Introduction

The judicial system is a foundational democratic institution that is charged with the legal protection of citizens and their rights. Recent events in the United States regarding inequalities and the judicial system have sparked social movements and inspired debate on the relationship between disadvantaged groups and the judicial system's tendency towards justice or, in some cases, injustice. There is a well-established literature on demographic and attitudinal correlates of trust in institutions, especially in the United States with its long-serving system of laws (Levi & Stoker 2000). This literature finds that the economically advantaged are more likely to trust the judicial system than the disadvantaged (Levi & Stoker 2000; Smith 2010). While there is a large international literature on trust in institutions, there is very little on trust in the judicial system, specifically. In the context of the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), with its relatively recent institutionalization of democratic law, the association between demographics and political attitudes on one side of the equation, and trust in the judiciary on the other, is not well-established. The main research question of this project is, “To what extent does economic situation and political attitudes influence individual trust in Poland’s judicial system?

I examine this question in the context of Poland. One of the largest countries in Europe, and the largest of the CEE, Poland had a Communist government from the end of World War Two until 1989. Poland continues to experience radical social change: In addition to the upheavals of 1989, the rush to European Union accession in 2004, and the late lustration policies of 2005-2007, the judicial and other governance institutions went through major reforms. In 2015, Law and Justice (PiS), a populist Catholic nationalist political party which was last in power during the 2005-2007 period, sought to change the laws that govern the operation of the constitutional courts. These changes to the judicial system have sparked mass demonstrations and a rebuke from the European Union that Poland is slipping away from its democratic ideals.

To address my research question, and to meaningfully add to the debates on economic situation, political attitudes, and trust in the judicial system, I have analyzed the Polish Panel Survey, POLPAN, a nationally representative panel dataset of Poles who were interviewed every five years since 1988. I focused on the 2008 and 2013 waves. These years cover the longest period of political stability in Poland’s post-Communist history: Civic Platform, a centre-right political party that promotes the European Union, globalization and free markets, held the majority in parliament from 2007 to 2015.

Theory and Hypotheses

I engage with theories of institutional development, trust in institutions, and social stratification. Institutional development is the idea
that institutions evolve through time: major changes are in terms of function, whether the new institution has been constructed over top of the old, or if the institution loses its relevance to society (Murillo and Levitsky 2009). Murillo and Levitsky (2009) argue that new institutions can be weakly enforced, and as such, they can question the validity of the rule of law. This, in turn, breeds uncertainty and an erosion of trust in institutions. Corruption, or the appearance of corruption, matters, too. Rothstein and Uslaner (2005) argue that, “Countries that start out with high levels of inequality and corruption, their governments will be caught in a vicious circle or’inequality trap’ (45). After 1989, Poland built its judicial system based on Western European standards, but it developed in the post-Communist context of radical changes and deep distrust in government and its system of laws. I posit the following hypotheses for Poland during 2008 to 2013:  

**Hypothesis 1:** Advantaged social classes express greater trust in the judicial system than disadvantaged classes, controlling for age, gender, religion and trust in political institutions.

**Hypothesis 2:** Those with high trust in the judicial system are also likely to have high trust in parliament and political parties, controlling for social class, age, gender and religion.

**Hypothesis 3:** Those who perceive that the government has a positive impact on corruption will be more likely to have high trust in judicial system, controlling for social class, age, gender, religion, and trust in political institutions.

### Data, Variables and Methods

POLAN is a panel survey of Poles that began in 1988. Respondents were re-interviewed every five years thereafter. The latest wave of responses was collected in 2013 (for details on the survey, see Slomczynski et al. 2015). I use the 2008 and 2013 waves. POLAN contains data on various aspects of human social life, including those pertinent to this study: economic situation, trust in institutions, political attitudes and demographics such as gender, age, and education.

My primary dependent variable is trust in the judicial system, measured with the item, “I will list various institutions. Please indicate to what extent you have trust in them: justice system.” The response categories range from “to a very high extent” (5) to “very little or not at all” (1). For the purpose of this research, the phrase “judicial system” will encompass the function and motives of the phrase “justice system”. The main independent variables are economic situation and political attitudes. For economic situation, I will use an objective indicator, combining respondent’s years of education and a measure of the frequency of privileged respondents in the 2008 wave of POLAN. I will also include a subjective indicator of economic situation, which is that of respondent’s self-ranked social status on a 10-point scale.

I include three political attitude variables. First, I include trust in other institutions, including trust in parliament and in political parties. Second, I include perception of government effectiveness against corruption, with the item: “Many countries experience such problems with corruption. Do you evaluate the effectiveness of actions undertaken by the current Polish government towards reducing corruption as very high, somewhat high, average, somewhat low or very low?”

Third, I have included a measure of confidence in the government, through respondent’s evaluation of the phrase: “In Poland, there has yet been no government which could be trusted to undertake the right actions”. I also asked the question: “Do you consider the work of the European Parliament increase, trust in political institutions, is this, too, is empirically supported. Hypothesis 3 proposes that those who perceive that the government has a positive impact on corruption will be more likely to have a high level of trust in the judicial system, and this, too, is empirically supported.

**Results**

Table 2 illustrates the strength and direction of the relationship between these selected variables and the dependent variable, trust in the judicial system, and this, too, is empirically supported.
Table 3, years of education was one of the most significant variables. In Table 5, when the influence of the government on corruption is considered, years of education becomes the least significant variable; it is unclear why this is the case. In both models, age was shown to have the greatest impact; as age increases, trust decreases. Further research regarding the relationship between age and political trust is needed.

References


# Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for All Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of variable (year of POLPAN arrive in parentheses)</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable(s)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in the Judicial System</td>
<td>E05C</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>2194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: To what extent do you trust the justice system?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trust13 (2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent, Control, and Additional Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Confidence in the Government</td>
<td>VM02A</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: Evaluate the statement &quot;In Poland, there has yet been no government which could be trusted to undertake the right actions. sex: male=1, female=0 (2008)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privileged Social Class</td>
<td>Chs3cat2008</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>6016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: Privileged 0=Neutral &amp; Disadvantaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Social Status</td>
<td>VSDBJ_STATUS08</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: To what extent do you feel you trust the political parties?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trustpol13 (2013)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in European Parliament</td>
<td>E05D</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>2199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: To what extent do you trust the European Parliament?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trustlep13 (2013)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Allocation</td>
<td>Edays08</td>
<td>11.88</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education</td>
<td>Edays08</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: Please indicate where on this scale you would locate yourself among other individuals, groups, or organizations.Gender: sex: male=1, female=0 (2008)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent’s Age</td>
<td>AGE2013</td>
<td>45.54</td>
<td>19.58</td>
<td>2106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relasqy</td>
<td>VW21</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of mass attendance</td>
<td>VW21</td>
<td>0=Never</td>
<td>3=About once a week or more than once a week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences of the Government on Corruption</td>
<td>E04B</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: In your opinion, the extent to which the actions undertaken by the current Polish government towards the reduction of corruption in... apply in your opinion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Political Parties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: To what extent do you trust political parties?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Observations |
|--------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------|-------------|
|              | 2194        | 1470      | 6016                | 1421        |
|              | 1408        | 5.8 10    | 2106                | 1375        |
|              | 11.88 3.11  |           |                     | 3.52 1.10   |
|              |             |           |                     | 2199        |
|              | 3=About once a week or more than once a week | | | | |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust in the Judicial System (2013)</th>
<th>Total Correlation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Confidence in the Government (2008)</td>
<td>-0.127*</td>
<td>1049</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Social Status (2008)</td>
<td>0.134*</td>
<td>1014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education (2008)</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>1048</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>2194</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (2013)</td>
<td>-0.234*</td>
<td>2194</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity (2008)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>981</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.050

Table 3. Linear Regression of Trust in the Judicial System in 2013 on Lack of Confidence in the Government in 2008 and Other Selected Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent and Control Variables</th>
<th>Trust in the Judicial System (2013)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Confidence in the Government (2008)</td>
<td>-0.110*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Social Status (2008)</td>
<td>0.059*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education (2008)</td>
<td>-0.018**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (2013)</td>
<td>-0.011*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity (2008)</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.329</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fit Statistics: F=9.770 (df=6) R²= 0.061 Root MSE=0.948 N=945

* p<0.050  ** p<0.010


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Political Parties (2013)</td>
<td>0.258*</td>
<td>0.300*</td>
<td>2189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in the European Parliament (2013)</td>
<td>0.228*</td>
<td>0.215*</td>
<td>2189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.050

Table 5. Linear Regression of Trust in the Judicial System (2013) on Influence of the Government on Corruption (2013) and Other Selected Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent and Control Variables</th>
<th>Trust in the Judicial System (2013)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of the Government on Corruption (2013)</td>
<td>0.176*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Confidence in the Government (2008)</td>
<td>-0.105*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Social Status (2008)</td>
<td>0.054**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education (2008)</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (2013)</td>
<td>-0.015*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religiosity (2008)</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.874</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fit Statistics: F=14.830* (df=7) R²= 0.126 Root MSE=0.912 N=769

* p<0.050  ** p<0.010