



ISSN: 2036-5438

# How multilevel governance structures and crisis mitigating measures impact political trust: a systematic literature review

by

Jakob Frateur<sup>1</sup>

Perspectives on Federalism, Vol. 15, issue 3, 2023





## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that political actors were willing to take or endorse drastic measures to mitigate the spread of the virus. At the same time, the political systems responding to the pandemic have become increasingly interconnected into multilevel governance structures. Also, studies have shown that political trust is seen as an important precondition for the functioning of a political system, especially in times of crisis, while the drivers of political trust are less often studied. The concept of political trust is also relevant from an MLG perspective, as different tiers of government (in)directly influence citizens' trust and as citizens can express trust in different levels simultaneously. However, the effect of both contexts on political trust is rarely studied. This paper therefore examines how crisis mitigating measures and multilevel governance contexts impact political trust. We study this question by means of a systematic literature review of 48 papers searched for in political science or legal research. The goal of this research is to systematize and integrate knowledge of distinct strands of research, searching for overlaps, in order to get more insight in the phenomenon of political trust.

## Keywords

Political trust, multilevel governance, crisis governance, Covid-19, multi-tiered systems, systematic literature review

## Acknowledgment

This work was funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme within the project called LEGITIMULT [Grant Number HORIZON-CL2-2021-DEMOCRACY-01, GA Nr. 101061550].



## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic that emerged in 2020 as a health crisis, and which later became an economic, social and even political crisis (Boin et al. 2020), has shown that political actors like governments, leaders and courts were willing to take or endorse drastic measures to mitigate the spread of the virus. So-called lockdowns and other social restrictions were imposed on citizens without much public participation (Bol et al. 2021). Measures to counter the economic crisis that followed the health crisis were taken as a reaction to increasing demands of the public, though, sometimes, without parliamentary approval (e.g., Bursens et al. 2021). During the sovereign debt crisis as well, the EU imposed austerity policies on various countries without much public debate (Hartveld et al. 2013). At the same time, political systems are increasingly interconnected, forming a multilevel governance (MLG) structure. This means that local, regional, national and supranational levels of government each have their separate spheres of authority, but these levels also need to cooperate, hence the interconnectedness, and therefore become increasingly complex (Behnke et al. 2019; Biela et al. 2013). This interconnectedness of various levels is well expressed in times of crisis. Within the European Union (EU), for example, different levels of government were, in one way or another, involved in the mitigation of the pandemic (Lynggaard et al. 2022).

The absence of public participation in the mitigation of crises and the increasing complexity of political systems raise questions on citizens' perceptions of their governments such as, among others, their political trust. Indeed, political trust is seen as an important precondition for the functioning of a political system, especially in times of crisis (for COVID-19 see Devine et al. 2024). Research shows, for example, that political trust influences citizens' willingness to vaccinate (Wynen et al. 2022) or to comply with laws (Marien & Hooghe 2011). The concept of political trust, which is related to concepts of legitimacy of a political system, is even more relevant in complex MLG contexts, where different tiers of government directly or indirectly influence citizens' and where citizens can express trust in several levels simultaneously.

Political trust can thus be considered as important in both crisis and MLG contexts, and especially in times of crisis in a MLG system. That is why this paper examines the following question: How do crises mitigating measures and multilevel governance contexts impact political trust? Political trust being defined as a "person's belief that political institutions will



act consistently with their expectations of positive behaviour” (Algan 2018). We study this question by means of a systematic literature review based on the PRISMA guidelines of 52 papers on crisis mitigating measures and/or MLG systems, and political trust. Contrary to most literature (e.g., Devine et al. 2024), political trust is the dependent variable. The goal of this research is to systematize and integrate knowledge of these distinct strands of research, searching for overlaps, in order to get more insight in the phenomenon of political trust. This review thus aims to bridge the gap between two different strands of research by searching for communalities in the way crisis mitigating measures and MLG contexts affect political trust.

This is even more relevant given the global scope of many contemporary crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, and the increasing pertinence of MLG structures. Both themes are extensively studied, but rarely in combination with political trust or in combination with each other (see for example Boin et al. 2020 for crisis governance, or Behnke et al. 2019 for MLG). The growing complexity and ‘trans boundedness’ of crises (Boin and Lodge 2016), however, require a stronger focus on the relationship between crises and MLG, as well as how they together affect political trust. Furthermore, while the literature shows that political trust influences, among others, compliance with crisis-mitigating measures and with vaccination intention (Devine et al. 2024), no reviews compiling research on the determinants of political trust have been done (with exception from a short section in Devine et al. 2021). This is surprising given the increase of literature stressing the importance of political trust, especially in times of crisis.

This review shows that there are some overlaps between the different strands of research, both in use of data and methods as in conceptions of and explanations for trust. There are, however, some gaps in the literature, especially with regards to the levels of government that are commonly studied. Research on the effect of crisis governance on trust focuses on the national level as the most important level, neglecting the MLG structure of most political systems. Additionally, the research on trust in MLG contexts focuses mostly on national and supranational levels of government. Literature on lower levels of government, especially the regional level, remains scarce. Furthermore, literature on crisis governance focuses on the policies themselves and on how the implementation of a policy affects political trust. This literature neglects the possible impact of the way in which measures were decided on political trust, for example whether the fact that decisions on measures were taken after



intergovernmental consultations or through legal and transparent procedures affects political trust.

The paper consists of six parts and is structured as follows: the first part elaborates on the research strategy of the paper, namely how the systematic literature review is performed. The second part discusses the findings with regards to the dependent variable, political trust, while the third and fourth part assess the impact of respectively crisis governance and MLG structures on political trust. In a fifth part, the impact of crisis governance on political trust in a multilevel system is discussed by means of four articles dealing with the sovereign debt crisis, and related austerity policies, in the EU. The paper concludes with a discussion of similarities between the two kinds of research and of the gaps in the literature, finally also providing avenues for further research.

## 1. Research strategy: a systematic literature review

To establish the state of the art in the literature on crisis governance and/or MLG and political trust, a systematic literature review was performed following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) scheme. This method was initially developed for research related to health care, and later evolved into the PRISMA statement which is increasingly used by researchers of various research fields (Page et al. 2021). The statement consists of a checklist of 27 items and a flow diagram which guides the search and review process with attention for transparent analysis and reporting (Page et al. 2021). In the following, we elaborate on the search and review strategy used for this paper following the guidelines of the PRISMA statement.

### *Literature search*

We conducted the search in October and November 2022, and again in July 2023 and May 2024, so articles published after June 2024 are not considered in this review. I searched for literature on crisis governance or on multilevel systems, and their effects on political trust in three well-known databases: Web of Science, Scopus and Proquest. More specifically, we searched for literature on trust (not on political trust), crisis OR multilevel governance.<sup>11</sup> We included trust as one of the search terms and not political trust, as many articles use terms like institutional trust or trust in government, which can be forms of political trust and thus



relevant for the study. To identify as much literature covering different levels of government as possible, we included a whole range of indicators of MLG structures instead of only using ‘multilevel governance’.<sup>1</sup> We also decided to look for ‘crisis’ instead of ‘crisis governance’ for the same reason. We found a total of 7591 publications in the three mentioned databases. In order to identify publications that were missed in the other databases, we also ran a search of Google Scholar. This double check yielded twelve additional relevant results, so 7603. The entire search was finished on the twenty-second of May 2024.

Because of the high number of publications found ( $n = 7603$ ), we chose not to include additional databases like JSTOR and/or look for more publications in specific journals. The downside of this approach is that we might have missed interesting articles highly relevant for this study. A check of JSTOR based on our search terms did not yield additional results. Also, to control whether we actually studied separate strands of literature, we performed an additional search in the three databases by using the search terms ‘trust’, ‘crisis’ AND ‘multilevel’, and its derivatives, AND governance. This resulted in a total of 190 publications, of which, after further analysis of the results as explained below, only four were eligible for the study. This might indicate that the strands of research are treated separately in the literature.

### *Eligibility criteria*

Articles from databases were included in the screening process if they complied with the following criteria:

- Search terms/key words: publications need to deal with trust and multilevel governance or crisis governance, so we searched for ‘trust’, ‘crisis’ and ‘multilevel governance’ (and derivatives). As mentioned before, an article should be about political trust, and crisis or multilevel governance.
- Research domain: the paper needs to be published in a journal that is related to political science, public administration, or legal research.
- Year of publication: publications of the last sixteen years are included (2008-2024). That way publications on the financial crisis that erupted in 2008 are also included and the literature on trust and crisis is not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic.





- Publication type: both articles and book chapters are included, if they are published in peer-reviewed journals or in academic books.
- Language: only articles in English were considered for the study.

#### *Screening and selection of literature*

Of the initial 7603 publications, 52 were considered for this study. In the following, we will go deeper into the selection and screening process. This is also presented in figure 1. First, using the tools of the databases themselves, we checked for research domain, year of publication, publication type and language. As Scopus and Proquest do not allow for detailed searches based on the research domain, I searched for publications in the fields of social sciences and law. For Web of Science, we were able to search for publications in the fields of political science and law.

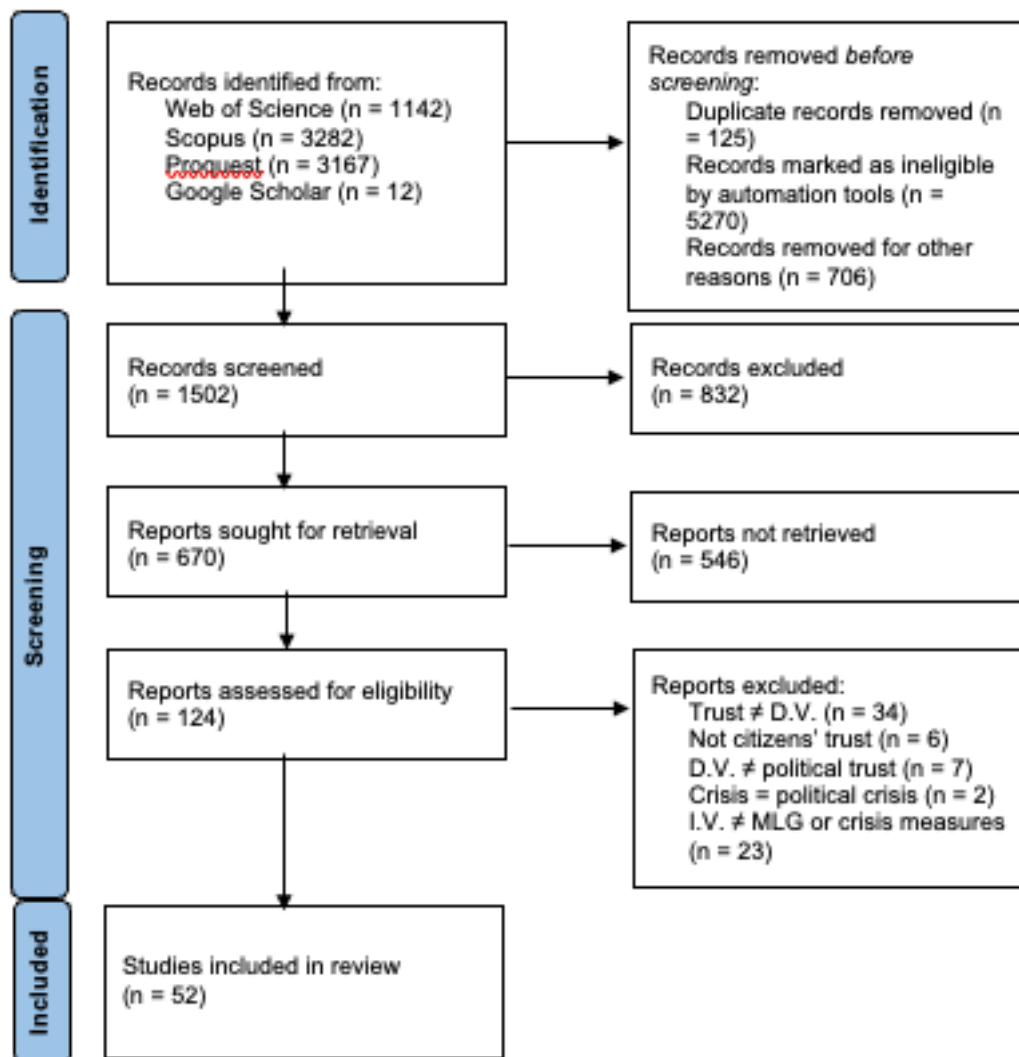


Figure 1. Identification of literature through databases

The number of publications was narrowed down by applying the eligibility criteria ( $n = 4835$ ), by controlling for the keywords as explained in the eligibility criteria ( $n = 706$ ), and by removing duplicate records ( $n = 125$ ). This was done by (search) tools available on the websites of the databases and resulted in 1502 publications. We narrowed these down by using additional tools filtering for, among others, geographic region (we only study trust in democracies). After this second step, we ended up with 652 publications, which were screened based on their title. For this purpose, an additional set of criteria was used. Publications need to deal with political trust, which included trust in political institutions or trust in governments, and political trust needs to be the dependent variable. Publications





about, for example, interpersonal, interorganisational or social trust were excluded, as well as publications on political trust as independent variable. Also, the focus needed to be on citizens' trust and not on politicians' or governmental trust. Finally, publications with MLG or crisis as dependent variable were excluded, as well as articles about political crises and disasters, as the latter are one-time events with a more short-term impact while crises often affect different areas and lead to policy changes (Boin and Lodge 2016). Articles about the effect of crisis in general and not the crisis mitigating measures were also excluded. When the title could not rule out a publication based on these criteria, we included it to be further examined based on the abstract. We ended up with 124 publications which were screened based on their abstract.

The same criteria used to examine the publications based on their title were used to screen the abstracts, after which 72 more publications were excluded from the analysis. Publications were mainly excluded in this final stage because political trust was not used as a dependent variable ( $n = 34$ ), MLG or crisis measures were used as dependent variables ( $n = 23$ ), or the dependent variable was not trust in a political institution ( $n = 7$ ). In total, we ended up with 52 eligible publications. Sixteen of the publications deal with MLG and political trust, thirty-two with crisis governance and political trust, while only four deal with the combination of MLG and crisis governance. All but three publications are journal articles, the other three being published book chapters. The articles were published between 2011 and 2024 in a variety of journals, but all related to political science or public administration. The set contains two papers based on a literature review, and 48 empirical papers using quantitative analyses of survey and panel data. The quantitative studies employ quantitative cross-sectional ( $n = 31$ ) or quantitative longitudinal analyses ( $n = 18$ ), of which twelve are based on cross-sectional longitudinal analyses. Most of these quantitative papers are based on (existing) surveys or panel surveys, though three articles rely on survey experiments – split ballot and different treatments experiments.

Furthermore, three of the papers compare the effects of crisis governance on political trust in two or three different states. Differences between states are based on a wide variety of variables, ranging from the nature of the political system in Austria and France – consensual vs. majoritarian – (Kritzinger et al. 2021), to different public health policies to mitigate the pandemic in Sweden and Denmark (Nielsen and Lindvall 2021) and different



democratic development (Coromina and Kustec 2020). Similarities are found in the timing and kinds of crisis mitigating measures (Kritzinger et al. 2021), the institutional and psychological level (Nielsen and Lindvall 2021) and the kind of crisis that affects the countries. All other papers, both on MLG and crisis measures, are either based on quantitative studies in one country ( $n = 24$ ) or on quantitative studies in multiple countries such as all EU member states or a set of countries around the world ( $n = 25$ ). In the case of the latter, comparisons are sometimes made between sets of countries based on different characteristics, such as degree of press freedom (Gozgor 2022), number of COVID-19 related deaths (Rieger and Wang 2021) or debtor vs. credit countries (Armingeon and Ceka 2014). Interestingly, the type of political system – federal, unitary, regionalized etc. – is never considered in comparisons.

Because it is possible that we missed some interesting articles following the strict eligibility criteria and search terms, we checked the three databases based on publication date and using broader search terms. Firstly, extending the period in which the articles were published to twenty years does not significantly alter the number of publications eligible for this study. Going back in time even further did not seem useful for a study focusing on the state of the art on a certain topic, but some publications will be mentioned nevertheless because of their value for more recent research. We did not, however, include them in the review. Extending the search terms to include references of ‘legitimacy’ or ‘support’, both sometimes used interchangeably with trust or trust being used as an operationalization of these concepts, does not lead to extra publications eligible for this research when applying the same criteria for this literature review or when comparing the definitions of legitimacy and support that are used.

## 2. Political trust, the dependent variable

Before going into detail about the ways political trust is operationalized in the studied literature, it is important to know what it is or how it is defined in the literature, and why it is important or relevant for researchers. One of the most cited definitions of political trust is based on Easton’s (1975) work on political support. He defines political trust as the belief of members of a political system “that their own interests would be attended to even if the



authorities were exposed to little supervision or scrutiny” (Easton 1975). In similar veins, OECD guidelines define trust as a “person’s belief that political institutions will act consistently with their expectations of positive behaviour” (Algan 2018), and Norris (2017) defines it as the reflection of “a rational or affective belief in the benevolent motivation and performance capacity” of a political institution. Political trust is thus characterized by a specific set of objects or trustees, namely political institutions, individual political actors or political systems (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017). Furthermore, following the abovementioned definitions, political trust is relational, in the sense that it entails a subject/trustor that trusts and an object/trustee that is trusted, and situational, meaning that it is characterized by a “certain degree of uncertainty about the object’s future actions” (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017; Newton 1999; van der Meer 2016). Indeed, political trust is dependent on the actions by the object or the contexts in which the trust relation exists. As Hardin (2000) puts it, “A trusts B to do X”.

In much of the (theoretical) literature on political trust as well as in literature reviewed in this paper, political trust is related to concepts of political support and, less often, political legitimacy. In some instances, political trust is seen as a source of political support (Thomassen et al. 2017). Easton (1975) for example treats political trust as a source of diffuse political support, which can be defined as more abstract feelings towards the nation-state and its agencies. This diffuse support is opposed to specific support which relates to incumbent political actors responsible for decision-making. Other authors see political trust as a component or indicator of political support (Dalton 2004; Norris 2017; Thomassen et al. 2017). Diffuse support is then measured by trust in various political institutions, while specific support is measured by trust in political authorities and actors (Thomassen et al. 2017). The latter approach is most common in the reviewed literature dealing with political support. Armingeon and Ceka (2014) and Ares et al. (2017) for example study trust in political systems and in various political institutions within these systems to make claims about diffuse support for these systems. Other authors see political trust as somewhat in the middle between specific and diffuse support and treat it as an indicator of both depending on how political trust is measured. Hartevelde et al. (2013) and Torcal (2014), for example, follow that approach as they measure trust in various political institutions ranging from incumbent leaders or representatives (= specific) to governments or political systems (= diffuse).



Despite the close interrelation between trust and support, they are distinct, though not always treated as such in the literature (Schraff 2020; Erhardt et al. 2022). Van der Meer and Zmerli (2017) argue that the uncertainty aspect of political trust, i.e., subjects do not know or at least face some degree of uncertainty about the object's future behaviour, sets it apart from more diffuse attitudes of political support like patriotism or national pride, which are more affective (Armingeon and Ceka 2014). Political trust, on the other hand, has also some kind of utilitarian or specific aspect as it also depends on performance by political institutions or actors (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017).

The same counts for the distinction between political legitimacy and political trust, which are sometimes equated in the literature as well (O'Sullivan et al. 2014). Other authors study trust as an aspect of legitimacy (Grimes 2006). Easton (1975), however, made a distinction between political trust and political legitimacy by treating them as different kinds of political support. Legitimacy refers to a normative judgment of political systems, related to norms and values, while trust implies an instrumental judgment on the regime's performance (Easton 1975; Thomassen et al. 2017). Most of the literature investigated in this review, however, studies political trust on its own, not in relation to the concepts of political support or legitimacy.

When discussing the motivations for research on political trust, much of the literature refers to its importance for the functioning of a political system. Indeed, there is a "widespread conviction that a reservoir of political trust helps preserve fundamental democratic achievements" (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017), especially in times of economic, social and political crises as it is seen as a prerequisite of a successful government response to crises (Schraff 2020). It is believed that political trust helps in maintaining stability, viability and legitimacy of the political system, and it is seen as a necessary precondition for democratic rule (e.g., Easton 1975; Norris 1999; Dalton 2004). However, scholars started investigating these assumptions only recently and research remains rather scarce (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017). Marien and Hooghe (2011), for example, argue that political trust determines citizens' law-abiding and rule-complying behaviour, while Dalton (2004) found that low political trust generates support for democratic reform. Political trust is also believed to influence voter turnout, vote choice, public participation and policy preferences (e.g., Dalton 2004; Norris 2011). Devine (2022), on the other hand, argues that the effect of political trust on the abovementioned features is only weak or moderate, and thus that the



effect of political trust on such features is smaller than is often assumed in the literature. However, research on the recent COVID-19 pandemic found that political trust positively influenced vaccination intention and compliance with restriction measures (Wynen et al. 2022; Jennings et al. 2022; Devine et al. 2024).

Despite the common dependent variable in all the articles under review, political trust, authors use different terms to refer to it. We already mentioned authors who write about (diffuse) political support ( $n = 9$ ) like Armingeon and Ceka (2014), Bol et al. (2021) and Schraff (2020) when studying, among others, political trust. It stands out that only six authors explicitly mention that they study political trust (e.g., Muñoz 2017; Davies et al. 2021). A total of twenty authors, among others Dominioni et al. (2020) or Baekgaard et al. (2020), mention trust in (political) institutions as their dependent variable, while another sixteen refer to trust in government (e.g., Wolak 2020; Kritzinger et al. 2021). Of course, this is only how the authors refer to political trust in their writings, and not how they operationalize it. However, it already shows that there are different aspects about political trust, and that there is no uniform way in the literature to refer to it.

The specific object of political trust, namely political actors and institutions, which distinguishes it from other kinds of trust (like social trust), can be – and is – operationalised in various ways. Most articles measure trust in government ( $n = 36$ ). However, this measure is not unambiguous, as Bol et al. (2021) rightfully point out. It can refer to both the institution of the government and to the incumbent government, depending on how citizens understand it. This is especially important in studies linking trust in government to notions of support, as it can be interpreted as respectively diffuse and specific support (Bol et al. 2021; see also Easton 1975). The same holds for trust in parliament, which is used in 22 articles as operationalisation of trust. Trust in the legal system is studied in only six articles, despite being an important, though understudied, aspect of political trust. Also, the nine articles about (diffuse) political support measure different aspects of political trust as indicators of such support, ranging from trust in parliament and government to trust in political systems ( $n = 2$ ). This indicates that the measurement of political support is still not straightforward and that it depends on how diffuse support is defined, which makes comparison difficult.

Few studies in this review study more specific forms of trust. Only eight measure trust in politicians, five measure trust in political parties and two mention trust in political





leadership. Political trust thus seems to be associated with more abstract notions of political institutions than with specific political actors. Note that the total ( $n = 81$ ) is larger than the number of articles under review as some authors measure trust in more than one institution.

The question then is if different authors who study political trust by measuring trust in different political institutions are actually studying the same thing. Indeed, Schneider (2017), for example, found that political trust differs depending on the institutions that are evaluated. She found four clusters of political trust: trust in central political institutions like the national parliament, political parties or national government; trust in local and regional institutions like subnational parliament or governments; trust in protective institutions like the armed forces and police; and, finally, trust in order institutions like courts (Schneider 2017). Especially the finding that trust in subnational political institutions differs from trust in more central, national political institutions will be of interest in the following part(s). The findings of Coromina and Kustec (2020) are in line with the argument of Schneider (2017). They distinguish three clusters and argue that trust in order institutions like the police or courts is most often the highest, while trust in central institutions is generally the lowest (Coromina and Kustec 2020).

Despite the differences between the various studies, there are also some similarities. We discuss two. A first similarity concerns the data that are used to measure the variables that affect political trust, but also to operationalise political trust as it often stems from the same source (e.g., survey questions). Almost all articles are based on survey or interview data ( $n = 50$ ). The other two are literature reviews. Furthermore, many authors use Eurobarometer ( $n = 12$ ) or European Social Survey ( $n = 5$ ) data, which are large  $n$  studies conducted on a regular basis and which contain a lot of different variables. Secondly, and to some extent related to the use of survey data, is the fact that all but two reviewed research focus on political trust, and not on related but distinct concepts like political mistrust (= the absence of trust) or political distrust (= the opposite of trust). Indeed, indicating that one does not trust a particular institution, does not necessarily mean that they distrust that institution (Cook and Gronke 2005). This distinction is often not made in surveys and thus not in the (empirical) literature (van der Meer and Zmerli 2017). However, investigating concepts like mistrust and distrust could provide a different understanding of political trust and how it is maintained or how it evolves.





As a conclusion, the review so far indicates that there are many ways to conceptualise, as well as to use – on itself or as component of political support/legitimacy – and operationalise political trust. This makes it difficult to make one-on-one comparison between various studies, despite the presence of similar results and similar explanations (see further) for the absence or presence of political trust. There are for example large differences between trust in government and trust in legal systems, the latter being more resilient, and within measures of trust in government itself, i.e., whether it is treated as trust in the institution of government or as trust in the incumbent government. It is difficult to assess how citizens view these concepts and whether they differentiate between types of political institutions at all (see Hooghe 2011).

### 3. Political trust in a multilevel governance structure

Multilevel governance systems are characterized by interdependent and interconnected governing institutions located at different levels of authority, both vertically and horizontally. The EU is a prime example of such a system. It is a complex environment with multiple institutions (governments, parliaments, councils etc.) at multiple levels (local, regional, national, supranational), and with multiple connections between the levels and the institutions. The EU is also a system in which citizens can participate in various ways, the best example being elections for various levels of government, and in which they are affected in various ways. MLG systems, like the EU, erupted mostly because of the disintegration of the national level, whose powers are increasingly eroded through processes of decentralisation and globalisation (Muñoz 2017). Indeed, some competences are decentralised to local and/or subnational levels (devolution), while others are integrated in supranational or international institutions (globalisation), sometimes both at the same time, which leads to a MLG structure in which various levels have different powers.

Research shows that citizens, when evaluating political institutions and expressing political trust, differentiate between different actors and institutions (Proszowska et al. 2023; Angelucci and Vittori 2023; Wolak 2020; Fitzgerald and Wolak 2016, though some suggest that this is not necessarily the case, see e.g., Hooghe 2011). The increasing relevance of MLG systems then logically leads to the question whether citizens distinguish between various levels of government and if so, what explains the differentiation and which mechanisms lie



behind it? That is the question that underlies much of the literature on trust in MLG systems and which is answered by two strands of research. One of them studies trust in separate levels, and the other studies trust in nested levels, which considers the interconnectedness of the multiple levels. We will shortly discuss the findings in literature on separate levels first and then turn to the findings with regards to trust in nested levels.

When looking at every level separately, it stands out that the local (and regional) levels are generally trusted more than any other level (Wolak 2020; Muñoz 2017; Fitzgerald and Wolak 2016), though Stoker et al. (2023) show that this is not a global phenomenon (see for example China, Wu and Wilkes 2018). This higher local trust is often explained by referring to the typically small size of lower government levels (Muñoz 2017). This would enhance responsiveness of political institutions and actors, as well as foster direct contact with representatives. Furthermore, the small size of lower levels of governance means they are more open to public participation. Additionally, the lower levels have competences that influence citizens in the most direct way. In sum, the proximity of these levels plays a role (Stoker et al. 2023). With regards to the highest levels of governance, like supranational governance, scholars argue that these are not necessarily less trusted than national governance levels. The large size of higher levels of governance is associated with more capacity and more policy output, relating trust to performance evaluations (Muñoz 2017). However, research on trust in nested governance levels shows that trust in supranational institutions is often determined by trust in national institutions (e.g., Armingeon and Ceka 2014; Dominioni et al. 2020).

Within the literature on trust in interconnected MLG systems, the main debates are about whether citizens, when making trust judgments, take the other levels into account, if that influences their trust in each governance level and which mechanisms then explain trust. In other words, whether they make independent or dependent judgments when expressing trust in a particular level (Muñoz 2017). Firstly, the literature that stresses independent evaluations argues that trust is level specific. Citizens judge political institutions ‘on their own turf’, without taking cues from other levels (Proszowska et al. 2023; Angelucci and Vittori 2023). This is often explained by mechanisms of subjective rationality such as responsiveness and performance evaluations (Proszowska et al. 2023; Wolak 2020; Fitzgerald and Wolak 2016). Citizens, especially but not only those with higher political sophistication, evaluate a government level by assessing its responsiveness, whether the political institutions react to



certain events in an appropriate way, and by assessing its (economic) performance (Hegewald 2024; Proszowska et al. 2021; Harteveld et al. 2013). This means that trust in each level is based on citizens' perceptions of responsiveness and performance, and not on objective indicators, hence the term 'subjective' rationality (Armingeon and Ceka; Proszowska et al. 2023). This subjective rationality thesis is found both in a European (Proszowska et al. 2021, 2023; Wolak 2020) and in an American (Fitzgerald and Wolak 2016) context, in three levels of government.

Other mechanisms that might explain the level-specificity of trust are identity or cognitive minimalism, i.e., not or randomly making trust judgments (Zaller 1992). Proszowska et al. (2021), studying trust in the Netherlands in three levels of governance (local, national and supranational), show that identity or cognitive minimalism have no effect. By contrast, Harteveld et al. (2013), who based their study on survey data in 28 European countries but only on trust in the national and supranational level, argue that emotional attachment partly overrules rational arguments. Hobolt (2012) for the EU, Talving and Vasilopoulo (2021) for the national level and Hegewald (2024) for the local level found a relationship between one's identity, EU, national or local, and trust in the corresponding governance level. They also found no evidence for the cognitive minimalism thesis. Citizens do not randomly express trust in different governance levels.

However, literature on the level-specificity of trust does not ignore the influence of cue-taking from other levels and related trust spillovers (e.g., Dominioni et al. 2020; Ares et al. 2017; Muñoz 2017). Citizens express trust in a governance level dependent on their trust judgments of (an)other level(s), which requires less knowledge about all different levels (Muñoz 2017). Indeed, because of the complexity of MLG systems, citizens tend to take cues from other levels they are more familiar with to evaluate other, less familiar, levels (Brosius et al. 2020; Angelucci and Vittori 2023). This cue-taking has two possible outcomes: either trust in different levels is the same (trust spillovers), or it is different (compensation). The former is explained in the literature by three potential mechanisms. Following the logic of extrapolation, trust is the same in all governance levels because both governance and trust are compound, i.e., resulting from the same trust attitude (Harteveld et al. 2013). Another explanation for trust spillovers originates in research on lower levels of government. The logic of cognitive proximity states that trust in higher levels of government is based on trust in the closest, local level (Wolak 2020; Proszowska et al. 2023). Finally, trust spillovers can



be explained by the mechanism of institutional saliency. Trust attitudes for all levels are based on trust in the most salient, i.e., the national, level (Ares et al. 2017; Armingeon and Ceka 2014).

The compensation mechanism, trust in different levels differs, is most often found in studies on the national and the supranational (i.e. the EU) levels. The underlying logic is that because governance levels are incompatible, so is trust. Following the compensation hypothesis, one level is used as a benchmark to which all other levels are assessed (Dominioni et al. 2020). For example, Muñoz et al. (2011) argue that on a country level, citizens compensate their lack of trust in the national institutions, based on the perceived performance of these institutions, by putting more trust in the EU level. They found that in countries in which citizens perceive the national level as corrupt, trust in the EU is higher than trust in the national level (Muñoz et al. 2011). Dominioni et al. (2020), who also work on the EU MLG system, add to the literature on trust spillovers and compensation that these mechanisms work in two ways. Not only is trust in higher levels dependent on trust in lower levels of government, as is often assumed in the literature, but it is also the other way around (Dominioni et al. 2020). Trust attitudes with regards to the EU might also impact trust in the national level institutions. This bidirectionality of trust spillovers is not yet studied for lower governance levels or outside the EU system.

The review indicates that trust in a MLG system is dependent, namely that citizens take cues from more familiar levels to express trust in other levels, mostly through trust spillovers. Besides, citizens in a MLG system, especially those with more political knowledge, can and do differentiate between various levels of governance when expressing trust, indicating that trust is to some extent also level specific. Indeed, trust can be explained by citizens' performance evaluations of a governance level. There are, however, some limitations to the generalizability of these results. First, the reviewed literature mostly stems from EU studies ( $n = 8$ ). Secondly, because of that, much of the literature limits its focus on trust in two levels of governance, most notably the national and the supranational/EU level, while studies on the lower levels remains scarce ( $n = 6$ ). Thirdly, the regional level is, apart from one study on the United States (Fitzgerald and Wolak 2016), completely overlooked in the literature on trust in MLG systems, despite the increasing relevance of such levels and of federal systems in general (Schakel et al. 2015). Finally, only few studies mention the existence of both low-high and high-low dynamics of trust spillovers (Dominioni et al. 2020; Proszowska et al.



2023; 2021). As the EU becomes more salient, this reversed directionality of trust spillovers, from higher levels to lower levels, might become more apparent and thus worth investigating in more detail.

#### 4. Trust in times of crisis: the effect of crisis mitigating measures

The literature on the effect of crisis governance on trust focuses on two types of crises: economic and health. Political crises, which can be the consequence of other crises (health, economic...) or their management, are often discussed as well but articles about these types of crises were not included in the review as they do not consider the effect of measures to mitigate the crisis on trust, but rather the effect of the crisis itself (e.g., Karlsson et al. 2021; Close et al. 2023). Also, such political crises cannot be considered what Boin and Lodge (2016) call trans-boundary crises, the focus of this literature review. In total, six papers deal with measures taken in the context of an economic crisis, in case the sovereign debt crisis in the EU after 2008. Most papers deal with – what is at its roots – a health crisis (n = 27), which should not come as a surprise given the global scope and profoundness of the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is also one paper on the initial stage of the H1N1 epidemic in the US. We will discuss the two types of crises and the effects of the related crisis mitigating measures separately before drawing conclusions on the effect of crisis measures on trust by comparing the two strands of research.

Six of the reviewed articles about trust in times of crisis deal with the sovereign debt crisis in the EU and the related austerity policies that were implemented by the EU from 2009 onwards (Armingeon and Ceka 2014). This strand of research focuses mostly on two levels of governance, which were deemed the most salient during the crisis, the national and the supranational EU-level, which are studied separately. In general, this literature found that the austerity policies led to a decline in trust in all levels of government, especially in the so-called bailout countries like Ireland, Portugal and Greece that needed to implement these policies (Proszowska 2021; Armingeon and Ceka 2014).

The literature broadly discusses three explanations for the differences in trust as an effect of austerity policies. First, citizens' performance evaluations with regards to the economy and democracy are an important mechanism behind trust formation, especially on the national level (Haugsgjerd 2017; Torcal 2014). Generally, the better the performance of the





national level is perceived the more the national political institutions are trusted. Haugsgjerd (2017), for example, found that citizens who perceived welfare state efforts as sufficient, and thus that the national political institutions performed better to mitigate the crisis, trusted these institutions more. Secondly, citizens base their trust judgments on mechanisms of responsibility attribution (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014). Biten et al. (2022), who studied the effect of the austerity measures on trust in the EU, found that people who believed the EU was responsible for the implementation of such measures trusted the EU less. Finally, personal experience and to a lesser extent ideological distance to the incumbent government also play a role (Armingeon and Ceka 2014). Citizens who were personally affected (Haugsgjerd 2017) or who live in regions which were affected by crisis mitigating measures (Lipps and Schraff 2021) tend to put less trust in respectively the national and the supranational level.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to many studies on the effect of health-related crisis governance on trust all over the world and in different contexts, e.g., in more and less affected countries or in countries with less or more strict measures, but always focused on the national level. Previously, such research mostly focused on the H1N1 epidemic in 2009 in the US (Freitmuth et al. 2014). In general, all authors, writing about different countries with different infection rates or lockdown measures, found an increase in trust at the onset of the pandemic, which lasted for approximately three to six months depending on the study, after which trust levels decreased to pre-pandemic levels (e.g., Weinberg 2022; Esaiasson et al. 2021; Davies et al. 2021; Kritzinger et al. 2021). This temporary increase is most often attributed to a rally around the flag effect (e.g., Schraff 2020; Weinberg 2022), though there is no agreement about whether this rally effect is a consequence of crisis mitigating measures like lockdowns and other social restrictions (e.g., Bol et al. 2021) or of the crisis itself (e.g., van der Meer et al. 2023; Rump and Zwiener-Collins 2021; Schraff 2020). The rally effect is, nevertheless, thought to be a valuable explanation for the increase in trust, regardless of the specific cause, and is believed to extend to political institutions that were not directly involved in the management of the crisis (Hegewald and Schraff 2022; Esaiasson et al. 2021).

The literature discusses three possible mechanisms underlying the rally effect, of which only one proved to have a significant effect. Authors found less impact of a patriotism mechanism, which posits that in-group loyalty and cohesion increase when the in-group is under threat, and of the opinion leadership explanation, which suggests that, in times of





acute crisis, focus on the political elites in power increases through, among others, media attention while at the same time there is less opposition or critique (Erhardt et al. 2022). Instead, most authors argue that the rally effect is driven by an emotional response, especially by anxiety, which leads citizens to pursue psychological safety behind political institutions they believe can act against the threat (Zwiener-Collins 2021; Baekgaard et al. 2020). Van der Meer et al. (2023) and Delhey et al. (2023) refined these findings by arguing that health related fears caused the rally effect, rather than socio-economic concerns. If that is the case, it would mean that the usual cognitive processes of political trust formation lost relevance because of the uncertainty, especially in the first wave, regarding the pandemic (Schraff 2020). Later, a common argument goes, when the pandemic was seen as less threatening, trust returned to pre-pandemic levels because citizens, the media and the opposition started to criticize the measures and the overall handling of the pandemic, while also being confronted with its persistent nature (Weinberg 2022; Davies et al. 2021; Esaiasson et al. 2021).

Other research, however, argues that performance evaluation factors and not the emotional-related factors explain the temporal increase in trust. Belchior and Teixeira (2023), studying trust in Spain after the COVID-19 outbreak, argue for example that the cognitive assessment of political institutions was not suspended after the outbreak of the pandemic. Citizens considered far-reaching crisis mitigating measures as necessary, often comparing to the situations in other countries like Italy. The measures were therefore considered as responsive behavior of governments, which led to the increase in trust (Rieger and Wang 2022; Goldfinch et al. 2021; Groeniger et al. 2021). Rieger and Wang (2022), who based their study on 57 countries, even argue that the perception of an insufficient reaction towards COVID-19 is the most important factor for low trust levels at the onset of the pandemic. Finally, ideological distance towards the incumbent government and personal experience with COVID-19, at least after some time when the rally effect faded away, also played a role in assessing a political institution's trustworthiness (Belchior and Teixeira 2023; Baekgaard 2021; Goldfinch et al. 2020). The rally effect thus generated a short period of high trust in political institutions around the world, regardless of one's personal experience, ideology, employment status, general lower levels of trust, support for populist parties (for a counterargument about the latter, see Colloca et al. 2024) etc., but these factors did resurface after a while and trust started to decrease to pre-pandemic levels (Hegewald and Schraff 2022).



To conclude, it seems that different kinds of crisis and related measures generate different effects on trust. The austerity policies following the sovereign debt crisis led to lower levels of trust in national and supranational level institutions, while the far-reaching social restriction measures at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic created a short upsurge of political trust, also in (national) political institutions that were not involved in the management of the crisis. However, there are some overlaps between the mechanisms used to explain the effect of measures on trust in political institutions. The reviewed literature indicates that performance evaluations is an important factor in explaining trust, regardless of the crisis context, and thus that citizens rely on cognitive mechanisms to assess trust. It also seems that responsibility attribution and responsiveness play a role, especially when confronted with sudden, external events. The mechanism of responsibility attribution hints at possible differences in trust between governance levels, as citizens seem able to distinguish between political institutions. Ideological distance and personal experience also have an effect, while a rally effect is only found in the context of the pandemic (or terrorist attacks, see for example Dinesen and Jaeger 2013). Scholars still debate whether the latter is a strictly emotional response or whether it is also fueled by cognitive mechanisms. Limitations or gaps in this strand of research relate to the governance levels that are studied, i.e., only the national level or only the supranational level but never lower levels of government or more levels in the same study (or, if so, not studied with attention for the different levels, see e.g., Aassve et al. 2024; Colloca et al. 2024); the focus on the EU or EU countries in studies on the effects of economic crisis measures; and the effect of how measures came into being – through intergovernmental dialogues, following ordinary parliamentary procedures etc. – on political trust. Herati et al. (2024) do point out that decision-making procedures might affect political trust but they do not provide evidence for this claim and mostly focus on how the implementation of measures affects political trust. We therefore argue that studies of the effect of decision-making procedures on political trust is absent in the literature.

## **5. Discussion: political trust in the EU MLG system in times of economic crisis**

Before we reach the conclusion, we discuss four papers that studied trust in a MLG system in times of crisis to illustrate the common explanations and mechanisms behind



political trust in both contexts, which may inspire future research as we will demonstrate in the final, concluding part. The studies are all based on the sovereign debt crisis in the EU. Only Proszowska (2021) included the local level in her study, besides the national and supranational levels which are studied in all articles. The articles nevertheless show the added value of an MLG view on trust in times of crisis by combining explanations and mechanisms for trust formation in order to come to a more complete understanding of political trust in times of crisis.

In general, political trust in the national and supranational governance levels decreased because of the austerity policies imposed by the EU (Torcal and Christmann 2019). However, based on the one article of Proszowska (2021) that measures trust in the regional/local level (the levels are taken together), it seems that trust in lower levels of government increased or stayed the same. What then explains the variations in political trust between the different levels of governance? Combining the explanations in the reviewed literature leaves us with possible mechanisms that were already discussed in the parts about the MLG context and the crisis governance separately.

First, citizens seem to be able to distinguish between different levels of government, also in times of crisis. Proszowska (2021) argues that citizens are able to assign responsibilities to various levels of government and that they evaluate trust accordingly. This means that, in the context of the EU sovereign debt crisis, citizens who attributed the responsibility for the austerity measures to the national or supranational level trusted that level of governance less. This might also (partly) explain the increased or equal level of political trust in lower governance levels as citizens did not assign responsibility for the measures to political institutions at these levels and therefore did not change their trust attitudes towards them. Secondly, citizens (to some extent) based their trust judgments on their evaluations of (economic) performance of the national level (Armingeon and Ceka 2014) or of the supranational level (Torcal and Christmann 2019), which are often fueled by personal experience (Lipps and Schraff 2021). However, there is no consensus in the literature about this effect of performance evaluations. Talving and Vasilopoulo (2021), for example, argue that economic evaluations have a limited impact on trust in the EU. They argue, and there is more consensus about this, that trust in the national government is the most important determinant of trust in the supranational level and that this linkage strengthens in times of crisis so that trust in the national political institutions becomes an even better predictor for



political trust in the supranational level (Talving and Vasilopoulo 2021; Armingeon and Ceka 2014; Torcal and Christmann 2019).

The spillover effect found in much of the literature on trust in the EU MLG system is thus also, and even more, important in times of crisis, especially because citizens' evaluations of the EU political institutions and their performance play a less prominent role in times of crisis (Torcal and Christmann 2019). Talving and Vasilopoulo (2021) argue that this might be the case because citizens become more aware of the interconnectedness of the different levels in times of crisis. Armingeon and Ceka (2014) reason that the severe effects of the austerity policies on the national economy make citizens rely more on the evaluation of the national economic performance to assess their trust in the supranational level. They even argue, contra Proszowska (2021), that trust in the EU is unrelated to what the EU does, despite its involvement in the governance of the crisis (Armingeon and Ceka 2014). Besides the spillovers, Torcal and Christmann (2019) found compensation mechanisms whereby the national level is used as a benchmark against which the supranational level is evaluated. This mechanism is also used to explain the increasing or equal levels of trust in lower levels of government in contrast to the declining trust in higher governance levels (Proszowska 2021).

Identity also plays a role. Citizens with a national identity, and especially those with an exclusive national identity, tend to trust the national level more and the EU level less (Talving and Vasilopoulo 2021). This is even more pronounced in relation to the austerity policies, and especially among those who attributed the responsibility for these measures to the supranational level (Talving and Vasilopoulo 2021). Finally, the ideological distance between a citizen and the incumbent government also explains trust in a certain level. Interestingly, one's ideology per se, whether one tends to the left or the right of the political spectrum, does not play a significant role in trust judgments (Armingeon and Ceka 2014).

So, to conclude, the accounts of the effects of crisis governance in a MLG system show that there are a lot of relations between the mechanisms used to explain trust in times of crisis and trust in MLG context. For example, responsibility attributions fuel trust evaluations with regards to one level, which then might spillover to or be compensated in another level. At the same time, personal experience with the austerity policies affects one's perceived performance of a given governance level, which also might affect trust in other levels. In sum, citizens' trust judgments in complex MLG and crisis contexts seem to be influenced by both subjective, rational evaluations (responsibility attribution, performance evaluation) and



less rational factors (ideological distance, identity, personal experience), which inform citizen's cue-taking (congruence, compensation). The question is of course to what extent these findings can be generalized to other (types of) crises (governance) or different MLG systems.

## 6. Conclusion: gaps in the literature and avenues for further research

The literature review is based on 52 articles, found in three databases, about political trust as a dependent variable in two distinct contexts that are increasingly relevant: multilevel governance systems and crisis governance contexts. Respectively sixteen and thirty-two articles dealt with citizens' political trust in one of these circumstances, four dealt with both. As only three databases were searched and the criteria to include literature were quite strict, it is possible that some useful articles missed the final cut. We are, however, confident that the picture of the literature that is sketched in this paper reflects the present state of the art in both strands of literature. The fact that we did not find many articles might also suggest that this research domain is still developing and underexplored, because, as we will demonstrate, much more can be studied.

The articles share some similarities with regards to their dependent variable (political trust, never dis- or mistrust), their analyses (quantitative cross-sectional), the data that are used (panel and single survey data) as well as the research domain (political science/public administration). The articles, however, do not share the same notion of political trust and identified different mechanisms underlying political trust formation. As mentioned, different authors employ different notions and different operationalizations of political trust. Some tie it to concepts of support, disagreeing on whether it is about diffuse or specific support, or legitimacy, while others use it as an isolated concept. The authors also operationalize it differently: from trust in parliaments to trust in governments or in the legal system. Common between these articles is that they all refer to trust in political institutions and that they all identified similar control variables that influence political trust. Indeed, all studies that included age, education and gender as control variables found that they influence trust, and that the effect is the same, both in times of crisis and/or in MLG structures. Women and older people are generally more trusting, as well as people with a higher level of education (e.g., Talving and Vasilopoulo 2021; Rump and Zwiener-Collins 2021). Political





sophistication also has a positive effect in the sense that people with more knowledge about the political system tend to have more political trust (e.g., Proszowska et al. 2021; Hartevelde et al. 2013).

The main findings about trust in political institutions in MLG and crisis contexts can be summarized in four points. First, there is no evidence for cognitive minimalism. Citizens do differentiate between governance levels when assessing their trust. In other words, they do not randomly attribute trust to political institutions. Secondly, political trust depends on citizens' evaluations and not on facts. Examples of this subjective rationality are the importance of perceived performance of the economy or of democratic institutions in citizens' trust judgments, as well as of perceived responsiveness and responsibility attribution. Thirdly, there is a strong emotional or non-rational component to trust, especially in times of crisis. A fitting example is the rally effect, mostly driven by anxiety, that many authors observed at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Relatedly, identity and ideological distance to the incumbent government play a role in trust formation processes as well. The effect of personal experience on trust is debated, but often used as an explanation for varying trust levels. Finally, in MLG systems, bi-directional trust spillovers from one level to another are a common explanation for similar (congruence) or opposite (compensation) trust levels between governance levels. These are explained by the abovementioned mechanisms, and by cue-taking from lower levels of government (cognitive proximity) or from the most salient levels of government (institutional saliency). Research, however, also shows that political institutions at various levels of government are judged on their own domain, hinting at the level-specificity of political trust.

What, then, are the gaps in the literature that emerged from the literature review? We discuss four. First, studies on political trust and crisis governance often neglect the subnational and supranational levels. Research however shows that, especially during the pandemic, crisis mitigating measures were taken at all levels of government, from the local to the supranational level (Lynggaard et al. 2022). Secondly, subnational (especially regional) levels are rarely included in studies on governance and trust in MLG contexts, despite the growing importance and relevance of these levels in MLG systems. This is probably partly due to the absence of questions on the regional level in often-used datasets like Eurobarometer or the ESS. Thirdly and related, studies on the impact of crisis governance on trust in MLG systems neglect the effect of crisis governance in MLG contexts with





regards to crises other than the sovereign debt crisis. Finally, research on political trust in times of crisis neglects the actual policies and the policymaking process. This process of policymaking in times of crisis, i.e., how crisis mitigating measures came into being, are never considered even though, in severe crisis situations, the proper procedures are not always followed (Popelier 2020).

These so-called gaps inform the avenues for further research. Given the increasing relevance and powers of subnational levels of government, this level deserves more attention, both in literature on political trust and crisis governance and on political trust and MLG. Secondly, and related to the discussion part, the effect of crisis governance on political trust in MLG systems deserves more attention. National or supranational level political institutions are not always the only ones taking crisis mitigating measures, but also lower levels of government can have an impact, directly or indirectly through intergovernmental discussion, as the reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic shows (Hegele and Schnabel 2021; Bursens et al. 2021). As this literature is only concerned with the sovereign debt crisis in the EU, which was a strictly economic crisis that mostly affected some bailout countries in the EU, more research is needed. Especially because crises are becoming increasingly complex, being different types of crises (health, economic, disasters, social...) at the same time. Furthermore, they need to be dealt with by more and more levels of government – local, subnational, national, supranational, international, global – as crises are increasingly transboundary (Boin et al. 2020; Boin and Lodge 2016). One only needs to think about recent (COVID-19) or ongoing (climate change, energy) crises to observe the disruptive, interconnected and complex nature of present-day crises.

Finally, research could delve into the question on if and how trust depends on the way in which crisis mitigating measures are formed and adopted. Not only the nature of the decision-making might have an effect (transparency, legality...), but also, taking the MLG context into account, the level at which a measure is taken, or if measures are taken through intergovernmental deliberations or not. One could expand this even further by studying whether the type of political system, i.e., the way in which the system is organized – unitary, (con)federation, cooperative vs. conflicting federalism, strong local levels... – matters for citizens' political trust, especially in times of crisis when systems might change or adapt themselves (e.g., Popelier 2021). The latter avenues for further research might benefit from



insights from (comparative) legal studies, thereby moving the contemporary literature on political trust beyond political science.

---

<sup>1</sup> PhD researcher in the Government and Law (Faculty of Law) and Politics and Public Governance (Faculty of Social Sciences) research groups at the University of Antwerp. I am also a member of the GOVTRUST Centre of Excellence (University of Antwerp). Email address: [Jakob.Frateur@uantwerpen.be](mailto:Jakob.Frateur@uantwerpen.be)

<sup>11</sup> The full search string is: “trust AND (crisis OR crises) OR ((multilevel OR multi-level OR decentral\* OR subnational OR supranational OR intergovernmental OR federal\*) AND govern\*)”

## References

- Algan Yann, 2018, ‘Trust and Social Capital’. In *For Good Measures. Advancing Research on Well-Being Metrics beyond GDP*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 283-320.
- Behnke Nathalie et al. (eds.), 2019, *Configurations, Dynamics and Mechanisms of Multilevel Governance*, Palgrave MacMillan, London.
- Biela Jan et al., 2013, *Policy Making in Multilevel Systems: Federalism, Decentralisation, and Performance in the OECD Countries*, ECPR Press, Colchester.
- Boin Arjen and Martin Lodge, 2016, ‘Designing Resilient Institutions for Transboundary Crisis Management: A Time for Public Administration’, *Public Administration* 94 (2): 289-298.
- Boin Arjen et al., 2020, ‘Learning from the COVID-19 Crisis: An Initial Analysis of National Responses’, *Policy Design and Practice* 3 (3): 189-204.
- Bursens Peter et al., 2022, ‘Belgium’s Response to COVID-19: How to Manage a Pandemic in a Competitive Federal System?’ In Chattopadhyay Rupak et al. (eds.), *Federalism and the Response to COVID-19: A Comparative Analysis*, Routledge, London, 39-48.
- Close Caroline et al, 2023, ‘A scandal effect? Local scandals and political trust’, *Acta Politica* 58, 212-236.
- Cook Timothy and Paul Gronke, 2005, ‘The Skeptical American: Revisiting the Meanings of Trust in Government and Confidence in Institutions’, *Journal of Politics* 67 (3): 784-803.
- Dalton Robert, 2004, *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Devine Daniel, 2022, ‘Does Political Trust Matter? A Meta-Analysis on the Consequences of Trust’, *OSF Preprints*.
- Devine Daniel et al., 2024, ‘Political trust in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic: a meta-analysis of 67 studies’, *Journal of European Public Policy*.
- Dinesen Peter Thisted and Mads Meier Jaeger, 2013, ‘The Effect of Terror on Institutional Trust: New Evidence from the 03/11 Madrid Terrorist Attack’, *Political Psychology* 34 (6): 917-926.
- Easton David, 1975, ‘A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support’, *British Journal of Political Science* 5 (4): 435-457.
- Grimes Marcia, 2006, ‘Organizing consent: The role of procedural fairness in political trust and compliance’, *European Journal of Political Research* 45 (1): 285-315.
- Hardin Russel (2000), ‘Do we want trust in government?’ In Warren Mark, *Democracy and trust*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 22-41.
- Hegele Yvonne and Johanna Schnabel, 2021, ‘Federalism and the management of the COVID-19 crisis: centralisation, decentralisation and (non-)coordination’, *West European Politics* 44(5–6): 1052-1076.
- Hooghe Marc, 2011, ‘Why There Is Basically Only One Form of Political Trust’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 13 (2): 269-275.
- Jennings Will et al. (2021), ‘How Trust, Mistrust and Distrust Shape the Governance of the COVID-19 Crisis’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 28 (8): 1174-1196.



- Karlsson Martin et al., 2021, 'Democratic Innovation in Times of Crisis: Exploring Changes in Social and Political Trust', *Policy & Internet* 13 (1): 113-133.
- Lynggaard Kenneth et al. (eds.), 2022, *Governments' Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic in Europe: Navigating the Perfect Storm*, Palgrave MacMillan, London.
- Marien Sofie and Marc Hooghe, 2011, 'Does political trust matter? An empirical investigation into the relation between political trust and support for law compliance', *European Journal of Political Research* 50 (2): 267-291.
- Newton Kenneth, 1999, 'Social and political trust in established democracies'. In Norris Pippa (ed.), *Critical Citizens. Global support for democratic government*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 169-187.
- Norris Pippa, 1999, *Critical Citizens. Global Support for Democratic Governance*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Norris Pippa, 2017, 'The conceptual framework of political support'. In van der Meer Tom and Sonja Zmerli (eds.), *Handbook on political trust*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham, 19-32.
- Popelier Patricia, 2020, 'COVID-19 Legislation in Belgium at the Crossroads of a Political and a Health Crisis', *The Theory and Practice of Legislation* 8 (1-2): 131-153.
- Popelier Patricia, 2021, *Dynamic Federalism. A new theory for cohesion and regional autonomy*, Routledge, London.
- Schakel Arjen et al, 2015, 'Multilevel Governance and the State'. In Leibfried Stephan et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Transformations of the State*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 269-285.
- Schneider Irena, 2017, 'Can We Trust Measures of Political Trust? Assessing Measurement Equivalence in Diverse Regime Types', *Social Indicators Research* 133: 963-984.
- Thomassen Jacques et al, 2017, 'Political trust and the decline of legitimacy debate: a theoretical and empirical investigation into their interrelationship'. In van der Meer Tom and Sonja Zmerli, *Handbook on political trust*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham, 509-525.
- van der Meer Tom, 2016, 'Political trust and "the crisis of democracy"'. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia on Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- van der Meer Tom and Sonja Zmerli, 2017, *Handbook on political trust*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham.
- Wynen Jan et al, 2022, 'Taking a COVID-19 Vaccine or Not? Do Trust in Government and Trust in Experts Help Us to Understand Vaccination Intention?', *Administration and Society* 54 (10): 1875-1901.
- Zaller John, 1992, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

#### Pieces included in the review

- Aassve Arnstein et al., 2024, 'Social and political trust diverge during a crisis', *Nature Scientific Reports* 14 (331): 1-12.
- Angelucci Davide and Davide Vittori, 2023, 'Where you live explains how much you trust local (and national) institutions: a study of the Italian case', *European Political Science Review*.
- Ares Macarena et al., 2017, 'Diffuse Support for the European Union: Spillover Effects of the Politicization of the European Integration Process at the Domestic Level', *Journal of European Public Policy* 24 (8): 1091-1115.
- Armingeon Klaus and Besir Ceka, 2014, 'The Loss of Trust in the European Union during the Great Recession since 2007: The Role of Heuristics from the National Political System', *European Union Politics* 15 (1): 82-107.
- Armingeon Klaus and Kai Guthmann, 'Democracy in Crisis? The Declining Support for National Democracy in European Countries, 2007-2011', *European Journal of Political Research* 53 (3): 423-442.
- Baekgaard Martin et al., 2020, 'Rallying around the Flag in Times of Covid-19: Societal Lockdown and Trust in Democratic Institutions', *Journal of Behavioral Public Administration* 3 (2): 1-12.
- Belchior Ana Maria and Conceição Pequeto Teixeira, 2023, 'Determinants of Political Trust during the



Early Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Putting Policy Performance into Evidence', *Political Studies Review*.

- Biten Merve et al., 2022, 'How Does Fiscal Austerity Affect Trust in the European Union? Analyzing the Role of Responsibility Attribution', *Journal of European Public Policy* 29: 1-17.
- Bol Damien et al., 2020, 'The Effect of COVID-19 Lockdowns on Political Support: Some Good News for Democracy?', *European Journal of Political Research* 60 (2): 497-505.
- Brosius Anna et al., 2020, 'Trust in Context: National Heuristics and Survey Context Effects on Political Trust in the European Union', *European Union Politics* 21 (2): 294-311.
- Colloca Pasquale et al., 2024, Rally 'round the flag effects are not for all: Trajectories of institutional trust among populist and non-populist voters, *Social Science Research* 119: 1–11.
- Coromina Lluís and Simona Kustec, 'Analytical Images of Political Trust in Times of Global Challenges. The Case of Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland', *Journal of Comparative Politics* 13 (1): 102-118.
- Davies Ben et al., 2021, 'Changes in Political Trust in Britain during the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020: Integrated Public Opinion Evidence and Implications', *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 8 (166).
- Delhey Jan et al., 2023, 'Existential insecurity and trust during the COVID-19 pandemic: the case of Germany', *Journal of Trust Research* 13 (2), 140-163.
- Devine Daniel et al., 2021, 'Trust and the Coronavirus Pandemic: What Are the Consequences of and for Trust? An Early Review of the Literature', *Political Studies Review* 19 (2): 274-285.
- Dominiononi Goran et al., 2020, 'Trust Spillovers among National and European Institutions'. *European Union Politics* 21 (2): 276-293.
- Erhardt Julian et al., 2022, 'What drives political support? Evidence from a survey experiment at the onset of the corona crisis', *Contemporary Politics* 28 (4): 429-446.
- Esaiasson Peter et al., 2021, 'How the Coronavirus Affects Citizen Trust in Institutions and in Unknown Others: Evidence from the "Swedish Experiment"', *European Journal of Political Research* 60 (3): 748-760.
- Fitzgerald Jennifer and Jennifer Wolak, 2016, 'The Roots of Trust in Local Government in Western Europe', *International Political Science Review* 37 (1): 130-146.
- Freimuth Vicki et al., 2014, 'Trust during the Early Stages of the 2009 H1N1 Pandemic', *Journal of Health Communication* 19 (3): 321-339.
- Goldfinch Shaun et al., 2020, 'Trust in government increased during Covid-19 pandemic in Australia and New Zealand', *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 80 (1): 3-11.
- Gozgor Giray. 2022, 'Global Evidence on the Determinants of Public Trust in Governments during the COVID-19', *Applied Research in Quality of Life* 17: 559-578.
- Groeniger Joost Oude et al., 2021, 'Dutch COVID-19 Lockdown Measures Increased Trust in Government and Trust in Science: A Difference-in-Differences Analysis', *Social Science & Medicine* 275: 1-8.
- Harteveld Eelco et al., 2013, 'In Europe We Trust? Exploring the Logics of Trust in the EU', *European Union Politics* 14 (4): 542-565.
- Haugsgjerd Atle, 2017, 'Political Distrust amidst the Great Recession: The Mitigating Effect of Welfare State Effort', *Comparative European Politics* 4: 620-648.
- Hegewald Sven, 2024, Locality as a safe haven: place-based resentment and political trust in local and national institutions, *Journal of European Public Policy* 31 (6): 1749–1774.
- Hegewald Sven and Dominik Schraff, 2022, 'Who rallies around the flag? Evidence from panel data during the Covid-19 pandemic', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*.
- Herati Hoda et al., 2023, Canadian's trust in government in a time of crisis: Does it matter? *PLOS ONE* 18 (9): 1–18.
- Hobolt Sara, 2012, 'Citizen Satisfaction with Democracy in the European Union', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50 (1): 88-105.
- Kritzinger Sylvia et al., 2021, "Rally Round the Flag": The COVID-19 Crisis and Trust in the National Government', *West European Politics* 44 (5–6): 1205-1231.





- Kudrnáč Aleš and Jan Klusáček, 2022, 'The Temporary Increase in Trust in Government and Compliance with Anti-Pandemic Measures at the Start of the Covid-19 Pandemic', *Czech Sociological Review* 58 (2): 119-149.
- Lipps Jana and Dominik Schraff, 2021, 'Regional Inequality and Institutional Trust in Europe' in *European Journal of Political Research* 60 (4): 892-913.
- Liu Ting-An-XU et al., 2021, 'Revisiting "Big Questions" of Public Administration after COVID-19: A Systematic Review', *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* 43 (3): 131-168.
- Muñoz Jordi, 2017, 'Political Trust and Multilevel Government'. In van der Meer Tom and Sonja Zmerli, *Handbook on Political Trust*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham, 69-88.
- Muñoz Jordi et al., 2011, 'Institutional Trust and Multilevel Government in the European Union: Congruence or Compensation?', *European Union Politics* 12 (4): 551-74.
- Nielsen Julie Hassing and Johannes Lindvall, 2021, 'Trust in government in Sweden and Denmark during the COVID-19 epidemic', *West European Politics* 44 (5-6): 1180-1204.
- O'Sullivan Siobhan et al., 2014, 'Political Legitimacy in Ireland during Economic Crisis: Insights from the European Social Survey', *Irish Political Studies* 29 (4): 547-572.
- Proszowska Dominika, 2019, 'Trust Lost, Trust Regained? Trust, Legitimacy and Multilevel Governance'. In Lord Christopher et al. (eds.), *The Politics of Legitimation in the European Union. Legitimacy Recovered?* Routledge, London, 61-89.
- Proszowska Dominika et al., 2021, 'Political Trust in a Multilevel Polity: Patterns of Differentiation among More and Less Politically Sophisticated Citizens', *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 89 (1): 165-185.
- Proszowska Dominika et al., 2023, 'On Their Own Turf? The Level-Specificity of Political Trust in Multilevel Political Systems', *Acta Politica* 57: 510-528.
- Rieger Marc Oliver and Mei Wang, 2022, 'Trust in Government Actions during the COVID-19 Crisis', *Social Indicators Research* 159: 967-989.
- Rump Maïke and Nadine Zwiener-Collins, 2021, 'What Determines Political Trust during the COVID-19 Crisis? The Role of Sociotropic and Egotropic Crisis Impact', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 31 (51): 259-271.
- Schraff Dominik, 2020, 'Political trust during the COVID-19 pandemic: rally around the flag or lockdown effects?', *European Journal of Political Research* 60 (4): 1007-1017.
- Sibley Chris G., 2020, 'Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Nationwide Lockdown on Trust Attitudes toward Government and Well-Being', *American Psychologist* 75 (5): 618-630.
- Stoker Gerry et al., 2023, "Trust and Local Government: A Positive Relationship?" In Teles Filipe, *Local and Regional Governance*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, 49-64.
- Talving Liisa and Sofia Vasilopoulo, 2021, 'Linking Two Levels of Governance: Citizens' Trust in Domestic and European Institutions over Time', *Electoral Studies* 70: 1-15.
- Torcal Mariano, 2014, 'The Decline of Political Trust in Spain and Portugal: Economic Performance or Political Responsiveness?', *American Behavioral Scientist* 58 (12): 1542-1567.
- Torcal Mariano and Paulo Christmann, 2019, 'Congruence, National Context and Trust in European Institutions', *Journal of European Public Policy* 26 (12): 1779-1798.
- van der Meer Tom et al., 2023, 'Fear and the Covid-19 rally around the flag: a panel study on political trust', *West European Politics* 46 (6): 1089-1105.
- Weinberg James, 2022, 'Trust, Governance, and the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Explainer Using Longitudinal Data from the United Kingdom', *The Political Quarterly* 93 (2): 316-325.
- Wolak Jennifer, 2020, 'Why Do People Trust Their State Government?', *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 20 (3): 313-329.
- Wu Cary and Rima Wilkes, 2018, 'Local-national political trust patterns: why China is an exception', *International Political Science Review* 39 (4), 436-454.