

Working Paper No. 196

Keeping tabs? Perceptions of relative deprivation and political trust in Africa

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Abstract

What are the implications of economic inequality for trust in government and state institutions? Political trust performs important functions in representative political systems, facilitating the efficient functioning of government, simplifying complex political processes, and reducing monitoring costs for ordinary people. The existing literature has shown that macroeconomic performance (including levels of inequality) and evaluations shape political trust. This paper addresses two gaps in the literature by focusing on the role of individual perceptions and subjective experiences of inequality and by studying cases in Africa. Using Afrobarometer survey data collected from more than 40,000 respondents in 34 African countries between late 2016 and mid-2018, I use multi-level modelling to demonstrate that perceptions of relative deprivation are significantly associated with less trust in representative government institutions and, more weakly, with less trust in state institutions. The effect of perceptions of relative deprivation remains significant when controlling for macroeconomic conditions and performance evaluations. In effect size, trust in representative government institutions is at least comparable to frequently cited covariates of trust such as location, level of education, and government economic performance, suggesting that perceived relative deprivation is indeed an important covariate of such trust. Feeling relatively advantaged is also significantly associated with greater trust in representative government institutions. This may reflect strong neopatrimonial ties between citizens and political agents. In demonstrating that individual-level economic considerations affect political trust in Africa, we challenge the conventional wisdom that only macroeconomic factors affect trust.



1. Introduction

Political trust has been declining over the past decades in many established and new democracies, and many observers have feared that such a crisis of trust could weaken support or demand for democracy (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; Dalton, 2004, 2008; Catterberg & Moreno, 2006; Denmark & Niemi, 2012).

Political trust is important in several ways. It allows incumbents to make decisions and govern without having to seek constant confirmation or approval from the people and without using coercion to enforce their decisions (Newton, Stolle, & Zmerli, 2018). Political trust also reduces complexity and monitoring costs for people, as they are not required to make difficult and technical day-to-day decisions but can decide between broader, less complex entities, such as political parties or candidates, during elections or party preliminaries. As Van der Meer and Zmerli (2017, p. 1) note “[p]olitical trust thus functions as the glue that keeps the system together and as the oil that lubricates the policy machine.” Past research suggests, moreover, that political trust is associated with participation and political interest, external efficacy, perceptions of corruption, compliance with laws, and tax compliance among citizens (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Scholz & Lubell, 1998; Catterberg & Moreno, 2006). Research in Africa has also suggested that having trusted institutions is important for providing developmental outcomes (Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016). Given the importance of political trust in political systems, any deterioration of public trust in government and state institutions can have considerable consequences for the ability of governments to make policy, and for political stability more generally (Anderson & Singer, 2008; Hetherington & Rudolph, 2008; Newton & Zmerli, 2011; Uslaner, 2011).¹

In this context, Africa represents an interesting paradox. As a region, Africans report among the highest levels of institutional trust or confidence. What is more, such trust is relatively consistent over time (Mattes & Moreno, 2018). At the same time, Africa records among the highest levels of economic inequality in the world (Beegle, Christiaensen, Dabalen, & Gaddis, 2016). However, little research in Africa or elsewhere has been conducted on the linkage between inequality and political trust, especially at the individual level (Van der Meer, 2018). To my knowledge, no previous research has examined the effects of perceptions of relative deprivation on trust in African contexts.

A rich literature exists suggesting that economic inequality is associated with a range of negative phenomena, including increased mortality and mental illness, poor educational performance, higher homicide and imprisonment rates, lower social capital and solidarity, lower social mobility, and racism (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2007; Anderson, 2010; Elgar & Aitken, 2010; Anderson & Curtis, 2012). Particular interest has been given to the linkage of inequality and political trust (Anderson & Singer, 2008; Jordahl, 2009; Newton & Zmerli, 2011; Uslaner, 2011, 2018; Paskov & Dewilde, 2012; van de Werfhorst & Salverda, 2012). Research suggests that economic and social inequality is linked to a deterioration of trust that ordinary people have in each other and in political and state institutions (Uslaner, 2011, 2017; Zmerli & Castillo,

¹ Lack of trust may not necessarily be a sign of a lack of democracy, and declining trust in government is a healthy symptom of postmodern democracies. As Warren (2018, pp. 91-92) notes, “Citizens should be distrustful of state powers and the political elites who wield the power. Yet citizens who generalize distrust – of political elites, of political institutions, and of one another – will find themselves collectively disempowered.” In fact, Mishler and Rose (1997, pp. 419) note that democracy requires active and “vigilant” citizens who keep a “healthy scepticism of government and [if necessary are willing] [...] to suspend trust and assert control over government.” See also Hardin (1999) and Offe (1999) on this matter.

2015; Gustavsson & Jordahl, 2008; Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002).² Economic inequality has also been linked to feelings of a lack of responsiveness and accountability of government as well as to perceptions of government failing to meet expectations among a large number of citizens. These feelings and perceptions in turn are associated with less political trust (Citrin, 1974; Miller, 1974; Miller & Listhaug, 1990; Hetherington, 1998, 2005; Uslaner, 2002, 2011).

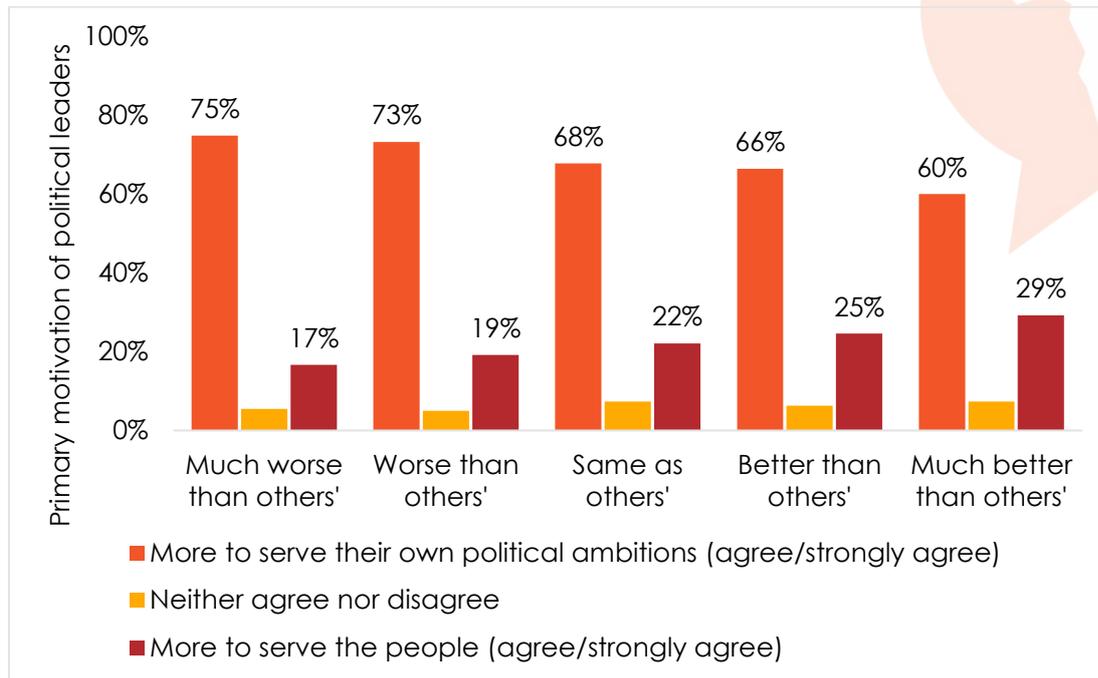
While past research – both in Africa and beyond – has pointed to the importance of macroeconomic performance and subjective evaluations of such performance as factors contributing to political trust, less attention has been paid to individual-level covariates of political trust, and in particular to the role of perceptions of individual-level conditions. In fact, Wroe (2016, pp. 133) goes so far as to state that “the conventional wisdom is that personal economic experiences and evaluations do not play much of a role.” However, subjective individual-level evaluations may be an important contributing factor to political trust. Research has found that people are often not aware of actual levels of inequality and are commonly not able to place themselves correctly within income or wealth distributions (Kaltenthaler, Ceccoli, & Gelleny, 2008; Norton & Ariely, 2011; Eriksson & Simpson, 2012, 2013; Cruces, Perez-Truglia, & Tetaz, 2013; Loveless, 2013, 2016; McCall & Chin, 2013; Chambers, Swan, & Heesacker, 2014, 2015; Engelhardt & Wagener, 2014; Niehues, 2014; Bartels, 2018; Gimpelson & Treisman, 2018). Other scholars have pointed out that objective and subjective levels of inequality are associated with each other only loosely, if at all (Loveless & Whitefield, 2011; Loveless, 2013; Binelli & Loveless, 2016). In this regard, several authors suggest that levels of trust are better explained by perceptions of inequality, rather than by actual inequality levels (Gustavsson & Jordahl, 2008; Loveless, 2013; Medve-Bálint & Boda, 2014).

Subjective perceptions of individual inequality may be important to consider. For example, nationally representative data collected by the Afrobarometer survey in 2014/2015 in 36 African countries show that respondents who feel relatively deprived are more likely than those who feel better off than others to see political leaders as motivated primarily by their own political ambitions (Figure 1).³ Likewise, respondents who feel relatively deprived are more likely to report that members of Parliament “never” listen to ordinary people (Figure 2). This suggests that perceptions of relative deprivation are associated with lower perceptions of accountability and responsiveness among politicians, which could be associated with lower levels of trust.

² Seeing political trust as being in crisis is by no means a new phenomenon (Offe, 1972; Citrin, 1974; Miller, 1974; Crozier, Huntington, & Watanuki, 1975; Dalton, 2004). Evidence is not strong that the “crisis” is actually a global one; it may be strongly shaped by a few highly scrutinised cases (United States and Western Europe) (see Dalton (2004) and Van der Meer & Zmerli (2017)). Others – see Citrin (1974) and Norris (2011) – argue that the crisis of political trust is overstated and caused by focusing only on a narrow definition and view of what constitutes and causes political trust. As Listhaug and Jakobsen (2018) note, the crisis perspective is strongly associated with the literature on social capital, of which political trust is a core component. In political behaviour research, the notion that political trust is “in crisis” is not widely shared. Rather, Norris (2011, pp. 24-31) finds “trendless fluctuation” of political trust using a broadened and revised set of Eastonian political support indicators.

³ The survey was conducted in the following 36 countries: Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Eswatini, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Figure 1: Perceived primary motivation of political leaders | by perceived relative living situation | 36 African countries | 2014/2015



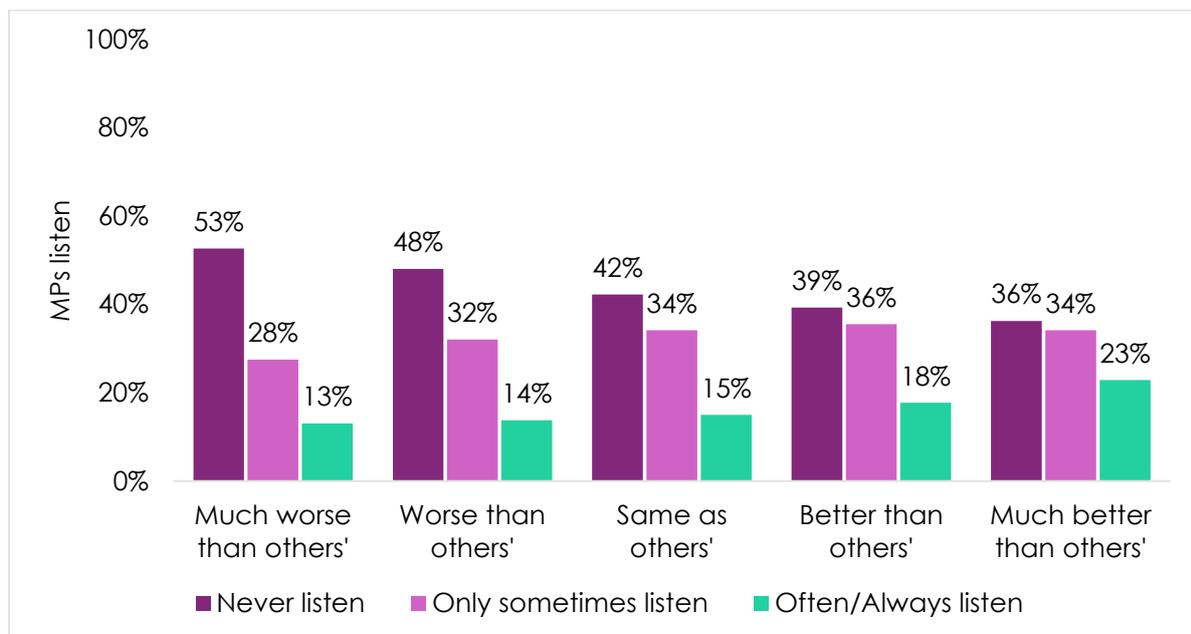
Respondents were asked:

Do you think that leaders of political parties in this country are more concerned with serving the interests of the people, or more concerned with advancing their own political ambitions, or haven't you heard enough to say?

In general, how do you rate your living conditions compared to those of other [citizens]?

For further details, see Appendix C.

Figure 2: Do MPs listen? | by perceived relative living situation | 36 African countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked:

How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Members of Parliament?

In general, how do you rate your living conditions compared to those of other [citizens]?



Individual-level economic conditions may be particularly important for political trust in the context of Africa. As noted by Newton (2007), political trust is linked to notions of legitimacy. Much of the empirical literature is focused on cases in the global North, and the nature of such legitimacy may look different in the African context, in particular regarding relations between state and society in post-colonial Africa.⁴

Operationalisation and research question

The literature on the causes, consequences, and measurement of political trust (or lack thereof) is rich, but not uniform. In this paper, I follow Mattes and Moreno (2018) – who offer the most recent scrutiny of causes of political trust in Africa – and construct two additive indices. The first index, *trust in representative government institutions*, comprises trust in the president/prime minister, trust in the Parliament/National Assembly, trust in the local government council, and trust in the ruling party/parties. This broadly echoes what has been referred to as “political institutions” in the past (Newton et al., 2018; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008). The second index, *trust in state institutions*, is composed of trust in the police, the army, and courts of law. These have in the past been referred to as “neutral and impartial institutions of the state” (Newton et al., 2018), although in African contexts they are often not neutral or impartial. I discuss both indices further under “Dependent variables” in Section 3. To measure someone’s perceived relative individual situation, I use a survey question that asks respondents how they feel their living situation compares to that of other people in their country. Response options are “much worse,” “worse,” “same,” “better,” and “much better.” No further information was given to respondents as to what “living situation” specifically implies, and no further data were collected as to what respondents understood by this. All data are Afrobarometer survey data collected between late 2016 and mid-2018 in 34 African countries.

Following the operationalisation of critical outcome and predictor variables, I formulate the following research question:

Does the perceived relative living situation shape how much ordinary Africans trust representative government institutions and state institutions?

Structure

This paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, I review the existing literature exploring linkages between inequality and political trust and draw a set of hypotheses to be tested. In Section 3, I introduce the data and statistical model chosen to test the hypotheses. I further discuss the variables employed in the models, paying particular attention to the operationalisation of political trust. I then turn to modelling political trust through multi-level modelling in Section 4.

The results suggest that perceptions of relative deprivation are significantly linked to less trust in government institutions and state institutions. The results also underline the importance of how political trust is conceptualised. The effect of perceptions of relative deprivation for trust in government institutions remains significant even when controlling for individual-level experiences of poverty, subjective economic performance evaluations, perceptions of corruption, and partisanship. Conversely, the effect of perceptions of relative deprivation becomes non-significant once macroeconomic evaluations are included in the regression model.

⁴ As Beresford (2014, p. 1) notes, neopatrimonialism is not an intrinsic or deeply rooted element of African politics, but rather emerged from the “colonial encounter” or a “peculiar Euro-African history.” See also Cooper (2002).

2. Inequality and political (mis)trust: Mechanisms and evidence

Numerous definitions of trust and related concepts exist today and are often used interchangeably (Seligman, 2000; Hooghe, 2011; Schneider, 2017).⁵ Widely accepted definitions of trust are provided by Luhmann (1979) and Warren (1999). As Luhmann writes, trust “as a modality of action [...] is essentially concerned with coping with uncertainty over time” (p. 30) – providing certainty that actions by others can be depended upon and that others won't choose to maliciously harm us (Offe, 1999).⁶ Similarly, according to Warren (p. 14), trust describes “the way groups of individuals presume the good will of others with respect to shared interests as well as the divisions of knowledge necessary to make use of explicit rules for collective action.”⁷

Inequality and political (mis)trust: Understanding the mechanisms

The literature provides diverse explanations of political trust.⁸ Broadly, it distinguishes between “bottom-up” and “top-down” explanations of trust. Material and immaterial inequality may shape trust in both explanations.

Bottom-up explanations of trust emphasise stable, long-term psychological or genetic explanations, which are typically associated with arguments of social capital (see Mondak, Hayes, & Canache, 2017; Cawvey, Hayes, Canache, & Mondak, 2018). For example, the psychological-propensity model argues that long-term optimism and psychological predisposition to framing life in general, acquired through socialisation, as well as social causes such as education, social class, and happiness, shape whether someone is trusting or not (Uslaner, 2002; Glanville & Paxton, 2007; Newton et al., 2018). In this approach, people are – more or less – either trusting or not, regardless of context or object of trust.

Bottom-up explanations of trust emphasise the effect that inequality has on the very fabric of society, and in particular on people's sense of system fairness and consideration for others (Zmerli & Castillo, 2015; Uslaner, 2011; Rothstein, 2011). In this regard, Rothstein (2011) writes of a “social trap” in which societies are unable to meaningfully address inequality through policy due to low levels of social trust. In Rothstein's argument, economic inequality reduces social trust. However, such social trust would be required to address economic inequality through policy (such as universalistic social welfare). Societies thus become ‘trapped’ in a status of high inequality and low social trust, in which they are unable to address inequality. As Rothstein (p. 154) concludes, “the prevalence of distrust results in more distrust.” In these explanations, inequality affects the core basis of trust, reflected in diminishing social and political trust over time. Similarly, Uslaner's “inequality trap” describes economic inequality leading to less social trust, which in turn leads to more corruption, which further reduces social trust, again leading to more corruption (Uslaner, 2005, 2008, 2011). A negative downward spiral results, thereby “trapping” societies. Uslaner (2008) notes that this trap also weakens political trust (see also Zmerli & Castillo, 2015).

Top-down approaches, on the other hand, point to political trust largely being a function of performance evaluations (Zmerli & Castillo, 2015; Newton et al., 2018). Top-down theories argue that (unlike a psychological or genetic predisposition) political trust is not unchanged over time, but that performance evaluations, and therefore trust, can change (prompted by a new government, global recession, a high-profile corruption case, etc.). In top-down

⁵ As Catterberg and Moreno (2006, p. 33) note, much of the research on political trust has been based on ambiguous concepts of political trust (see also Hooghe, 2011). The differences between trust in political institutions (detached from performance) and trust in government performance (trust in the fact that government will deliver certain services or policies) are especially weakly defined.

⁶ The importance of malicious actions and intentions is particularly emphasised in the definitory work by Gambetta (1988) and Warren (1999).

⁷ Warren's (1999) definition draws heavily on Annette Baier's (1986) notion of trust as reciprocal good will.

⁸ For an overview, see Mishler & Rose (2001) and Newton et al., 2018.



approaches, the consequences of high inequality are commonly associated with how people evaluate governments' economic performance as well as with how accountable people perceive the system to be.

In the empirical literature, economic performance is one of three core covariates of political trust repeatedly cited in both cross-national and cross-time studies (corruption and partisanship being the other two) (Van der Meer, 2018).⁹ Because more people in highly unequal systems are relatively worse off, a large number of people are likely to report negative performance evaluations. This, it is argued, results in less political trust in more unequal systems.

But high inequality may not be associated only with perceptions of how well the government is performing, but also with how inclusive and responsive the system and political leaders are.

As Goubin (2020) notes, high economic inequality suggests that the system is not responsive to the needs of all citizens, creating a distance between citizen expectations of system responsiveness and what they feel they are getting. Indeed, in systems with high levels of inequality, individuals are more likely to report lower levels of accountability or perceptions thereof (Goubin, 2020). A similar argument is found in Uslaner (2017, p. 302), who argues that inequality "leads people to believe that leaders listen to the rich far more than others in society." And indeed, consistently high and rising levels of economic inequality in most developed economies in recent decades (Milanovic, 2011, 2016; Stiglitz, 2012; Piketty, 2014) suggest that the influence of the "haves" and the "have-nots" on government policy has not been equally distributed, but has been skewed in favour of the former (Gilens, 2005, 2012; Uslaner, 2011).¹⁰

Inequality and political (mis)trust: Evidence in the literature

Despite the attention in the literature awarded to inequality and political trust, empirical results are neither consistent nor easily summarised. This is due to two reasons. First, political trust as a concept is weakly defined, and empirical research in the literature frequently employs different conceptualisations and measurements. Empirical findings are thus difficult to compare (Uslaner, 2017). Second, the term "economic inequality" is also used ambiguously in the literature, again making comparisons of empirical findings difficult. To make sense of the existing literature and empirical findings, it is useful to differentiate between analyses at the country and individual levels, as well as between those using objective and those using subjective measures of inequality.

Objective measures

In the study of the consequences of economic inequality on political trust, the most common measurement of the independent variables is at the country level, using arithmetic indicators of inequality such as the Gini coefficient or various ratio indicators describing the relative sizes of top and bottom income groups.

Country level

At the country level, the empirical evidence on the linkage between economic inequality and political trust is not consistent. For example, Anderson and Singer (2008) – using 2002-2003 European Social Survey data from 20 countries – found that higher country-level income inequality (as per Gini coefficients) and greater poverty are significantly related to lower

⁹ Note that the three factors mentioned here largely emanate from the top-down approach to political trust. An alternative bottom-up approach locates the sources of political trust more centrally in explanations of social capital (see Stolle, 2003; Zmerli & Castillo, 2015; Newton et al., 2018).

¹⁰ For historical evidence that high levels of inequality do in fact allow the rich to subvert legal, political, and regulatory systems and institutions, see Glaeser, Scheinkman, & Shleifer, 2003; Sonin, 2003; Jong-Sung & Khagram, 2005.

levels of political trust (in Parliament, legal systems, police, and politicians). Likewise, Zmerli and Castillo (2015) – in a study of 18 Latin American countries using Latinobarómetro data from 2011 – found that higher levels of income inequality (as per Gini) are significantly associated with less political trust.¹¹ Meanwhile, for a sample of African and Latin American cases using Afrobarometer and Latinobarómetro data, Mattes and Moreno (2018) found that country-level inequality (measured by the Gini coefficient) has only a weak effect on political trust¹² (see “Dependent variables” in Section 3 for details on operationalisation).

Others have suggested that inequality and political trust are not linked directly. For example, Goubin (2020) – using the International Social Survey Programme Citizenship rounds of 2004 and 2014 for 37 European and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries – found that inequality (as Gini coefficient of net income and the country poverty rate) has no direct significant effect on political trust (as confidence that government will do the right thing most of the time), but that both forms of country-level inequality moderate the effect of political responsiveness on political trust.

Individual level

Top-down explanations of trust widely accept that macroeconomic performance forms a strong determinant of political trust. This is the case for both objective performance (gross domestic product (GDP), for example) as well as for subjective evaluations of performance (typically captured in representative surveys). Empirical studies suggest that more positive macroeconomic performance and evaluations produce greater political trust (Citrin, McClosky, Shanks, & Sniderman, 1975; McAllister, 1999; Dalton, 2004; Keele, 2007).

Somewhat surprisingly, comparatively little evidence is available with regard to evaluations at the individual level. Wroe (2016) notes that while the literature widely agrees that country-level economic performance evaluations matter in determining political trust, little emphasis has been placed on individual-level conditions – whether relative or not. As Wroe (2016, p. 133) writes, “the conventional wisdom is that personal economic experiences and evaluations do not play much of a role” in regard to understanding political trust. However, a number of studies in the literature suggest that individual-level experiences and evaluations are important in understanding political trust.

Frequently, researchers have used the household income decile as a measure of individual deprivation. Catterberg and Moreno (2006) – using World Values Survey data (1995-2001) – found that household income deciles are significantly associated with political trust, although the effect is inconsistent across “world regions.” Political trust is operationalised as confidence in the civil service and confidence in Parliament. Catterberg and Moreno found that people in higher income deciles are less trusting in a sample of six established democracies, but more trusting in eight new democracies in Eastern Europe and four Latin American countries.¹³

Conversely, Kaasa and Parts (2008) found no significant effect of relative income (household income decile) on institutional trust using the fourth round of the World Values Survey (1999-2002).¹⁴ Boda and Medve-Bálint (2014) – in a study of 14 West European and nine East-Central European countries using the fifth wave of the European Social Survey – found that higher household income deciles increase institutional trust in Western European countries, but reduce trust in Eastern European countries.

¹¹ Zmerli and Castillo compute an index of political trust that includes reported trust in government, national congress/Parliament, judiciary, and political parties. The authors report a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.80 but no factor-analysis results.

¹² However, the authors do find a significant, moderate-size, negative effect for country-level inequality and social trust.

¹³ See Catterberg and Moreno (2006) for a list of countries in each “world region.”

¹⁴ Institutionalised trust is operationalised as confidence in Parliament, the police, and the press.

Others have used different approaches yet found results consistent with the relationship described in Catterberg and Moreno (2006) and Boda and Medve-Bálint (2014). For example, Schoon and Cheng (2011) – using two nationally representative cohort studies (1958 and 1970) in Great Britain¹⁵ – found that experiences of economic disadvantage (as per family social status at birth (parental occupational status and parental education) and occupational attainment) – are significantly associated with lower levels of political trust.¹⁶

Perceptual measures

Despite much theoretical attention, the empirical evidence with regard to political trust and economic inequality is far from consistent (Zmerli & Castillo, 2015), and some authors question the empirical linkage altogether (Boda & Medve-Bálint, 2014; Fairbrother & Martin, 2013; Olivera, 2015). Some of the inconsistencies probably follow from choices in conceptualisation and measurement of political trust (see discussion in “Dependent variables” in Section 3), and some are probably due to actual differences in how the linkage between economic inequality and political trust works in different contextual settings. By contrast, a growing body of evidence suggests that perceptions of inequality, rather than objective levels of inequality, shape levels of political trust (Goubin, 2018). Inconsistent findings may be due to how people perceive and evaluate¹⁷ inequality at both the country and individual levels (Loveless & Whitefield, 2011; Loveless, 2013; Boda & Medve-Bálint, 2014; Zmerli & Castillo, 2015; Goubin, 2018).

Country level

Indeed, some evidence suggests that perceptions and evaluations of country-level inequality are associated with individual-level political trust. For example, Zmerli and Castillo (2015) – using 2011 Latinobarómetro data from 18 Latin American countries¹⁸ – found that individual perceptions of distributive fairness within a country are strongly associated with less political trust at the individual level. Similar results were reported in a recent study by Lee, Chang, and Hur (2020). Using the fourth wave of the Asian Barometer (2014/2016; N=20,667) in 14 Asian countries,¹⁹ the authors found that perceived fairness of the income distribution within a country is significantly correlated with more political trust (operationalised as trust in the president/prime minister, courts, national government, political parties, and Parliament). Likewise, Uslaner (2017) used 2004 Afrobarometer data and computed political trust as trust in the president, Parliament, ruling party, courts, and the police. He found that – at the individual level – political trust is shaped by individuals’ evaluations of government performance in handling the economy and of perceived corruption in the Presidency, and

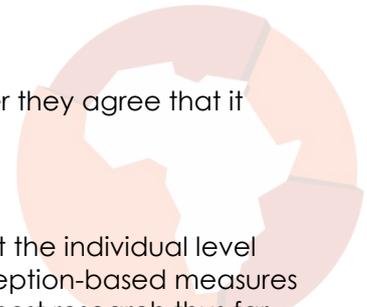
¹⁵ Schoon and Cheng (2011) employed the 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70).

¹⁶ Schoon and Cheng (2011, p. 635) used a seven-item attitude scale recording respondents’ attitudes and views about government and institutions as indicators of political trust. Examples of attitudes probed in the survey include: “There is one law for the rich and one law for the poor,” “Politicians are in politics for their own benefit,” and “No political party would benefit me.” I would argue that these attitudes are more indicative of perceived fairness and responsiveness of the political system or politicians rather than political trust itself.

¹⁷ Conceptually, evaluations of economic inequality are distinct from perceptions of economic inequality. For example, I may perceive economic inequity as being high, but evaluate that such levels are fair (or not). In practice, evidence suggests that evaluations and perceptions are strongly associated. As Wegener (1987) and others suggest, perceptions of inequality (How unequal is a country?) appear to be strongly shaped by evaluations of inequality (Is inequality fair, good, bad, unjust, worth addressing?) – see Zmerli & Castillo (2015).

¹⁸ Zmerli and Castillo’s sample consists of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

¹⁹ Lee et al.’s sample consists of Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, China, Mongolia, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Myanmar.



by whether people agree with equal treatment in theory (i.e. whether they agree that it would be better if all people were treated equally).

Individual level

Lastly, economic inequality can be conceptualised and measured at the individual level using a perceptual measure. Despite evidence suggesting that perception-based measures of inequality may yield more useful results in regard to political trust, most research thus far focuses on social trust (see Uslaner & Brown, 2005).²⁰ With regard to political trust, Zmerli and Castillo (2015) found a positive, significant effect for subjective social status. The authors' models suggest that when citizens' self-ratings on the poor–rich ladder are high, political trust (measured as trust in government, Parliament, judiciary, and political parties) is enhanced.

Most studies that use subjective individual-level measures that are nominally about absolute subjective, individual economic well-being, rather than explicitly comparative well-being. For example, Boda and Medve-Bálint (2014) – in a study of 14 West European and nine East-Central European countries using the fifth wave of the European Social Survey – found that whether or not respondents report to be coping or struggling on their present household income significantly shapes trust in institutions.²¹

In some cases, it is plausible that respondents compare themselves to others, even though the indicator refers to absolute evaluations. For example, Catterberg and Moreno (2006) found that the self-reported level of financial satisfaction is significantly associated with more political trust. Similarly, Wroe (2016) used subjective economic insecurity in a study of trust in government in the United States.²² Wroe found that subjective, individual-level perceptions of economic insecurity have a significant and negative effect on political trust. Wroe (2016, 140) argues that “insecurity activates deep-seated psychological biases, rooted in human evolution and survival, to avert losses and preserve the status quo. Government and the political class are blamed for insecurity, because economic precariousness violates citizens' expectations about the role of the state.”

Hypotheses

From the discussion of past research employing individual-level, perceptual measures of either inequality or deprivation, it appears that people's political trust is driven by egocentric considerations. As such we expect that:

H1a: Feeling relatively deprived compared to others is associated with less trust in government institutions.

H1b: Feeling relatively deprived compared to others is associated with less trust in state institutions.

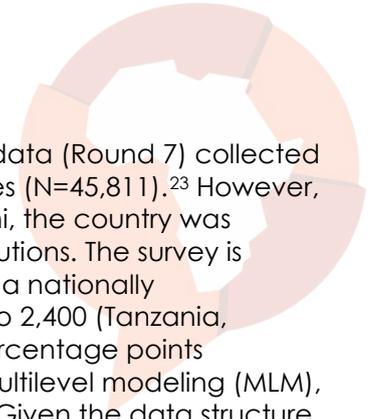
H2a: Feeling relatively advantaged compared to others is associated with greater trust in government institutions.

H2b: Feeling relatively advantaged compared to others is associated with greater trust in state institutions.

²⁰ Much evidence in the literature supports the expectation that relative deprivation shapes social trust (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005; Wilkinson, 2005; Putnam, 2007; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2007; Bjørnskov, 2008). Medve-Bálint and Boda (2014) also claim that the rich literature on inequality and social trust should encourage the testing of the linkage between inequality and political trust.

²¹ The authors use an 11-point indicator as a measure of institutional trust. The index comprises the mean values (of valid responses) to questions regarding the respondents' trust in Parliament, the legal system, the police, and political parties.

²² Wroe (2016) uses a survey item that asks respondents how often government does what “most Americans” want it to do (always, most of the time, about half of the time, once in a while, never).



3. Data, methodology and variables

For my analysis I use nationally representative Afrobarometer survey data (Round 7) collected between September 2016 and September 2018 in 34 African countries (N=45,811).²³ However, since the question on trust in the ruling party was not asked in Eswatini, the country was dropped from the analysis of trust in representative government institutions. The survey is conducted face to face, in the respondent's choice of language, in a nationally representative sample. Country samples range from 1,193 (Guinea) to 2,400 (Tanzania, Ghana), yielding error rates of 2 percentage points (N=2,400) to 3 percentage points (N=1,200).²⁴ Due to the clustering of data within country units, I use multilevel modeling (MLM), with Level 1 at the individual level and Level 2 at the country level.²⁵ Given the data structure (small number of Level 2 units, N=34), I run only random intercept models and restricted maximum likelihood estimation.²⁶

Dependent variables

One of the issues that make a comparative review of the literature more difficult is that the term, the conceptualisation, and the measurement of “political trust” differ in the literature and a number of alternative concepts – such as “political confidence” and “trust in government” – are frequently used equivalently (Newton, 2001a; PytlikZillig & Kimbrough, 2015; Uslaner, 2017; Van der Meer & Zmerli, 2017; Listhaug & Jakobsen, 2018).²⁷ For example, while some researchers use single objects of trust, such as trust in Parliament or trust in the police (Dunn, 2012; Wroe, 2016; Uslaner, 2017; Goubin, 2018), others use indices comprising several trust items (Zmerli & Castillo, 2015; Hooghe, Dassonneville, & Marien, 2015). To complicate the matter (and comparability) further, indices found in the literature reflect two

²³ My data set includes the following countries: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Eswatini – an absolute monarchy – is not included in some analyses. To access data used in this paper, see Afrobarometer (2019). For the survey codebook, see Afrobarometer (2020a). For information on the sampling methodology, see Afrobarometer (2020b).

²⁴ I use data that are weighted within countries to ensure gender parity. Importantly, I do not weight the data by population size. While countries with larger populations tend to have a larger sample size of N=2,400, and countries with smaller populations tend to have national samples of N=1,200, these sample-size differences do not reflect the differences in actual populations. The incongruence in sample-to-population ratios may affect the reliability of comparisons of within-country results.

²⁵ To test whether clustering at the country level is significant, I first ran a null model with no predictor variable. For both dependent variables (trust in elected representatives and trust in state institutions), the estimates of covariance parameters are significant at the 1% level. To further confirm the necessity for an MLM analysis, I calculated the interclass correlation coefficient (ICC) for each dependent variable. For both trust in elected officials (ICC=0.146) and trust in state institutions (0.13), the ICC meets the threshold (0.05).

²⁶ A possible problem arising from my data could be the overestimation of effect size due to the limited case number at Level 2. Data with low case numbers at Level 2 tend to yield overly small effect sizes when using a random slope model. Multilevel modeling analysis allows for two estimation modes: maximum likelihood and restricted maximum likelihood. Restricted maximum likelihood (REML) is advised to be used when the case number at Level 2 is relatively small.

²⁷ Moreover, uncertainty exists as to how the lack of trust is conceptualised. As Van der Meer and Zmerli (2017, 5) note, the lack of trust may be understood as “political mistrust (i.e. the absence of trust), political distrust (i.e. the opposite of trust) and political skepticism (i.e. withholding one’s judgement).”

(Catterberg & Moreno, 2006), three (Marien, 2011), four (Moehler, 2009; Ellinas & Lamprinou, 2014), five (Uslaner, 2017), or six (Hooghe et al., 2015) items of trust.²⁸

I follow Mattes and Moreno (2018) and use two index variables as measures of political trust. As noted above, Africans report among the highest levels of institutional trust or confidence by world region. What is more, such trust is relatively consistent over time (Mattes & Moreno, 2018). However, Afrobarometer survey data (Round 5) reveal that Africans display considerable differences in trust between institutions. While more than six in 10 Africans report trusting the national military (66%), the president (61%), and courts (61%), only around half say they trust political parties (52%) and local government (49%) (Mattes & Moreno, 2018). Using factor analysis, Mattes and Moreno (2018) found that Africans do not view institutions as a single entity upon which they bestow trust or not, but as two distinct dimensions when it comes to political trust: first, partisan, representative institutions of government, and second, state institutions.²⁹

The first index – *trust in representative government institutions* – is computed by adding respondents' scores for trust in the president/prime minister, trust in the legislature (Parliament/National Assembly), trust in the elected local council, and trust in the ruling party.³⁰ To allow for the greatest amount of variance in the dependent variable, I did not recode the index to create categories. The index has a minimum value of 0 (no trust in any of the four government institutions) and a maximum value of 12 (high trust in all four institutions).³¹ Across the sample of 33 countries, respondents score a mean of around 6, suggesting neither high nor low levels of government trust (see Appendix D). This mean score hides considerable variance between countries. For example, Tanzanians, Gambians, Mozambicans, and Burkinabè score closer to a mean value of 8 on the scale, while Gabonese and Moroccans score below 3, on average. Respondents appear to be most trusting of the president (mean=1.7) and equally trusting of Parliament (1.4), local government (1.4), and the ruling party (1.5).

The second index – *trust in state institutions* – is composed of scores for trust in the police, army, and courts of law. Again I form an index by adding scores of the three variables, and I refrain from recoding the index variable. The scale runs from 0 (no trust) to 9 (high trust).³²

²⁸ Yet other research proposes the use of several indices (each comprising different items) to measure political trust (Rothstein & Stolle, 2007; Mattes & Moreno, 2018, Newton et al., 2018). The comparison and replication of findings as to covariates, causes, and consequences of political trust are moreover made more difficult by different survey methods across surveys and changes across time within surveys (Newton et al., 2018).

²⁹ For Round 7 data, the two indices of trust correlate significantly, with a moderate strength. The relation between the two indices is positive, suggesting that respondents who are more trusting of government institutions also report more trust in state institutions, and vice versa ($r(38606)=0.634$; $p<.001$).

³⁰ Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president/prime minister? Parliament/National Assembly? Elected local council? Ruling party?* Response options were: *not at all* (coded as 0), *just a little* (1), *somewhat* (2), *a lot* (3). See Appendix A for more details on the questions. The choice of variables in each factor reflects the results of an exploratory factor analysis by Mattes and Moreno, who found two related but distinct dimensions of political trust – trust in representative institutions and trust in state institutions. See Mattes & Moreno (2018, 11).

³¹ A factor analysis (extraction method: maximum likelihood) was performed, and a single factor was extracted (direct oblimin rotation). The items were found to be suitable for a factor analysis with a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p<0.001$) and a KMO above the threshold (0.807). The factor produced an eigenvalue of 2.867 (four items) and accounted for 71.67% of variance. A reliability analysis produced a satisfactory Cronbach's alpha of 0.868.

³² Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The police? The army? Courts of law?* Response options were: *not at all* (coded as 0), *just a little* (1), *somewhat* (2), *a lot* (3). See Appendix A for more details on the questions. A factor analysis (extraction method: principal axis factoring) was performed, and a single factor was extracted (direct oblimin rotation).



Across all 34 countries, average trust in institutions is 5.19, but considerable country differences appear (see Appendix E). Here, Senegalese, Nigeriens, and Tanzanians are most trusting of state institutions, while Togolese, Malagasy, and Gabonese are least trusting. On average, respondents appear to be most trusting of the army (mean=1.97) and least trusting of the police (1.56).

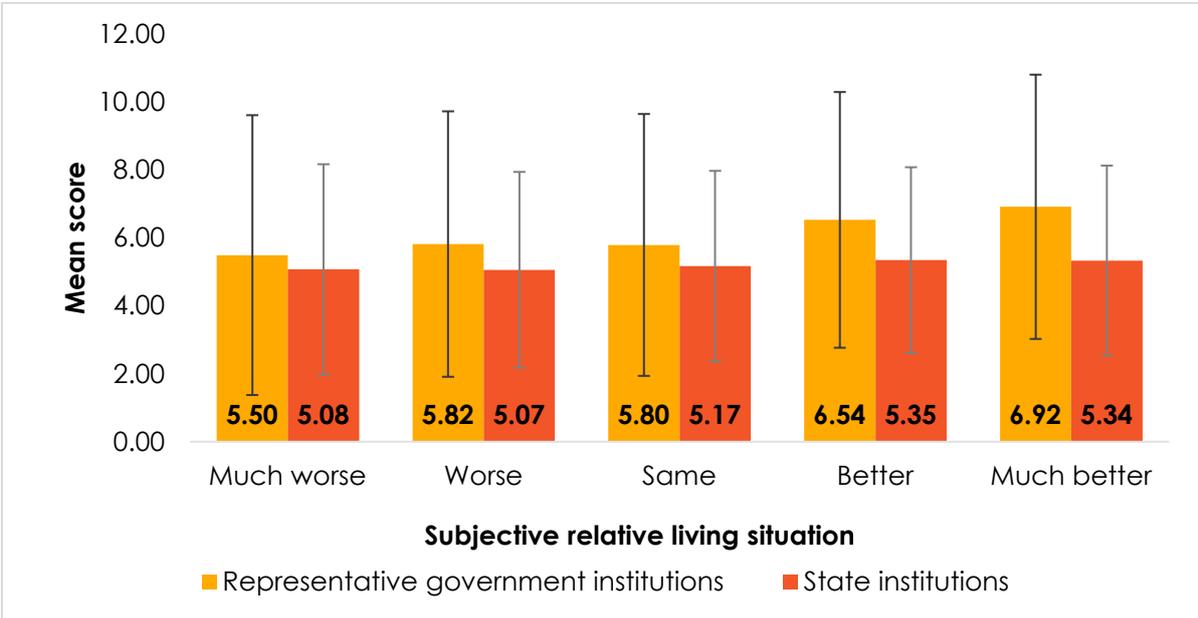
Independent variables: Perception of relative deprivation and advantage

I operationalise “perceptions of relative deprivation” by using an Afrobarometer survey question that asks respondents how they feel their living conditions compare with other people’s in their country. Substantive responses to this question are: much worse, worse, same, better, much better. Responses were read out to respondents. Throughout this paper, I use the terms “living conditions: (as it reads in the question text) and “living situation” interchangeably. Further, I refer to this variable as both *subjective* relative living situation and *perceived* relative living situation.

To test the effect of relative situation, I compute four dummy variables from the variable described above. For each variable, I code “much better,” “better,” “worse,” “much worse” as 1 and all other categories as 0. I do not compute a dummy for the “equal” category, making it a reference category. In my sample of 34 countries (N=45,811), around one in three respondents (35%) report feeling equal, with similar proportions feeling either worse off/much worse off (34%) or better/much better off (32%).

Indeed, the bivariate results suggest that feeling relatively deprived is associated with less trust in government institutions (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Trust in representative government institutions and state institutions | by perceived relative living situation | Afrobarometer Round 7 data (2016/2018)³³



Mean scores and standard deviations; N=42,992

The items were found to be suitable for a factor analysis with a significant Bartlett’s test of sphericity ($p < 0.001$) and a KMO above the threshold (0.708). The factor produced an eigenvalue of 2.143 (three items) and accounted for 71.43% of variance. A reliability analysis produced a satisfactory Cronbach’s alpha of 0.800.

³³ The data are weighted by country to ensure gender parity within countries. No weight has been applied to equalise the country-level sample sizes. To recall, the index for trust in government institutions can only be computed for 33 countries (Eswatini is missing), while the index for trust in state institutions can be computed for all 34 countries.



It appears that respondents who feel much worse off or worse off than others have lower political trust, compared with respondents who feel better or much better off than others.³⁴ While the same relationship emerges with regard to trust in state institutions, the differences in trust appear much less pronounced, compared with trust in government institutions.

4. Analysis

In this section, I first test my hypotheses. I begin by testing the main effects with no control variables before introducing measures of individual- and country-level poverty and objective inequality to differentiate the influence of these related issues. I then run my main predictors against commonly used explanations of political trust to assess how useful my main predictors are above and beyond what we already know from the literature.³⁵

Testing main effects

The results – displayed in tables 1 and 2 – support both hypotheses 1a and 1b, namely that feeling relatively deprived is significantly associated with less trust in both government and state institutions. The effect sizes for perceptions of relative deprivation are considerably larger for trust in government institutions than for trust in state institutions. This finding is intuitive, as people likely blame politicians for economic conditions and policy failure, but less so the army or police. The results also show that greater trust in government and state institutions is significantly linked to feelings of relative advantage, thus supporting hypotheses 2a and 2b, respectively.³⁶ For feelings of both relative deprivation and relative advantage, the correlation is weaker for those who feel only moderately deprived or advantaged and stronger for those who feel severely deprived or advantaged, respectively. These results suggest that the association of perceived relative living situation and political trust is linear.

Models 1b-3b confirm that how people feel their living situation compares to others' is significantly associated with both trust in representative government and state institutions even when controlling for socio-demographic characteristics, such as location and level of education (Model 1b), as well as objective (Model 1c) and subjective (Model 2a) poverty experiences.³⁷ While experiencing more lived poverty is associated with less trust in both

³⁴ Trust in government institutions: $r(38586)=0.088$; $p<0.01$. Trust in state institutions: $r(41683)=0.037$; $p<0.01$.

³⁵ A technical description and descriptive statistics for all variables used in the models of this paper can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B.

³⁶ Feeling much better off is only significantly correlated with trust in state institutions once socio-demographic and absolute and relative experiences of poverty are considered.

³⁷ To examine the effect of absolute economic and material well-being of individuals, I include two indices: Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) and an asset index. The LPI comprises five variables that measure how often respondents or anyone in their families has gone without enough food, enough water for personal consumption, medical services, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income in the past year (see Appendix A for question text). Responses range from "never" having gone without to "always." The index is computed by adding a respondent's five responses. The scale of the additive index is recoded, and categories are created running from "no lived poverty" (coded 0) to "high lived poverty" (coded 3). A factor analysis (extraction method: maximum likelihood) was performed, and a single factor was extracted (direct oblimin rotation). The items were found to be suitable for a factor analysis with a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p<0.001$) and a KMO above the threshold (0.816). The factor produced an eigenvalue of 2.026 (five items) and accounted for 40.5% of variance. A reliability analysis produced a satisfactory Cronbach's alpha of 0.768.

The asset index reflects how many non-elemental goods a respondent has access to or owns personally. The index reflects whether respondents say they have access to, or personally own, a radio, television, mobile phone, computer, motor vehicle, and bank account. The scores for the six items were added without any weighting, and the resulting scale was not recoded. The scale runs from 0 (no access or personal ownership to any item) to 12 (personal ownership of all six items). A factor analysis (extraction method: maximum likelihood) was performed, and a single factor was extracted (direct oblimin rotation). The items were found to be suitable

government and state institutions, trust appears more strongly associated with how people feel they fare compared to others (Model 2a).

This is an important finding, as it suggests that the relation between people and politics is not improved by addressing only absolute conditions of people, but that how people feel their situation compares to other people's is important to understanding political trust. Moreover, the significant effect of perceived relative living situation, above and beyond experienced absolute poverty, provides empirical support for the narrative of trust breaking down as a result of being "left behind" (which is an inherently comparative status) rather than "being poor." Strikingly, the results also suggest that respondents who own more assets are also less trusting of both government and state institutions, although the effect size is much smaller than the effect of lived poverty (Model 2a).

Regardless of which index is consulted, however, subjective relative assessments remain significant, underlining the importance of how people think they fare compared to others in informing political trust, regardless of their absolute situation. This means that regardless of how poor people say they are and how poor they in fact are compared to others objectively, feeling relatively deprived is significantly associated with less political trust, and feeling relatively advantaged is significantly associated with more political trust.

While the results here are not directly comparable with past research (as, to my knowledge, no one has used the variable or a similar item in this way), the significant association between feeling relatively deprived and being less trusting of government and state institutions does echo the findings of Wroe (2016), Zmerli and Castillo (2015), and Medve-Bálint and Boda (2014), who all found that the sentiment of feeling precarious or "at the bottom" is linked to less trust (see Section 2).

Compared to past findings, this paper explores the relationship between subjective relative living situation and trust in a more differentiated and nuanced way. For example, Zmerli and Castillo (2015) – for 18 Latin American countries – found that where people place themselves on a poor–rich scale is significantly correlated with political trust. This finding appears to suggest a linear relationship between the two variables. In my models, I demonstrate – particularly in regard to trust in state institutions – that the relationship between relative self-placement and trust appears not to be linear once important control variables such as incumbent partisanship and economic performance evaluations are considered.

In regard to trust in state institutions, the models suggest that feeling relatively deprived is significantly correlated with less trust above and beyond the effect of other control variables. Conversely, feeling relatively better off than others is not significantly correlated with trust once other explanations of trust are considered in the models. The results thus suggest that the relationship is non-linear: Feeling relatively better off than others does not simply have the opposite effect as feeling relatively worse off than others.

for a factor analysis with a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < 0.001$) and a KMO above the threshold (0.803). The factor produced an eigenvalue of 2.046 (six items) and accounted for 34.1% of variance. A reliability analysis produced a satisfactory Cronbach's alpha of 0.744.

To compute measures of objective relative well-being, I compute the relative position and distance of a respondent vs. the national LPI and asset index mean score.

Table 1: Modeling trust in representative government institutions | 33 countries | Afrobarometer Round 7 data (2016/2018)

	M1a: Relative living situation	M1b: Controls	M1c: Objective relative poverty (LPI)	M1c: Objective relative poverty (assets)	M1d: Country inequality	M2a: Poverty	M2b: Country poverty	M3a: Complete economic model 1	M3b: Complete economic model 2
<i>Intercept</i>	5.92 (0.267)	5.594 (0.266)	5.61 (0.265)	5.638 (0.269)	4.88 (1.31)	6.652 (0.273)	8.59 (1.227)	8.675 (1.547)	7.744 (1.578)
Much worse= 1	-0.563*** (0.073)	-0.779*** (0.072)	-0.607*** (0.073)	-0.813*** (0.073)	-0.779*** (0.072)	-0.638*** (0.074)	-0.779*** (0.072)	-0.638*** (0.074)	-0.639*** (0.074)
Worse= 1	-0.423*** (0.048)	-0.59*** (0.047)	-0.491*** (0.048)	-0.618*** (0.048)	-0.59*** (0.047)	-0.518*** (0.048)	-0.59*** (0.047)	-0.518*** (0.048)	-0.519*** (0.048)
Better= 1	0.341*** (0.046)	0.388*** (0.046)	0.342*** (0.046)	0.408*** (0.046)	0.387*** (0.046)	0.362*** (0.046)	0.387*** (0.046)	0.361*** (0.046)	0.361*** (0.046)
Much better= 1	0.793*** (0.108)	0.877*** (0.107)	0.817*** (0.107)	0.907*** (0.108)	0.876*** (0.107)	0.848*** (0.109)	0.877*** (0.107)	0.847*** (0.109)	0.847*** (0.109)
Relative to national LPI mean			-0.347*** (0.023)						-0.373*** (0.023)
Relative to national asset index mean				-0.056*** (0.008)				-0.072*** (0.008)	
Lived Poverty Index						-0.373*** (0.023)		-0.374*** (0.023)	
Asset index						-0.072*** (0.008)			-0.071*** (0.008)
Age		0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)
Female= 1		-0.074* (0.036)	-0.088* (0.036)	-0.115** (0.037)	-0.074* (0.036)	-0.139*** (0.037)	-0.074* (0.036)	-0.138*** (0.037)	-0.138*** (0.037)
Rural= 1		0.709*** (0.039)	0.751*** (0.039)	0.651*** (0.041)	0.709*** (0.039)	0.677*** (0.041)	0.708*** (0.039)	0.676*** (0.041)	0.676*** (0.041)
Level of education		-0.208*** (0.009)	-0.231*** (0.009)	-0.176*** (0.01)	-0.208*** (0.009)	-0.191*** (0.01)	-0.207*** (0.009)	-0.191*** (0.01)	-0.191*** (0.01)
Income inequality (Gini)					0.017 (0.03)			0.032 (0.028)	0.027 (0.028)
Human Development Index							-5.463*(2.191) (2.194)		-5.136* (2.239)
<i>Within country R²</i>	0.013	0.041	0.048	0.042	0.041	0.050	0.041	0.050	0.050
<i>Between country R²</i>	-0.007	0.148	0.155	0.130	0.129	0.156	0.268	0.290	0.260

Note: Cell entries are linear mixed-model coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Some effect sizes may be displayed as zero as they have been rounded off. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2: Modeling trust in state institutions | 34 countries | Afrobarometer Round 7 data (2016/2018)

	M1a: Relative living situation	M1b: Controls	M1c: Objective relative poverty (LPI)	M1c: Objective relative poverty (assets)	M1d: Country inequality	M2a: Poverty	M2b: Country poverty	M3a: Complete economic model 1	M3b: Complete economic model 2
<i>Intercept</i>	5.221 (0.166)	5.212 (0.175)	5.217 (0.175)	5.255 (0.177)	5.139 (0.853)	5.868 (0.18)	5.517 (0.879)	6.066 (1.113)	5.548 (1.14)
Much worse= 1	-0.252*** (0.053)	-0.383*** (0.053)	-0.29*** (0.053)	-0.416*** (0.053)	-0.383*** (0.053)	-0.317*** (0.054)	-0.383*** (0.053)	-0.317*** (0.054)	-0.318*** (0.054)
Worse= 1	-0.223*** (0.034)	-0.318*** (0.034)	-0.261*** (0.035)	-0.34*** (0.035)	-0.318*** (0.034)	-0.281*** (0.035)	-0.318*** (0.034)	-0.281*** (0.035)	-0.281*** (0.035)
Better= 1	0.086** (0.033)	0.116*** (0.033)	0.094** (0.033)	0.126*** (0.034)	0.116*** (0.033)	0.103** (0.034)	0.116*** (0.033)	0.103** (0.034)	0.103** (0.034)
Much better= 1	0.151 (0.079)	0.199* (0.078)	0.163* (0.079)	0.214** (0.079)	0.199* (0.078)	0.176* (0.079)	0.199* (0.078)	0.176* (0.079)	0.176* (0.079)
Relative to national LPI mean			-0.191*** (0.016)						-0.211*** (0.017)
Relative to national asset index mean				-0.039*** (0.006)				-0.048*** (0.006)	
Lived Poverty Index						-0.211*** (0.017)		-0.211*** (0.017)	
Asset index						-0.048*** (0.006)			-0.048*** (0.006)
Age		0(0)	0(0)	0.001(0)	0(0)	0.001 (0)	0 (0)	0.001 (0)	0.001 (0)
Female= 1		-0.116*** (0.026)	-0.122*** (0.026)	-0.146*** (0.026)	-0.116*** (0.026)	-0.158*** (0.027)	-0.116*** (0.026)	-0.158*** (0.027)	-0.158*** (0.027)
Rural= 1		0.402*** (0.029)	0.427*** (0.029)	0.359*** (0.03)	0.402*** (0.029)	0.377*** (0.03)	0.402*** (0.029)	0.377*** (0.03)	0.377*** (0.03)
Level of education		-0.124*** (0.007)	-0.138*** (0.007)	-0.103*** (0.007)	-0.124*** (0.007)	-0.113*** (0.008)	-0.124*** (0.007)	-0.113*** (0.008)	-0.113*** (0.008)
Income inequality (Gini)					0.002 (0.02)			0.005 (0.02)	0.001 (0.02)
Human Development Index							-0.556 (1.566)	-1.217 (1.592)	-0.118 (1.631)
<i>Within country R²</i>	0.006	0.024	0.027	0.026	0.024	0.029	0.024	0.029	0.029
<i>Between country R²</i>	-0.005	0.084	0.090	0.069	0.055	0.111	0.059	0.062	0.014

Note: Cell entries are linear mixed-model coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Some effect sizes may be displayed as zero as they have been rounded off. *p<=0.05, **p<= 0.01, ***p<=0.001.

Testing competing explanations

The results thus far show that how people feel their living situation compares to other people's is significantly correlated with how much they trust representative government and state institutions. But are these results important to consider given current models of explaining political trust? To test this, I run the main predictor variables concurrently with widely held explanations of political trust found in the literature. Here I focus on three explanations: partisanship, performance evaluations, and perceptions of corruption.³⁸

Previous research has found that government performance and evaluations of performance are central determinants of trust in government institutions (Mattes & Moreno, 2018). To capture performance evaluations, I focus on free and fair elections, economic performance, service delivery, and the performance evaluation of the president or prime minister.³⁹

Past research suggests, moreover, that political trust is strongly tied to the ideas of representation and accountability (Grimes, 2006; Uslaner, 2005, 2011, 2013, 2017, 2018; Van der Meer & Dekker, 2011; You, 2018). Corruption inherently goes against these ideas, as the interest and benefit of the individual or a small group of clients is placed above the interest and benefit of the electorate. Indeed, Lavallée, Razafindrakoto, & Roubaud (2008) – using Afrobarometer Round 2 (2002/2003) and Round 3 (2005/2006) data for 18 countries – find that perceptions of general levels of corruption as well as personal experiences of petty corruption (paying a bribe) are significantly associated with less trust in political institutions.⁴⁰ To account for the role of corruption perceptions, I include two variables that measure to what extent people believe that the president and his office and members of Parliament are corrupt, as well as a variable that asks respondents to evaluate changes in the overall level of corruption in their country.⁴¹

³⁸ A technical description and descriptive statistics for all variables used in the models of this section can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B.

³⁹ For African cases, see Moehler (2009), Hutchison & Johnson (2011), Uslaner (2017), and Mattes & Moreno (2018). For cases outside of Africa, see Citrin (1974), Easton (1975), Listhaug (1995), Alesina & Wacziarg (2000), Scharpf (1999), Hetherington (2005), Keele (2007), Newton (2007), Uslaner (2011), and Van der Meer (2018). To account for performance evaluations, I include the respondent's evaluation of "free and fair" national elections in the country, as well as an economic performance index, which reflects how people assess the government's performance in managing the economy, improving living standards of the poor, creating jobs, and keeping prices stable. I also include an index variable that reflects assessments of government performance in service delivery. This index includes assessments of government efforts to reduce crime, provide basic health services, address education needs, and ensure provision of water/sanitation services and enough food for everyone. Confirmatory factor analysis and reliability analysis were performed for both indices, which confirmed an underlying latent dimension in all three cases. Both indices are scaled to run from negative evaluations (low scores) to positive evaluations (high scores). Given the interest in the role of perceptions of economic inequality on trust, I also include a variable that measures how people feel government is handling narrowing income gaps between rich and poor. Lastly, I include a variable that reflects respondents' evaluations of the performance of the president (or prime minister in countries in which the prime minister heads government). At the country level, I include a control variable – the rule of law index – from the Varieties of Democracy Project that captures to what extent laws are "transparently, independently, predictably, impartially, and equally enforced" and to what extent "the actions of government officials comply with the law" (Coppedge et al., 2019, 269).

⁴⁰ Political institutions are defined by the authors as president, Parliament, independent electoral commission, ruling party, and opposition parties.

⁴¹ Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?* For a description of the variable, see Appendix A. At the country level, research has routinely found a significant, negative effect of corruption on political trust. I use V-Dem's

Partisanship is important in informing how much someone trusts government institutions or the state.⁴² In an analysis of determinants of political trust in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America using survey data, Mattes and Moreno (2018) found partisanship to be one of the strongest predictors of trust in government institutions and a strong predictor of trust in state institutions. Moehler (2009) obtained similar results using Afrobarometer Round 1 data (1999-2001; 20 countries, N=15,715). This suggests that the effect of partisanship on political trust is present in African cases, too, and stable over time. To capture partisanship, I compute a variable that is coded 2 if the respondent identifies with the party of the president or prime minister, coded 1 if the respondent identifies with another party, and coded 0 if the respondent identifies with no party. I also control for the type of electoral system, which likely has consequences for the relationship of electorate and representatives (Binzer Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2007; Spoon & Klüver, 2014).⁴³

In line with past research, I include socio-demographic variables that have been found to be associated with political trust. I control for age, gender, location (urban vs. rural setting), and level of education. Table 3 displays the results for trust in representative government institutions, and Table 4 shows the results for trust in state institutions.⁴⁴

Covariates of political trust

The results emphasise the importance of the president in shaping people's trust in both representative government institutions and state institutions. Across all models, both forms of trust are most strongly correlated with the perceived performance of the president (see Model 7). In both cases, more positive performance evaluations of the president are significantly correlated with more trust in representative government and state institutions. Further, perceived corruption in the Presidency is strongly associated with less trust in representative government institutions, which is in line with findings from earlier rounds of Afrobarometer data by Moehler (2009) and Uslaner (2017). I also find a significant, moderate correlation of perceived corruption in the executive and the legislative with trust in state institutions. For both forms of trust, perceptions that levels of corruption have been decreasing over time are significantly correlated with more trust. For both forms of trust, the results also suggest a significant, strong, and positive effect of partisanship, meaning that respondents who feel close to the incumbent party are significantly more trusting of both government and state institutions than respondents who do not. As would be expected, partisanship has a greater effect on trust in representative government institutions than on

political corruption index, which comprises indicators related to corruption in the legislature, judiciary, executive, and public sector (Varieties of Democracy, 2019).

⁴² Here the argument of political distance or “gaps” could also be useful to consider. The argument posits that someone will have more trust in government or institutions the closer the institutions’ issue positions are to the issue positions of the individual (i.e. the shorter the distance between the two). By extension, institutions will be more trusted if they are closer to a larger share of the population (Listhaug & Jakobsen, 2018). I argue that partisanship is a good proxy for such “distance” and that people choose whom they support based on the shortest distance between their positions on issues that are salient to them and the respective issue positions of various candidates.

⁴³ I control for type of electoral system using data from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). I recode the IDEA data to 1 if a country uses a majoritarian system and 0 if it does not (proportional representation or mixed system).

⁴⁴ Following the recommendation by Ray (2003), I run separate models for separate explanatory variable groups so as not to include intervening variables in a single model. I include incumbent partisanship in a separate model, as partisanship is probably highly correlated with performance evaluations (Model 5) and perceptions of corruption (Model 6). Including partisanship in such models would cause problems of multicollinearity in the computation and interpretation of results.

trust in state institutions, in which the ruling party (to which people feel close) will have only limited reach.⁴⁵

Trust in representative government institutions

Despite the strong effect of incumbency and perceived performance of the president on political trust, I find that perceived living situation maintains a significant association with trust in representative government institutions. Both perceived relative deprivation and advantage are significantly correlated with trust in representative government institutions when controlling for whether someone feels close to the president's party (Model 4), people's evaluations of governmental and presidential performance (Model 5), and perceptions of corruption (Model 6). In all three models, the results suggest egocentric motivations, as feelings of relative deprivation are significantly associated with less trust and feelings of relative advantage are significantly associated with more trust. The significant association of perceptions of relative deprivation and advantage, above and beyond incumbent partisanship, is important as it suggests that trust, even for partisans of the incumbent, is not "blind" and that individual feelings of relative deprivation or advantage are linked to political trust, regardless of whom one feels close to. Although significant, I find only a weak correlation between perceptions of how government is handling narrowing income gaps and trust in state institutions, and I find no significant correlation for trust in representative government institutions.

The results show that once all competing explanations are taken into account (Model 7), perceptions of severe relative deprivation ("feeling much worse off") are no longer significantly associated with levels of trust in government institutions but only feeling moderately deprived compared to others is. This is an important finding in the context of the discourse around people's weakening bonds with politicians and the state as a result of feeling "left behind" or "left out." The results suggest that feeling severely deprived compared to others is not significantly associated with more or less trust in politicians and the state, when one considers how people evaluate the government on economic matters, how free and fair they think past elections were, or whether they think that politicians are corrupt, but that feelings of moderate relative deprivation are. Likewise, I find that when all other tested explanations are entered, only feeling severely advantaged is significantly associated with (more) trust in government institutions, but not feeling moderately advantaged. Again, the results emphasise the importance of how the chief executive is perceived to be performing. When the perceived performance of the president is dropped from Model 7, the effect of feeling moderately advantaged compared to others turns significant (see far-right column in Table 4).

⁴⁵ This difference is further underlined by the model performance for either form of trust. While model 4 accounts for approximately 9.2% of variance within countries for trust in representative government institutions, the model accounts for only half that in regard to trust in state institutions. What is more, model 4 accounts for approximately 49% of trust in representative government institutions between countries, but only 3% for state institutions. Interestingly, the electoral system is however not significantly associated with more or less trust in neither representative nor state institutions.

Table 3: Modeling trust in representative government institutions | 33 countries
| Afrobarometer Round 7 data (2016/2018)

	M4: Partisanship	M5: Performance	M6: Corruption	M7: Full model	(Sans President)
<i>Intercept</i>	7.756 (1.328)	-0.57 (1.138)	12.366 (1.701)	3.735 (1.322)	5.422 (1.522)
Much worse= 1	-0.638*** (0.073)	0.082 (0.07)	-0.331*** (0.073)	0.02 (0.072)	-0.029 (0.074)
Worse= 1	-0.501*** (0.048)	-0.131** (0.046)	-0.353*** (0.048)	-0.116* (0.047)	-0.138** (0.047)
Better= 1	0.324*** (0.046)	0.112** (0.044)	0.248*** (0.046)	0.07 (0.045)	0.123** (0.046)
Much better= 1	0.774*** (0.107)	0.429*** (0.106)	0.717*** (0.104)	0.447*** (0.107)	0.372*** (0.103)
Rel. to nat. asset index mean	-0.074*** (0.008)	-0.023** (0.007)	-0.037*** (0.008)	-0.014 (0.008)	-0.022** (0.008)
Lived Poverty Index	-0.391*** (0.023)	-0.106*** (0.022)	-0.197*** (0.023)	-0.089*** (0.023)	-0.074** (0.023)
Incumbent partisanship	0.94*** (0.023)			0.473*** (0.023)	0.579*** (0.023)
Free elections		0.634*** (0.018)		0.492*** (0.019)	0.645*** (0.019)
Economic performance index		0.2*** (0.009)		0.162*** (0.01)	0.23*** (0.009)
Service delivery index		0.076*** (0.007)		0.051*** (0.007)	0.09*** (0.007)
Government handling income gaps		0.029 (0.027)		0.019 (0.028)	0.002 (0.028)
Performance of president		1.276*** (0.02)		1.04*** (0.022)	
Perceived corruption in the Presidency			-0.926*** (0.028)	-0.432*** (0.028)	-0.599*** (0.028)
Perceived corruption among MPs			-0.374*** (0.029)	-0.329*** (0.028)	-0.32*** (0.029)
Change in levels of corruption			-0.574*** (0.015)	-0.213*** (0.016)	-0.295*** (0.016)
Age	0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)	0.002* (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)
Female = 1	-0.053 (0.036)	-0.047 (0.035)	-0.184*** (0.036)	-0.052 (0.036)	-0.104** (0.036)
Rural = 1	0.53*** (0.041)	0.426*** (0.039)	0.539*** (0.04)	0.339*** (0.041)	0.348*** (0.041)
Level of education	-0.183*** (0.01)	-0.112*** (0.01)	-0.131*** (0.01)	-0.094*** (0.01)	-0.097*** (0.01)
Majoritarian electoral system	0.652 (0.384)			0.261 (0.237)	0.368 (0.267)
Economic growth (mean: 2011-2017)		0.128 (0.091)		0.127 (0.092)	0.191 (0.102)
Rule of law index		-0.371 (0.587)		-1.671 (0.957)	-1.733 (1.055)
Political corruption index (V-Dem)			-0.419 (0.903)	-1.353 (0.989)	-1.617 (1.08)
Income inequality (Gini)	0.031 (0.024)	0.01 (0.015)	0.024 (0.023)	0.011 (0.014)	0.01 (0.016)
Human Development Index	-6.728*** (1.874)	-3.932** (1.411)	-6.016** (1.936)	-3.525* (1.38)	-3.638* (1.49)
<i>Within country R²</i>	0.092	0.345	0.215	0.396	0.332
<i>Between country R²</i>	0.490	0.809	0.527	0.833	0.774

Note: Cell entries are linear mixed-model coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Some effect sizes may be displayed as zero as they have been rounded off. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4: Modeling trust in state institutions | 34 countries | Afrobarometer Round 7 data (2016/2018)

	M4: Partisanship	M5: Performance	M6: Corruption	M7: Full model
<i>Intercept</i>	5.905 (1.154)	2.855 (1.526)	10.013 (1.262)	5.407 (1.964)
Much worse= 1	-0.309*** (0.055)	0.039 (0.058)	-0.171** (0.057)	0.013 (0.062)
Worse= 1	-0.275*** (0.036)	-0.085* (0.037)	-0.22*** (0.037)	-0.109* (0.04)
Better= 1	0.091** (0.034)	0.029 (0.036)	0.049 (0.035)	0.004 (0.039)
Much better= 1	0.185* (0.081)	-0.099 (0.087)	0.087 (0.08)	-0.053 (0.092)
Rel. to nat. asset index mean	-0.047*** (0.006)	-0.029*** (0.006)	-0.025*** (0.006)	-0.017** (0.006)
Lived Poverty Index	-0.218*** (0.017)	-0.043* (0.018)	-0.12*** (0.017)	-0.02 (0.019)
Incumbent partisanship	0.375*** (0.017)			0.154*** (0.02)
Free elections	0.348*** (0.015)			0.267*** (0.016)
Economic performance index	0.097*** (0.008)			0.072*** (0.008)
Service delivery index	0.1*** (0.005)			0.086*** (0.006)
Government handling income gaps	-0.042 (0.022)			-0.05* (0.024)
Performance of president	0.529*** (0.017)			0.395*** (0.018)
Perceived corruption in the Presidency				-0.455*** (0.021)
Perceived corruption among MPs				-0.327*** (0.022)
Change in levels of corruption				-0.321*** (0.012)
Age	0 (0)	0.001* (0.001)	0(0)	0.001 (0.001)
Female = 1	-0.109*** (0.027)	-0.097** (0.028)	-0.193*** (0.028)	-0.099** (0.03)
Rural = 1	0.323*** (0.03)	0.216*** (0.032)	0.281*** (0.031)	0.169*** (0.035)
Level of education	-0.103*** (0.008)	-0.071*** (0.008)	-0.078*** (0.008)	-0.057*** (0.009)
Majoritarian electoral system	-0.085 (0.334)			-0.142 (0.354)
Economic growth (mean: 2011-2017)	-0.095 (0.121)			-0.057 (0.137)
Rule of law index	1.116 (0.762)			0.219 (1.427)
Political corruption index (V-Dem)				-1.665* (0.675)
Income inequality (Gini)	0 (0.021)	-0.016 (0.02)	-0.006 (0.017)	-0.017 (0.021)
Human Development Index	-0.998 (1.629)	-2.38 (1.896)	-1.998 (1.448)	-1.583 (2.056)
<i>Within country R²</i>	0.042	0.170	0.124	0.200
<i>Between country R²</i>	0.031	0.122	0.335	0.050

Note: Cell entries are linear mixed-model coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Some effect sizes may be displayed as zero as they have been rounded off. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Trust in state institutions

How people feel their living situation compares to other people's is not consistently and significantly correlated with trust in state institutions, once you consider other explanations of such trust. For example, controlling for incumbent partisanship, both feelings of relative deprivation and feelings of relative advantage are significantly correlated with trust in state institutions. This suggests that regardless of whether someone feels close to the incumbent's party or not, people who feel worse off than others are less trusting of such institutions, and people who feel better off than others are more trusting. However, in the context of performance evaluations and perceptions of corruption, people who feel worse off (both moderately and severely) are less trusting of state institutions, but people who feel better off than others (both moderately and severely) are no different in their levels of trust than people who feel equal to others. Further, in the context of performance evaluations, feeling severely deprived compared to others is not significantly correlated with trust in state institutions, while feeling moderately deprived is. Unlike trust in representative government institutions, I find no consistent significant correlation between trust in state institutions and feelings of relative advantage. People feeling relatively better off than others (both moderately and severely) is not significantly correlated with trust in state institutions when people's performance evaluation of government and the president or their perceptions of corruption are taken into account. Only in the context of partisanship is feeling better off (both moderately and severely) significantly associated with more trust in state institutions.

The results in this section show that trust in representative government institutions and trust in state institutions are both tied to perceptions of good conduct (free and fair elections, lack of corruption) and to economic and social performance evaluations. These findings echo the conclusion by Mattes and Moreno (2018, p. 27) that "trust and distrust are not reflexive or unreasoned" but rather are tied to evaluations, such as economic, social, and political performance by the government. Analogous to findings by Mattes and Moreno (2018), the models have considerably higher explanatory power for trust in government institutions than trust in state institutions.⁴⁶ This difference in explanatory power is plausible as it is rational, if we assume a functionalist explanation of trust, that people associate their perceived relative deprivation or economic and social performance evaluations with *government* institutions, rather than with the police or courts of law.

Adding to the existing literature, the results demonstrate that how people feel compared to others at the individual level matters, too, and ought to be included in future research on political trust in Africa. The findings in this section moreover make clear that feeling relatively deprived and feeling relatively advantaged are not merely opposites in how they relate to political trust. Rather the results demonstrate that the two feelings are associated with political trust in different ways, especially when alternative explanations of trust are considered.

Country-level explanations

Unlike much previous research on political trust in Africa, I test the influence of individual- and country-level factors by using a multi-level modeling approach. The results at country level suggest that country levels of income inequality (as per Gini) are not significantly associated with trust in government institutions. I find a negative and significant effect for V-Dem's political corruption index in Model 6 for trust in state institutions only, suggesting that people in countries with higher levels of political corruption (on said index) are less trusting of state

⁴⁶ Using multi-level models, I am able to distinguish between variance accounted for within countries and between countries. The most comprehensive models (models 7) account for approximately 40% (government institutions) and 20% (state institutions) of within-country variance and 83% and 5% of between-country variance, respectively. In terms of accounting for variance in trust in state institutions between countries, the models looking at only performance evaluations (Model 5, ~12%) or only corruption (Model 6, ~34%) perform better than Model 7.

institutions. This finding is in line with past research that notes that "corruption is *the* major explanation of cross-national differences in political trust" (Van der Meer, 2017, p. 14).⁴⁷ However, this effect turns non-significant when other country-level factors are controlled for (see Model 7). I find no evidence to suggest that people in majoritarian electoral system are more trusting of representative government institutions.

Among Level 2 predictors of trust in government institutions, the level of human development stands out as the strongest effect. Given the positive linkage between perceived government performance and trust at the individual level, I find a strong and negative effect for level of human development (using the Human Development Index), suggesting that people in more developed countries are less trusting of government institutions. This country-level effect is significant across models 4-6 for trust in representative government institutions, suggesting that the effect is robust even in the context of other country-level variables. I find no significant effect of human development on trust in state institutions. Past research – outside of Africa – has found both similar and contrasting results regarding objective and subjective economic development (see McAllister, 1999; Mishler & Rose, 2001).⁴⁸

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I explore the individual, perceptual covariates of two forms of political trust using representative survey data from 34 African countries. I pay particular attention to whether perceptions of relative deprivation or advantage shaped such trust. While researchers are becoming increasingly sensitive to the importance of perceptions, past research has thus far failed to account for perceptions of relative deprivation and advantage in the study of political trust in Africa.

Much ambiguity exists in the literature with regard to how political trust is conceptualised and measured. Here I follow past research and construct two indices of political trust: first, trust in government institutions – constituted of trust in the president, Parliament, elected local council, and the ruling party – and second, trust in state institutions – constituted of trust in the police, army, and courts of law.

Perceptions of individual relative deprivation and advantage are significantly associated with levels of political trust. Past research has emphasised that macroeconomic performance evaluations play a central role in generating political trust, but conventional wisdom has awarded little importance to individual-level economic factors. My findings challenge such wisdom and support past research that has pointed to significant linkages between individual-level economic considerations and political trust (see Catterberg & Moreno, 2006; Zmerli & Castillo 2015; Wroe, 2016). I demonstrate that subjective perceptions of relative deprivation are significant, even when controlling for macroeconomic predictors, government performance evaluations, perceptions of corruption, and partisanship. Furthermore, my results suggest that the effect of perceptions of relative deprivation is significant when controlling for absolute individual-level considerations of well-being. Given the importance of political trust within the political system, this finding should have important bearings on policy making, as it indicates that simply addressing *absolute* material conditions alone does not fully alleviate low levels of trust. Rather, the perceived *relative* situation of individuals must be addressed. What is more, the results suggest that individual-level economic considerations follow a functionalist logic, with perceptions of relative deprivation being more closely tied to trust in government institutions, and less so to state institutions, perhaps because people look to the former (rather than the latter) to address inequality (see, for example, Simpson & Loveless (2017)). This underlines that political trust in government

⁴⁷ Italics in the original.

⁴⁸ Past evidence for Africa can be found in Hutchison and Johnson (2011), who – in a study of 16 African countries using Afrobarometer rounds 1 to 3 – find a negative coefficient for economic development using GDP (per capita).

institutions and political trust in state institutions – in this context, at least – are not one and the same, but that differentiation takes place in the minds of ordinary people.

The results moreover strongly emphasise the role of individual egocentric evaluations. In all models, feeling relatively advantaged was more strongly associated with more trust in government institutions than feeling relatively deprived was associated with less trust in government institutions. Feeling relatively better off than others matters, above and beyond more general performance evaluations and partisanship. This suggests that, regardless of how government is seen to be doing or conducting itself in general, people who (individually) feel better off than others have significantly more trust in government institutions than people who don't.

Besides the main predictor variables, the models provide an updated view on covariates of political trust in the context of Africa. People's trust appears to be associated with positive performance – both economically and politically – but also with conduct (lack of corruption, free and fair elections). Whether or not someone is a partisan of the ruling party matters, too. This suggests that, while sociotropic considerations are associated with trust, clear clientelist expectations are also present.

This paper has shortcomings and limitations. First, as discussed in Section 2, there are multiple explanations as to how economic inequality shapes political trust. While our results suggest that perceptions of individual inequality are significantly associated with less political trust, future research would be well advised to unpack this finding further through in-depth interviews targeted at understanding why people say they feel relatively deprived or advantaged. Likewise, the results – while statistically significant – suggest that other, unobserved factors are important to understand within-country variation of political trust. As noted in the discussion of the statistical models in the previous sections, most independent variables entered in the models are probably short- to mid-term evaluations and attitudes. Past research has pointed to the role of early socialisation and political education, as well as long-term experiences with government and state institutions (Niemi & Sobieszek, 1977; Merelman & King, 1986; Mishler & Rose, 2002; Dalton, 2005; Job, 2005; Kroh & Selb, 2009; Schoon & Cheng, 2011).⁴⁹ Here, qualitative studies or specific and localised case studies should explore the effect of such factors on political trust in the African context.

As noted in the introduction, Africans report among the highest levels of political trust in the world, when viewed by region, and among the highest levels of economic inequality. This seems a paradox given what previous research (for cases outside of Africa) has suggested regarding the linkages between economic inequality and political trust. But Africa may appear less paradoxical in light of my results suggesting that, at the country level, no significant association exists between levels of economic inequality and levels of trust in political institutions. This means that country-level inequality does not significantly help account for levels of political trust among the African countries included here. The results must be understood and interpreted within this context. As such, people who feel relatively deprived in Africa may report less trust in government institutions, compared to Africans who feel relatively equal or better off, but may still be more trusting than people elsewhere – regardless of their perceived relative living situation.

⁴⁹ For evidence on African cases, see for example Finkel & Ernst (2005) and Esau, Rondganger, & Roman (2019).

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Appendix A

A detailed description of all Afrobarometer variables used in this paper can be found in the Round 7 codebook here: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/survey-resource/merged-round-7-codebook-34-countries-2020/>.

Appendix B

Descriptive statistics | 34 countries | Afrobarometer Round 7 (2016/2018)⁵⁰

Descriptive statistics				
Name	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Trust in representative government institutions	0	12	6.03	3.89
Trust in state institutions	0	9	5.19	2.84
Lived Poverty Index	0	3	1.53	0.94
Asset index	0	12	5.75	3.24
Incumbent partisan	0	2	0.69	0.83
Free elections	1	4	3.02	1.10
Economic performance index	4	16	7.81	2.97
Service delivery index	5	20	11.81	3.62
Government handling income gaps	1	4	1.81	0.86
Performance of the president	1	4	2.65	1.02
Corruption: office of the Presidency	0	3	1.37	0.93
Corruption: Members of Parliament	0	3	1.42	0.88
Level of corruption	1	5	3.61	1.33
Age	18	106	37.11	14.90
Female= 1	49.9% men; 50.1% women			
Rural= 1	44.5% urban; 55.5% rural			
Level of education	0	3	1.47	0.97
Majoritarian electoral system= 1	45.9% non-majoritarian; 54.1% majoritarian electoral systems			
Economic growth in % (mean: 2011-2017)	-2	13	4.21	2.74
Rule of law index	0	1	0.56	0.22
Political corruption index	0	1	0.56	0.22
Income inequality (Gini)	30.80	63.00	42.53	8.30
Human Development Index	0.35	0.79	0.55	0.10

⁵⁰ We apply within-country weighting to ensure gender parity within countries. The percentages displayed in the table represent valid responses. I exclude respondents who said "Don't know," refused to answer the question, or for whom data are missing.

Appendix C

Variables used in the figures in the Introduction (Afrobarometer Round 7 data, 2016/2018)



a. Political leaders serve their own interests

Question Number: Q50

Question: Do you think that the leaders of political parties in this country are more concerned with serving the interests of the people, or more concerned with advancing their own political ambitions, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Variable Label: Q50. Leaders serve interests of people or their own

Values: 1-5, 9, 98, -1

Value Labels: 1= More to serve their own political ambitions – strongly agree, 2= More to serve their own political ambitions – agree 3= Neither agree nor disagree 4= More to serve the people – agree 5= More to serve the people – strongly agree 9=Don't know, 98=Refused to answer, -1=Missing

b. MPs don't listen

Question Number: Q59A

Question: How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Members of Parliament?

Variable Label: Q59a. MPs listen

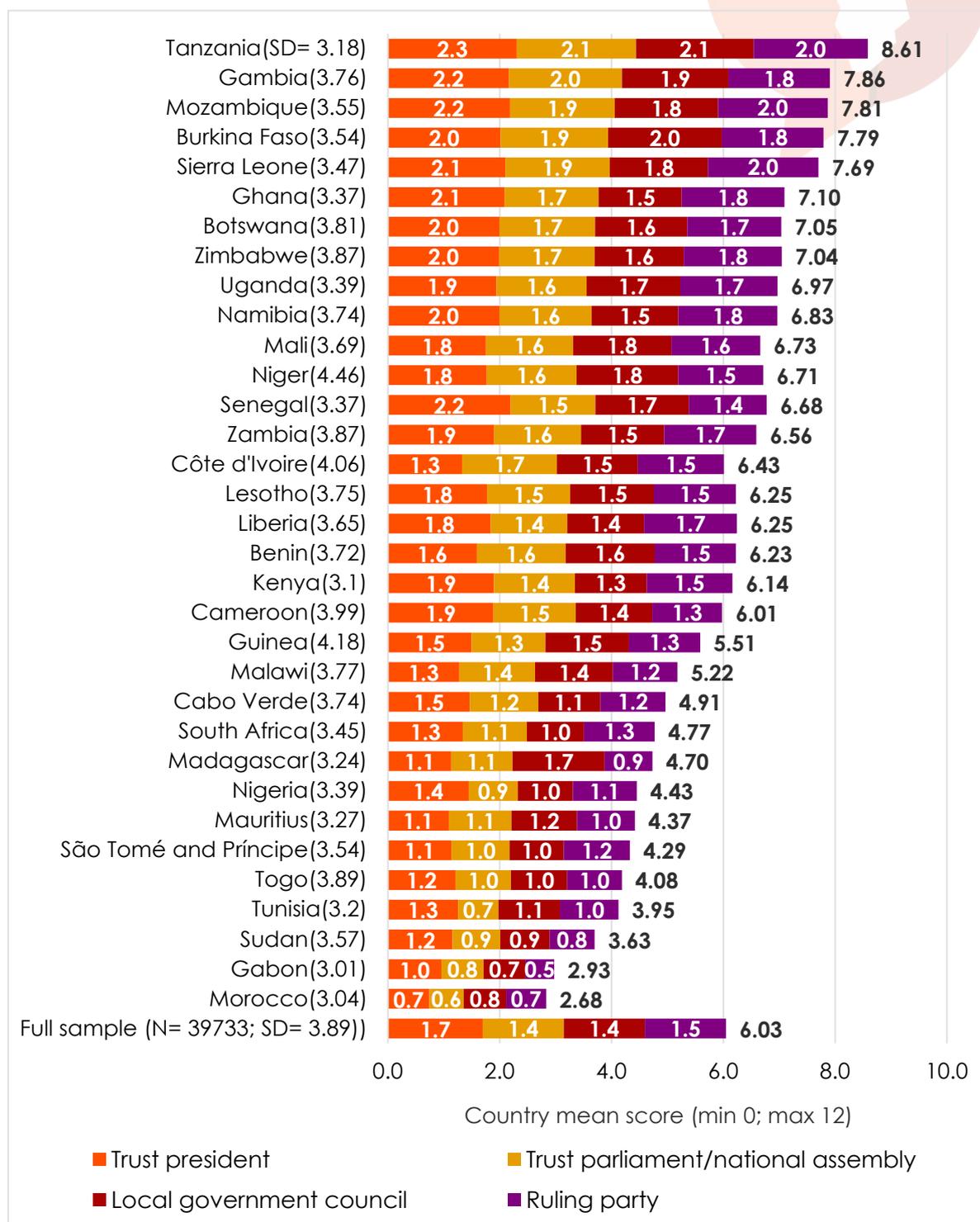
Values: 0-3, 9, 98, -1

Value Labels: 0=Never 1=Only sometimes, 2=Often, 3=Always, 9=Don't know, 98=Refused to answer, -1=Missing

Appendix D

Trust in representative government institutions (country mean score)

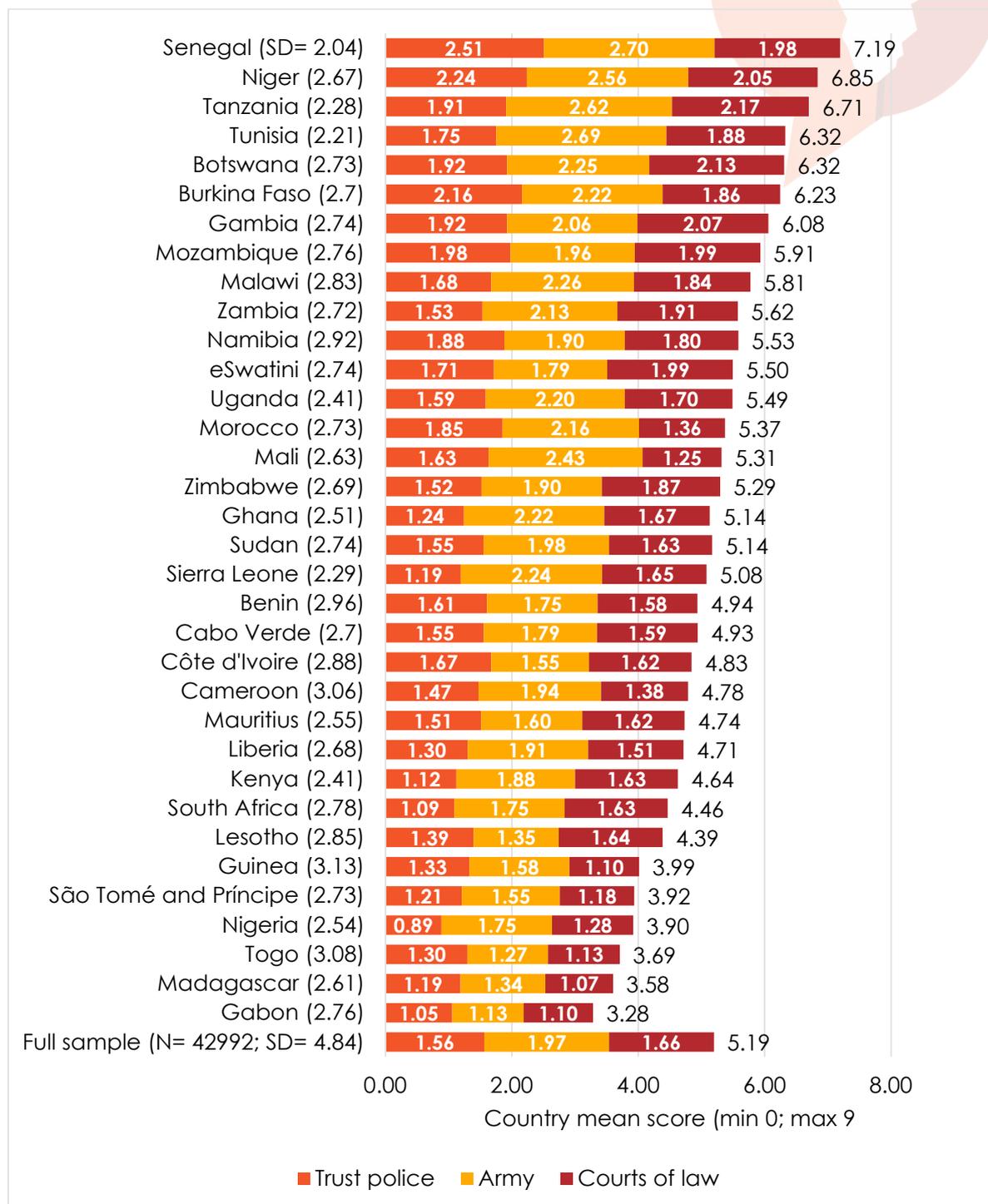
| 33 countries (N=39,733) | Afrobarometer Round 7 data (2016/2018)⁵¹



⁵¹ As the mean scores for each component of trust in representative government institutions are rounded, the overall index mean score may not be equal to the sum of the displayed (rounded) component variables.

Appendix E

Trust in state institutions (country mean score) | 34 countries (N=42,992)
 | Afrobarometer Round 7 data (2016/2018)⁵²



⁵² As the mean scores for each component of trust in representative government institutions are rounded, the overall index mean score may not be equal to the sum of the displayed (rounded) component variables.

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