

# THE TRUST OF THE ALBANIAN YOUTH TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Albania appears to provoke a new problem. The desire of young people to leave the country, as well as the strong focus on EU membership of the country as the greatest answer for their future and that of the country, has drawn academics to the topic. According to studies, young Albanians' trust in national institutions has fallen significantly. Based on these findings, the purpose of this study is to examine the factors, such as: perceived political situation, trust in the national situation and EU education programme, that contribute to a high degree of trust in EU institutions. From a methodological standpoint, the paper is based on the quantity approach, and the survey is the technique of data gathering. The survey was established as part of this research, and the categories for the analyses were determined by the theoretical foundation. A total of 212 people responded to the survey. The analytical model of the paper is based on authors Fukuyama and Putnam. They define trust as an expectation that evolves in a community as a result of regular and societal changes in common norms. This declaration served as the foundation for the entire project. Following the examination and processing of the data, as well as running a multiple linear regression, it was determined that a negative perception of the political situation, low level of trust in national institutions and high level of trust in the EU education programme contribute to the high degree of trust towards EU institutions.

*Keywords: Albanian youth, trust, perceptions, institutions, EU*

## THE TRUST OF ALBANIAN YOUTH TOWARDS EU INSTITUTIONS

The concept of trust and changes in how it is understood has recently become one of the most hotly debated topics among academics working on trust issues at both the personal and institutional levels. Recent events in Europe have once again demonstrated that European citizens' trust in European authorities and institutions is eroding. The fall appears to be related to economic and political issues, and neither the Union's members nor its institutions have been able to adequately address the crisis' roots [1]. Trust is also perceived as the expectation that grows inside a community with regular, honest, and cooperative behaviour by other

members of this community, based on common norms [2] In contrast to EU member states, however, the crisis has had less of an impact on non-member but aspirant countries' trust in EU institutions. The same conclusions can be drawn in the situation of Albania, which is one of the countries that has been designated as a candidate country. On the other hand, trust levels appear to vary from nation to country [3], but Albania continues to have the greatest degree of trust in the EU thus far. This attitude is particularly evident among Albanian youth, who appears to be attempting to find solutions to EU membership through expressing faith in EU institutions [3].

Recent research on Albanian youth, on the other hand, do not appear to have been undertaken until 2015-2016. As a result, there has recently been a scarcity of data that can be used to build a clear framework for measuring or understanding if support has changed in recent years. Albanian youth are obviously pro-European, according to a study performed by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in 2015 [4]. According to their research, 87 percent of Albanian young people would vote in support of EU membership in the event of a referendum. While 62 percent of Albanian youth feel that integration will result in political and economic prosperity. Taking these studies into account, research in this area has mostly concentrated on identifying probable characteristics that influence the increase of trust in Albanian youth. The following are some of the probable variables linked to a significant measure of influence in this context: (i) internal political situation; (ii) level of trust at individual and national level; and (iii) EU youth development and integration projects, such as Erasmus programs.

The main aim of this study is to examine the features that influence Albanian youth's increased trust in EU institutions, as well as to develop an analytical and theoretical profile of Albanian youth. This issue was sparked by the commencement of discussions for Albania as a candidate country on March 24, 2020, and it intends to examine the elements that influence the increase of Albanian youth trust in the institutions of the European Union. Some influencing elements derived from the literature review will be examined in the context of this paper. The study focuses on three main areas to assess the elements that influence Albanian youth's trust in EU institutions: (i) The political situation in the country; (ii) Trust in Albanian institutions; (iii) European youth-focused programs.

According to Mathews and Roz, the core analysis of this study is based on a quantitative methodological approach that is founded on positivist epistemological views, according to which social reality is objectively measurable [5]. The factors used to establish this article are based on Putnam's thesis [6], which claims that communities with high levels of trust are better able to collaborate to solve social problems, making their governments more accountable and honest, as well as improving democratic institutional performance.

Based on Putnam's reasoning, this study examines whether internal political reasons, trust in national institutions, and the impact of Erasmus programs all

contribute to young Albanians' increased trust in EU institutions. The analysis of the paper focused on the analysis and interpretation of the data generated by the survey used in the context of this paper. The survey was distributed to Albanian youth between the ages of 19 and 40, both inside and outside the country. The survey was carried out using the snowball method. A total of 212 young Albanians from inside and outside Albania completed the survey. When accounting for (i) the political situation in the country; (ii) trust in Albanian institutions; and (iii) European youth-focused programs, multiple linear regression is used to estimate the likelihood that trust in EU institutions will increase, while controlling for the economic well-being (incomes) of the survey participants.

## **POLITICAL SITUATION IN ALBANIA**

Albania should align its legislation with that of the European Union in order to join the EU and ensure its efficient implementation. The EU-Albania Stabilization and Association Agreement [7], which was signed on June 12, 2006 and entered into force on April 1, 2009, requires the Republic of Albania to align its legislation with the EU acquis. Albania will seek to ensure that its present laws and future legislation gradually align with the EU acquis, according to Article 70 of the SAA. This transformation was planned to happen over the course of a 10-year transition period, separated into two phases. The approximation concentrated on the important elements of the internal market acquis during the first phase of the transitional period, which began with the entrance into effect of the SAA, while Albania would have to approximate the remaining portions of the acquis during the second phase.

The development of judicial reform, as well as the strengthening of the fight against corruption and organized crime with real achievements, has been emphasized by internationals and re-articulated by the German Bundestag in 2019. In response to these calls, the Albanian Parliament and the relevant institutions worked to establish a special prosecutor's office that is focusing on issues of corruption and organized crime. The Albanian Parliament has approved Law No. 95/2016 on the establishment and operation of institutions fighting corruption and organized crime, such as the Special Prosecutor's Office (SPAK). The prosecution of all of the aforementioned instances, including those involving MPs or judges, is at the heart of the SPAK's foundation. SPAK has begun the activity and is currently reviewing the first issues.

All of this hasn't convinced Albanians that the country's political situation is improving. This could be linked to the lack of interpersonal trust. Albanian inhabitants are wary of national institutions and have a low level of trust in them. As a result, trust has a direct impact on the attitude of (non) trustful institutions [8].

## **TRUST AND INSTITUTIONS IN THE ALBANIAN CONTEXT**

The scholars have addressed the notion of trust, highlighting some of its significance, as a mechanism to build healthy relationships between individuals with each other, but also individuals in relation to the state and institutions. This occurrence appears to be able to be explained by institutional theory. The origins of institutional theory can be traced back to James Coleman's Theory of Rational Choice [9]. By addressing how we understand procedures, theory borrows logical reasoning and contextualizes it. This method asserts and supports the notion that actors use utilization to optimize tire utilization [10]. In this approach, this theory presents theory as an entity that enables individuals and societies to comprehend the game rules that affect people's interactions. Institutions are established to examine the boundaries that society erects.

According to Mishler and Rose [11], political trust is perceived as the trust that citizens have in the effectiveness of public institutions believing that public administration policies will serve society. Trust in institutions implies the expectation that individuals have on the positive results of institutions [8]. Emphasizing the significant role of political trust towards the consolidation of institutions, it is essential to establish political trust between citizens and the political elite because under the presence of trust citizens can cooperate with the political elite [12]. In this context, it appears that institutional trust is a critical component in maintaining a strong link between the political elite and the general public. If this link is broken, it may have negative effects for democracy's health. This appears to have occurred in Albania, where national institutions have a low level of trust in Albanian residents, according to the Public Opinion Trust in Government measurement. Religious Institutions (76 percent), Armed Forces (63 percent), Public Education Institutions (63 percent), Civil Society Organizations (57 percent), Media (54 percent), Public Health Institutions (53 percent), and State Police (53 percent) are among the national institutions that receive more than half of respondents' trust in 2017 [13]. In contrast to this, citizens appear to have a high level of trust in EU institutions and other foreign organizations. In contrast to national institutions, international institutions/organizations such as the EU (85%), UN (85%), and NATO (84%) are regarded as the most trusted institutions for the fifth year in a row [13].

## **TRUST IN EU EDUCATION PROGRAMS - ERASMUS PROGRAMS**

Erasmus is a European Union program that promotes education, training, youth, and sport throughout Europe. Its budget seeks to provide approximately 4 million Europeans with the opportunity to study, train, and gain experience abroad. These initiatives have a significant impact on young people's consciousness by encouraging them to become more involved in numerous social concerns, civil society, and decision-making. On the other hand, the interaction

between different cultures in order to promote distinct values is the major goal of such programs.

According to EU regulations, the objectives of the Erasmus program will be as follows:

- Creating a unified sense and strengthening the spirit of European citizenship based on understanding and respect for human rights and democracy;
- Encouraging tolerance and respect for peoples and other cultural heritage;
- To cultivate understanding and solidarity among peoples;
- Finally, support knowledge building.

Education, youth work, and athletics are all important aspects of spreading European values. The ways in which this is immediately reflected in young people reveal themselves in a variety of ways. The well-known Erasmus Program (European Community Action Scheme for University Student Mobility) has heavily funded education in order to improve intercultural competencies and understanding across different cultures [14]. Students recreate their social circles overseas through these activities, based on perceived similarities and differences, which goes hand in hand with altering group borders [15].

## **ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This study aims to understand whether internal political reasons, trust in national institutions, and the impact of Erasmus programs all contribute to young Albanians' increased trust in EU institutions. Through multiple regression analysis our attempt is to test the above postulate.

**Table 1.** Regression Analysis estimating the effect of the political situation in the country, trust in Albanian institutions, and European youth-focused programs, on Trust toward EU institutions

Dependent variable:			
Trust in EU Institutions			
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)
Pol. Situation	0.011 (0.054)	0.235* (0.131)	0.023 (0.050)
Alb. Institutions	-0.011 (0.012)	0.069 (0.043)	0.144*** (0.050)
EU Programmes	-0.012 (0.039)	-0.003 (0.038)	0.217** (0.083)
Incomes	-0.066 (0.053)	-0.052 (0.052)	-0.031 (0.051)
<b>INTERACTION TERMS</b>			
Pol.Sit:Alb.Ins		-0.026* (0.014)	
A.Ins:EUP			-0.039*** (0.013)
Constant	0.318 (0.283)	-0.322 (0.451)	-0.648 (0.418)
Observations	206	206	206
R2	0.072	0.126	0.206
Adjusted R2	-0.007	0.031	0.119
Residual Std. Error	0.367 (df = 54)	0.360 (df = 54)	0.340 (df = 51)
F Statistic	0.889 (df = 5; 54)	1.341 (df = 6; 54)	2.403** (df = 6; 53)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Source: own compilation

The table shows which model outperformed the others. Model 1 reveals that citizens' perceptions of Albania's political condition have no impact on their trust in EU institutions. Model 2 found a significant regression equation accounting for the interaction effect between the political situation in Albania and trust in national institutions (Predicted Trust in EU Institutions =  $-0.322 + 0.235$  (political situation in Albania) +  $0.069$  (trust in Albanian institutions) -  $0.052$  (income) -  $0.026$  (political situation\*trust in national institutions)).

The results show that the political situation has an effect on trust towards EU institutions when is associated with trust in national institutions. The significant interaction term means a better fit of the model to the data, and better predictions from the regression equation. However, it creates uncertainty about the relative importance of the main effects of the Political Situation. Especially because the relationships between the interaction effect of the political situation and trust in national institutions and the dependent variable it is negative.

Model 3 results are more nuanced. A significant regression equation was discovered (Predicted rise in Faith in EU Institutions =  $-0.648 + 0.023$  (political

situation) + 0.144 (trust in national institutions) + 0.217 (EU Education Programme) - 0.031 (Income) - 0.039 (trust in national institutions\*EU Education Programme). When it comes to EU education programs, the data suggest that trust in national institutions has an impact on trust in EU institutions. The significant interaction term indicates a better fit of the model to the data and better regression equation predictions. However, it raises questions about the relative relevance of the primary consequences of national institutions' trust. Especially when there is a negative link between the interaction impact of trust in national institutions and EU education programs and the dependent variable.

According to the findings, trust in EU institutions grows when people have a bad assessment of the current situation and have low trust in national institutions.

## CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to analyse the factors that affect the increase of trust of Albanian youth towards the EU Institutions. A quantitative methodological approach was used to achieve the purpose of the paper. Furthermore, based on the theoretical argument, a questionnaire was designed which aimed to test the main hypothesis and generate some important findings regarding the trust of Albanian youth. To sum up, this study identified the main variables affecting the increase of the Albanian youth towards EU institutions, that are (i) the political situation in the country; (ii) trust in Albanian institutions; and (iii) European youth-focused programs. In order to run the analysis, 3 models have been established, respectively: Model 1: the association between perceived political situation and trust towards EU institutions. The analysis showed that perception of the political situation has no effect on the trust of the Albanian youth towards EU institutions.

Model 2: the association between perceived political situation, trust in national institutions and trust towards EU institutions. Running model 2 a significant regression equation was found. The results show that the perceived political situation has an effect on trust towards EU institutions when is associated with trust in national institutions.

Model 3: the association between perceived political situation, trust in national institutions and EU education programmes and trust towards EU institutions. Model 3 generated a significant regression equation, too. The results show that trust in national institutions has an effect on trust towards EU institutions when is associated with the EU education programmes. According to the results of the multiple regression analysis, Trust towards EU institutions is more likely to increase, when citizens perceive a negative political situations, low levels of trust in national institutions and high levels of trust in EU education Programmes.

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