12	9	8	16	6
Police[a]	4						
King	8	5	11	8	7	12	6
Army	6	5	8	8	5	10	5
NGOs	21	17	26	20	22	44	14
Trade unions	17	12	22	16	17	38	10
District development committee	10	6	15	14	7	18	8
Chief district administration office	7	4	11	10	5	15	5
Village/town development committee	5	4	7	7	4	7	5
School/college[a]	4						
University	12	8	17	12	12	26	7
Hospital[a]	3						
Media	9	5	14	10	9	17	7
CIAA	23	17	30	20	26	49	14
Index of institutional trust	27	20	36	27	27	48	20

Note: [a]For three institutions the 'Don't know' category is below 5% and we have not calculated the relevant differences.