

# INSTITUTIONS, CASTE AND THE VITAL COG OF TRUST

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of STs, SCs, and OBCs - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

Trust impacts income and growth through markets and public institutions. There is a positive relationship between trust and the development of financial markets. Operation of these markets is contingent on trustworthiness of debtors, as legal methods of recovery of dues are fraught with delays and heavy expenses. Turning to labour markets, higher trust manifests in 'higher levels of cooperative relations between labour and management and higher levels of unionisation. In fact, firms that have unions representing their employees are better able to adapt to new management methods, and show better productivity. Evidence suggests a strong positive correlation between trust and the quality of the legal system. There is a similar correlation between trust and the quality of governance'.

Here, our focus is on whether trust in institutions such as state government, judiciary and police varies by caste. We rely on the India Human Development Survey 2015 (IHDS).

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A unique feature of the 2005 and 2012 rounds of the IHDS is that they ask a question on trust. Trust in public institutions is measured in terms of levels of confidence: a great deal of confidence, only some confidence and hardly any confidence.

Caste hierarchy reflects socio-economic status. Brahmins are at the top, followed by High Castes, Other Backward Classes/OBCs, and then the deprived including Scheduled Castes/SCs and Scheduled Tribes/STs. The residual category of Others is mixed but akin to High Castes. Hence, General combines Brahmins, High Castes and Others, while other castes are as stated. Although affirmative action (e.g., quotas for SCs, STs and OBCs in education and public sector employment) has benefited these groups, segments of SCs and STs are still among the most deprived and vulnerable to poverty.

A vast majority of households surveyed lacked confidence in State governments in 2012. There is a sharp reversal in the case of the judiciary. A large majority reported a great deal of confidence, a moderate proportion had only some confidence and an extremely small proportion had hardly any confidence. Yet another contrast emerged in the case of the police. A low proportion had a great deal of confidence in it, a majority had only some confidence and a more than moderate proportion had hardly any confidence. Thus among these institutions, the most trusted was the judiciary, followed by State governments and then police.

To avoid circularity, trust in institutions is for 2012 and the caste hierarchy is for 2005. In the composite caste category, General, the highest proportion (under half) had only some confidence, under 30% had a great deal of confidence while about a quarter had hardly any confidence. A high proportion of OBCs also reported a great deal of confidence, a much higher proportion displayed a great deal of confidence and a much lower proportion had hardly any confidence. In sharp contrast, among SCs, the highest proportion (under 45%) displayed a great deal of confidence, a smaller proportion had only some confidence, and a much smaller proportion with hardly any confidence. STs, however, display a pattern not dissimilar to OBCs.

An important issue is why do SCs display so much confidence in State governments? One reason is quotas. Another is a conjecture. While those higher-up in the socio-economic hierarchy are likely to have other options (stemming from relative affluence), SCs are largely

reliant on state munificence. STs, in contrast, while also dependent on quotas, are so isolated that they have limited experience of social safety nets.

In striking contrast to trust in State governments, trust in the judiciary is highly pervasive with a slight variation across castes. For each caste, a large majority displayed a great deal of confidence, with nearly three-fourths of STs reporting a great deal of confidence. The proportion of those with hardly any confidence was extremely low, ranging between 5% and 7%. These findings are indeed surprising given the judicial overload of cases and prolonged delays.

Yet another striking contrast emerged for the police as a law enforcement agency. A great deal of confidence varied within a narrow range of 13%-18%, with the lowest among STs. Over 30% displayed hardly any confidence, with the highest among SCs and STs. This is not surprising given rampant corruption and discrimination against lower castes.

One component of trust is shaped by beliefs inherited from earlier generations, and another by a contemporaneous environment. Trust in these institutions rose between 2005 and 2012. However, recent accounts indicate a sharp erosion of trust, presumably because of State government policies that are far from inclusive, judicial verdicts that do not conform to high standards of autonomy and fairness, and police actions that violate rights of citizens, and are often brutal. While inculcation of initial beliefs is bound to be slow, transition to a policy environment that is inclusive and transparent is daunting too but growing awareness among the citizens is likely to facilitate it.

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To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

**END**

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