What is affecting political trust?

A comparative study on Europe
Abstract

This study addresses the question of what is affecting political trust in Europe. Political trust is vital for creating system legitimacy, which is needed for a democracy to be stable and effective. Over the years many theories about what is determining political trust have been developed, though no consensus of which theory that has the most effect has been reached. This paper will examine the effect that social capital and economic fairness evaluations have on political trust in Europe and if these effects can be seen to change depending on how long the countries has had democratic institutions. 27 countries were included in the study; these were divided into four regions depending on their time with democratic institutions.

The theories used when looking at what could be effecting political trust are the social capital theory, defined by Robert Putnam in his studies of the system changes in Italy and the United States, and the economic fairness theory, used by Kluegel & Manson in their research on the post-communist states in Eastern Europe. The division of countries based on time with democratic institutions was done based on the two forms of political support defined by David Easton. The survey material used in the study is taken from the 2012 European Social Survey (ESS).

The study concludes that both social capital as well as economic fairness evaluations have an effect on political trust, though how strong the effects are varies depending on the region of research and on which parts of the two theories that is tested. Though by far the strongest impact is in all four European regions seen when looking at how the citizens evaluate the economic system. The time since a country formed democratic institutions could not be found to have an effect on political trust.

Keywords: Political trust, Social capital, Economic fairness evaluations, Robert Putnam, James Kluegel, David Manson, David Easton, Diffuse support, Europe
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1. Introduction

Democracy is one of the western world’s greatest values, something that by most people living in a democratic system is considered valuable and maybe even crucial for the whole world to function. There is no consensus about what a system needs to entail to qualify as democratic. Though no matter if we stand by a strict or loose definition of democracy it entails elected representatives and institutions which are meant to govern the people. The question is what it is worth to have elections and elected representatives if the people do not feel confidence and trust in the political system. This study is made to keep building on the knowledge of what is actually determining if we feel trust in the governing institutions.

The possible decrease in political trust has long been debated, both in old democracies such as the United States and new democracies such as the former communist states in Eastern Europe. The main debate has not been about whether or not the trust in political leaders has actually decreased, but rather if the decrease is a sign of lack of trust in the elected representatives and their institutions or reflects distrust in democracy as a political system. Arthur Miller (1974) considered the declining confidence in the politics of the United States to originate from political scandals and the politicians failure to implement working policies. He argued that this scepticism was being generalized to a broader mistrust in the system as a whole. Though other researchers such as Jack Citrin (1974) considers Millers interpretation to be too pessimistic, he instead believes that this decline shows a disappointment towards specific politicians and authorities and therefore is not a sign of mistrust in the democratic system (Dalton 2008:244).

In Europe this has also been a topic for researchers, Jonas Linde and Gissur ó Erlingsson (2013) have been looking at how presumed corruption in Sweden might be leading to mistrust in the democratic system and a lack of legitimacy for its leaders. Even though many researchers have been studying the topic of political trust and its change over time, they have not come to a consensus about what is causing rise or decline in political trust. There has also been a debate about whether the trust in political institutions and in democracy as a system are interconnected or separate phenomena’s, though this question will not be assessed in this study.

David Easton (1965:267ff; 1975:436ff) defined two different types of political support, the first being diffuse support, something that is created during your upbringing and is more of a state of mind. This support is the feeling towards the system and its institutions as a whole and does not, according to Easton, get affected by mistakes done by one or some elected representatives. The second support is specific support which is a feeling shaped by action of the officeholders and
political elites. The specific support can change much faster than the diffuse support and since all representatives occasionally fail to live up to the public’s expectations a democratic system needs a supply of diffuse support to remain strong even through the hard times when governments do not live up to the expectations of their citizens (Dalton 2008:240).

The goal of this study is to analyse and compare the effect that varying degrees of social capital and the people’s evaluations of the distributional fairness of the economic system have on political trust in the European context.

When looking at Easton’s definition of specific and diffuse support, he argues that with a high diffuse support within the country the people become less influenced by temporary problems, such as misbehaving politicians or economic decline (Easton 1975:451ff). New institutions take a long time to establish and to have an effect on people’s behaviour, culture and most importantly feelings (Putnam 2011:74). To understand how the level of social capital and economic fairness evaluations affect countries with a varying degree of diffuse support I have chosen to divide 27 of the countries surveyed in the 2012 European Social Survey (ESS) into four regions, based on the time since they formed democratic institutions. This division was done to control for the hypothesis that old democracies, with well-established institutions, which should have a high level of diffuse support, show more confidence in the political institutions and whether this can be correlated to the effect that the social capital or economic system evaluations have on political trust.

1.1 Theory

To see what is affecting the political trust in the four European regions two established theories have been analysed. The first theory is the social capital theory; this theory has been used and defined in the work of Robert Putnam. The social capital theory revolves around people’s social involvement and networks, both strong and weak, which they build up during their lives. These networks help form trust in other people; this trust serves as a base for a wider understanding and social confidence. Strong social capital in a country has been seen to increase the government’s effectiveness, according to Putnam (2001:363ff), this is also increasing the confidence that the people have for the system and its representatives.

The second theory is an extension of the Social Justice Theory, which has its roots as far back as Socrates and which has later been refined by John Rawls (1971), amongst others, in the book *A theory of social justice*. This study will be based on the definitions used by James R. Kluegel & David S. Manson (2004) in their research about the economic fairness aspects effect on political trust and legitimacy in the post-communist states. They find that people’s perception of the
distributional capacity of the government and its institutions as well as the perceived economic situation of the country is great determinants for political trust.

1.2 Method

This study is conducted as a quantitative, theory testing, comparative study on what can be seen to affect people’s trust in their political institutions in the European setting. The study is comparing 27 out of the 29 countries surveyed in the 2012 ESS; these countries were divided up into four regions depending on the time since they formed democratic institutions. Since the focus of the study was on Europe in a geographical sense two countries have been excluded from the 2012 ESS survey. Russia was not included in this study since it to the most part is located in Asia and Israel was not included since it is located in the Middle East.

The questions were answered through multivariate regression analysis conducted on the results from the 2012 ESS and through descriptive data derived using SPSS. Eleven questions from the 2012 ESS were chosen to represent three parts of the Social capital theory; these questions were revolving around the organisational and interpersonal aspects of people’s lives. Further, five questions were chosen to represent and test the Economic fairness theory where three questions were focused on fairness and two on the economic situation of the households and the country.

In the 2012 survey we can see that the respondents had high expectations on and demands of the democratic system in their countries. The demands were much higher than just having free and fair elections of representatives and even though the Topline Results from the 2012 ESS show that some sort of consensus about what a democracy needs to entail has been reached, we can also see a gap in the views of how the democratic systems in the different countries are perceived to be functioning. The 2012 survey showed that all governments have been falling short of living up to their citizens expectations regardless of how high the expectations were (Ferrin et al. 2012:9,14,17).
1.3 Purpose and Research problem

According to Putnam (1993) democracies are not resistant or durable without the trust and participation of their people and therefore trust is a vital ingredient in the success of a democratic system. Kluegel & Manson (2004) also argues that democracies need the support and trust of its people to become established and to function in a good way. Pharr & Putnam (2000:xviii) argues that after the end of the cold war liberal democracies had proven their power and shown that they could survive the test of time and stand firm against other ideologies. The dilemma now is whether or not the democratic institutions and their leaders can satisfy the needs of the people.

There are many different theories about what can be affecting trust in the political system. According to Peter Kotzian (2010:23f,31,35) the economic development of a country is the single most important factor to explain support of the democratic system. In his article he compares the economic development factor to other individual orientated factors, such as perceived corruption and satisfaction with life. Kotzian reaches the conclusion that support for liberal democracy is never stable, but always dependent on the economic situation of the country. In contrary Pedro C. Magalhães (2014:77) uses David Easton definitions of the diffuse and specific support and argues, after analysing 100 surveys from around 80 countries, that government effectiveness measured in the quality of policy-making formulation and implementation, and not economic development, is the strongest determinant for politic support.

Since all theories, about what is affecting individuals trust in the political system, seems to be strengthened by some and refuted by others it led me to believe that there is a need for more research to be conducted in this area. I have done this to keep building on the knowledge of which theory is most effective when looking at political trust. The aim of this study is to look at how well the social capital and economic fairness theories can explain confidence in the political system in the European context. To do this I have chosen to, with the 2012 ESS as a base, look at and compare 27 countries divided into four regions. These regions are: Northern, Central, Southern and Eastern Europe. The 27 countries have been divided based on the time since democratic institutions were formed in the countries. This was done to control for the effect that time with democracy might have on the level of political trust, as well as to see the relationship between this and the explanatory power that the two theories have.
1.4 Research question

The main research question for this study is;
*What explains trust in the political institutions in Europe?*

This main question is going to be answered through three sub-questions;

1. *How does the political trust compare between the four regions?*

2. *What correlation can be seen between the amount of time that the regions have been democratic and their level of political trust?*

3. *What effect can the social capital and economic fairness evaluations amongst the people be seen to have on political trust in the European context and which of them have the strongest explanatory power on changes in political trust?*

1.5 Delimitation

This study is delimited to only focus on data retrieved from the 2012 European Social Survey (ESS). This was chosen since the dataset was considered to entail the questions needed to be able to examine the two theories explanatory power. The ESS was also considered to be a reliable source of information since it has been conducted for many years and developed in the aspiration to act as a role model for reliable cross country surveys (ESS - History). The ESS has a wide respondent base with almost 50 000 respondents in the chosen 27 countries, the selection of the respondents is also well accounted for in the ESS material and weights are available to equate for differences between the countries in cross country analyses. This would have been useful if all or some countries had been analysed separately, though the analyses in this study have been conducted on non-weighted data; this since the comparison was done between regions of countries.

Another delimitation has been the division of the countries into four regions instead of doing a full cross country analysis of all 27 countries. This was decided due to time and space restrictions and with the knowledge that this means that there might be cross-country differences within the regions that will not be seen due to the division.

Since not all of the questions used by Putnam and Kluegel & Manson were available in the ESS other questions had to be used as variables in this analysis. The use of other questions might have given slightly different results, though the questions used were carefully chosen and found to be representative for the same variables used in the two theories.
2. Theory

The three theories that will be outlined below will be the basis for this research. The two first were chosen since they approach different angels of what can be affecting political trust and the third theory is the one which was used as a base for the hypothesis that time with democratic institutions effects political trust.

2.1 Social capital

The concept of social capital is something that has been spoken about for centuries, Alexis de Tocqueville highlighted, already in the 1800s, that social organisation was the basis for a stable and working democracy (Putnam 2011:25). The concept of social capital is not well defined and is used with different definitions by researchers, though according to Gaute Torsvik (2000:452,453) some kind of consensus has been reached about the definition of social capital, but this only stretches as far as that social capital is different from other capitals, such as economic, physical or human, but works as a structure to assimilate the other capitals. In this study social capital will be defined as in the research conducted by Robert Putnam (2001:24ff; 2011). Putnam sees social capital as something that is directly connected to a person’s interactions with other people and her engagement in civic and political organisations. Social capital is important for a society to function collectively; if there is mutual trust in the society it will benefit democracy, though it is also important for the individual herself. Putnam speaks about different forms of social capital, primarily the bonding and the bridging capital. The bonding capital is strengthened when you are in a homogenous group; these groups form a base for solidarity, it creates loyalty within the group which gives you support when you need it. Examples of groups where you form more of the bonding capital are ethnic organisations, regional football organisations, golf clubs and others where the group is more excluding. The bridging capital is primarily formed in more diverse groups, such as youth organisations, civil rights organisations or others where people from different backgrounds engage. The bridging capital enhances the information flow a person receives and might increase her chances of finding her way on the job market and make a career. A bonding organisation instead creates a more excluded mind-set amongst the members and enhances antagonistic feelings and a feeling of “we versus them”, though both forms of social capital can have strong positive social impacts. The two capitals strengthen each other and with a loss in one there is also a loss in the other, which is why there is no clear division between them; all
interactions are instead more or less of both (Putnam 2001:22f). This is why there will not be a
differentiation between them in this study.

Putnam and his colleagues see social capital as important for personal gains throughout your
life. When trying to find a job or when you need help in your everyday life it is important to have a
strong social network, which is the basis for your social capital. Social capital can also be seen as a
public gain; people with a strong social capital have been seen to be more efficient which benefit
the society as a whole and can also increases trust in the governing institutions (Herreros 2012). An
example of social capital as an indirect personal gain is a vigilance committee; where even a person
that has a house in the neighbourhood where the committee is active, but that has not themselves
become active in the group or maybe even know their neighbours, gain from the extra attention
being paid to their house (Putnam 2001:19f). According to Putnam (2001:363ff; 2011:112ff) if the
social capital in a country is high there are fewer people that will be inclined to “free ride” on the
system and not follow through on their civic duties. This strengthens the democracy and the trust in
the political system.

Social capital can also be reflected in your interpersonal trust, which means the direct trust
you feel towards other people. If you feel that you can rely on others, feel assured that people will
help you if you help them, and that they will be honest, both personally and in business, you will
also be inclined to be more honest, law abiding and trustworthy yourself. According to Putnam
(2011:126) this creates a civic trust that also positively affects the trust in political institutions.

A strong social capital amongst the citizens has also been shown to increase the capacity of
the political institutions (Putnam 2001:363ff; Putnam 2011:112ff). This could be a reason to why
the publics’ political trust has been seen to increase with a stronger social capital. If this theory
holds also for the four European regions a high participation in civic and political organisations in a
region should render a higher level of trust in the political institutions. The same should then also be
true for a high level of interpersonal trust. These three models have been tried together as different
parameters for social capital.

2.2 Economic fairness

Economic progress is often discussed in positive terms as prosperity, success and wealth but
can also be said to include negatives like inequality, poverty and exploitation. Researchers such as
Lipset (1959) and the modernization school spoke about economic development as a determinant
for democratization. Przeworski (2005) has even claimed that a high Gross Domestic Product
(GDP) acts as a protection for a democracy from retracting back into non-democratic forms of
government. Peter Kotzian (2010) focused his research on development of democracy and the legitimacy of the system. He concluded that the strongest determinant for legitimacy and support for democracy is the economic prosperity of a country. Kotzian (2010) contrary to Przeworski (2005:9) finds that support for liberal democracy is never stable but always dependent on changing economic situation of a country even after a certain level of GDP is reached.

Kluegel & Manson (2004:815f) continues the research on the effect of economic aspects on democracy and legitimacy for a system and its institutions. They have been looking at possible and relative effects of people's perception of economic fairness on democratic system legitimacy, as well as for support of the ruling government in the post-communist states in Eastern Europe. They have built on research previously conducted by Mishler & Rose, which has shown that perception of fairness and economic distribution of the new regime, compared to the old, was the a strong determinant for support in the post-communist states. In Kluegel & Manson’s research they controlled for how the perceived economic fairness and redistribution affect individuals’ political support against other factors that have previously been shown to have an impact; such as GDP, economic system evaluations and economic growth rate. Kluegel & Manson’s assumptions also build on the justice studies which have shown that a strong welfare state, government regulation of the economy, the governments capacity to protect the weak and poor, as well as if the government manages to lay the foundation for equal opportunities, are highly rated in the West but even more important in the Eastern states (Ibid:814). In their research they include two bases for fairness which are also used by the social justice theory; distributive justice and procedural economic justice. The distributive justice is something that indicates how individuals perceive the fairness in the distribution of the economic outcomes in the country. The procedural economic justice is representing the perceived function of the distributive mechanism and if the rules are followed. The hypothesis in their article is that the fairer the people perceive the government the more content they are with the system at large. They hypothesised that the more secure people felt with the distributive mechanisms and the way these were governed the more fair people would also perceive the system, this even if inequality persists (Ibid:817). Kluegel & Manson reaches the conclusion that a very strong determinant for trust and satisfaction with political institutions are the economic system mechanisms, such as market satisfaction, but that fairness is a strong and significant determinant for political trust and system support in the Eastern European states. The effects of the fairness aspects hold even when controlling for the other variables in their study (Ibid:225).
2.3 Easton’s definition of political support

This study has aimed to look at the effect that time with democratic institutions has on political trust and how this effects the impact that social capital and economic fairness evaluations have, this was done based on David Easton's (1965:267ff; 1975:436ff) definition of diffuse support. Easton divided political support into specific support which is a feeling created by action done by the current officeholders and political elites, what is seen in the media and perceived outputs from direct demands on the government. The second support is diffuse support which is something that is accumulated through time and dependent on your upbringing and cultural preferences. The diffuse support is seen more as a state of mind and as support for an ideal rather than dependent on perceived outputs (Miller 1971:201). Easton finds diffuse support to be established through ideals in the society and finds that people in a country with a high diffuse support becomes less influenced by temporary problems with officeholders or a countries temporary economic problems (Easton 1975:451ff). Since new institutions take time to establish and to have an effect on people’s behaviour, culture and feelings (Putnam 2011:74), and through this establish diffuse support for the democratic institutions, this study has chosen to divide the 27 European countries surveyed in the 2012 ESS based on the time since they formed democratic institutions. Research conducted by Scott Mainwaring (1993:204) concludes that the durability of a regime is dependent on the time it has been democratic. A system is deemed strong when it has been an uninterrupted democracy for more than 25 years and becomes more stable with time. This is in line with Easton's definitions of diffuse support and what effect an increased diffuse support could have on a country and its support for the governing institutions.
3. Method and Material

This is a quantitative, theory testing, comparative study. The method design was chosen to enable analysis of what effect that social capital and economic fairness evaluations have on political trust in a European context, and if the effects vary between the four European regions. The method of cross country comparative research can be difficult since the definition of categories, or questions, used often varies between the datasets and between countries. Another dilemma is often that the interpretations and translations of the questions can create misunderstandings in the countries surveyed. Since the ESS asks the same questions in all countries, with translations being done in the area of research, by well-established organisations and institutions, this survey material was considered a good base for a comparative study. The dataset is also very extensive in the areas where this study has its base.

The decision of dividing the countries into four regions, based on the time they formed democratic institutions, instead of doing a full cross country comparison between all 27 countries, was made due to time restrictions. The method of a comparative study was chosen instead of a single or two case study because it intends to be more generalizable and not to make an in-depth analysis of the effects seen in a single country or region. It is meant to say something about what is affecting trust in Europe as a whole and the applicability of the two theories in the European context. This study is also looking at the possible differences seen based on how long ago democratic institutions were formed, hence their levels of diffuse support.

This study is deductive and takes its departure in the research conducted by Putnam and his use of the social capital theory. The books primarily used are; Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy (Den fungerande demokratin: medborgarnas rötter i Italien) and Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (Den ensame bowlaren: Den amerikanska medborgarandans upplösning och förnyelse). In the first book Putnam (2011) is looking at the Italian system and how well the new institutions, which were put in place in the 1970’s, have worked in regions with varying conditions. He found that the trust in other people in the community and the time spent in civic and political organisations were strong determinants for how well the institutions worked in the regions. In the second book Putnam (2001) looks at the American society and how the social capital is said to be decreasing due to the loss of organisational involvement; which according to Putnam has worked as glue in the American society to uphold the democratic system. The decrease in social capital is then used as an explanation to the fall in political trust that has been seen in the last decades.

The second theory used in this study is taken from research conducted by Kluegel &
Manson and published in the article *Fairness Matters: Social Justice and Political Legitimacy in post-Communist Europe*; which examines the aspect of economic fairness and its effect on political trust and legitimacy in the former communist states. They find that the perception of economic fairness, which was defined in the theory chapter, has a great impact on the legitimacy of a democratic government and the individuals trust in the political system and that it together with market satisfaction has the strongest effect on political support.

These theories have developed different hypotheses for what is affecting political trust which in this study will be tested on empirical data from the 2012 ESS. The division of the countries has been made based on the amount of time since they formed democratic institutions. This was done since I have worked from the hypothesis that the longer a country has had democratic institutions the more diffuse support should have been accumulated amongst the people. This should according to my hypothesis also render higher levels of trust in the democratic political institutions.

When examining the material the questions have been divided into five models, these have then been analysed in a multivariate regression analyses. This was done to test the effect and correlation of each of the 16 predictor variables, defined in the five models, on the two questions used as representative for political trust while holding the other variables constant. The results from the multivariate regression analysis for trust in the parliament are presented in table 3 and for satisfaction with democracy in table 4. A multivariate regression is also a way to see how the effects vary between the regions. The results presented in table 3 and 4 are reporting the standardized regression coefficients; this was chosen to easily show what effect the different feelings have on trust and satisfaction and to be able to compare the effects of the 16 predictor variables to each other even when measured on different scales. The variables and their scales are shown in table 5 in the Appendix.

All variables used were controlled for normality. The data used was, as expected, not perfectly normally distributed but seen as sufficient to conduct the regression analysis. This since real world data seldom has a perfectly normal distribution (Djurfeldt, Larsson & Stjärnhagen 2010:55). The variables used were also checked for homoscedasticity, this was done to control that the variance associated with the residuals of the political trust variables were relatively homogenous across all levels of the independent variable. The variables used in all models were also controlled for multicollinearity, which means that the independent variables used in a multivariate regression analysis are correlated to one another, if variables are internally correlated and still used together it would render unreliable data (Djurfeldt, Larsson & Stjärnhagen 2010:364ff).

In the result section I have answered the three research questions by using descriptive data
and the results from the multivariate regression analyses. The analyses are made through the statistical program SPSS. A big advantage with using this software was that the ESS dataset, which contains all questions used in this study, comes in the SPSS format. This limited the need for my own data entries, which was seen to increase the validity of the data used in the analyses.

3.1 The European Social Survey (ESS)

The ESS is conducted by an academic collaboration with its base in London and has been carried out every second year since 2001. It surveys, amongst other things, people’s social habits, income and feelings about the economic and political system in their country. In 2013 ESS was awarded ERIC (European Research Infrastructure Consortium) status by the European Commission. The survey was in 2012 conducted in 29 countries in and around Europe, with the aim to map the state of peoples’ attitudes and feelings about society, economy, politics and moral. The collaboration aims to introduce and spread higher standards for cross country research in social science. They work on making the data as robust and representative as possible through elaborating the design, sampling, collection methods etcetera to reduce biases and increase reliability (ESS- History).

The ESS dataset was chosen since it is an extensive survey which addresses questions about individual attitudes, beliefs and behavioural patterns for example social habits, feelings, voting patterns and expectations of democracy. The survey also contains information about respondent’s engagement in political and non-political activities, interpersonal trust, economic satisfaction and other information which were needed to conduct this cross regional analysis. The questions used are the same in all countries and have been translated in the country of research from British English to all languages that are spoken by more than 5 percent of the population in the country. The translations are conducted by well-established institutions and organisations. This way of translating is done to make the survey inclusive and to minimize the risk of misinterpretation by the respondents (Ibid).
3.2 Operationalization and Definitions

3.2.1 Regions

In the 6th European Social survey, conducted in 2012, 29 countries were included. I have chosen to include 27 of these countries, with 49,681 respondents, in this study. The countries have been divided based on the amount of time since they introduced democratic institutions and named after their geographical location. I have chosen to remove Israel and Russia, which were also surveyed in 2012, since they were not considered a part of the European geographical region. The inclusion of the other 27 countries does not mean that they are all in the European Union but they are all geographically situated in Europe.

The four regions are; “Central Europe” including seven countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The “Northern Europe” including: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. “Southern Europe” including: Cyprus, Italy, Portugal and Spain. The fourth region “Eastern Europe” is including eleven of the former communist states: Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Kosovo, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

The region with the longest history of democratic institutions is the Central followed by the Northern region. Since the countries in the Northern region are geographically and culturally linked and have had a similar social system, with historically high political and civic engagement, they have been chosen to stand as their own region even though some countries have been democratic as long as countries in the Central Region. The Northern countries have also in previous studies been seen to have generally high levels of trust, this has been explained by both compositional effects, especially their historical economic performance and their short distance between the people and their politicians, as well as macro effects, such as their comparably good living conditions and high equity (Listhaug & Ringdal 2007:15f). Based on these conditions the Northern region was deemed more likely to have higher political trust than the Central region, even though some of the countries in the Central region have had democratic institutions longer than the Northern countries. The hypothesis for this study is therefore that the Northern region should have the highest political trust followed by the Central region. The Southern region became democratic in the mid-20th century and the Eastern region in the last decade of the 20th century, after the fall of the Soviet Union. Because of this the Eastern region should have the least confidence in their political institutions, this based on the hypothesis that a stable democracy should render a higher level of diffuse support and through this a stronger confidence in the political system and ultimately higher levels of political trust.
3.2.2 Political trust

Trust is a word that has proven to be hard to define, Sandro Castaldo (2008:9) highlights this when trying to himself define the concept of trust in his research; he discusses the discrepancies between the many definitions of trust used in social science. He highlights Shapiro's text about that the concept of trust, that although used in many analyses and research, have received confusingly differing definitions.

When defining political trust in this study I have followed the example of Marc J. Hetherington (1998:791) and Jason A. Husser (2012:313) and defined political trust on the basis of people's evaluations of their government’s performance in relation to their expectations. It is important to remember that political support can be defined differently depending on the focus of the research. In this study the focus will only be on the diffuse support. Both specific and diffuse support can be said to strengthen or weaken each other and therefore be seen as dependent on each other. Though since the division of the countries into four regions has been done to control for the effect that the diffuse support has on political trust the decision was taken to only include variables of diffuse support. This was done with the knowledge that the study might miss independent variations in the specific support (Easton 1975:443ff; Hetherington 1998:792).

There are survey questions designed by the University of Michigan which helps you evaluate individuals’ perceptions of governments’ effectiveness, efficiency and correctness of their decisions, which could then later be combined to more accurately represent a persons’ trust (Stokes 1962:64; Herreros 2012:504f). In this paper this design was seen as unnecessary since the 2012 ESS has direct questions about the respondents trust and satisfaction which was considered sufficient to conduct this study.

Political trust in this study is referring to trust in the governing institutions and is measured through the individuals’ direct trust in the country's parliament. The parliament is used to capture the trust in the governing institutions to capture the underlying feelings beyond those towards the ruling government and its representatives (ESS Education Net 2013; OECD 2006:112). To ensure that the trust could be generalised to all the democratic institutions the question of satisfaction with the countries democratic system was also added. The question of satisfaction with the country’s democracy is meant to capture the evaluation of regime performance and through that give an indication to how the people find the state of their governing institutions. For both questions the respondents were asked to grade their answer from 0 to 10 with 0 being the lowest and 10 the highest of trust and satisfaction.
3.2.3 Operationalization of social capital

Putnam’s interprets the social capital theory as a combination of a person’s feelings towards others and their participation in organisational activities. This study has looked at both political and civic organisations; this was done since involvement in political organisations have been shown to positively affect a person’s social capital and participation in democracy which is said to render trust in the political system. Involvement in social organisations has also been shown to contribute to enhance the social networks hence strengthen the social capital which, according to Putnam, increases political effectiveness and through this also the people’s confidence in the political institutions (Putnam 2001:32ff).

When Putnam was conducting research on the American society he saw that the trends for individuals involvement in politics, measured in participation in political meetings, signing of petitions, involvement in groups for a better society etcetera, were consistent with the respondent’s feelings towards the politicians and the political institutions (Ibid). When analysing to what extent a person’s political involvement has an effect on her political trust in a European context, which is Model I of social capital theory, this study has used at the ESS questions: “Have you worked in a political party or action group in the last 12 months”, “Taken part in lawful public demonstration in the last 12 months” and “Contacted politician or government official in the last 12 months”.

These questions are similar to those used by Putnam (2011:32ff) when looking at the political involvement in the United States. Easton (1975:441) also found in his research that the question of whether a person contacted officials could be seen to indicate a support for politicians and authorities. Whether or not this actually leads to a deeper trust in the political institutions Easton leaves unsaid but this aspect has been analysed in this study.

Even though participation in non-political organisations is just a small part of the social capital, Putnam (2001:51) considers it to be a good variable to use when trying to determine a person’s social capital. The questions for used for non-political involvement, Model II, are: “Worked in another organisation or association in the last 12 months”, “How often in the past 12 months have you been involved in work for voluntary or charitable organisations” and “About how often do you attend religious services nowadays”. Since these questions are asking the respondents if they have spent time working in these organisations, and not only if they are members, they were found to be suitable to evaluate the organisational part of the social capital. As Putnam notes in his work, if people do not actively engage in the organisations it is not increasing the social capital growth and therefore questions of mere membership could be misleading (Putnam 2001:65f).

The question about how often the respondent is attending religious services was added since
these meetings are an important part of many people’s lives, which especially in very religious countries makes it a vital social gathering. They can also form a strong feeling of trust and unity in the community and could through this also be an important indicator for social capital. People that are actively involved in religious activities are also said to more frequently be working with charity and meeting friends (Putnam 2001:69). It is important to note that religious meetings, in some countries and religious groups, have been seen to promote a more exclusive mind-set, which instead is inhibiting the trust a person feels for outsiders (Ibid:74ff).

The first four questions in Model I and II were Yes and No questions with No being coded 0 and Yes 1. The question about involvement in voluntary or charitable organisations was graded on a scale between 1-6, and the last question regarding religious services was graded between 1-7, where a higher number represents an increased involvement.

Interpersonal trust is a feeling towards others, which makes you lower your guard and believe that people will not try to deceive you or break the law, this in turn makes you more inclined to help others and be law-abiding. A high interpersonal trust has been shown to lower transition costs between people in their everyday life and has also proven to have measurable positive effects on the economy (Ibid:143). As indicators for interpersonal trust which is the second part of the social capital, Model III, this study has used the six ESS questions, “Most people can be trusted or you can't be too careful”, “Most people try to take advantage of you, or try to be fair”, “Most of the time people are helpful or mostly looking out for themselves”, “Feeling close to the people in the local community” and “Feel people in the local area help one another”. The first three questions, included in model III, were graded on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being no confidence, the last question is on a scale from 0 to 6, with 6 representing very helpful.

There is a difference between the trust you feel for people in a closely linked community or group, also called social trust, and what you feel towards looser connections such as the people you meet in the store or at the hairdresser. The former includes people that you trust because you know them and have built up a personal connection to; this trust has been shown to have less of an effect on people’s feelings towards the political sphere. The thin trust, which you feel towards people that you do not know personally but that you might pass on the street, helps you look beyond your own circle and makes you more inclined to trust people you have never met, such as politicians. A social norm of trust is built upon the thin trust and has its roots in the same expectations of mutuality as the thick trust (Ibid:143). Because of this the question of feelings towards the people in the local area can be an indicator for the thick trust which might even have an opposite effect on a person’s political trust.
3.2.4 Operationalization of economic fairness

To evaluate the effect that economic fairness has on political trust the focus has been to look at the satisfaction with the fairness in economic distribution and perceived outcomes amongst the respondent. Kluegel & Manson looks at different possible independent factors which might affect political trust. They divide these factors by expected causality, starting with socio-demographic factors, egocentric evaluations leading to the respondent’s sociotropic well-being. In this study we will focus on the two last stages in their causality spiral, which they also find most significant, namely the economic fairness and economic system evaluations (Kluegel & Manson 2004:822ff).

The fairness aspect is defined by how the respondents perceive the allocation of money between poor and rich and whether or not the people find inequality to be legitimate. This study will focus on the governments work to prevent poverty and inequality. The questions used for fairness and equality, Model IV, in this study are: “The government in your country protects all citizens against poverty”, “In your country the government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels” and “Important that people are treated equally and have equal opportunities”. The first two questions asked the respondents to grade their answer between 0-10, with 10 being the best in preventing poverty or best at trying to tackle inequality. The third question was rated from 1 to 5 with 5 being very important.

In their study Kluegel & Manson are also looking at economic system performance evaluations (Ibid: 831ff), in this study this is represented in Model V by the questions; “How satisfied are you with the present state of economy in your country”, which is used to include the direct perception of how well the country is doing and is measured from 0 to 10, with 10 being very satisfied. The second question used is; “Which of the descriptions on this card comes closest to how you feel about your household’s income nowadays?”, which is graded from 0 to 3 where 3 is living comfortably, this question was used as an indicator to determine perceived personal gains from the governments’ economic policies.

A summary of all variables, including scale, can be seen in table 1 and the correlation coefficients (Pearson’s r) for the variables in bivariate regressions are presented in the Appendix.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Determination variables</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 Dependent variables</td>
<td>1. How much do you personally trust the [country]'s parliament?</td>
<td>0 – No trust at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]’?</td>
<td>0 – Extremely dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 – Complete trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Political involvement</td>
<td>1. Have you worked in a political party or action group in the last 12 months?</td>
<td>0 – No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Have you contacted a politician, government or local government official in the last 12 months?</td>
<td>0 – No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Have taken part in a lawful public demonstration in the last 12 months?</td>
<td>0 – No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Organisational involvement</td>
<td>4. Have you worked in another organisation or association in the last 12 months?</td>
<td>0 – No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. In the past 12 months, how often did you get involved in work for voluntary or charitable organisations?</td>
<td>1 - At least once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services nowadays?</td>
<td>1 – Every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7 – Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III Interpersonal trust</td>
<td>7. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?</td>
<td>0 – You can’t be too careful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair?</td>
<td>0 – Most people would try to take advantage of me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves?</td>
<td>0 – People mostly look out for themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. I feel close to the people in my local area.</td>
<td>1 – Agree strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. To what extent do you feel that people in your local area help one another?</td>
<td>5 – Disagree strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV Fairness evaluations</td>
<td>12. The government in [country] protects all citizens against poverty.</td>
<td>1 – Does not apply at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. The government in [country] takes measures to reduce differences in income levels.</td>
<td>10 – Applies completely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Important that people are treated equally and have equal opportunities</td>
<td>1 – Does not apply at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 – Applies completely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V Economic system evaluation</td>
<td>15. On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [country]?</td>
<td>1 – Not like me at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. Which of the descriptions on this card comes closest to how you feel about your household’s income nowadays</td>
<td>6 – Very much like me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Result

4.1 Political trust in the four regions

This chapter begins with answering the first research question; “How does the political trust compare between the four regions?”. Political trust is defined through two questions from the 2012 ESS survey, both questions addresses the individuals direct trust in the function of their governing institutions. The first question is concerning the direct trust a person feels towards the country’s parliament, the parliament was chosen since it is considered to be representative for more than just the current government or political elite. This study has also included the question about the respondents’ satisfaction with how democracy works in the country. This question was included since there are so many more democratic institutions than just the parliament and earlier research has shown that the trust in political institutions can become effected by the result of the last governmental elections and that this is especially significant in the newer democracies (Anderson et al. 2005:185). The question about how democratic system works is seen to entail the respondents’ feelings about how the governing institutions are actually working; satisfaction is seen as an indicator for the individuals feeling towards the political institutions and through this also how much they trust them to work properly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Trust in the Parliament</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Satisfaction with democracy</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nordic</td>
<td>5.87 (2.256)</td>
<td>7910</td>
<td>6.96 (1.887)</td>
<td>7959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>4.61 (2.384)</td>
<td>14679</td>
<td>5.88 (2.231)</td>
<td>14614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>3.08 (2.447)</td>
<td>5934</td>
<td>4.16 (2.506)</td>
<td>5946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>2.98 (2.548)</td>
<td>19867</td>
<td>4.26 (2.523)</td>
<td>19430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>3.96 (2.678)</td>
<td>48439</td>
<td>5.19 (2.572)</td>
<td>479000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Outlined in means for each region. The means are calculated on an 11 grade scale, from 0-10, where a high mean is interpreted as high faith in or satisfaction with the country’s political institutions.

When examining the data presented in Table 2 we can see that the trust in all 27 countries
combined is 3.96, this indicates a low general trust in all four European regions. When looking at the regions individually you can see that there are big variations within Europe, with values ranging from 2.98 in the Eastern region to 5.87 in the Northern. When looking at the mean level of satisfaction with the way democracy works for all regions it is a lot higher than for trust in the parliament with 5.19. This could indicate that the parliament is not seen as representative of all governing institutions, though similarly when looking at satisfaction with democracy the values diverge a lot between the regions. The highest satisfaction is again shown in the Northern region with a mean value of 6.96, which is far above the lowest level shown in the Southern region with only 4.16. As mentioned in the method chapter the high trust levels in the Northern region has earlier been explained by the special characteristics of the countries in this region, with a low distance between the people and the political elites as well as their equity and high economic performance (Anderson et al. 2005:183).

4.2 The effect of democratic stability

When answering the second research question; *What correlation can be seen between the amount of time that the regions have been democratic and their level of political trust?*, we start by looking at the relationship between the two variables, represented in table 2 and 3, here we can see that the level of trust in the parliament is a lot lower than the satisfaction with how democracy works in all regions. Though there seem to be a relationship between them, a low trust in the one also seems to lead to a low level in the other. The Eastern region is deviating from the others since they have a lot higher satisfaction with their democracy than could be expected from their trust in the parliament.

The starting hypothesis for this study was that the political trust would be correlated to the time since a country had formed democratic institutions, with an exception being made when looking at the Northern region where earlier studies have shown that the societal context has had a positive impact on political trust. The study therefore expected the highest level of trust to be found in Northern followed by Central, Southern and with the lowest levels to be found in the new democracies in Eastern Europe. When looking at Table 3 we can see that this hypothesis can be rejected, the levels of trust and satisfaction in Eastern Europe cannot be explained by this hypothesis, and the differences in trust and satisfaction levels between the Central and Northern regions are larger than expected. This indicates that the accumulated diffuse support from time with democratic institutions might not be an explanation for people’s level of political trust.
4.3 Effect of the theories

The third question was concerning the social capitals and economic fairness evaluations effect on the regions; “What effect can the social capital and economic fairness evaluations amongst the people be seen to have on political trust in the European context and which of them have the strongest explanatory power on changes in political trust?”

Before conducting the analyses the social capital theory, defined by Putnam (2001; 2011), was divided up into three models under the topics; political engagement, involvement in non-political organisations and interpersonal trust, whilst the economic fairness theory, by Kluegel & Manson, was divided into two models; system fairness evaluations and economic system evaluations, see table 1. These five models were tested in two multivariate regression analyses which are presented in table 4 and 5. The dependent variable for the first multivariate regression, presented in table 3, is the survey questions; “How much do you personally trust the country’s parliament”. The dependent variable in the second multivariate regression, presented in table 4, is “How satisfied are you with the democracy in your country”.

When looking at table 4 and 5 we can see that the adjusted R square for the different regions show that the two theories together account for between 23.6 and 32.8 percent of the variations in trust in the parliament and between 26 and 40 percent of the variation in satisfaction with
democracy. The adjusted R square is reported instead of the regular R square since it adjusts for possible overestimations of the analysis explanatory power. In these analyses the R square and adjusted R square values were almost identical in all regions, this could be due to the big sample size (Djurfeldt, Larsson & Stjärnhagen 2010:161).

The effects shown in table 4 and 5 are reported in standardized regression coefficients, this was done since comparing unstandardized regression coefficients in a multivariate regression can be difficult. Since the variables used in these analyses are measured on different scales the effect on political trust when a predictor variable increases with one unit is therefore not directly comparable without standardization of the regression coefficients.

Since dummy variables, such as if a person has worked in a political organization or not, only has two answers a one unit change in a regression analysis will be larger than the effect shown for a question measured on a larger scale. It is therefore hard to determine which of the variables that has the strongest effect when only looking at unstandardized coefficients. When standardizing the data the questions are recoded to range between +/- 1. Recoding in this way is somewhat controversial (Miller et al 2002:171f) but was seen as suitable for this study to be able to easily compare and answer the question of which theory that has the best explanatory power and what variable that has the most effect on political trust. Before deciding to use the standardized data both unstandardized and standardized effect has been examined for possible differences in the cross regional effects.

It is also important to understand the confidence intervals where the lowest accepted significance of the t-value is 95%. A significant level below 95% will be recognized as if “no linear dependence was found” and will not be interpreted in the results but are reported in the tables (DeVeaux, Velleman & Bock 2012:801).
Table 3
Effects on Trust in the parliament, Standardized Regression Coefficients (β), from a multivariate regression analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Predictor variables</th>
<th>Northern</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Southern</th>
<th>Eastern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Worked in political organisation</td>
<td>0.028**</td>
<td>0.032***</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.026***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contacted politicians</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.011*</td>
<td>0.032*</td>
<td>0.034***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Took part in a legal demonstration</td>
<td>-0.022*</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Worked in a non-political organisation</td>
<td>0.031**</td>
<td>0.027**</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worked in a voluntary or charitable organisation</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.019**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attend religious gatherings</td>
<td>0.03**</td>
<td>0.028***</td>
<td>0.08***</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Most people can be trusted</td>
<td>0.192***</td>
<td>0.128***</td>
<td>0.111***</td>
<td>0.087***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People does not try to take advantage of you</td>
<td>0.077***</td>
<td>0.079**</td>
<td>0.044**</td>
<td>0.039***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most people are helpful</td>
<td>0.035**</td>
<td>0.02*</td>
<td>0.072***</td>
<td>0.040***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feel close to people in the local area</td>
<td>-0.04***</td>
<td>-0.037***</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feel that people in the local area are helpful</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>0.050***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government protects all citizens against poverty</td>
<td>0.105***</td>
<td>0.055***</td>
<td>0.183***</td>
<td>0.113***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels</td>
<td>0.091***</td>
<td>0.124***</td>
<td>0.057**</td>
<td>0.123***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Important that people are treated equally and have equal opportunities</td>
<td>0.044***</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.09***</td>
<td>0.035***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Satisfied with the present state of economy</td>
<td>0.282***</td>
<td>0.382***</td>
<td>0.223***</td>
<td>0.307***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings about your household's income nowadays</td>
<td>0.042***</td>
<td>0.058***</td>
<td>0.054***</td>
<td>0.02**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjusted R2</td>
<td>0.281</td>
<td>0.328</td>
<td>0.236</td>
<td>0.283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F-value</td>
<td>182.27***</td>
<td>417.99***</td>
<td>103.38***</td>
<td>422.822**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>7412</td>
<td>13688</td>
<td>5305</td>
<td>17069</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** = p < 0.001   ** = p < 0.01   * = p < 0.05
4.3.1 Effect of the social capital theory

When looking at the relationship between the 11 variables in the three social capital models, I-III seen in table 4 and 5, we can see that the strongest effect comes from an increased interpersonal trust. This is true also when comparing the four European regions. The strongest effect comes when the people have an increased direct trust, which is represented by how much they feel that they can trust others. The direct trust has a higher effect on the trust in the parliament but with a significant and strong positive effect on both variables for political trust. The effect that direct trust has also seems to increase with the time that the countries in a region has had democratic institutions.

The questions about general helpfulness and egocentric behaviour show less effect on the trust in the parliament, but still have a significant positive effect in all regions. The effect on satisfaction with democracy is not as conclusive but at least one of the two questions concerning...
social trust is seen to have a positive effect in all regions except for the Southern where no linear dependence was found.

Putnam (2001:143) discusses the difference between the thick trust, which is the trust you have in the people that you know or have in your close circle, and thin trust, which is what you feel towards looser connections and people you do not know. This differentiation might prove to be important when interpreting the results of the analyses of interpersonal trust. We can see that the questions about thin trust represented by; if people in general are trustworthy, if they feel that other people in general are honest or if they feel that other people in general are helpful, all have significant positive impacts on the trust in the parliament in all regions, and a positive though not always significant effect on the satisfaction.

When we move on to look at thick trust, we can see that the two questions about feelings towards the people in the local area give contradicting results. Feelings of closeness to others in the local area have a negative impact on political trust in the Nordic and the Central regions and with non-significant results in the Southern and Eastern. This is in-line with Putnam's theory that the thick trust could counteract the feeling of trust beyond the close circle, whilst the thin trust enhances the trust in strangers and through this also the trust for the governing institutions (Ibid). When looking at the question about helpfulness in the local area, this instead has a positive impact on satisfaction with democracy in all regions, as well as for trust in the parliament in the Eastern region. Putnam’s theory about the negative impact of thick trusts can therefore not be neither refuted or strengthen by this study, though feeling close to the people in the local area is the only interpersonal trust variable that has a negative effect on political trust.

When examining the effects of political involvement we can see that this only has a slight impact on satisfaction with democracy, if any, in the regions. In the Northern region we can see that both contacting politicians and partaking in demonstrations have a negative impact on the satisfaction the latter is also true in the Southern region. In the Northern region the negative effect of partaking in demonstrations is also seen on trust in the parliament. This might indicate that people demonstrate when they are already dissatisfied with the political system or political decisions and therefor lack political trust. Though this is not in-line with Putnam’s analysis of the United States where he instead concludes that even though demonstrations have increased between the 1970s and 1990s the average demonstrator has become older and is very politically involved and aware (Ibid:174). If this would also have been true in the Northern region the people involved in political organisations would have been the same as those participating in the demonstrations, hence these two actives should have the same or at least a similar effect on political trust.

For non-political involvement attending religious meetings does not seem to impact any of
the two measurements for political trust in the Eastern region, though they have a positive impact on trust in the parliament in all the others. The strongest effect is seen in the Southern region which might be explained by that the countries in Southern Europe, in general, are more religious. This feeling of inclusion in the religious community might then deepen the feeling of trust in the general public and therefore also effect political trust positively. Though attending religious gatherings does also have a positive effect on the trust in the Nordic and Central regions. Putnam (Putnam 2001:69) notes in his book that people who actively engage in religious activities have also been seen to be more inclined to join other gatherings, meet friends, join political organisations and do voluntary work. This all increases their social capital which then enhances trust. An interesting contradiction here is that being involved in voluntary work has a negative effect on satisfaction with democracy in the Southern as well as the Northern and the Eastern regions.

Working in non-political organisations only show an effect on the questions of political trust in the Northern region whilst it in the southern region only affects the evaluation of democracy. This is interesting since this is seen as a very strong determinant for a person’s social capital (Ibid:51)

4.3.2 Effect of the economic fairness theory

When looking at Kluegel & Manson's theory about the impact of economic fairness evaluations on political trust (Models IV-V), we see that the economic system evaluations have the strongest effect on trust of all variables controlled for in these regression analyses. By far the strongest effect on political trust, amongst the variables controlled for, is seen with an increase in satisfaction with the present state of economy. This means that a better perception of the economy increases the political trust. The relationship is stronger in the newer democracies and weakest in the Northern region, but there is no correlation to the time with democratic institutions. This finding is supporting the theory used by Peter Kotzian (2010) who highlights the economic parameters, including present state of economy as well as perception of growth potential, as the single most important factor to explain support for the system. Kluegel & Manson’s (2004:825) research also suggests that the market satisfaction is a strong determinant for political support. A more positive view of the personal economy is also seen to have a smaller but still strong and significant effect on political trust in all European regions.

Looking at the fairness evaluations of the economic system we can see that these also, as suggested by the research conducted by Kluegel & Manson, have a strong impact on political trust. Especially important are the evaluations of how well the government is at protecting its people
against poverty and their effectiveness in reducing income inequality. These questions are, in most regions, more important for the political trust than the strongest variable, direct interpersonal trust, for the social capital theory.
5. Conclusion

The two questions used to define political trust in this study were chosen to capture the deeper lying political trust and minimise the risk of the results being impacted by fluctuation in the political realm. Both questions used are representing the diffuse support, defined by Easton (1965; 1975) as the deeper underlying support for the democratic system, which is created through social norms and experience. Diffuse support will not, in contrast to the specific support, easily become affected by the wrong doing of current officeholders or political decisions. When looking at the two parameters used to determine political trust we can see that these are slightly correlated though the trust in the countries parliament is constantly lower than the satisfaction with the way the democracy works, table 2 & 3. Though there is a deviation from this correlation when looking at the Eastern region. This deviation could be depending on that peoples trust in the institutions are not related to if they feel satisfaction with how democracy works or that the parliament is not a representative of political institutions as a whole.

When looking at the starting hypothesis that the amount of time a country has had democratic institutions would have an impact on the level of political trust, the results when analysing the relationship between the regions is that there is no distinct correlation. Table 3 shows that even though there is a slight correlation between trust in the parliament and time since democratization, this was not true when looking at satisfaction with how democracy works. The Eastern region has a lot higher satisfaction with how democracy is functioning than could be expected from their time with democracy. On the other hand the Central region had a lot lower political trust, seen in both questions used, than could be expected from a region that has had democratic institutions the longest, this even when considering the peculiarities of the Nordic region. I have decided to interpret the findings as that there is no direct correlation between time since democratisation and political trust.

The political and social involvement models (I & II), which were used to look at the social capitals effect on political trust, had low and uneven effects on political trust in Europe. We can see that involvement in both political and non-political organisations had both positive and negative effects depending on both the area of research and if we looked at trust in the parliament or satisfaction with democracy. The feeling of direct interpersonal trust was shown to have the strongest effect of the social capital variables both on trust in the parliament, across all of Europe, and on satisfaction with democracy, in most of Europe. Though strong this effect was lower in most regions than the effect that the economic fairness evaluations or the perception of the current state of economy had.
When looking at Kluegel & Manson’s theory about the economic fairness and economic system evaluations we can see that the latter has the highest effect on political trust but that the economic fairness evaluations also have strong significant effects on political trust. In the Eastern region the fairness aspects have a stronger effect on political trust than it does in the Nordic or Central regions, this corresponds with the conclusions drawn by the earlier justice studies, which showed that the effectiveness of the state and its ability to protect its people is more important in the Eastern European countries than in the Western (Kluegel & Manson 2004:814).

To answer the main research question; “What explains trust in the political institutions in Europe”, we see that a possible decrease in political trust in Europe could not just be explained by either of the two theories controlled for in this study, though since the combined theories can explain between 26 and 40 percent of the variance in political trust, we can see that they are important when looking at the development of trust and through this also important to take in to consideration when analysing a country’s democratic stability.

Even though the social capital theory does not have the strongest effect on political trust an increased direct interpersonal trust is seen to strengthen the political trust in the European countries. This then of course also suggests that a decrease of the interpersonal trust could have a significant negative effect on political trust in the way that Putnam suggests in his research on the loss in organisational involvement in the United States. The fairness evaluations, which were highlighted by Kluegel & Manson, show a lot lower effect than the economic system aspects, which were also included in their study, but evaluations of system fairness still have a strong and significant impact on political trust also when expanding their study to include more parts of Europe. Since economic system evaluations have a very strong effect on political trust in all regions, it can be seen as especially important for the political institutions, and especially the current governments, to focus on the perception of economic success to keep the legitimacy of their people.

The sometimes contradicting and varying effects which have been seen when analysing the relationship between social capital and economic system evaluations and the two questions used to define political trust, show that the trust in the governing institutions might be harder to define than only using the direct trust in the parliament or satisfaction with the state of democracy. For future studies I would recommend, given that the questions are available, trying a combination of the survey questions in the way defined by the University of Michigan.

The reason why the two parameters used to define political trust had varying results might be because of the people’s perception of the parliament as an extension of the national government, or that the perception of the democracy is affected by the ideals that people might have for democracy as the preferred form of government. Since the use of trust for the parliament as a
parameter for political trust has been done in earlier studies I still feel that by combining and analysing the impact on the two questions they together capture a broader sense of the meaning of political trust.
## Appendix

### Table 6
Correlation coefficients (Pearson’s R) for the predictor variables for social capital and levels of trust in the parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variable</th>
<th>Nordic</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Southern</th>
<th>Eastern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work in political party</td>
<td>0.030**</td>
<td>0.064***</td>
<td>0.061***</td>
<td>0.044***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted politician</td>
<td>0.027*</td>
<td>0.029***</td>
<td>0.077***</td>
<td>0.057***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took part in a legal demonstration</td>
<td>0.039***</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked in a non-political organisation</td>
<td>0.053***</td>
<td>0.115***</td>
<td>0.070***</td>
<td>0.048***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked in a voluntary or charitable organisation</td>
<td>0.050***</td>
<td>0.107***</td>
<td>0.083***</td>
<td>0.077***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend religious gatherings</td>
<td>0.074***</td>
<td>0.048***</td>
<td>0.120***</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people can be trusted</td>
<td>0.355***</td>
<td>0.317***</td>
<td>0.255***</td>
<td>0.258***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People does not try to take advantage of you</td>
<td>0.275***</td>
<td>0.273***</td>
<td>0.201***</td>
<td>0.229***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people are helpful</td>
<td>0.224***</td>
<td>0.212***</td>
<td>0.230***</td>
<td>0.238***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel close to people in the local area</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.046***</td>
<td>0.038**</td>
<td>0.016*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel that people in the local area are helpful</td>
<td>0.084***</td>
<td>0.116***</td>
<td>0.098***</td>
<td>0.152***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** = p<0.001  ** = p<0.01  * = p<0.05

### Table 7
Correlation coefficients (Pearson’s R) for the predictor variables for economic fairness evaluations and levels of trust in the parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variable</th>
<th>Nordic</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Southern</th>
<th>Eastern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government protects all citizens against poverty</td>
<td>0.290***</td>
<td>0.272***</td>
<td>0.333***</td>
<td>0.361***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels.</td>
<td>0.277***</td>
<td>0.287***</td>
<td>0.267***</td>
<td>0.361***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important that people are treated equally and have equal opportunities</td>
<td>0.044***</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>0.80***</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with the present state of economy</td>
<td>0.411***</td>
<td>0.495***</td>
<td>0.373***</td>
<td>0.454***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings about your household's income nowadays</td>
<td>0.184***</td>
<td>0.250***</td>
<td>0.167***</td>
<td>0.184***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** = p<0.001  ** = p<0.01  * = p<0.05

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### Table 8
Correlation coefficients (Pearson’s R) for the predictor variables for social capital and levels of satisfaction with the democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variable</th>
<th>Nordic</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Southern</th>
<th>Eastern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work in political party</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.033***</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted politician</td>
<td>0.027*</td>
<td>-0.010</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.029***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took part in a legal demonstration</td>
<td>0.062***</td>
<td>-0.031***</td>
<td>-0.074***</td>
<td>-0.022**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked in a non-political organisation</td>
<td>0.032**</td>
<td>0.067***</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.033***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked in a voluntary or charitable organisation</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.067***</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
<td>0.044***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend religious gatherings</td>
<td>0.051***</td>
<td>0.08***</td>
<td>0.130***</td>
<td>0.025***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people can be trusted</td>
<td>0.312***</td>
<td>0.260***</td>
<td>0.133***</td>
<td>0.257***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People does not try to take advantage of you</td>
<td>0.264***</td>
<td>0.246***</td>
<td>0.109***</td>
<td>0.246***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people are helpful</td>
<td>0.213***</td>
<td>0.210***</td>
<td>0.129***</td>
<td>0.253***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel close to people in the local area</td>
<td>0.031**</td>
<td>0.059***</td>
<td>0.058***</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel that people in the local area are helpful</td>
<td>0.116***</td>
<td>0.156***</td>
<td>0.145***</td>
<td>0.149***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** = p<0.001    ** = p <0.01    * = p <0.05

### Table 9
Correlation coefficients (Pearson’s R) for the predictor variables for economic fairness evaluations and levels of satisfaction with democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variable</th>
<th>Nordic</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Southern</th>
<th>Eastern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government protects all citizens against poverty</td>
<td>0.340***</td>
<td>0.335***</td>
<td>0.383***</td>
<td>0.410***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels.</td>
<td>0.310***</td>
<td>0.306***</td>
<td>0.376***</td>
<td>0.400***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important that people are treated equally and have equal opportunities</td>
<td>0.056***</td>
<td>0.023**</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>-0.035***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with the present state of economy</td>
<td>0.436***</td>
<td>0.487***</td>
<td>0.418***</td>
<td>0.594***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings about your household's income nowadays</td>
<td>0.192***</td>
<td>0.236***</td>
<td>0.105***</td>
<td>0.226***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** = p<0.001    ** = p <0.01    * = p <0.05
6. References

6.1 Books


6.2 Articles


6.3 Online sources

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