

Confidence in social institutions in the post-communist countries

Andrzej Borowski

Department of Sociology and Social Works, Faculty of Education and Philosophy,
Pomeranian University in Słupsk, 64 Westerplatte St., 76-200 Słupsk, Poland

E-mail address: aubor@poczta.onet.pl

ABSTRACT

Public confidence is a phenomenon of social change, being characterised for the periods of political and cultural revolutions. Twenty years of democratic transformations in the post-communist countries and multiple changes in the ruling elite have given responders a basis to negative assessment of the quality of establishment. A characteristic feature of this assessment is a low level of confidence in the institutions of political life. An increase in confidence in these institutions may be connected with their longer functioning in social consciousness and feeling its positive effects by citizens.

Keywords: public confidence; social institutions; post-communist countries

1. INTRODUCTION

Public confidence is a phenomenon of social change, being characterised for the periods of political and cultural revolutions. As noted by P. Sztompka: “(...) *the sphere of uncertainty, risk and threats undergoes a sudden enlargement, while non-transparency of structures and organisations increases (...). All that undermines the sense of existential security and social order and, as a result, generates a crisis of confidence, both horizontally – to other people, and vertically – to public institutions, leading to the culture of cynicism.*” [P. Sztompka, 1997].

With no confidence, with no conviction that it is possible to trust another person, nobody is able to function well, neither in family, nor in workplace, or in the country and its institutions. As the results of recent studies on confidence in social life have shown, the Poles are fairly distrustful. Only about “*one fourth of those questioned (23 %) assume that most people can be trusted, whereas almost three fourth (74 %) hold the principle to exercise far-reaching caution in relations with other people.*” [A. Cybulska, 2012]. That principle induces a mistrust towards the institutions of public life and any actions which increase the isolation of institutions at the cost of transparency are being perceived negatively [A. Borowski, 2013; Powell, 2014; Vlăduțescu, 2014; Oprea-Valentin Bușu, 2014; Iorgulescu, 2014].

2. RESULTS OF THE STUDY ON CONFIDENCE IN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

In 2009-2012, while taking part in an international research project on the perception of public confidence categories in the post-communist countries, I gave a special attention to the issues of confidence in social institutions. This study involved the youth from Russia (European part), Ukraine, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, the Buryat Republic (Asian part of Russia) and Poland. Within the project, about 5 thousand responders was surveyed, using a proprietary research tool (questionnaires). Confidence is the basis of cooperation and an element which holds each civil society together. It allows citizens to solve problems and achieve social goals in a more optimal manner, with a considerably smaller input of efforts and resources. Confidence is also indispensable in the sphere of actions of local communities as well as when concluding financial transactions. Yet, confidence increases a cooperation and the latter affects an increase in the level of confidence. Then, a so called feedback follows. As opposed to financial inputs, confidence is a “moral resource”, the amount of which increases the more it is being used, while disappears when being unused.

Table 1. Confidence in medical institutions (own study).

I believe that if I ended up in hospital, doctors would do their best for my health, irrespective of my position, contacts, money, etc.	Percentage Czech Republic	Percentage Lithuania	Percentage Poland	Percentage Russia	Percentage Ukraine	Percentage Buryat Republic
Strongly disagree	4.4	14.5	12.8	20.7	26.3	8.0
Disagree somewhat	9.7	29.2	19.5	31.8	27.4	17.6
Hard to say	19.1	19.3	15.9	21.0	26.0	26.8
Agree somewhat	45.0	29.4	30.0	18.8	14.7	35.6
Strongly agree	21.7	7.5	21.4	6.7	4.0	10.4
No answer	0.1	0.1	0.4	1.0	1.6	1.6
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Medical institutions have the greatest confidence in the Czech Republic, while the lowest one in Ukraine. This results from a higher degree of corruption of medical institutions in the post-Soviet republics. An exception to this is the Buryat Republic.

Health care institutions, in view of their social mission, should be of good repute and be reliable organisations. At the same time, they have to be effectively managed (fulfilment of a honourable vocation to save lives and restore health of other people does not release from maintaining practical wisdom in management). Therefore, irrespective of whether it is a public or non-public hospital (although this division is not important from the perspective of patient in the context of transformations and provision of free medical services), it is worth profiting from the advantages of medical PR which, while being used sensibly, combine benefits for both a patient and a medical organisation [R. Staszewski, 2009].

Confidence in bureaucratic institutions is the highest among responders in Poland, while the lowest in Ukraine and Russia. Such a distribution results from importance which the bureaucratic apparatus have in a given country and from assessment of the quality of its functioning.

Confidence is the basis of functioning of the bureaucratic system and officials are the persons settling the citizen matters, which with specific monopoly of government or local authority administration monopoly should automatically set high ethical requirements for the persons holding those offices. The factors mobilising officials include staff turnover and reward system. Nevertheless, justification of negative phenomena in bureaucracy consists first of all in perception of the effectiveness of their results (fairly or unfairly, the matter has been settled). However, a reliable responder being devoid of cynicism and having a little bit of fairness must admit that, for instance, corruption in bureaucracy is something negative.

Building a positive image of bureaucracy should be associated, among others, with a sensible disposing of money, excellent preparation of officials for work, convenience in making use of office services, availability, authenticity and comprehension of information and clarity of provisions, responsibilities and powers. Citizen-friendly bureaucracy will be definitely more positively perceived by citizens.

Table 4. Confidence in public order institutions (own study).

At present, the police in our country is trustworthy	Percentage Czech Republic	Percentage Lithuania	Percentage Poland	Percentage Russia	Percentage Ukraine	Percentage Buryat Republic
Strongly disagree	9.7	14.5	12.6	41.7	39.8	18.2
Disagree somewhat	34.3	35.2	23.8	28.2	27.7	27.2
Hard to say	29.2	31.0	27.3	19.0	20.5	36.6
Agree somewhat	24.8	15.9	25.5	6.5	6.8	12.0
Strongly agree	1.9	3.1	10.4	2.6	2.7	3.6
No answer	0.1	0.3	0.4	2.0	2.5	2.4
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Confidence in the police as an institution being responsible for maintaining public order is the highest in Poland, while the lowest in Russia and Ukraine. In the group of countries being surveyed, definitely greater transformations towards democratisation of the activities of law enforcement bodies have been achieved in those not being Soviet republics earlier. This has had its effects on public reception of these institutions. Confidence in the police in the Polish society is definitely higher, reaching in some surveys even 70 % among people over 40 years of age, having a parallel to the functioning of militia in the Polish People's Republic. Among young people, to the age of 30 years, this confidence remains low, at 30-40 %. The surveys being carried out on the group of students seem to confirm this.

Such conclusions arise, among others, from the 6th edition of the Polish Crime Survey, the biggest independent public opinion research. Almost 17 thousand people over the age of 15

years assessed the security and the policemen work in January 2013. The sense of security among citizens belongs to the most important components of overall national security. This sense is very high – more frequently than in each three cases per four ones (75.5 % of responders) the person being questioned emphasises that she / he is not afraid of going for a walk in her / his neighbourhood after the onset of darkness. At the same time, 68 % of the Poles assess well the work of the Police and almost the same number – 66.2 % – regards the Police's activities as effective [Polskie Badanie Przystępczości, 2013].

Table 5. Confidence in the political class 1 (own study).

Most politicians really care about the country's welfare, they only have better or worse ideas of bringing it to that condition	Percentage Czech Republic	Percentage Lithuania	Percentage Poland	Percentage Russia	Percentage Ukraine	Percentage Buryat Republic
Strongly disagree	22.5	14.2	17.7	29.9	39.7	14.0
Disagree somewhat	43.2	28.0	31.9	32.9	28.8	21.6
Hard to say	22.5	29.7	22.7	24.9	18.9	40.6
Agree somewhat	10.3	24.0	20.6	7.8	7.8	19.2
Strongly agree	1.3	3.9	7.0	3.1	2.8	2.6
No answer	0.2	0.2	0.1	1.4	2.1	2.0
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Confidence in the political class among the responders in the countries being surveyed is the highest in Lithuania and Poland, while the lowest in the Czech Republic, Russia and Ukraine. Nevertheless, the level of public confidence in the political class is low in all these countries. The weakness of our political class – apart from any other reasons – is also signalled by the fact that confidence in politicians seems to be regularly on decline in the polls being periodically published. Politicians in whom confidence is being declared by most of the inquired people are few and far between.

A much more frequent answer is distrust or indifference. After all, a politician, or, more broadly speaking, each leader, must inspire trust if she / he wants to implement her / his programme.

The essence of leadership is not a charisma supported by propaganda tricks but a skill to inspire authentic trust – a genuine one as each uncovered falsehood causes the confidence to disappear suddenly. And the problem with our political and public life may depend on the fact that there are no authentic leaders, genuine pacemakers, statesmen, whom we can trust, and through this start to place more our trust in each other.

Where there is no trust, there will be no real politics, being understood as a rational care for the common good, either. The politics relaying solely in mutual fight and beating the opponent does not have a lot in common with the real politics. Therefore, let us hope that people

being able to inspire authentic confidence, not stage-managed and not resulting from calculation, will start to show up on the Polish political scene in the coming years [Pięta P.].

Table 6. Confidence in the political class (own study).

For most of those who are at the highest level of government, their individual interests are more important than public welfare	Percentage Czech Republic	Percentage Lithuania	Percentage Poland	Percentage Russia	Percentage Ukraine	Percentage Buryat Republic
Strongly disagree	4,4	5,0	5,4	5,8	11,2	5,2
Disagree somewhat	9,7	8,8	11,5	9,3	7,8	11,0
Hard to say	19,1	18,3	19,1	19,2	15,2	35,2
Agree somewhat	45,0	38,2	37,8	31,3	24,9	31,2
Strongly agree	21,7	29,7	26,1	33,1	38,4	16,0
No answer	0,1	0,0	0,1	1,3	2,5	1,4
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Confidence in the motivation of people performing the highest functions in the institutions of authority in almost all these countries is at similarly low level. Twenty years of democratic transformations in these countries and multiple changes in the ruling elite have given responders a basis to negative assessment of the quality of establishment. A characteristic feature of Poland is a low level of two dimensions of public confidence, namely generalised confidence in other people and confidence in the institutions of political life. On the other hand, confidence in the private sphere is kept at a high level, which means that relations between people being connected by kinship, acquaintance, joint work, neighborhood or parish-related bonds are invariably based on it. The fact that where confidence in the immediate family is usually unlimited, that in other close persons is being characterised by a certain amount of aloofness, is deserves our attention [M. Mularska-Kucharek, 2011].

Table 7. Confidence in judicial institutions (own study).

A judge in my country abides by law in letter and in spirit	Percentage Czech Republic	Percentage Lithuania	Percentage Poland	Percentage Russia	Percentage Ukraine	Percentage Buryat Republic
Strongly disagree	6.8	11.5	7.8	24.4	30.7	9.4
Disagree somewhat	27.2	32.1	24.5	31.4	32.4	19.0
Hard to say	33.2	31.8	36.8	25.9	24.6	37.8

Agree somewhat	29.3	21.5	22.9	13.7	7.4	25.8
Strongly agree	3.4	2.9	7.9	3.3	2.7	6.2
No answer	0.1	0.2	0.1	1.3	2.2	1.8
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Confidence in judicial institutions is relatively the highest in the Czech Republic, the Buryat Republic and Poland, while the lowest in Ukraine. It is the result of factual or supposed availability of judicial institutions towards authorities in former post-Soviet republics. The Poles take their knowledge on the functioning of courts in Poland primarily from daily news being watched on TV. Moreover, important sources of information are different TV shows (e.g. “Judge Anna Maria Wesołowska”), articles in the daily press and radio shows. It is worth noticing that one fifth of the subjects uses the Internet to find information on the functioning of administration of justice. Confidence in courts and judges in Poland is undermined the most by suspected corruption, long judgement-awaiting time and excessive duration of judicial proceedings. Moreover, according to the subjects, the collapse of confidence in courts is affected by unjust judgements and nepotism and connections in the administration of justice [Raport, 2009].

Table 8. Confidence in judicial institutions (own study).

If I had to make use of counsellor’s services, I would certainly do all my best for my good, irrespective of retainer	Percentage Czech Republic	Percentage Lithuania	Percentage Poland	Percentage Russia	Percentage Ukraine	Percentage Buryat Republic
Strongly disagree	10.0	11.9	11.6	16.8	17.0	8.2
Disagree somewhat	33.3	32.1	30.1	32.5	27.4	20.4
Hard to say	31.0	33.6	34.2	31.3	35.1	41.6
Agree somewhat	22.2	19.0	17.5	14.2	13.1	22.2
Strongly agree	3.3	3.4	6.5	4.1	5.2	6.0
No answer	0.2	0.0	0.1	1.1	2.2	1.6
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Confidence in the treating of customer welfare in the autotelic manner, like confidence in judicial institutions, is relatively the highest in the Buryat Republic, the Czech Republic and Poland, while the lowest in Russia and Ukraine. Moreover, the ethical issues being connected with counsellor-client relations are regulated (in Poland) by the Code of Ethics for Counsellors of 2011 which assumes, among others, that each counsellor is obliged to defend the interests of

her / his client courageously and honourably, with all due respect and courtesy for the court and other bodies, without heeding own personal benefits and consequences resulting from such an attitude for herself / himself or other person. She / he has also an obligation to aim at settlements that allow a client to save money on costs and advise on compromising an action when this is justified by the interest and welfare of her / his client. In view of the doubts showing up that refer to fully independent functioning of the administration of justice in post-Soviet countries, a great trust is not put to the institution of counsellor either. Relatively low assessments in this survey may also result from the age of responders and rare direct contacts with the administration of justice.

Table 9. Confidence in public institutions (own study).

Public institutions in my country treat all citizens in the same fair manner	Percentage Czech Republic	Percentage Lithuania	Percentage Poland	Percentage Russia	Percentage Ukraine	Percentage Buryat Republic
Strongly disagree	24.1	27.3	29.0	34.9	33.5	21.2
Disagree somewhat	43.1	47.1	38.3	36.8	32.7	29.4
Hard to say	21.5	18.9	19.5	18.0	23.2	32.8
Agree somewhat	10.3	5.2	10.1	7.5	6.5	12.4
Strongly agree	0.9	1.2	3.0	1.6	2.1	2.8
No answer	0.1	0.3	0.1	1.2	2.0	1.4
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Confidence referring to the egalitarian treating of all citizens by public institutions oscillates at a very low level in all countries under this survey. In accordance with Article 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, all citizens are equal before the law. All citizens have the right to be equally treated by public authorities. No one shall be discriminated against in political, social and economic life for any reason whatsoever.

This letter is perceived by the vast majority of responders as being dead. Unequal treatment in fact refers to physically and mentally disabled people and those being socially excluded. In the countries having relatively numerous ethnic minorities, this problem also occurs in the context of predominant ethnic group.

Table 10. Confidence in economic institutions (own study).

I believe that taxes being paid by the citizens of my country are used well for the common good	Percentage Czech Republic	Percentage Lithuania	Percentage Poland	Percentage Russia	Percentage Ukraine	Percentage Buryat Republic
Strongly disagree	35.8	40.1	33.3	40.1	44.5	19.6

Disagree somewhat	39.0	38.7	40.6	32.3	28.8	23.2
Hard to say	17.6	15.2	19.3	18.7	19.2	32.6
Agree somewhat	6.7	5.4	6.0	5.8	4.3	20.8
Strongly agree	0.8	0.4	0.7	2.1	1.3	2.4
No answer	0.1	0.2	0.1	1.0	1.9	1.4
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Apart the Buryat Republic, confidence in economic institutions is the lowest in all other countries in the range of the institutions being surveyed and does not exceed 8 %. In the awareness of the responders, democratic transformations are associated with deterioration of their economic status, being combined with uncertainty that results from the changeover from centrally planned economy to free-market one.

The criticism of the sector of economic institutions worldwide and the scale of irregularities in the management of different international institutions has affected the perception of financial institutions in respective countries. For instance, the image of the Polish banking sector suggests a decline in confidence in national financial institutions during the greatest turbulence on the financial markets. Clients take less confidently the marketing and promotion actions being carried out by banks. The activities being taken up by public economic institutions are assessed equally negatively and distrustfully.

A characteristic feature of social consciousness in the post-communist countries is the lack of confidence in politicians. The powers growing out of former anticommunist opposition have been meeting from the very start an accusation of being incompetent. In turn, the governments of post-communist parties, being called social democracy, have been accused of reconstructing the arrangements of former political system. Representatives of these two options have been attributed with careerism, cynicism and that they are not able to set national interest above the individual interests of own political group [H. Domański, 2004].

3. CONCLUSIONS

One of more important problems of the post-communist countries is the fact that their elite often lack a charisma, while politicians lack a professional ethos. The weakness of elite is accompanied by the lack of confidence in public institutions as a legacy of the past period. Twenty years of the existence of democratic institutions (to a varying extent in respective countries under survey) may be explained by the fact that in social perception they have not become yet an important instrument of agreement with the authority. In the feeling of an average citizen, the authorities do not function for her / him but for the needs of policy makers. The apparatus of public authority is still socially uncontrollable, which does not strengthen confidence and awareness of its legal validity in the eyes of a statistical resident. An increase in confidence in these institutions may be connected with their longer functioning in social consciousness and feeling its positive effects by citizens.

References

- [1] P. Sztompka, *Studia Socjologiczne* 4 (1997) 147.
- [2] A. Cybulska, *Zaufanie społeczne*, raport CBOS BS/33/2012, 2012, p. 3.
- [3] A. Borowski, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 3 (2013) 69-74.
- [4] A. Borowski, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 2 (2013) 56-60.
- [5] A. Borowski, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 4 (2013) 70-74.
- [6] A. Borowski, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 5 (2013) 79-83.
- [7] A. Borowski, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 7 (2013) 113-118.
- [8] R. Staszewski, *Ogólnopolski Przegląd Medyczny* 7 (2009) 71-75.
- [9] Oprea-Valentin Buşu, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 10(2) (2014) 156-162.
- [10] Oprea-Valentin Buşu, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 12 (2014) 41-48.
- [11] Peter Emerson, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 12 (2014) 90-109.
- [12] Ştefan Vlăduţescu, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 10(2) (2014) 100-106.
- [13] *Polskie Badanie Przeszłości* /VI edycja/. Wydział Analiz KGP, Warszawa 2013.
- [14] Pięta P., Krótki tekst o zaufaniu,
<http://www.teologiapolityczna.pl/przemyslaw-pietak-krotki-tekst-o-zaufaniu>
- [15] M. Mularska-Kucharek, *Studia Regionalna i Lokalne* 2 (2011) 44.
- [16] Alexandra Iorgulescu, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 7 (2014) 14-21.
- [17] Ştefan Vlăduţescu, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 7 (2014) 8-13.
- [18] Raport: Badanie opinii publicznej związane z zaufaniem do wymiaru sprawiedliwości, *Krajowa Rada Sądownictwa* 4 (2009).
- [19] H. Domański, *Nauka* 4 (2004) 65-98.
- [20] Jason L. Powell, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 10(2) (2014) 107-120.
- [21] Susanne Y. P. Choi, Roman David, *American Journal of Sociology* 117(4) (2012) 1172-1201.
- [22] Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, *American Journal of Sociology* 83(4) (1978) 920-939.
- [22] Amy C. Butler, *Social Service Review* 69(1) 1995) 1-30.
- [23] A. Borowski, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 1 (2013) 14-18.
- [24] A. Borowski, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 1 (2013) 19-27.
- [25] Francis J., B. Giles-Corti, L. Wood, M. Knuiiman. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 32(4) (2012) 401-409.

[26] Cattell V., N. Dines, W. Gesler, S. Curtis. *Health & Place* 14(3) 2008) 544-561.

[27] Goodman B., *Nurse Education Today* 33(2) (2013) 81-82.

(Received 10 March 2014; accepted 18 March 2014)