Social Experience and Trust: Studies on Prisoners and non-Prisoners

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Abstract. Trust is shaped by the role of personal interaction in social experience, including past experiences, individual knowledge of events experienced by close people, and exposure to information from the community. Based on this paradigm, individuals who are formed with different experience, knowledge, and information will have different trust. Aiming to examine the paradigm, this study investigated the differences of trust in two groups of participants with different experiences, i.e. prisoners \((n=68)\) and non-prisoners \((n=68)\). Using the questionnaire of trust in institution, trust in people scale, and inclusive general trust scale, the data were analyzed by t-test, Mann-Whitney, and Wilcoxon. Results showed that there were no significant differences between groups in the level of general trust, and there were significant differences between groups in the level of trust in institution. This study supports the opinion that trust is more a matter of culture.

Keywords: trust in institution, general trust, prisoners, non-prisoners

Introduction

Trust is a foundation of the spirit of cooperative behavior, a moral sentiment for being with others. Rothstein (2013) stated that one reason for the strong interest in social trust is that it correlates with a number of other variables that for most people are normatively and highly desirable. Trust has been studied across a variety of disciplines and has even been equated with broader concept of social capital (Whiteley, 2000, in Bauer & Freitag, 2017). In many studies, trust is studied at the level of individual, groups, family, organizations or institutions, and countries.

Differences in categories of trust correlate with social behavior, in which trust can be examined as independent variable, as well as dependent variable. As independent variables, trust plays an important role in individual decision making on whether they choose to cooperate or not cooperate. As dependent variable, trust is examined as variable that influenced by individual social experience. Specific events that are experienced directly or known by the individual through the closest person will affect individual trust. Research on reward systems (Irwin, Mulder, Simpson, 2014) showed that punishment system had side effect of reducing trust to level below a control group that never experienced sanctions. In family life, research on adolescent’s trust in divorced parents (Zulkarnaen & Rosiana, 2017) shows that based on their experience interacting with their parents, they trusted their fathers and mothers differently. Father were more trusted in aspects of benevolence, competence, and openness; while mothers were more trusted in aspects of reliability and honesty.

As a psychological variable, trust discussed in the micro scope, but this variable has an impact that cannot be ignored. We can conclude that trust is important, and a society cannot function well without trust between its people. Even researchers gave specific terms that describe the important functions of trust. Yamagishi (2011) stated that trust is
a lubricant of social relationships and also a social capital that enriches a person’s life, and, at the same time, is publicly possessed social capital that makes our society a comfortable place to live. Van Lange (2015) explained trust as social glue in relationships, groups, and societies which connects people and facilitates thoughts, motives, and behaviors that promote collective goals.

Balliet and Van Lange (2012) find differences across countries in the extent that people condition their own cooperation based on their trust in others. Putnam (1993) stated that in high-trust societies there are many social networks that can be used by individuals as a means of creating values and prosperity, while low-trust society does not have an established social network. Trusts can also predict organizational growth (Fukuyama, 1995) and are even related to the wealth of a nation (Knack & Keefer, 1997; La Porta et al, 1997). Trust is important in predicting sanctions’ behavioral effects, in which the effectiveness of sanctions depend on the trustworthiness of the leader and general trust that people have in authorities (Mulder, Van Dijk, De Cremer, 2009). Punishment more strongly promotes cooperation in societies with high trust rather than low trust (Balliet & Van Lange, 2013).

In this study, we focus on two specific type of trusts, that are general trust (rather than trust in a particular individual), and trust in institution. General trust is a default trust in other people when sufficient information is missing to judge whether they are trustworthy or not (Yamagishi; 2011; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). This type of trust describes the idea that individuals possess some generalized situation-independent expectation. General trust is a fragile form of trust in the sense that it is quickly replaced by more specific trust, or expectations of trustworthiness of a particular individual based on information obtained in on-going interactions (Yamagishi, 2011). General trust assesses the social environment in general, does not refer to certain people. This general trust covers two aspects, first is the hope of trusting others, the extent to which other people are reliable and siding with the good of the individual; and second, satisfaction comes from acting in a trustworthy way and being a trustee, having a self-identity as a trustee (Yamagishi, et.al, 2015). Van Lange (2015) provided a review of generalized trust in the form of propositions that are rooted in recent research. He proposed that generalized trust is more a matter of culture than genetics, and trust is deeply rooted in social interaction experiences (that go beyond childhood), networks, and media.

Understanding of the social environment contributes to individual general trust. It can be understood that certain social environments will contribute to high general trust, while other social environments with different characteristics can contribute to the low general trust. Wider social influences, such as economic downturns or national prosperity can affect individual general trusts (Nannestad, 2008). Communities from different places have different degrees in terms of community members trusting others (Inglehart, Basanez, & Moreno, 1998; Knack & Keefer, 1997). For example, in some communities if someone loses their wallet, they are sure that the wallet will be returned soon; whereas, in other communities it is not (Zak & Knack, 2001). The results of World Values Survey for the period of 1995-2009 showed that communities and countries have different levels of trust. This difference in level of trust indicates the different conditions that occur in certain society and country. In a survey of these trusts, respondents were asked questions about, “in general, do you think that most people can be trusted or do you have to be very careful in dealing with other people?”. Then each country has an interpersonal trust index from the results of this survey. In 2006, Indonesia had a trust index of 16.9, which meant it was in the low trust category and in the category of low-general trust. If it compared to other Asian countries, China had 120.9, Hong Kong 82.4, Thailand 83.1, Japan 79.6, Taiwan 70, Pakistan 65, Singapore 59, South Korea 56.9, Russia 55, Philippines 20.1, Malaysia 17.7, and Turkey 10.1.

Trust in institutions is a type of trust that specific to a particular institution, for example the government (Bélanger and Carter, 2008), and trust in public institutions (Faturochman, 2010). Those types of trust are positioned as the product rather than the cause of institutional performance, for example mismanaged government breeds distrust. This type of trust is measure in situation-specific. We essentially speak about a trustee that judges the trustworthiness of institutions. As Rothstein and Stolle (2003) argued that it is the degree of perceived fairness and impartiality of the institutions responsible for the implementation of public policies that serves as an important
foundation for building and maintaining the high institutional trust levels, which, in its turn, spills over to influence generalized trust in others. Data of Edelman Trust Barometer (2018) shows Indonesian people relatively trust in public institutions. Even compared to other countries in Asia, the score of Indonesia’s trust in institution in 2018 was 71, which increased from the 2017 score of 69; a score of 60-100 categorized as trust. Whereas, Singapore’s score was 58, Malaysia’s score 53, which categorized neutral; Hong Kong’s score 45, South Korea’s score 44, which categorized distrust. The survey results on trust in institutions was conducted in general populations. More specific about trust in institutions in Indonesia was a poll conducted by Charta Politika and Assumptions (Tempo, 2018), which used a random telephone interview method to 800 respondents in eight major cities, with a margin of error of 3.46 percent, and resulted in TNI (Indonesian national armed forces) and the Corruption Eradication Commission or KPK as the most trusted institutions. The level of trust in TNI is 73.5%; while KPK is 73.4%. In the third place, the most trusted institution is the presidential institution with a trust level of 68.5 percent, while for the National Police is 50.4 percent. The House of Representatives is in the fifth position with a trust level of 49.3 percent. The last third position are the Supreme Court with 46 percent, DPD (regional representative council) for 37.5 percent; and political parties for 32.5 percent.

This study tested two types of trust: general trust and trust in institution. Although research on general trust shows that general trust can vary based on age and individual social background, we assume that general trust is more a matter of culture. It means individuals who come from the same geographical area exposed by the same social environment will have the same level of general trust. Second assumption, when individuals have personal specific experience about institution, this past experience will contribute to their appreciation of how much this institution fulfills individual interests and contributes to the expectation that in the future this institution will fulfill individual interests. We tested our assumptions by comparing two groups of subjects with different ages and social status, which were corruption prisoners and students. Prisoners of corruption cases were chosen with the consideration that they have already had specific personal experience of being involved in legal processes and social responses obtained. Before being declared as suspect in a corruption case, these individuals had experience of directly involved with public institutions; and after being declared as suspect in a corruption case they had experience undergoing a follow-up process that also involved many public institutions who dragged them into corruption cases. The fact that these two groups come from the same country and exposed by the same information and social environment means their general trust will not significantly different. Regarding trust in institutions which involve a more specific personal experience, trust referred in these two groups will be different. Corruption prisoners groups are assumed to have certain experiences dealing with corruption cases, so that they may have a different understanding of the results of their interactions with certain public institutions.

Based on those assumptions, this study aims to answer two questions: (1) Are there differences in general trust in individuals who have different ages and social status but are in the same geographic area? (2) Do people who have personal specific experience (as corruption prisoners) have the same level of trust in institution as people who have no personal specific experience (as corruption prisoners)?

Research Methods

This study aimed to find out whether there are differences in general trust and trust in institutions between groups of prisoners and non-prisoners. The subjects of this research consisted of two groups participants. The first group was the corrupt prisoner (n = 68, M_age = 45 years, 100% of men) and the second group was students who had no experience in cases of corruption (n = 68, M_age = 18 years, 75% women). The research measurement used three questionnaires. First, general trust was measured using Inclusive General Trust Scale consisting of 9 items (Yamagishi, 2015). Result of rank spearman correlation for total items were around 0.291-0.631 with all items are usable and reliable (α = 0.83). Inclusive General Trust Scale measures the belief in trustworthiness (e.g most people are basically honest). The questionnaire was submitted by self-reporting with response categories ranging from 1 (= not trust at all) to 5 (= trust completely). There are 3 general trust categories based on score scales, value of Mean and Standard Deviation, low-trust (X <25,68), medium-trust (25.68 ≤ X≤
33.12), and high-trust (X> 33.12). This data were analyzed using t-test.

Second, in measuring individual trust towards people in general, we also use a trust in people questionnaire intended to be a comparison with the results of the questionnaire of Inclusive General Trust scale. The questionnaire composed in three items: in general, can most people be trusted or do you need to be careful when engaging with other people? In your opinion, have people tried to help or were they more selfish? Do you think most people try to use you when there is an opportunity, or do they try to be fair to you? The questionnaire was submitted by self-reporting with response categories ranging from 0 (= need to be careful) and 1 (= can be trusted). This data were analyzed using statistics test Mann-Whitney and Wilcoxon.

Third, trust in institutions is measured using a questionnaire of trust in institutions compiled by researchers. This questionnaire consists of 21 items and measures trust in institutions in Indonesia (for example, how much do you trust the BPK?). The questionnaire was submitted by self-reporting with response categories ranging from 1 (=not trust at all) to 5 (= trust completely). This data were analyzed using t-test.

### General Trust in the Prisoners Group and Non-Prisoners group

The results of general trust measurement showed that statistically there were no significant differences between the level of general trust among prisoners group and non-prisoners group (t = -2.504; p value = 0.0001), both groups were categorized as medium trust. The results of general trust measurement is in line with result of trust in people questionnaire. The results of trust in people measurement showed that there

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Group of prisoners</th>
<th>Group of non-prisoners</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Trust score</td>
<td>Level of trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>84.78</td>
<td>Very High</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>55.22</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>62.39</td>
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were no significant differences between the level of trust in people among prisoners group and non-prisoners group ($Z = -0.909; p \text{ value } = .364$), both groups were categorized as medium trust. Comparison of responses of two groups participants in the trust in people questionnaire showed both groups had high scores on statements that assessed the kindness and honesty of people in general. Participants believe that most people are basically honest, good, and will respond well when they are trusted by others. Both groups have different opinions in responding to the item that most people trust others, most people choose to lie when they benefit from lying, and people who behave unselfishly often exploited by others. Some people choose not to cooperate because they only pursue short-term interests for themselves. Therefore, cooperation often fails because of people like this. The group of prisoners showed an assessment in the medium category while the non-prisoner group assessed the high category for this item.

Comparison of responses of two groups participants in the trust in people questionnaire showed the similarity of opinion that they need to be careful when interacting with others. A total of 94.11% of prisoners and 88.23% of non-prisoners shared the opinion that it is necessary to be careful when engaging with other people. On other items, these two groups showed different responses to the opinion that people tried to help or be selfish. Only 45.58% of prisoners argue that people try to help, while 52.94% of non-prisoners think that people try to help. Furthermore, there are differences between groups of prisoners and non-prisoners in seeing that most people try to use you when there is an opportunity, or they try to be fair. A total of 77.94% of prisoners believe that most people try to try to be fair, but only 54.41% of non-prisoners think that most people try to try to be fair.

**Trust in Institution in Prisoners Group and Non-prisoners Group**

The results showed that there were statistically significant differences between level of trust in institution in the prisoners group and non-prisoners group (using t-test, $t = -6.040, p \text{ value } = 0.0001$). Furthermore, the differences in trust in institutions in two groups presented in the following table 1.

When we viewed in more detail the results of measurement of trust in 21 different institutions, there were several differences and similarities between two groups. Group of prisoners have the lowest trust in KPK, Kejaksaan (attorney), and Pengadilan Negeri (District Court). Whereas, group of non-prisoners have high trust in these institution. Both groups are equally high in trusting religious leaders and bank. Both groups have the same level of medium trust in parliament and political parties. For other institutions, mass media, central government, local government, Police, TNI, Lembaga Pemasyarakatan, BPK, Inspektorat, Lawyer, Mahkamah Agung, Kehakiman, BUMN, BUMD, and foreign companies, both groups have different level of trust: the prisoners group is at medium level, and the non-prisoners group is at a high level.

**General Trust**

This study aims to find out whether there are differences in general trust and trust in institutions between groups of prisoners and non-prisoners. The results of general trust and trust in people measurement showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the prisoners group and the non-prisoners group, and both groups were categorized as medium trust.

The present study results are different from the results of World Values Survey (WVS) that in 2006 Indonesia including a low-trust society. Indonesia had trust index score of 16.9, on a scale from 0 to 200. It seems too early to state the conclusions of these results. This study compared WVS has differences in respondents in terms of the number and variety of age and background. We limit ourselves in explaining the results of our research, and conducting reasonable discussions.

Talk about society and general trust closely related to culture. Datas about trust, actually shows point to the important role of culture (Balliet & Van Lange, 2013). As Yamagishi (2011) defines general trust as an innate expectation about other people, which implying that the actual general trust is a trust based on information of people in general. In fact, both our research and WVS data show that Indonesia is not a society in which the majority of high trust individuals. The WVS result that Indonesia was low trust society might be formed by individual perspective upon general
conditions in Indonesia. For example, the fact that Indonesia is experiencing relatively low economic conditions, or the condition of Indonesian democracy which might also make society uncomfortable. The existence of public facilities that guarantee the fulfillment of, at a minimum, basic needs of community also contributes to the expectations of individuals in their environment in general. Another condition that might undermine general trust is corruption. The high level of corruption also decreases trust (Rothstein, 2013). In fact, Indonesia’s corruption perception index (CPI) score is relatively stagnant and still in the low category. Since the last six years, in 2012 and 2013, Indonesian CPI scored 32; while in 2016 and 2017 scored 37. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) scores countries on how corrupt their governments are believed to be. A country’s score can range from zero to 100, with zero indicating high levels of corruption and 100 indicating low levels.

This study confirms the argument that trust is more a matter of culture. Cultural differences suggest that trust is shaped by cultural contribution. People who come from the same culture and country tend to have the same level of trust. The result is that there are no differences in general trust between groups of prisoners and non-prisoners. The fact that the two groups come from the same country and exposed by the same information and social environment explain why general trust of the groups are not significantly different.

General trust is a fragile form of trust in the sense that it is quickly replaced by more specific trust, or it is expectation of trustworthiness of a particular individual based on information obtained in on-going interactions (Yamagishi, 2015). Therefore, although general trusts were not different in two groups, the results of testing in the trust in institutions showed different results. Low general trust means low in belief that other people are honest and that they trust (not in) risk. Yamagishi (1986) stated that general trust also describes individual norms of cooperation in groups. This is an interesting consideration about how it relates to cooperative behavior adn how willingness contribute to public interest. Other studies show that low trust individuals tend to be low in contributing to public interest. In addition, low trust individuals compared to high trusts are more likely to support sanctions that punish non-cooperators (Yamagishi, 1986) and reduce cooperation in response to the stated intention of partners not to cooperate (Parks., 1996).

**Trust in institution**

The results shows there is significant differences between level of trust in institution in prisoners group and non-prisoners group. As it is stated above, the two groups of prisoners and non-prisoners who come from the same country and exposed by the same information and social environment have no significant different in general trust. But trust in institutions, which involve a more specific personal experience, indicates a different result for these two groups. Corruption prisoner’s groups are assumed to have certain experiences dealing with corruption cases, so that they may have a different understanding on the results of their interactions with certain public institutions.

This study confirms the argument that trust is shaped not only by the role of experiences in early childhood, but also by personal interaction in social experience, including past experience, individual knowledge of events experienced by people close by, and exposure to information from the community. Based on this result, individuals who are formed with experience, knowledge, and exposure to different information will have different beliefs. In prisoners group, the specific experience is being involved, that is a specific case of corruption with a series of individual experiences undergoing legal processes and social responses obtained. Contrast with non-prisoners group who does not have this experience, group of prisoners have the lowest trust in KPK, Kejaksaan and Pengadilan Negeri. Whereas, group of non-prisoners have high trust in these institutions. These three institutions were intensively involved in the process of prosecuting corruption convicts.

**Conclusion**

The result shows there are no differences in general trust between groups of prisoners and non-prisoners. There are no differences in general trust in individuals who have different ages and social status but are in the same geographic area. The fact that the two groups come from the same country and exposed by the same information and social environment, explain why general trust of the groups are not significantly different. On the other hand, there is a difference in trust in
institution between groups of prisoners and non-prisoners. Trust in institutions, which involve a more specific personal experience, explain why there is different trust in institution between two groups. People who have personal specific experience (as corrupt prisoners) have different level of trust in institution with people who have no personal specific experience. Group of prisoners have the lowest trust in KPK, Kejaksaan and Pengadilan Neger, while group of non-prisoners have high trust in these institutions.

Although this research has reached its aims, there are some unavoidable limitation. The number of women and men in both groups of participants was not balanced. The group of prisoners were all male, while the student group was mostly female. Both of them also have a significant age differences in the average. Therefore, to generalize the result of larger groups, the study should involved equal number of gender and age. Further research is suggested to investigate the causal relationship between general trust and corrupt behavior, and the extent to which trust in institutions influence individual decision making to behave cooperatively with rules.

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