

Generalized Trust and Personal Security as the Factors for Assessing the Quality of the Institutional Environment and Threats to Social Security (Research Experience in the Altai Territory)

S Maximova^{1,a}, D Omelchenko^{1,b*}, and O Noyanzina^{1,c}

¹ Altai State University, 61 Lenina pr., Barnaul 656049 Russia

^asvet-maximova@yandex.ru, ^{b*}daria.omelchenko@mail.ru, ^cnoe@list.ru

*Corresponding author

Keywords: confidence, generalized confidence, personal security, perception of risks and threats, social security

Abstract: The focus of this paper is the relationship between the level of personal security, generalized confidence, an assessment of the functioning quality of public and state institutions, and assessments of the severity of threats to social security. The paper presents rich empirical data collected in the Altai Territory among the population aged 18 to 79 (n = 620). Clusters that define various combinations of assessments of the generalized confidence and personal security/vulnerability are highlighted; their social characteristics are described. The paper clearly shows that a high level of generalized confidence and personal security contributes to a favorable assessment of the activities of state and public institutions. Consequently, it leads to a more positive vision of risks and threats, differentiated by their nature and probabilistic assessment, which determines further risk management strategies in the region.

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, the fundamental role of trust is determined by its colossal impact on social relations in all areas and spheres of social practice, from narrowly technological (such as computer networks or financial markets, science, and medicine) to universal, global implications, affecting interethnic relations, transnational cooperation, and integration. Social issues in which trust plays a key role are central to understanding how contemporary society functions; how various professional groups, including government and other institutions, affect human relationships and social life in general under conditions that most scientists define as “risk society” and “crisis of confidence” [1].

In social science, there is still no final understanding of the nature of trust, its determination, mechanisms of generation, reproduction, and management capabilities [2]. A view from below (psychological, individualistic, bottom-up) implies an emphasis on the personal characteristics of individuals and their life experiences. It is noted that attitudes towards trust/distrust are formed in early childhood and change in the negative direction under the influence of traumatic experience. Trusting individuals are more optimistic and believe in the possibility of cooperation with others, while a lack of trust leads to greater pessimism, misanthropy, and suspicion [3]. A sociological perspective considers trust about social categories such as education, income level, social class, happiness, and satisfaction with life, religiosity, majority-minority group relationships, negative life experiences (divorce, loss of earnings, serious illness, etc.) [4]. In contrast, the “top-down” approach focuses on entire communities and explores the relationship between trust and level of social homogeneity, national well-being, social equality, and the functioning of democratic institutions. These properties are not reduced to particular individuals but represent collective qualities inherent in the social context. According to proponents of an institutional approach (such as B. Rothstein and D. Stolle), government institutions are capable of influencing conditions that enhance or destroy trust. At the same time, the so-called permanent institutions that are responsible for the implementation of social policy and ideology play a unique role [5].

In the scientific literature, in addition to separation based on the starting point of the analysis, several axes or dimensions of confidence are highlighted. One of them includes strategic (rational, based on knowledge and

practical experience of interaction, namely knowledge-based) (B. Mistal, A. Seligman, R. Hardin) and normative trust, presented as a culturally inherited value that defines an optimistic view of the world and the ability to control [6]. The rational-normative continuum is accompanied by one more, whose poles indicate a willingness to cooperate and positive attitudes towards strangers and particularistic forms, manifested in limited social networks consisting only of verified individuals that inspire confidence [7]. According to the results of cross-national studies, it is the generalized trust considered in the framework of this article that is associated with economic well-being, stability, and efficiency of democratic institutions. More than that, it ensures the harmonious functioning of organizations and social interactions [5, 8].

The “Risk Society,” the first descriptions of which were outlined in the last decades of the last century, with its characteristic permanent state of anxiety caused by global technological threats, has moved into a new phase, designated by scholars as a “risk perception society.” The opinions of people, their subjective assessments, and behavioral strategies appropriate to them become more significant. The frustration in expert systems and the increasing demands of civil society on social institutions that should provide security and protection against risks, a sense of pessimism and insecurity in the ability to control risk-generating processes have replaced the dominant role of knowledge [9]. Already in early studies of risk perception, the effects of social values on the assessment and acceptance of risk, including the assessment of perceived inequality in the distribution of risk, exposure to involuntary risks, were identified. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of trust in risk management and document a high level of skepticism and mistrust of individuals, organizations, and institutions responsible for this process [10]. Thus, studies conducted in different countries have shown that a high level of trust helps to reduce the negative perception of risks and significantly affects the assessment of new technologies [11]. The correlations between trust and risk perception are determined by the type of risk, and the method of measuring confidence, and in general, can be used as a significant element of modeling. However, their strength and relevance varies by country and is nationally-culturally determined [12]. The contradictions in empirical results and disagreements regarding the conceptualization of trust and risk indicate the incompleteness of scientific debate in this field [13] exposes the need for additional research, including in contemporary Russian conditions.

The purpose of this article is to identify the relationship between the generalized trust as an indicator of a culture of trust in society, an assessment of the functionality of social institutions, and the perception of threats to social security in the Altai Territory.

2. Materials and Methods

The objectives of the study were solved on the empirical material of a sociological study conducted in the Altai Territory among the population aged 18 to 79 years ($n = 620$, the average age of the respondents was 42.7 years ± 0.64 years) in 2019. The region is characterized by environmental, economic, and demographic features, which negatively distinguishes it from other regions of Russia [14, 15]. Quota sampling, in combination with route-based respondent selection technologies providing representativeness by gender, age, and type of settlement. The generalized trust was measured on a ten-point scale based on the following classic question: "Do you think that most people can be trusted, or should you be careful when dealing with people?" Personal safety/vulnerability assessments were measured based on a five-point scale and the following question: "How do you feel safe in general?" The quality of the institutional environment was evaluated on the basis of indicators of institutional trust on 12 scales, grouped during the factorization process into the following three integral indicators: trust in public institutions, trust in government institutions, and trust in law enforcement and security institutions (α_{Cronbach} on all integral scales > 0.9). The repertoire of assessed threats included 27 items, the severity of which was also evaluated on the basis of five-point ordinal scales (from “no threat” to “very pronounced threat, danger”). Statistical processing included the following types of analysis: correlation, factorial, cluster, variance.

3. Results

First of all, we will point out the peculiarities of the social moods of the inhabitants of the region, reflecting the current socio-economic processes and determining assessments of social trust and security. According to the study, only 36% of the respondents considered the Altai Territory a prosperous region. Whereas according to the majority (64%), it was dysfunctional, underdeveloped, poor, and depressed. Only 6.5% of respondents were convinced that the dangers and thunderstorms facing our society were becoming less, while 45.2%

believed that there were more of them, 35.5% believed that their number were not changed. Although the majority of respondents (52.0%) felt relatively healthy, and 16.2% even experienced positive emotions. Namely, they felt a surge of spiritual and physical strength; they were optimistic about the future. Every third respondent experienced negative emotions, such as anxiety, insecurity, emotional stress, danger, fear, hopelessness.

A rather low level of generalized trust of the population was in line with social moods. The average value was 3.9 ± 0.09 points, and the median was 4 points, the modal value was 1 point (22.3%), only 6.8% of the respondents had a high level (8-10 points). At the same time, only 14.4% of respondents felt utterly safe, 41.4% felt "rather safe," 37.7% felt rather low security, and 6.4% did not feel safe at all. As a result of clustering, four significant clusters were identified, the first of which (28.4%) included respondents with high confidence (above 4 points) and security. The second cluster (27.6%) brought together respondents who felt relatively safe, but at the same time, they had a low level of generalized trust. The third cluster (22.9%) was the least favorable combination of high vulnerability and mistrust. The fourth cluster (21.1%) represented those who, despite their insecurity, maintained a relatively high level of trust in others. The distribution of belonging to a particular cluster was almost uniform in different age and ethnic groups (χ^2 , $p > 0.05$). Gender differences were manifested in variations in safety ratings under low confidence. In women, it was more often associated with vulnerability (28.9%, among men – 13.3%), while in men, on the contrary, it was more often associated with a more stable position (35.6%, in the group of women – 22.5%). Other important factors determining the cluster affiliation in the sample were the following: (a) place of residence (in the city, combinations of low trust with higher security are more frequent, in the village is vice versa), (b) marital status (registered marriage reduced the level of distrust and vulnerability, while, on the contrary, the state of divorce increased the level of distrust and vulnerability), (c) educational and socio-professional status, financial situation (the lowest levels of security and trust were observed in groups with low incomes and status of unskilled workers and specialists with secondary vocational education; among the intellectual elite, an increased perception of risk, combined with a higher generalized trust, was recorded (χ^2 , $p < 0.01$)).

In conditions of high social anxiety, assessments of the quality of the institutional environment were not accidentally characterized by the exaggerated public confidence in specialized institutions that ensure security (armed forces, FSB, police, National Guard of Russia) (they had 40-46% of the total positive ratings) and almost complete discredit of financial and commercial institutions (positive ratings were about 20%). Confidence in state institutions representing the executive branch (president, federal and regional authorities, local authorities) was assessed at an average level. Among public institutions, the greatest trust in the population was caused by public and human rights organizations, as well as the Russian Orthodox Church (positive ratings were 36-37%). The least trust was in political parties, the media, and non-Orthodox religious organizations (10-18%).

According to the population, the most relevant threats to public safety were the following: mass unemployment, rising prices, and impoverishment of the population (52.4% of the total high ratings), as well as corruption, lawlessness and arbitrary rule of the authorities (51.6%). According to respondents (60-70% of the total low ratings), the following threats were mild: the threat of an influx of illegal migrants and the invasion of Islam, loss of sovereignty, expansion of border states, anarchy, interethnic war and civil war, mass repression, military attack by other states, the use of nuclear weapons. Potential threats, assessed as probable by more than a third of the citizens surveyed, were the following: threats of depletion of natural resources, banking crisis, and economic collapse.

We have identified four general factors that determine private estimates (the proportion of the described variance was 62%). The first factor summarized environmental disasters, mass epidemics, and technological disasters. The second factor included political threats to national security; the third one includes threats of inadequate domestic policies, such as the collapse of the economy, population decline, restriction of democratic freedoms, banking crisis. And the fourth factor included threats of migration specific to the border, such as the gradual expansion of border states, the replacement of the population of the Russian border with foreign migrants, weak borders, and the threat of an influx of illegal migrants.

Confidence in public institutions was negatively correlated with the perception of technological threats ($r = -0.22$, $p < 0.001$). Along with confidence in security institutions, it formed a more favorable assessment of political threats threatening the integrity of the Russian state ($r = -0.27$, $p < 0.001$ and $r = -0.4$, $p < 0.001$).

Confidence in government institutions correlated most significantly with the perception of threats to domestic politics ($r = -0.26, p < 0.001$). A variance analysis of differences in the severity of institutional trust and perception of threats in groups of respondents with different indicators of generalized trust and personal security showed significant differences for all seven factors (three confidence factors and four threat factors), the largest of which were observed between polar groups with low and high levels of confidence and security (Fig. 1).

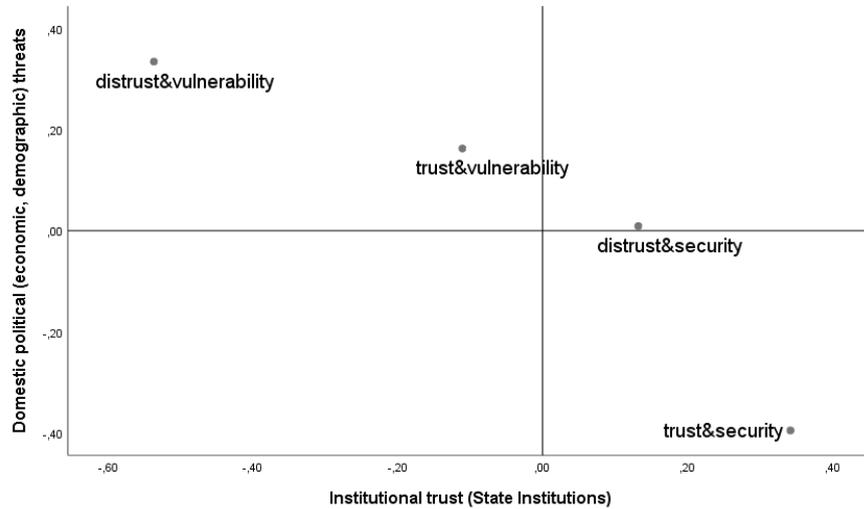


Fig. 1. The average values of the severity of factors of institutional trust (to state institutions) and assessments of domestic political threats in different clusters.

4. Discussion

The results of the study obtained in the Altai Territory continue the discussion on the relationship between generalized and institutional forms of trust. Are both types of trust derived from common factors, or is there a causal relationship? At this stage, we have not been able to answer this question yet. However, we have convincingly proven that generalized and institutional trust are closely linked and are indicators of a culture of trust in the region. Along with the assessment of personal security, generalized trust is a significant indicator of social security, the severity of threats of different localization and nature.

5. Conclusion

The assessment of the quality of functioning of the state and public institutions indicates a "crisis of confidence," including with regard to expert systems responsible for preventing the most pronounced threats related to domestic economic and social policies. Overcoming the crisis, restoring lost ground should become an integral part of a regional policy aimed at security and the creation of favorable conditions for people to live in the border region.

6. Acknowledgments

This article was prepared with the financial support of grant No. 19-011-00417 "Factors and Mechanisms for Building Confidence in the System of Maintaining Social Security in the Border Regions of Russia."

References

- [1] Candlin, C., & Crichton, J. (Eds.) (2013). *Discourses of trust*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [2] Maximova, S., Maximov, M., Noyanzina, O., Omelchenko, D., Goncharova, N., & Morkovkina, A. (2017). Relation between civic attitudes, generalized and institutional trust in six regions of the Russian Federation. *Journal of Management and Marketing Review*, 2(1), 24-32.
- [3] Newton, K., Stolle, D., & Zmerli, S. (2018). Social and political trust. In E. Uslaner (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of social and political trust* (pp. 37-57). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- [4] Uslaner, E. M. (2002). *The moral foundations of trust*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- [5] Rothstein, B., & Stolle, D. (2008). The state and social capital: An institutional theory of generalized trust. *Comparative Politics*, 40(4), 441-459.
- [6] Rothstein, B., & Stolle, D. (2008). Political institutions and generalized trust. In D. Castiglione, J. W. Deth, & G. Wolled (Eds.), *The handbook of social capital* (pp. 273-302). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- [7] Nannestad, P. (2008). What have we learned about generalized trust, if anything? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, 413-436.
- [8] Inglehart, R. (1999). Trust, well-being and democracy. In M. Warren (Ed.), *Democracy and trust* (pp. 88-120). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- [9] McInnes, C. (2005). *Health, security and the risk society*. London, UK: Nuffield Trust.
- [10] Slovic, P. (1993). Perceived risk, trust, and democracy. *Risk Analysis*, 13(6), 675-682.
- [11] Siegrist, M., Gutscher, H., & Earle, T. C. (2005). Perception of risk: The influence of general trust, and general confidence. *Journal of Risk Research*, 8(2), 145-156.
- [12] Viklund, M. J. (2003). Trust and risk perception in western Europe: A cross-national study. *Risk Analysis: An International Journal*, 23(4), 727-738.
- [13] Cvetkovich, G. (2013). *Social trust and the management of risk*. Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge.
- [14] Maksimova, S. G., Akulich, M. M., Pit, V. V., Noyanzina, O. E., & Omelchenko, D. A. (2018). Social moods as ecological risk perception in residential area around nuclear power plants (regional analysis). *Ukrainian Journal of Ecology*, 8(1), 409-419.
- [15] Maximova, S. G., Noyanzina, O. E., & Omelchenko, D. A. (2018). Risk of social exclusion and social security of the elderly age persons in Russian regions. *Society and Security Insights*, 1(1), 73-84.