

Joint Master in Global Economic Governance and Public Affairs

***Internal and External Efficacy
Moderating National and
International Trust: A statistical
analysis of the 2024 OECD Trust
Report.***

Supervised by Milad Zarin

**Allard Zeegers
2024/2025**

Abstract

This thesis investigates the psychological mechanisms underpinning the relationship between trust in national governments and trust in international organizations, with a focus on citizens in OECD countries. Drawing on data from the 2024 OECD Trust Survey, it tests the hypothesis that individuals often rely on domestic trust as a cue or shortcut to evaluate international institutions. However, this reliance seems to be not uniform across the population. The analysis introduces a moderated moderation model in which internal political efficacy (a citizen's sense of competence in understanding and participating in politics) reduces heuristic dependence, while external political efficacy (perceived institutional responsiveness) further conditions this effect. Using ordinary least squares regression with bootstrapped interaction terms, the findings show that among individuals with low internal efficacy, trust in national governments strongly predicts trust in international organizations, a pattern consistent with cue theory. In contrast, this relationship is weaker among high-efficacy individuals, especially when they perceive low institutional responsiveness. These results contribute to political psychology on critical citizens (Norris, 2011) by highlighting the cognitive dimensions of institutional trust formation in multilevel governance systems. The study concludes with policy recommendations for strengthening civic capacity and institutional legitimacy in OECD democracies, particularly through targeted investments in civic education and responsive governance practices.

This work uses the OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (2024). Its content reflects solely the work and opinions of the author(s). Neither the OECD nor its member countries bear any responsibility for any interpretations, analyses or inferences based upon using the data.

Disclaimer: The final version of this document benefited from linguistic refinement using AI tools. All content and reflects the authors' own analysis and positions.

I hereby declare that I have composed the present thesis autonomously and without use of any other than the cited sources or means. I have indicated parts that were taken out of published or unpublished work correctly and in a verifiable manner through a quotation. I further assure that I have not presented this thesis to any other institute or university for evaluation and that it has not been published before.

Allard Zeegers

26/07/2025

I would like to thank my parents, Chantal and Migchel, for helping me research and edit this thesis. I also would like to thank my girlfriend, Hatice, for supporting me through the research and writing process. Lastly, I would like to thank the all the people at CIFE and my thesis supervisor Milad Zarin, for giving me this wonderful assignment.

My thesis pitch is available at this link: <https://youtu.be/wer7vHdErOc>

Index

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Abstract | 2 |
| 1.0 Introduction | 5 |
| 2.0 Literature review | 9 |
| 2.1 Political trust | 9 |
| 2.2 Cue theory definition | 10 |
| 2.3 Relationship between cue theory and political trust in IO's | 11 |
| 2.4 Relationship between internal efficacy and cue theory | 12 |
| 2.5 External efficacy | 14 |
| 2.6 Relationship between external efficacy and cue theory | 14 |
| 2.7 Relationship between external efficacy and cue theory for low internal efficacy individuals | 15 |
| 2.8 Relationship between external efficacy and cue theory for high internal efficacy individuals | 16 |
| 2.9 Other potential factors | 17 |
| 3.0 Methodology | 19 |
| 3.1 data collection | 19 |
| 3.2 Data analysis | 19 |
| 3.3 Operationalization | 20 |
| 3.4 limitations | 21 |
| 4.0 Results | 22 |
| 4.1 Correlation matrix | 22 |
| 4.2 Regression analysis | 23 |
| 4.3 Moderation analysis between internal efficacy and heuristic usage | 24 |
| 4.3 Moderated moderation analysis between external efficacy, internal efficacy and heuristic usage | 27 |
| 5.0 Discussion | 29 |
| 5.1 High internal efficacy and high external efficacy | 30 |
| 5.2 High internal efficacy and low external efficacy | 30 |
| 5.3 Low internal efficacy and high external efficacy | 30 |
| 5.4 Low internal efficacy and low external efficacy | 31 |
| 6.0 Conclusion | 32 |
| 6.1 Scientific implications | 32 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 6.2 <i>Policy recommendations</i> | 33 |
| 6.3 <i>Limitations</i> | 35 |
| 6.4 <i>Suggestions for future research</i> | 36 |
| References | 37 |
| <i>Annex I: Email to Oecd Service Desk (govtrustinfo@oecd)</i> | 45 |
| <i>Annex II: SPSS Syntax</i> | 46 |

“Public trust is a pillar of democracy, fostering debate and participation, encouraging compliance with the law, and facilitating reforms.”
(OECD, 2024).

1.0 Introduction

Why do citizens sometimes trust the United Nations as much as they do their own governments? OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions report (2024) finds that trust in international organizations (IO's) exceeds national trust in several countries, despite the former being institutionally remote and politically abstract. This apparent contradiction raises a fundamental question about how citizens form trust in multilevel governance. This question is relevant as the effectiveness of an international organization seems highly dependent on its perceived legitimacy, as when IO's lack legitimacy but still enjoy a high degree of power, this can result in a democratic deficit (Sommerer & Agné, 2018). The recent OECD Survey on Public Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (2024) pointed to trends concerning citizen trust in public institutions and the media. There has been an international average 2 percentage point drop in trust in the national government from 2021 to 2023 and no sign of reversal. However, implementing institutions such as the National Health Service and the police, enjoyed higher trust (OECD, 2024b). It seems these institutions did not experience the same decrease in citizen trust that other institutions have. This discrepancy is what inspired this thesis.

The findings of the OECD report are congruent with the scientific literature on political trust, as these implementing institutions seem to enjoy a sense of 'closeness' with the citizenry, that other, more abstract institutions (i.e. the media, national governments, business) do not (Denters, 2002; Marien, 2011; Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2014). International institutions, however, seem to enjoy a similar, and sometimes even higher level of trust than national institutions. Citizens' trust in international organizations stands at a relatively high 43.6% trust. This number is on par with, or even higher than, citizens' trust in regional or national government (41.1% and 39.3%, respectively) although, these are the furthest removed from the individual (OECD, 2024b). 'Closeness', therefore, as an explanatory variable, falls short of explaining this phenomenon. However, it could be argued that opinion formation on IO's could better be explained by heuristic usage. Existing research does suggest this, individuals often seem to use national institutions as heuristic proxies when assessing IO's, a pattern that is known from cue theory. Specifically, it seems that voters cannot distinguish between national and international governance and, therefore, use heuristics derived from the former to determine their position on the latter (Karakoç, 2013; Brosius et al., 2020). These heuristics even apply to other international institutions; for example, one's opinion of the EU is determinative of one's opinion of the UN (Marien, 2011). However, the strength of this association seems to decrease proportionally to one's education. This aligns with other theories of political trust, wherein those with higher levels of education feel they have a better grasp on the workings of political organizations and would, therefore, feel that they could distinguish between the duties of national and international governance.

This paper tries a novel approach because it uses both the literature on internal and external efficacy which have been shown to have a significant influence on political behavior as well as the literature on international political trust formation, to develop a new way of analyzing the opinion formation of individuals. Internal efficacy refers to an individual's

political sophistication, while external efficacy is their perception of how responsive the political system is. Research on political trust in international organizations suggests that citizens often conflate national and international governance using heuristics, typically overlooking internal and external efficacy in this process (Lamprianou & Charalambous, 2018; Marien, 2011). This thesis proposes that trust in national and international governance is positively correlated for those with lower political sophistication, but this relation is inverted for those with higher political sophistication. Furthermore, I claim that this relationship between sophistication and heuristic usage, is moderated by the perceived representativeness of one's political system.

According to the literature, when one resides in a system that is not deemed representative, one is more likely to rely on heuristic cues. This is because they do not feel as if they belong in a political environment and have a high degree of political cynicism as a result (Carmines & D'Amico, 2015; Marien, 2011; Hetherington, 2004). In such environments, lower external political efficacy can heighten reliance on national trust as a cognitive shortcut, making citizens more susceptible to spillover effects between levels of governance (Casiraghi et al., 2024). However, highly sophisticated voters, when positioned in a system wherein they are unable to express their voice to a satisfactory degree, will be more likely to engage in the political system in a violent manner (Prats & Meunier, 2021; Craig & Maggioto, 1982). Sophisticated individuals that reside in a non-representative political system seem therefore to be unlikely to use heuristics to assess their level of trust in their national government. This leads to the following research questions. *To what extent do politically competent individuals use heuristics to form their opinion on international political organizations? And, to what extent does the one's perceived national political context influence the opinion-formation process?*

The interplay between trust and efficacy is important because of the implications that it has on the health of democratic governance. Both concepts are seen as barometers of democratic legitimacy and vitality (OECD, 2024b; Devine & Valgarðsson, 2024). A high degree of trust and efficacy is therefore typically considered indicative of positive well-being for a democracy. The implications for this research in the broader context of democratic legitimacy should therefore be considered. Trust is considered as an 'inherently important legitimizing quality of democratic government' (Devine & Valgarðsson, 2024). When citizens trust democratic institutions to have the public's best interest in mind, these institutions gain a 'reservoir' of goodwill and compliance that smooths the governance process. Trust can foster the acceptance of even unpopular policies and reinforces the democratic system in times of crisis. High trust environments also seem to improve social cohesion. People are more likely to view their fellow citizens and the authorities as part of a cooperative civic enterprise. Empirical research shows that this greater policy compliance results in a higher willingness to pay taxes or follow public health guidelines (Devine & Valgarðsson, 2024). Indeed, the OECD itself highlights that "public trust is a pillar of democracy, fostering debate and participation, encouraging compliance with the law, and facilitating reforms." (OECD, 2024b). Getting a better view into the trust formation process of citizens could therefore inform policies aimed at encouraging international trust.

In addition, countries suffering a collapse of trust often see governability problems and an opening for demagogic figures who promise to bypass "corrupt institutions." Populist

rhetoric like this actively undermines public trust. For example, in the United States, the claim that the 2020 election was ‘stolen’ was not based on any actual evidence provided. Afterwards, this claim was amplified on social media (sometimes by foreign actors) and republican lawmakers, to the point that only 20% of Americans felt ‘very confident’ about the integrity of the 2020 elections, and a majority felt little or no confidence that the votes were counted fairly (Sanchez & Middlemass, 2022). Governance reforms aimed at transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption are often justified as means to earn or rebuild public trust (OECD, 2024b). However, this thesis proposes the claim that these types of interventions, mostly aimed at improving existing policies, will not achieve the intended results. The previously mentioned interplay between efficacy and trust formation is not addressed directly by these governance reforms, as these reforms are just focused on achieving certain policy outcomes. If citizens cannot discriminate between different levels of government, they will struggle to give credit to government organizations that have improved their standard of living. As a result, trust in national and international government will not increase, as the originator of these improvements in the standard of living is not sufficiently clear to citizens.

In the OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (2024) five recommendations are listed that aim to improve citizen trust in public institutions. Of these five, just one is aimed at increasing citizen engagement in decision-making processes. This involves setting clear expectations about the roles of their domestic democratic system, along with giving individuals more mechanisms through which they can express their political preferences. This is a promising development but falls short of acknowledging the most important part of increasing efficacy, namely, that it reduces heuristic usage in the development of opinions about governance. The other policy recommendations listed in the report aim to increase policy effectiveness and improve organizational checks and balances. Even though increases in policy effectiveness or other policy issues will not matter if individuals cannot determine where these policies come from or who is responsible for them, these steps still need to be taken to ensure trust in public institutions from high efficacy individuals.

The field of study regarding public trust in international organizations (IOs) is still developing, with comparatively fewer empirical investigations than those on domestic political trust. While the literature on the relationship between internal efficacy and national trust is quite rich and has delivered insights that inform even OECD policy recommendations, trust in IOs has only recently gained scholarly traction, particularly in the context of global governance crises and democratic backsliding (OECD, 2024; Dellmuth & Tallberg, 2018; Easton, 1975). This relative novelty means the theoretical and methodological frameworks for analyzing international trust remain underdeveloped compared to their domestic counterparts.

Similarly, the relationship between internal and external political efficacy, and how these forms of efficacy interact to influence political judgment, is underexplored in the literature. Although classic definitions have long distinguished between the two, few studies explicitly investigate their interaction effects, particularly in comparative or multilevel governance contexts (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016; S. C. Craig et al., 1990). Therefore, this thesis may provide valuable insights into both these developing fields. This way, the relationship

between the average voter and international institutions, and the relationship between ones' sense of political sophistication and one's sense of their political environment can be clarified. This could lead to more informed policy from political institutions to improve their relationship with their electorate. To comprehensively address the research questions, I will first examine the pertinent concepts and theoretical connections between them, from which the hypotheses will be derived. Subsequently, these concepts will be operationalized in the methodology chapter, where I will also outline the methods used to test the relationships between the variables. The results section will then explore and test these relationships. Then, in the discussion I will address these findings in detail. Lastly, in the conclusion I will discuss the theoretical and practical implications of this research.

2.0 Literature review

In this literature review I will review the important concepts, starting off with defining political trust and cue theory and the relationship between these two concepts. This leads to the first hypothesis. Then the conditional relationship between internal efficacy and cue theory will be discussed, which leads to the second hypothesis. Lastly, the conditional relationship between external efficacy and individuals with low or high internal efficacy will be discussed, leading to the third and fourth hypothesis.

2.1 Political trust

Political trust is well defined in sociological literature as ‘the expectation that a political entity will behave in accordance with one’s expectations’ or ‘The belief that one will not be harmed when his or her fate is placed in the hands of others’ (Wrighton, 2022).’ This, however, does come with a few problems. Firstly, political trust is measured in different ways. Political trust can concern a single policy, an entire public institution, or politicians as a class (Marien, 2011). This paper uses the definition given by Easton (1975). Easton divides political trust into two types: specific trust, where one trusts a specific element of the government, and diffuse trust, where one trusts an entire institution. In a normal context, a democracy tends to feature a stable baseline of diffuse trust (belief in the constitutional order) combined with a volatile specific trust that responds to government actions. In the context of this thesis the diffuse trust is the relevant concept, namely trust in national government and trust in international institutions. The diffuse nature of this type of trust makes it difficult to understand. National or international governance influences many aspects of a person's life, both directly and indirectly. Unlike trust in specific individuals or institutions with clear records, diffuse trust is harder to pinpoint.

Political trust is widely regarded as a foundational civic virtue in democracy (Turper & Aarts, 2015). It is therefore essential to democratic stability and effective governance. A high level of institutional trust is a key component of the civic culture that sustains stable democracies. Trusting citizens are more likely to accept collective decisions and support their government even when outcomes disappoint. This is what Easton (1965) termed, a ‘reservoir of goodwill’ that supports the democratic system in times of hardship, when unpopular decisions need to be taken or when outcomes disappoint. Given these crucial implications, political trust is often considered as a crucial necessity for the stability of democratic systems. Political theorists thus consider trust not only instrumental for compliance, but also as a glue that holds the polity together. This theoretical importance is supported by empirical research. A meta-analysis of 61 studies reporting 329 coefficients derived from over three and a half million observations shows that trust matters to many different outcomes as diverse as turnout, vote choice, and policy preferences (Devine, 2024).

Marien and Hooghe (2010) find that trust in government also legitimizes authorities, leading citizens to perceive laws and policies as rightful and worthy of obedience. When people trust their government to act in the public’s interest, they are inherently granting it moral license to exercise power. This makes their power a result of consent rather than coercion. The societal role of trust goes beyond simple compliance. A trusting citizenry

voluntarily complies with laws because it views government decisions as legitimate, not because they fear that they might be punished. High trust thereby reduces the need for heavy-handed police enforcement and lowers the costs associated with governance, since citizens will be more likely to willingly cooperate with public programs and regulations. Additionally, a culture of trust fosters civic cooperation and solidarity among citizens themselves. Empirical studies find that societies with higher institutional trust tend to exhibit greater societal cohesion, reciprocity, and collective problem-solving (Devine & Valgarðsson, 2024). For these reasons, trust is often described by the OECD as a pillar of civic culture that nurtures social cohesion. Public trust encourages open debate and participation in public life, as people feel invested in a common system (Turper & Aarts, 2015; OECD, 2024).

Considering this, it is unsurprising that low institutional trust is associated with many problematic outcomes for democratic governance. A distrusting or dissatisfied public is broadly seen as a threat to democratic stability (Wilson, 2024). Empirical evidence from numerous studies confirms that declining trust has tangible effects on citizen behavior and attitudes. One key consequence is reduced conventional political participation. Citizens with low trust often withdraw from the normal channels of democratic engagement, such as voting, working for a political party, or contacting officials. Hooghe and Marien (2012), for example, find that across European democracies, individuals who distrust political institutions participate less often in institutionalized political acts like electoral voting or working with parties. Low trust can lead to feelings of political cynicism that dampen the motivation to engage with politics critically. Indeed, periods of eroding trust seem to correlate with outcomes such as reduced civic engagement (Devine, 2024). Generally speaking, the politically cynical are more likely to withdraw from politics altogether rather than take part in a system that they do not have faith in. This withdrawal undermines the representative legitimacy of democracy, since a government elected by distrustful, disengaged citizens may lack a robust mandate (Piterová & Loziak, 2024). This increased distrust can in turn lead to anti-establishment or confrontational channels. When people lack trust in mainstream institutions, they tend to turn to avenues that challenge the system itself (Hooghe and Marien; 2012). Political protest and unconventional activism tend to increase as trust declines. While trust can foster orderly participation, distrust is negatively associated with non-institutionalized participation, meaning those who lack trust are more likely to engage in protests, boycotts, or even riots as outlets for political expression.

2.2 Cue theory definition

The literature suggests that trust in political institutions correlates with trust in other political institutions, to streamline the trust-formation process (Marien, 2011). This type of opinion formation is supported by cue theory, a psychological theory that posits that individuals mostly rely on informational shortcuts from trusted sources to form opinions that they might hold if they were fully informed (Carmines & D'Amico, 2015). This theory claims that acquiring knowledge on complex political topics is costly for most people, and therefore they choose to save resources by taking signals from cue-givers, to make decisions without having to familiarize themselves with these topics. This approach to political judgment is rooted in Anthony Downs' (1957) concept of rational ignorance. Downs argued that the

typical citizen, viewing themselves as a rational agent, sees that the time, effort, and mental resources needed to be fully informed on every political issue exceed the probable benefit, especially given the low individual impact on policy outcomes in a large-scale democracy. Therefore, it is reasonable for many individuals to stay politically unaware and to assign the responsibility of making decisions to representatives or leaders whose opinions they have confidence in. Cue theory is based on this reasoning: because people are not motivated to explore every policy or institution thoroughly, they seek heuristic cues from recognizable or ideologically consistent sources to bridge the knowledge gaps. Examples of cue-givers can be one's political party, endorsements by organizations or respectable people, or, in the case of this thesis, their existing opinion on their domestic government. For example, an individual might not know anything about tariffs, but if their preferred political figure supports it, they will eschew doing a cost benefit analysis on this specific policy, substituting detailed policy analysis with their political affiliation. This process mostly presents in voters that are not politically sophisticated and is meant to imitate real expertise on a topic. However, when looking at both politically sophisticated and unsophisticated voters, their political preferences differ significantly, suggesting that heuristic usage does not achieve the intended result (Carmines & D'Amico, 2015).

Heuristic-usage can often be one of the strongest determiners of one's support for a policy, sometimes overcoming even ones' own economic interests or political affiliation (Hetherington, 2004). More specifically, during instances where the government asks something from their electorate that will negatively impact their economic situation, or that contradicts their ideology, their political trust might operate as a heuristic to go against their self-interest in favor of perceived collective goods. However, some evidence exists that this depends on the ideology of the individual, and that right wing individuals on average seem to be more willing to use political trust as a heuristic in favor of self-interest when determining their support for a specific policy (Casiraghi et al., 2024). Heuristics seem to be one of the strongest variables in determining one's opinion on international institutions (Lamprianou & Charalambous, 2018, Marien, 2011). Heuristic usage, therefore, must be considered when evaluating the opinion formation process of citizens.

2.3 Relationship between cue theory and political trust in IO's

For the reasons mentioned above, one would expect to see a lack of distinction between international governance and national governance. Conceptually, it seems that voters (especially low-information voters) use cues to determine their opinion on international organizations. This means that, instead of engaging in a cost-benefit analysis when determining the level of diffuse trust they hold towards international institutions, they decide this by considering to what extent they approve of proxies for these organizations (Marien, 2011). Many citizens are not even aware of the existence of certain international organizations. Consistently, 10%-15% of European Social Survey respondents are unfamiliar with the UN; this number is even higher in new democracies (Lamprianou & Charalambous, 2018). Even for those who are familiar with the UN, their trust in the UN seems to be largely predicated on their trust in other international institutions like the EU. This concept is also called the transfer heuristic approach (Karakoç, 2013). Trust in institutions seems to be 'transferred' from the national to the international level. This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1: Respondents with low Internal Efficacy will have a significant, positive relationship between the level of trust in their national government and the level of trust in international organizations on average.

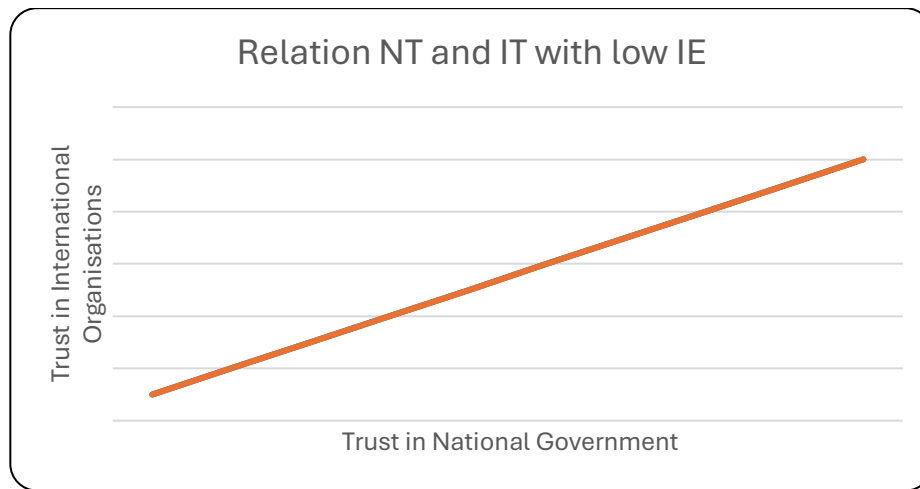


Fig 1. The expected relation between Trust in National Government (NT) and Trust in International Organizations (IT) with low Internal Efficacy (IE)

2.4 Relationship between internal efficacy and cue theory

However, while much of the literature treats this cue-based mechanism as stable, recent research has pointed to individual-level cognitive factors that condition the degree of heuristic use. Lamprianou & Charalambous (2018) show that less politically aware citizens are far more likely to use proxies like the EU when judging other global institutions, whereas more informed citizens differentiate their evaluations. In the European Social Survey analysis, trust in the European Parliament can serve as a proxy for trust in the UN among low-awareness individuals. However, individuals with high political interest or knowledge about the UN break away from this heuristic: they form more nuanced, independent trust judgments. This finding dovetails with others: Armingeon & Ceka (2014) noted that the linkage between national and EU trust is much weaker for people with greater political knowledge of the EU.

This suggests that the variable ‘political sophistication’ has a moderating effect on the relationship between national and international trust. This does not necessarily mean that those with high levels of political sophistication tend to have a more positive or negative view of national or international organizations. Instead, it means that more sophistication leads to a different opinion-formation process. As sophistication increases, the relationship between both kinds of trust (national or international) changes. Internal political efficacy, or the belief in one’s ability to understand and participate in politics, is what will be used as a proxy for the broad concept of ‘political sophistication’ in the subsequent analysis. It has been shown to significantly influence political attitudes, including trust (S. C. Craig et al., 1990). Furthermore, citizens with higher internal efficacy are less reliant on cognitive shortcuts when evaluating complex institutions (Zmerli & Hooghe, 2011). Similarly, Dellmuth and Tallberg (2015) note that individuals with higher cognitive mobilization, which is closely

related to internal efficacy, evaluate international institutions more independently, guided by direct considerations of performance and legitimacy.

Apart from the transfer heuristic model, that seems to apply to the opinion-formation process of those with lower internal efficacy, there is also the substitution approach. This approach suggests that, in certain circumstances, cue theory does not apply, and a cost benefit analysis is used instead to guide one's opinion on national and international governance. This is done after an evaluation of the IO or national government on the bases of performance, inclusion or other types of perceived fairness (Kritzinger, 2003). This was the case with the Kurdish population in Turkey, who reported a higher-than-average trust in the UN compared to the ethnically Turkish population because the national government in Turkey was seen as oppressive to the local Kurdish population (Karakoç, 2013). International institutions like the European Parliament were seen as providing relief for this perceived oppression. The substitution approach requires a critical comparison of the political reality that one resides in, be it through having to deal with the political realities on a day-to-day basis and seeing the difference between national and international governance as a result, or through being politically capable and able to discriminate between different levels of government and their legitimacy or functionality. In Kritzinger's (2003) foundational study on EU trust, a distinction is made between conditional and non-conditional evaluations. Those with low internal efficacy will not evaluate the EU but judge it conditionally, based on their experiences and beliefs on the domestic level. Those with high internal efficacy will evaluate the EU based on 'quite a high level of information about both the EU and the nation-state in order to enable independent judgement'. This leads to the second hypothesis:

H2: Respondents with high Internal Efficacy will have a negative relationship between the level of trust in their national government and the level of trust in international organizations on average.

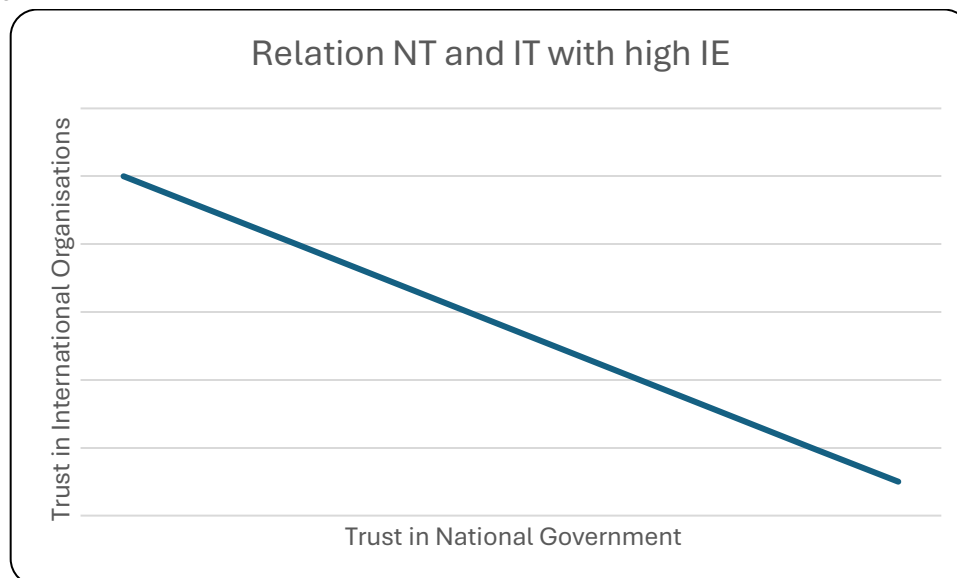


Fig 2. The expected relation between Trust in National Government (NT) and Trust in International Organizations (IT) with high Internal Efficacy (IE)

This will result in the following Conceptual model.

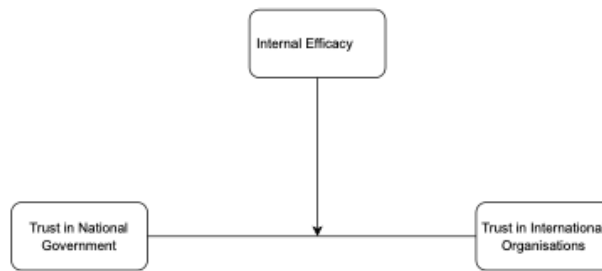


Fig 3. Conceptual model Trust in National Government (NT) and Trust in International Organizations (IT) moderated by Internal Efficacy (IE)

2.5 External efficacy

In addition to internal efficacy, external efficacy is introduced as a second-order moderator, influencing how internal efficacy conditions the relationship between national and international trust. External efficacy is a way to measure the perceived potential ability of an individual to change the political system. It plays an instrumental role in people's perception of their national government institutions, as well as their perception on international institutions. Whereas internal efficacy reflects a citizen's perceived political competence, external efficacy captures the perceived influence of the individual on political institutions (S. C. Craig et al., 1990). This might seem conceptually similar to internal political efficacy, and while they seem to correlate positively with each other, factor analysis shows that they are distinctly separate concepts. Empirical studies show that internal efficacy alone is insufficient to explain political trust; it must be understood in context (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2014). Similarly, the relationship between external efficacy and political trust also is positively correlated. This is unlike the relationship between internal efficacy and political trust. Since external efficacy captures perceptions of responsiveness and fairness, it closely aligns with the core attributes that define institutional trust, while being distinctly separate concepts (S. C. Craig et al., 1990).

Due to the complicated ways that external efficacy reacts with internal efficacy, this paper adopts a moderated moderation framework, positing that the moderating role of internal efficacy on cue-based trust depends on the broader perceived political environment, as captured by external efficacy. Individuals can have as much internal efficacy as they would like, if they perceive the country they live in as one where they are unable to impact the political process to a satisfactory degree, their trust in government can be impacted negatively. Therefore, the moderating variable of 'Internal efficacy' is in many ways dependent on the external efficacy as a context variable.

2.6 Relationship between external efficacy and cue theory

The literature describing the interaction between external efficacy and usage of heuristics in determining one's opinion on IO's is quite scarce. Both concepts are studied individually, but the interaction between both is not looked at in detail (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016; S. C.

Craig et al., 1990). In the following paragraphs both concepts and the expected relationship between them will be discussed.

The established political sociological research tends to describe external efficacy as the ‘voice’ a citizen can express in a political system (Lamprianou & Charalambous, 2018). Both a citizens’ ‘voice’ and external efficacy reference the degree that one can influence their political environment. Due to the ‘voice’ mechanism, entities that are close to a citizen, such as the police and other implementing institutions, enjoy higher levels of trust. This is because people can interact with them and potentially change their policies (Denters, 2002). In systems with high levels of external efficacy, individuals feel as if the system around them can be changed. The research suggests that if individuals perceive their local political system to be malleable, they may feel like their participation matters and thus be motivated to be informed and engage more systematically. Some scholars argue that internal and external efficacy both lead to an increase in political participation, thereby likely increasing their ability to distinguish between different levels of government (De Moor, 2015). For example, a person who trusts that their vote will count might invest effort in learning about issues instead of just following party cues, because they feel empowered to make a difference.

2.7 Relationship between external efficacy and cue theory for low internal efficacy individuals

A strong sense of external political efficacy, the belief that government is responsive to people’s input, can therefore buffer against overreliance on simplistic cues. When citizens feel that “*leaders do care about people like me,*” they see more incentive to engage actively and seek information, even if their personal confidence (internal efficacy) is low. Research shows that people with higher external efficacy are *more* likely to get involved in politics (voting, attending meetings, contacting officials), whereas low external efficacy can undermine participation (Lai & Beh, 2025). In other words, believing one’s voice will be heard gives even a less confident individual a reason to invest effort rather than defaulting to minimal-effort decision making. This engagement often translates into less dependence on cognitive shortcuts. Voters commonly rely on heuristics, party labels, slogans, or cues from trusted figures, when detailed policy knowledge is lacking (Lamprianou & Charalambous, 2018). However, if a person trusts the system’s responsiveness, they are less likely to retreat into cynicism. Such an individual might still use cues, but they do so critically, knowing their choice matters.

Importantly, feeling externally efficacious also counteracts the specific heuristic of populist anti-elite appeals. A core element of populist attitude is a perception of powerlessness or lack of external efficacy (Akkerman et al., 2013). Studies consistently find that feelings of political powerlessness correlate strongly with anti-elite, populist sentiments. Conversely, those who perceive government as responsive are far less prone to embrace the “rigged system” narrative. In a cross-national survey of 15 European countries, Bene and Boda (2023) observed that individuals with higher external efficacy exhibited significantly lower populist attitudes. Likewise, Piterová and Loziak (2024) report that people who feel disempowered and ignored by elites are much more likely to agree with populist

statements, implying that empowerment through external efficacy would reduce that agreement. In short, trusting that “*the system listens*” undermines the appeal of simplistic us-vs-them cues that often guide low-efficacy voters. In summary, external efficacy influences how those with low internal efficacy use heuristics. Politically alienated individuals who trust government responsiveness are more likely to participate and thoughtfully engage with issues, believing their actions can have an impact. This leads to the third hypothesis:

H3: Heuristics usage in the formation of opinions about IO's will decrease for individuals with lower internal efficacy as the amount external efficacy increases.

2.8 Relationship between external efficacy and cue theory for high internal efficacy individuals

The literature suggests that this decrease in heuristic-usage at higher levels of representativeness is not necessarily similar for all individuals, however. The relationship between general heuristic usage and external efficacy does get expanded upon in Pippa Norris's *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited* (2011), which is a seminal contribution to the scientific literature on political trust and external efficacy. Norris claims that citizens in advanced democracies have become more critical in their orientations, deeply valuing democratic principles while voicing dissatisfaction with the performance of their democratic institutions. These critical citizens have arisen because of demand and supply factors. On the demand side, societal modernizations, such as an increase in education or cognitive skills and emancipative values have increased the public aspirations for democracy. The supply side, the performance and structure of democratic regimes, have not appeared to keep up with these demands. The decrease in political trust in democratic countries is therefore not attributable to a decrease in democratic values among the populace, but a response of a more critical citizen to institutions that cannot accommodate these demands sufficiently. The recent decrease in political trust is sometimes seen as the result of a purely alienated public, but the opposite could not be truer. Instead, Norris argues, critical citizens are active participators in the system and want more or better democracy rather than to reject the democratic system itself. Norris therefore states that the decrease in trust for institutions is the result of a more educated, internally efficacious public, clashing with democracies that are not equipped to handle their requests. The low degree of external political efficacy, paired with a high degree of internal efficacy, does not seem to lead to an increase in political cynicism in high efficacy individuals, as their frustration originates from a desire to be more involved with politics. The critical citizen should not be confused with the dissatisfied democrat, both are different concepts (Fuks et al., 2017). Namely, the critical citizen is politically active and bumps up against the limits of their democratic system. This type of citizen is only made more politically aware by experiencing low external efficacy. The dissatisfied democrat, however, does support democracy but simply lacks specific political trust towards the incumbent government and its policies and is unwilling or unable to politically oppose it.

Whether an increase in external efficacy will therefore necessarily lead to less heuristic usage is not clear from the literature, as it seems that those with high internal

efficacy will be more politically active, regardless of the perception that their ‘voice’ will be heard (Prats & Meunier, 2021; Craig & Maggioto, 1982). Even if there are no traditional avenues in which to voice their opinions, these individuals can switch to engaging in politics more extremely than before, for instance, by resorting to violence or social media. Similarly, Hetherington (2005) claims that rising public expectations and the lack of perceived responsiveness of the United States government has led to a decline in institutional trust from American citizens. Here, trust is negatively impacted because individuals perceive the level of external efficacy provided by the American political system as too low. Low external efficacy therefore seems to inspire a critical political lens when it does not match the level of internal efficacy that a population has. Lastly, when individuals feel as though their voice is not being heard by their political system, they are more likely to support direct democracy (Bessen, 2020). This suggests that individuals who feel that they are not being represented are less inclined to use institutional cues to determine their opinion and instead opt to evaluate policy on a case-by-case basis. It therefore seems that, when there is a mismatch between one’s perceived internal ability to change the system around them, and the actual malleability of the system, one’s reliance on heuristics may decrease. This leads to the fourth hypothesis.

H4: Heuristics usage in the formation of opinions about IO’s will decrease for individuals with high internal efficacy as the amount external efficacy decreases.

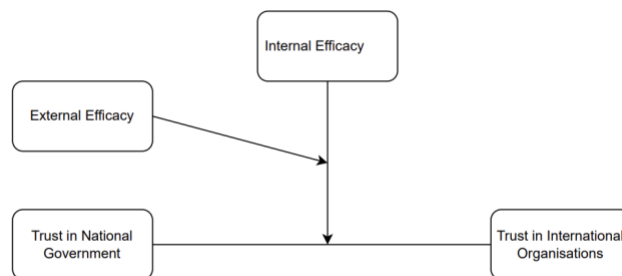


Fig 4. Conceptual model Trust in National Government (NT) and Trust in International Organizations (IT) moderated by Internal Efficacy (IE), moderated by External Efficacy

2.9 Other potential factors

Other factors, such as generalized social trust or ideology, have been suggested as more fundamental sources of trust in IO’s and national governments (Dellmuth & Tallberg, 2018). People with higher social trust tend to have a higher baseline trust in national and international government. However, these would not work within our model, as it does not impact the formation of the opinion, because it does not have an impact on the relationship between national and international trust. It does not explain why these two are linked, just that both might be higher for a person that has high social trust. It is a predictor and not a moderator. For this reason, ideology is also not a theoretically supported moderator of cue usage.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic should also be mentioned. This event has been associated with fluctuations on national and international trust. For instance, the early moments of this crisis seemed to cause a ‘rally around the flag’ effect. Survey evidence from early in the pandemic showed increased diffuse trust in government and even higher satisfaction with democracy immediately after lockdowns, suggesting that effective crisis management can temporarily boost public confidence (Zoch & Wamsler, 2024). However, subsequent data indicate these trust gains were not fully sustained. By 2023, overall trust in national governments had edged back down from its 2021 peak, and many countries are again confronting trust deficits. During the time of the lockdown, trust in international organizations declined during the early stages of the COVID-crisis but has now returned to roughly pre-pandemic levels (Colloca et al., 2024). The diverging natures of national and international trust could potentially have an influence on the OECD results; however, the abovementioned scientific literature suggests that these effects were short-lasting. This post-pandemic volatility does highlight that trust can be context-dependent and fragile; surging or depleting during acute emergencies but vulnerable to decline as normal politics resumes or if expectations are unmet.

A theoretical limitation that should be mentioned concerns the normative assumptions underlying political trust and efficacy. While this thesis highlights the benefits of high internal efficacy and trust in institutions, it is important to recognize that uncritical or unconditional trust is not inherently democratic. It is possible that some respondents in the sample simultaneously report high efficacy and high trust while still endorsing undemocratic attitudes. However, the prevailing concern in contemporary democracies is not over blind trust, but rather a growing crisis of legitimacy. Scholars have increasingly warned that persistently low trust can erode democratic engagement, discourage participation, and fuel the rise of anti-establishment or authoritarian alternatives (OECD, 2024).

3.0 Methodology

3.1 data collection

The data concerning the trust in national government and trust in international government and the data from the moderating variable internal efficacy are taken from the OECD Survey on Public Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (2024a). This data is not available on the website. Therefore, I emailed the OECD service desk at govtrustinfo@oecd.org to provide me with this data. The questions seen below are from the OECD methodology published alongside the 2024 Drivers of Trust Report (OECD, 2024a). The operationalizations are based on the conceptualizations that were stated in the theoretical framework. With this existing statistical data, a multivariate regression analysis was performed. This analysis was done with the data analytics software SPSS. The results are then presented as graphs in Excel. To test for moderation effects, the PROCESS macro for SPSS (version 5.0; Hayes, 2024) was used. Model 1 was selected to examine whether internal efficacy moderated the relationship between national trust (predictor) and international trust (outcome).

3.2 Data analysis

In testing the moderation hypotheses, this study applies bootstrapping to estimate confidence intervals for two-way and three-way interaction terms. This technique is particularly useful given that interaction effects often have non-normal sampling distributions, rendering standard errors and p-values derived from normality assumptions potentially unreliable. Following Hayes (2024), 5,000 bootstrap resamples were used to obtain bias-corrected confidence intervals for each interaction term. Bootstrapping thus improves the robustness and reliability of inference, especially in a cross-sectional setting with complex moderation structures. The independent variable and moderator were mean centered prior to computing the interaction term. Johnson–Neyman technique was used to probe the conditional effects of the predictor at varying levels of the moderator.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was also considered but ultimately deemed unsuitable for the research design. The model does not include latent constructs or recursive feedback loops, and the main variables of interest are directly observed or scale constructed. Instead, this framework, with bootstrapped estimates for interactions, provides a transparent and replicable strategy widely validated in political psychology research. In sum, the analytical strategy adopted in this study is both methodologically sound and theoretically coherent, enabling a rigorous test of how internal and external political efficacy moderate the relationship between national and international trust.

Notably, the observed moderation effects may be somewhat attenuated due to measurement limitations. In particular, the absence of a strong direct correlation between internal efficacy and trust supports the theoretical model advanced in this thesis: internal efficacy does not directly affect trust in international organizations but rather shapes how individuals interpret and apply trust cues—such as trust in their national government. This is consistent with contemporary approaches to moderation analysis, where a non-significant main effect of the moderator does not undermine its theoretical or statistical relevance (Hayes, 2024).

3.3 Operationalization

The operationalization has the following parameters:

National trust

National trust will be measured with the following items:

Q2: On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust each of the following?

- The national government

International trust

International trust will be measured with the following items:

Q2: On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust each of the following?

- International organizations

Internal Efficacy

Internal efficacy will be measured with the following items:

Q32. How confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?

[Not at all confident – Completely confident – 97. Don't know]

External Efficacy

External efficacy will be measured with the following items:

Q8. If many people complained about a public service that is working badly, how likely do you think it is that it would be improved?

[Very unlikely – Very likely – 97. Don't know]

Q10. If over half of the people in [COUNTRY] clearly expressed a view against national or central policy, how likely do you think it is that it would be changed?

[Very unlikely – Very likely – 97. Don't know]

Q16. If a decision affecting your local community is to be made by the local government, how likely do you think it is that you would have an opportunity to voice your opinion?

[Very unlikely – Very likely – 97. Don't know]

Q19. If you participated in a public consultation on reforming a policy area, how likely do you think it is that the government would adopt the opinions expressed in the consultation?

[Very unlikely – Very likely – 97. Don't know]

Q31. How much would you say the political system in [COUNTRY] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?

[Not at all – Completely – 97. Don't know]

The internal efficacy scale consisted of 5 items ($\alpha = .87$), making it a reliable scale.

Demographic Information

B11: Being a member of a discriminated group

Gender

Age numerical

3.4 limitations

Several methodological and theoretical limitations should be acknowledged. First, the survey sample comprises participants from diverse cultural and national backgrounds, which may introduce variation in how key concepts, such as "trust", are interpreted. In some cultural contexts, trust may emphasize benevolence or integrity, while in others it may center on procedural competence. However, existing research using Multigroup Confirmatory Factor Analysis has shown that the meaning and structure of trust-related constructs remain sufficiently consistent across countries to allow for meaningful cross-national comparisons (Marien, 2011). Second, the OECD Survey on Public Drivers of Trust presents all institutional trust questions in the same survey block. This design choice may induce consistency bias, whereby respondents provide similar answers across institutions without fully differentiating between national and international trust (Brosius et al., 2020). As a result, the strength of the correlation between national and international trust may be somewhat inflated. Third, both the dependent and independent variables in this study are based on single-item measures. Critiques of single-item indicators note that they lack the depth and internal consistency of multi-item scales, making it impossible to directly assess reliability or capture nuanced facets of a concept. However, there are strong practical and theoretical justifications for their use in large-N cross-national surveys. Single-item measures greatly reduce respondent fatigue and survey length, which is crucial when fielding questionnaires across many countries (Castro et al., 2023). Large comparative projects like the World Values Survey and Eurobarometer have traditionally relied on single questions to gauge political trust in various institutions, in part because including multi-item batteries for each would be prohibitive. Indeed, it is common practice to measure generalized trust in government with a single direct question and this approach has yielded meaningful insights across decades of research (Van Der Meer, 2010; Hetherington & Rudolph, 2008). In this thesis, the OECD survey's enormous sample size (tens of thousands of respondents) helps mitigate random measurement error that might afflict a single item. With more data, the signal (true attitudinal variation) can be distinguished from noise to a greater extent, bolstering confidence in the results. Single-item indicators are therefore a defensible and often necessary choice in large-scale public opinion research. They enable the inclusion of key constructs like trust and efficacy in global surveys, and when carefully designed and interpreted, they provide valid gauges of citizens' sentiments. Lastly, "I don't know" responses were coded as missing values, although some scholars argue these answers may reflect meaningful attitudes, such as political disengagement or low internal efficacy. Nonetheless, in the context of closed-ended questions, there is little evidence to suggest that coding "I don't know" as a separate category would significantly alter the results (Luskin & Bullock, 2011).

4.0 Results

4.1 Correlation matrix

This inductive correlation matrix provides some insight into the relationships between the variables that will be used to test the hypotheses. The matrix shows that age has a small positive correlation with trust in the national government ($r = 0.077$, $p < .001$) and a negative correlation with trust in international institutions ($r = -0.012$, $p < .001$). Age also has a small negative correlation with external efficacy ($r = -0.060$, $p < .001$). The variable 'Man' (coded as Man = 1 and Woman = 0) shows a positive correlation with all relevant variables: National trust ($r = .035$, $p < .001$), Trust in international institutions ($r = .017$, $p < .001$), internal efficacy ($r = .154$, $p < .001$) and external efficacy ($r = .041$, $p < .001$). National trust, as expected, correlates strongly and positively with international trust ($r = .567$, $p < .001$), internal efficacy ($r = .249$, $p < .001$) and external efficacy ($r = .626$, $p < .001$). International trust similarly correlates positively with both internal ($r = .240$, $p < .001$) and external efficacy ($r = .541$, $p < .001$). Lastly, internal efficacy has a strong positive correlation with external efficacy ($r = .385$, $p < .001$).

Correlation matrix

| | <i>n</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Age (Quota) | Man | National Trust | International Trust | Internal Efficacy | External Efficacy |
|------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------------|---------|-------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Age (Quota) | 47923 | 3.85 | 1.654 | 1 | | | | | |
| Man | 50393 | .4847 | 0.4998 | 0.133** | 1 | | | | |
| National Trust | 50731 | 4.715 | 2.8120 | 0.077** | 0.035** | 1 | | | |
| International Trust | 45851 | 5.1271 | 2.4540 | -0.012** | 0.017** | 0.567** | 1 | | |
| Internal Efficacy | 49229 | 4.9338 | 2.8275 | 0.002 | 0.154** | 0.249** | 0.24** | 1 | |
| External Efficacy | 46762 | 4.5868 | 2.0710 | -0.06** | 0.041** | 0.626** | 0.514** | 0.385** | 1 |

Note. Pearson correlation coefficients among the study variables. N varies from 45,000 to 103,000 depending on the variable pair. Correlations significant at the $p < .01$ level are indicated with **.

Fig. 5. Correlation matrix

4.2 Regression analysis

Because the hypotheses presume different interactions between national and international trust depending on the level of internal efficacy of a respondent, a moderation analysis is of interest to verify whether internal efficacy moderates trust at all. However, before a moderation effect can be assessed, the relevant variables need to be mean-centered to avoid multicollinearity (where the interaction variable correlates with the dependent and independent variables due to shared variance, making it difficult to interpret the unique contribution of the interaction term) (Aiken et al., 1991). Mean-centering refers to the process of transforming a variable by subtracting its mean from each of its observed values, thereby rescaling it to have a mean of zero. The dependent variable does not need to be mean-centered. As is shown in Figure 6, the mean level of National Trust was $M = 4.72$ ($SD = 2.81$), Internal Efficacy was $M = 4.93$ ($SD = 2.83$), and External Efficacy was $M = 4.60$ ($SD = 2.07$), all measured on a 0–10 scale.

| Variable | N | Minimum | Maximum | M | SD |
|-------------------|--------|---------|---------|--------|---------|
| National Trust | 101543 | 0.00 | 10.00 | 4.7159 | 2.81202 |
| Internal Efficacy | 94938 | 0.00 | 10.00 | 4.9338 | 2.82753 |
| External Efficacy | 81357 | 0.00 | 10.00 | 4.5968 | 2.07100 |

Note. Valid N (listwise) = 73,476.

Fig. 6: descriptive statistics of National Trust, Internal Efficacy, and External Efficacy

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether internal political efficacy moderates the relationship between national trust and international trust. The overall model was statistically significant $F(2,79,781) = 18,654.35$, $p < .001$, and explained 31.9% of the variance in international trust ($R^2 = .319$, adjusted $R^2 = .319$), indicating a large effect size ($F^2 = 0.47$). National trust was a significant positive predictor of international trust $B = 0.494$, $SE = 0.003$, $\beta = .565$, $t(79,781) = 193.14$, $p < .001$. The interaction term (National Trust \times Internal Efficacy) was also significant, $B = -0.007$, $SE = 0.001$, $\beta = -.023$, $t(79,781) = -8.01$, $p < .001$. Following this, a moderation analysis was conducted on the following formula:

$$Y = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Z + b_3(X \cdot Z)$$

Y = International Trust

b0 = Intercept

b1 = National Trust (Mean-centered)

b2 = Internal Efficacy (Mean-centered)

b3 = Interaction Variable (Mean-centered)

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the effects of National Trust and its interaction term (INT1) on International Trust. The overall model was significant, $R = .319$,

Adjusted $R^2 = .319$, $F(2, 79781) = 18654.35$, $p < .001$, indicating that the model explains approximately 32% of the variance in International Trust.

Coefficients

| Predictor | B | SE B | β | t | p |
|----------------|-------|------|---------|---------|--------|
| Constant | 2.917 | .014 | - | 213.702 | < .001 |
| National Trust | .494 | .003 | .565 | 193.140 | < .001 |
| INT1 | -.007 | .001 | -.023 | -8.007 | < .001 |

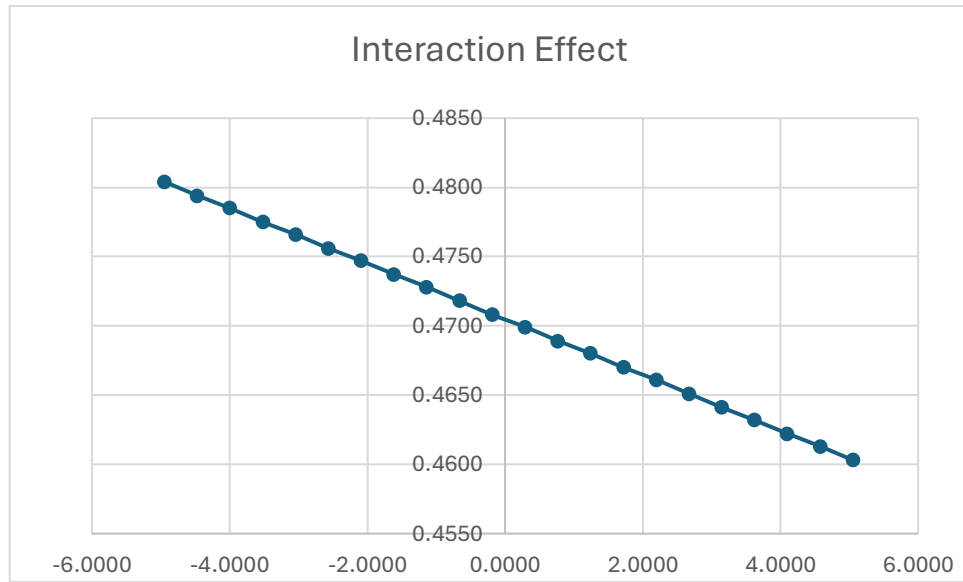
Note. INT1 = Interaction term; SE B = Standard Error of B; β = Standardized Beta.

*Fig. 7: Multiple Regression analysis with INT (National trust * Internal Efficacy)*

4.3 Moderation analysis between internal efficacy and heuristic usage

Following this initial moderation analysis to confirm whether a moderation was even present, a more comprehensive moderation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (version 5.0; Hayes, 2024; Model 1) to examine whether internal political efficacy moderated the relationship between national trust (predictor) and international trust (outcome). All continuous variables were mean-centered. Bootstrapping with 5,000 samples was used to generate bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals.

The overall model was significant, $F(3,79780) = 12,978.30$, $p < .001$, explaining 32.8% of the variance in international trust ($R^2 = .328$, $MSE = 3.9971$). National trust significantly predicted international trust, $B = 0.4705$, $SE = 0.0026$, $t = 178.38$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.4653, 0.4756] as did internal efficacy, $B = 0.0879$, $SE = 0.0026$, $t = 33.69$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.0828, 0.0930]. The interaction between national trust and internal efficacy was statistically significant, $B = -0.0020$, $SE = 0.0008$, $t = -2.43$, $p = .015$, 95% CI [-0.0036, -0.0004], indicating a very small but reliable moderation effect. The change in R^2 associated with the interaction term was statistically significant, $\Delta R^2 = .0000$, $F(1,79,780) = 5.89$, $p = .0152$. A Johnson–Neyman analysis indicated that the conditional effect of national trust on international trust remained statistically significant across the full observed range of internal efficacy values. For example, at low levels of internal efficacy (-2.94 SD), $B = 0.4764$, $SE = 0.0038$, $t = 126.91$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.4690, 0.4837], at the mean, $B = 0.4704$, $SE = 0.0026$, $t = 178.60$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.4652, 0.4755], and at high levels (+3.06 SD), $B = 0.4643$, $SE = 0.0035$, $t = 133.36$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.4575, 0.4712]. No regions of non-significance were identified using the Johnson–Neyman technique. The data from the moderation analysis were plotted on the graph below;



Note: The X-axis shows the levels of internal efficacy and the Y axis showing the interaction effect between National and International Trust.

Fig. 8: Graph depicting the interaction effect between national trust and international trust at different levels of internal efficacy (moderating variable)

| IE | Effect | se | t | p | LLCI | ULCI |
|---------|--------|--------|----------|--------|--------|--------|
| -4,9433 | 0,4804 | 0,0051 | 94,7337 | < .001 | 0,4705 | 0,4903 |
| -4,4671 | 0,4794 | 0,0047 | 101,1878 | < .001 | 0,4702 | 0,4887 |
| -3,991 | 0,4785 | 0,0044 | 108,3683 | < .001 | 0,4698 | 0,4871 |
| -3,5148 | 0,4775 | 0,0041 | 116,326 | < .001 | 0,4695 | 0,4856 |
| -3,0386 | 0,4766 | 0,0038 | 125,0717 | < .001 | 0,4691 | 0,484 |
| -2,5624 | 0,4756 | 0,0035 | 134,5389 | < .001 | 0,4687 | 0,4826 |
| -2,0862 | 0,4747 | 0,0033 | 144,5246 | < .001 | 0,4682 | 0,4811 |
| -1,61 | 0,4737 | 0,0031 | 154,6151 | < .001 | 0,4677 | 0,4797 |
| -1,1338 | 0,4728 | 0,0029 | 164,116 | < .001 | 0,4671 | 0,4784 |
| -0,6576 | 0,4718 | 0,0027 | 172,0484 | < .001 | 0,4664 | 0,4772 |
| -0,1814 | 0,4708 | 0,0027 | 177,2942 | < .001 | 0,4656 | 0,476 |
| 0,2948 | 0,4699 | 0,0026 | 178,9257 | < .001 | 0,4647 | 0,475 |
| 0,771 | 0,4689 | 0,0027 | 176,5905 | < .001 | 0,4637 | 0,4741 |
| 1,2471 | 0,468 | 0,0027 | 170,6834 | < .001 | 0,4626 | 0,4733 |
| 1,7233 | 0,467 | 0,0029 | 162,1627 | < .001 | 0,4614 | 0,4727 |
| 2,1995 | 0,4661 | 0,0031 | 152,1606 | < .001 | 0,4601 | 0,4721 |
| 2,6757 | 0,4651 | 0,0033 | 141,6558 | < .001 | 0,4587 | 0,4715 |
| 3,1519 | 0,4641 | 0,0035 | 131,3337 | < .001 | 0,4572 | 0,4711 |
| 3,6281 | 0,4632 | 0,0038 | 121,5959 | < .001 | 0,4557 | 0,4706 |
| 4,1043 | 0,4622 | 0,0041 | 112,6328 | < .001 | 0,4542 | 0,4703 |
| 4,5805 | 0,4613 | 0,0044 | 104,5003 | < .001 | 0,4526 | 0,4699 |
| 5,0567 | 0,4603 | 0,0047 | 97,1782 | < .001 | 0,451 | 0,4696 |

Note: the standard error = se , the t-statistic = t , the p-value = p , the Lower Level Confidence Interval = LLCI , and the Upper Level Confidence Interval = ULCI

Fig. 8: Table depicting the interaction effect between national trust (dependent variable) and international trust at different levels of internal efficacy.

The first hypothesis is supported based on the above-listed results, as there seems to be a positive relationship between national and international trust for respondents with low internal efficacy. However, this relationship seems to be positive for every level of internal efficacy. This contradicts the second hypothesis, as the assumption was that individuals with high levels of internal efficacy will have a negative opinion on international institutions if they deem themselves politically competent, as the relationship between one's opinion on national government and IO's is still positive. However, this relationship does show a decline, as is evident in figure 7. Individuals that have low internal efficacy, 2.94 standard deviations below the mean, the interaction effect is the highest ($B = 0.4764$), conversely, individuals with high internal efficacy, 3.06 standard deviations above the mean, have the smallest interaction effect between trust in national government and IO's ($B = 0.4643$).

4.3 Moderated moderation analysis between external efficacy, internal efficacy and heuristic usage

To test whether this relationship is impacted by the introduction of the second moderation variable, external efficacy, a moderated moderation analysis was conducted again using PROCESS v5.0 (Model 3; Hayes, 2024) to examine whether the moderation of the relationship between national trust and international trust by internal efficacy depends on the level of external efficacy. All continuous variables were mean-centered prior to the creation of interaction terms, and bootstrapping with 5,000 samples was used to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(7,73,468) = 5907.04, p < .001$, explaining 36.0% of the variance in international trust ($R^2 = .3601, MSE = 3.8026$). The three-way interaction between national trust, internal efficacy, and external efficacy was significant, $B = 0.0031, SE = 0.0004, t = 8.35, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.0023, 0.0038]$, indicating that the moderating effect of internal efficacy on the national trust–international trust relationship depends on external efficacy. To directly assess Hypothesis 3 and 4 conditional two-way interaction tests were examined at different values of external efficacy. At low levels of external efficacy (-2.24 SD), the interaction between national trust and internal efficacy remained statistically significant, $B = -0.0157, F(1,73,468) = 139.28, p < .001$, with a conditional effect of national trust also significant at this level, $B = 0.3968, SE = 0.0056, t = 71.22, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.3859, 0.4077]$.

| IE | EE | Effect | se | t | p | LLCI | ULCI |
|---------|---------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| -3,0378 | -2,2384 | 0,3968 | 0,0056 | 71,2244 | < .001 | 0,3859 | 0,4077 |
| -3,0378 | 0,1616 | 0,362 | 0,0051 | 71,4276 | < .001 | 0,3521 | 0,372 |
| -3,0378 | 2,1616 | 0,3331 | 0,0074 | 44,967 | < .001 | 0,3185 | 0,3476 |
| -0,0378 | -2,2384 | 0,3497 | 0,0043 | 80,8444 | < .001 | 0,3412 | 0,3582 |
| -0,0378 | 0,1616 | 0,3369 | 0,0034 | 98,7127 | < .001 | 0,3302 | 0,3436 |
| -0,0378 | 2,1616 | 0,3263 | 0,0047 | 70,1148 | < .001 | 0,3172 | 0,3354 |
| 2,9622 | -2,2384 | 0,3026 | 0,0062 | 48,9517 | < .001 | 0,2905 | 0,3147 |
| 2,9622 | 0,1616 | 0,3118 | 0,0047 | 66,6853 | < .001 | 0,3027 | 0,321 |
| 2,9622 | 2,1616 | 0,3195 | 0,0053 | 60,8357 | < .001 | 0,3092 | 0,3298 |

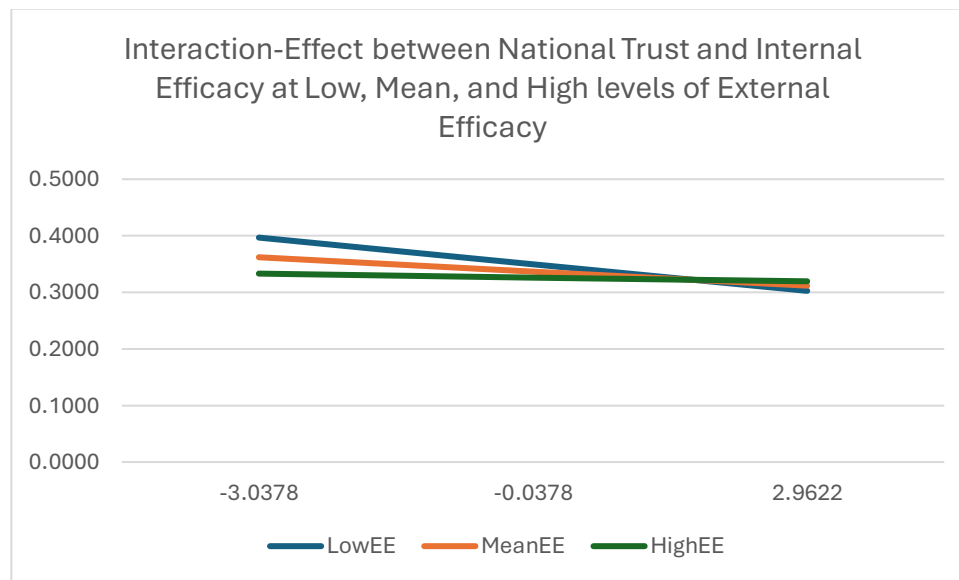
Note: the standard error = se, the t-statistic = t, the p-value = p, the Lower Level Confidence Interval = LLCI, and the Upper Level Confidence Interval = ULCI

Fig. 9: Level of Heuristic usage at different levels of internal efficacy and external efficacy.

From the data you can surmise that H3 and H4 are supported. Indeed, the results seem to differ based on the level of internal efficacy that a respondent possesses. Most heuristic usage is found in individuals who report both low internal and low external efficacy (an interaction effect between national governments and IO's of 0.3968). Heuristic usage decreases for these individuals when external efficacy increases. This supports H3, that predicted that heuristics usage in the formation of opinions about IO's will decrease for individuals with lower internal efficacy as the amount external efficacy increases. When

domestic governments that are deemed more representative, the difference between national government and IO's becomes clearer.

The lowest use of heuristics is reported by people with low external efficacy, but high internal efficacy (an interaction effect of 0.3026). This supports H4; Heuristics usage in the formation of opinions about IO's will decrease for individuals with high internal efficacy as the amount external efficacy decreases. Higher internal efficacy generally seems to decrease heuristic usage; however, this decrease is less noticeable when respondents document high external efficacy, the interaction effect for low internal efficacy (0.3331) and high internal efficacy (0.3195) does not decrease as steeply as with lower levels of external efficacy. For median levels of external efficacy, the decrease in heuristics usage from low internal efficacy (0,3620) to high internal efficacy (0,3118) is 0,0502.



Note: On the X-axis, the levels of Internal Efficacy and on the Y-axis the interaction effect between National and International Trust

Fig. 10: Graph of the level of Heuristic usage at different levels of internal efficacy and external efficacy.

5.0 Discussion

This paper set out to test whether trust in international organizations is shaped by trust in national governments, and whether that relationship is moderated by internal and external political efficacy. This was done by looking at the strength of the correlation between one's trust in national government and trust in IO's (international organizations), at different levels of internal and external efficacy. The higher the correlation between the two variables, the higher the usage of heuristics by the respondent. The results largely support cue theory: on average, respondents who trust their national governments are also more likely to trust international organizations. This aligns with previous findings (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014), which suggest that citizens often extrapolate institutional trust from the national to the supranational level using heuristic reasoning.

However, the results also confirm that this relationship is not uniform across all individuals. As was hypothesized in H1, relationship between national trust and trust in international institutions was highest for low internal efficacy individuals. Those who do not perceive themselves as politically sophisticated, were most likely to use heuristics to determine their opinion on international governmental organizations. However, while this relationship remained positive and significant for all levels of internal efficacy, partially contradicting H2, the strength of the relation did decrease proportionally to one's level of internal efficacy. This indicates that among respondents with higher internal political efficacy, the relationship between national and international trust weakens. This is in line with substitution theory (Karakoç, 2013), politically confident individuals may assess international organizations independently of national cues, or even in opposition to them. This supports the idea that internal efficacy disrupts reliance on heuristics and enables more autonomous, comparative evaluations of governance.

The results also support H3, as heuristic usage did decrease with higher levels of external efficacy, for individuals with lower internal efficacy. This is in line with the current theoretical understanding of external efficacy. Namely, an increase in external efficacy would lead to an increase in political involvement because one feels like their vote matters, even at lower levels of internal efficacy (De Moor, 2015). Inversely, a decrease in external efficacy is understood to lead to an increase in heuristic usage, as low external efficacy often breeds disengagement or reliance on simplistic cues, and it is a known predictor of populist attitudes (Piterová & Loziak, 2024). The results did seem conditional on one's level of internal efficacy, as lower levels of external efficacy seemed to reduce heuristic usage at a higher rate for internally efficacious individuals. This supports H4, as it seems that politically sophisticated individuals are less likely to use heuristics when developing their opinion about IO's, when they perceive themselves to be in a non-representative political context. This is in line with the literature, that supposed that a mismatch between the level of political sophistication of an individual and the representativeness of the system around them, will not lead to an increase in heuristic usage (Norris, 2011). The results seem to suggest that this category of respondents rely the least on heuristics usage. In the following paragraphs all different levels of internal efficacy and external efficacy will be discussed.

5.1 High internal efficacy and high external efficacy

Heuristic usage remained largely similar for persons with a high degree of perceived external efficacy, regardless of their level of internal efficacy. However, politically efficacious individuals are slightly more likely to use cues in contexts they perceive to be representative (high external efficacy), because the interaction effect between national and international trust is the highest in a high external efficacy context, when looking at just high internal efficacy respondents. This provides additional support for H4; a person with a high degree of political sophistication would be more likely to rely on heuristic usage in a representative context, as they do not have the added dissatisfaction that leads to more political participation in unrepresentative contexts (S. C. Craig et al., 1990). One thing that can therefore be surmised from this data is that a lack of faith in the domestic political system, therefore, does not translate to a lack of faith in IO's, even for those who deem themselves politically efficacious. These respondents perceive themselves to be in an unrepresentative environment but can clearly discriminate between national and international governmental levels. This illustrates the nuanced influence that both internal and external efficacy exert on the development of opinions regarding international organizations.

5.2 High internal efficacy and low external efficacy

For those with high internal efficacy but low external efficacy, the data reveals a particularly interesting pattern. Politically sophisticated individuals who perceive their environment as unresponsive or unrepresentative show a notable reduction in heuristic usage compared to their less internally efficacious counterparts. In fact, in these contexts, respondents appear more inclined to scrutinize information independently rather than rely on cues derived from national trust. The interaction effect here (0.3026) is among the lowest observed, signifying that those with confidence in their political understanding are least likely to default to heuristic reasoning when external efficacy is low. This supports the idea presented in H4 that high internal efficacy can act as a buffer against the reliance on heuristics, especially in environments perceived as politically disengaging or unresponsive. These individuals demonstrate an ability to form more nuanced, differentiated opinions about international organizations, even amidst a lack of perceived political voice at the systemic level. This finding underscores the importance of both dimensions of efficacy: while external efficacy shapes overall engagement, internal efficacy equips individuals to operate with a greater sense of autonomy, resisting the pull of simplistic cues in challenging political climates.

5.3 Low internal efficacy and high external efficacy

For individuals with low internal efficacy, heuristic usage was the lowest in contexts that were perceived as high in external efficacy. The level of heuristic usage did not change as drastically between high and low levels of internal efficacy, as with other levels of external efficacy. Those who reside in systems that they deem responsive to their political needs, seem therefore equally able to distinguish between the roles and functions of national and international government across all levels of political sophistication. This is in line with our understanding of external efficacy, as an increase in the perceived representativeness of a

political system, seems to inspire an increased ability to distinguish between different levels of government (De Moor, 2015). Conversely, those in environments with low external efficacy, are more likely to be disengaged from politics and, therefore, more likely to make use of cues (Piterová & Loziak, 2024).

5.4 Low internal efficacy and low external efficacy

Those with low internal efficacy, within an environment they deem to be low in external efficacy, are most likely of all respondents to use heuristics to develop their opinion on IO's. This supports H3, as the expectation was that individuals within environments that are low in external efficacy would be likely to be disengaged with their political environment, which seems to be the case. At low levels of internal efficacy, this effect seems to be the most prominent. It seems that a lack of perceived political voice leads one to be more likely to disengage from politics, leading to a higher usage of heuristics in opinion formation. The results also show that low internal efficacy has a positive relation with heuristics usage, even when moderating for different levels of external efficacy. Those that perceive themselves to be politically unsophisticated and as residing in unrepresentative political contexts, are least able to discriminate between national and international governance levels.

| | Low external efficacy | High external efficacy |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Low internal efficacy | Highest degree of heuristics usage 0,3968 | Low degree of heuristic usage 0,3331 |
| High internal efficacy | Lowest degree of heuristics usage 0,3026 | Low degree of heuristic usage (similar to low internal efficacy/high external efficacy) 0,3195 |

Fig. 10: Simplified matrix low-high internal and low-high external efficacy

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study's findings shed light on the cognitive underpinnings of how citizens form trust in multilevel governance, revealing that trust in international organizations is conditioned by individual political efficacy and cues from national politics. This nuanced understanding carries broader democratic significance. At its core, the result implies that a more informed and efficacious citizenry will not grant trust blindly or transfer loyalties uncritically across levels of government. Such discerning trust is healthy for democracy: in 2025's institutional context, marked by ongoing pandemic recovery, economic uncertainties, and challenges to the liberal international order, democracies depend on citizens who can critically evaluate institutions yet still hold confidence in those that deliver. If internal efficacy can be bolstered through civic education and if external efficacy is strengthened by responsive, accountable governance, citizens are likely to develop trust based on informed judgment rather than reflexive allegiance. Ultimately, fortifying the public's capacity to think independently about institutions while also ensuring institutions perform for the public, will help elucidate the difference between national and international governance. In an era of global challenges that demand cooperation, the ability of international organizations to draw legitimacy from the trust of engaged, efficacious citizens is crucial. By highlighting the conditions under which trust travels across governance levels, this thesis contributes knowledge that is vital for democratic resilience, affirming that trust, when rightly placed and moderated by civic competence, can bind citizens to their institutions at home and abroad in a sustainable, democracy-enhancing way.

6.1 Scientific implications

This paper examines how internal and contextual factors shape opinions about international organizations. Research indicates that citizens often rely on cues rather than rational analysis when forming views on IOs (Marien, 2011). In political science, cue theory explains that people use shortcuts from trusted sources to form opinions, as in-depth analysis is costly (Carmines & D'Amico, 2015). For instance, someone unaware of tariff details may support them simply because a preferred political figure does. In examining political trust in international organizations, individuals often rely on cues from national politics to shape their perspectives on international affairs, a tendency described by the transfer heuristic model (Karakoç, 2013).

Nonetheless, existing scholarship highlights specific individual-level characteristics, such as political sophistication (defined in this thesis as 'internal efficacy'), and a lack of perceived representation (defined in this thesis as 'external efficacy') that can influence the opinion formation process (S. C. Craig et al., 1990). The theory suggests that for individuals with high internal political efficacy the reliance on cue usage decreases, as these individuals are more likely to have the political knowledge to discriminate between national-level and international-level politics (Armingeon and Ceka, 2014; Dellmuth and Tallberg, 2015; Zmerli and Hooghe, 2011). Conversely, the theory suggests that an increase in external efficacy has the same effect, as individuals will be more likely to engage critically with politics if they feel as if they are represented (De Moor, 2015). Furthermore, if individuals feel unrepresented by their political system, they will be more likely to be disengaged from politics (Piterová &

Loziak, 2024). The data from the OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (2024) largely confirmed these hypotheses. Along with the unique effect that highly sophisticated voters in systems that are deemed unrepresentative are the least likely to use cues than any other studied group.

The findings of this thesis thus affirm the critical citizen theory (Hetherington, 2004; Norris, 2011). The lowest usage of heuristics was found in people who were perceived to be in a democratic deficit, as they deemed their ability to participate in politics as high, but they deemed the ability for their political system to be changed as low. The results suggest that these individuals do not become politically defeatist and reliant on cues to determine their opinion. In fact, these individuals display less willingness to deploy heuristics in their assessment on IO's than similarly sophisticated individuals positioned in representative systems. This suggests that the difference between a critical citizen and a dissatisfied democrat is their respective levels of internal efficacy.

This thesis therefore contributes to political psychology and trust research by moving beyond the conventional treatment of political efficacy as a static predictor of trust. Instead, it frames efficacy as a conditional and interactive factor that mediates how individuals use heuristics in environments of political complexity. By showing that internal efficacy reduces reliance on national trust as a cue, and that this effect depends further on the perceived responsiveness of institutions, the study proposes a cognitive-behavioral model of trust formation that is both context-sensitive and psychologically grounded. This reframing has potential applications for understanding citizen decision-making in other domains of politics, including issue voting, media consumption, and institutional evaluations beyond the national level.

Lastly, this thesis has demonstrated the value of adopting a moderated moderation approach to better understand the relationship between national and international political trust. Specifically, the interaction between internal and external political efficacy moderates the extent to which citizens use trust in their national government as a heuristic when forming their opinions about international organizations. This layered model reveals that the influence of national cues is not uniform across individuals, but contingent on their psychological resources (internal efficacy) and their perceptions of institutional responsiveness (external efficacy). Such findings add nuance to political psychology literature and point to the necessity of incorporating interaction effects when studying political trust in multilevel governance contexts.

6.2 Policy recommendations

The understanding of trust formation developed in this thesis has the potential to inform policy decisions that aim to decrease heuristic usage among citizens. Considering the findings of this thesis, it becomes essential to consider targeted strategies that address both internal and external efficacy in the development of public trust toward international organizations. Policy initiatives should, therefore, not only focus on increasing citizens' knowledge and critical capacity but also on fostering a sense of genuine representation within political structures. Empowering citizens to feel both competent and heard is crucial for reducing the reliance on cognitive shortcuts and encouraging a more nuanced, independent engagement with complex international issues. To this end, effective

interventions must bridge the knowledge gap while simultaneously building trust in the responsiveness of institutions. Educational reforms and participatory opportunities are likely to be most effective where they combine elements of skill-building with experiences that demystify the workings of international bodies. Such measures can transform passive spectators into active participants, cultivating a populace that scrutinizes international organizations with both discernment and a sense of agency.

Firstly, to address heuristic use directly, one should focus on enhancing civic education and highlighting how these institutions function, not merely what their roles are. The policy implications are clear: any effort to foster well-founded trust in international organizations should address both the cognitive and representational dimensions of political engagement. Designing interventions that simultaneously build political knowledge and strengthen individuals' sense of being represented can reduce the tendency toward heuristic-based judgments. One practical example that demonstrates how international trust can be strengthened through targeted civic education is Germany's "EU Project Days" (Bundesregierung, 2025). This annual initiative invites national and EU-level politicians to visit schools and engage students in discussions and simulations about European governance. By offering young citizens direct access to policymakers and institutional procedures, the program fosters a deeper understanding of how international institutions operate and how citizens are represented within them. In doing so, it helps reduce reliance on national-level cues by increasing both internal efficacy and factual knowledge, which are key factors in mitigating heuristic-based trust formation. These interventions illustrate how civic education can function as both a means for democratic socialization and a method to foster critical, independent confidence in international organizations.

Secondly, promoting civic education by having citizens attend town halls and speak with local politicians, especially citizens from with low-trust backgrounds, will promote a critical engagement with their political system. The results of this thesis show that promoting internal efficacy has significant positive effects on political behavior. Politically sophisticated individuals are more likely to engage in a critical analysis of their political institutions and less likely to use heuristics. Similarly, showing politically unsophisticated individuals that they can influence the system around them has been shown to decrease heuristic usage as well. An example of this type of policy in action is the Dutch organization ProDemos – House for Democracy and the Rule of Law (ProDemos, 2023). This organization runs programs where students and adults can tour parliament, meet politicians, and engage in role play debates. These are exercises that can increase a sense of internal political efficacy, that one belongs in politics. Furthermore, it can increase external political efficacy as well, by reducing the distance between a citizen and their political system, which could increase the perceived voice that they have within the political system.

Thirdly, IO's should not rely solely on national governments for IO legitimacy. In low efficacy populations, trust in international organizations becomes dependent on trust in national government. This can be volatile and therefore must be countered with an independent communication strategy between IO's and citizens, especially in low-trust environments. A good example of this is the Europe Direct Information Centers (EDICs) (European Union, 2025). There are over 400 EDICs across all EU member states serve as local hubs for direct EU-citizen communication. These centers offer in-person consultations

and educational materials about EU policies, rights and initiatives. These are also purposefully located in smaller cities and rural areas to directly address populations that might feel less connected to IO's.

Fourthly, policymakers and international organizations must recognize that one-size-fits-all approaches to communication or engagement are insufficient in the face of varying efficacy levels. The evidence suggests that the complexity of public attitudes towards international organizations cannot be addressed merely through broad messaging or generic outreach. Instead, populations need to be spoken to in a segmented fashion, considering internal and external efficacy profiles, can ensure that interventions resonate with citizens' lived realities. For instance, in areas where internal political efficacy is high, but representativeness is low, IO's should emphasize their ability to implement policies that can bypass one's national government. Conversely, in areas where internal efficacy is lower, national governments should create avenues where citizens can use their voice.

Lastly, public institutions aimed at improving citizen trust could monitor efficacy as a trust risk indicator. A comprehensive strategy for public trust should also consider the continuous assessment and observation of citizen effectiveness as both an indicator and a forecaster of trust dynamics. Regular assessments, whether through surveys, focus groups, or digital engagement tools, can help institutions remain attuned to shifts in both internal and external efficacy across different segments of the population. By tracking these changes, policymakers and organizations are better equipped to adapt their strategies in real time, responding proactively to emerging trust risks or windows of opportunity. Such data-driven insight lays the groundwork for more responsive, evidence-based interventions, ensuring that trust-building efforts are not only well-meaning but also well-targeted and effective. Integrating these principles into routine practice means that interventions can be evaluated and refined over time, creating a feedback loop that sustains public engagement and strengthens institutional legitimacy. Proactive monitoring also encourages transparency, as organizations openly acknowledge the evolving challenges of public trust and demonstrate a willingness to learn and adapt. In this context, efficacy becomes not just a theoretical concept but a practical tool, one that guides communication, shapes participatory opportunities, and anchors trust-building as an ongoing, adaptive process.

6.3 Limitations

As was mentioned in the methods, the independent and dependent variable of this research were single-item variables. While this allows for less respondent fatigue and is generally useful for surveys meant to be filled out by large sample sizes, such as the 2024 OECD Trust Survey, this does deprive the results of deeper sociological meaning (Castro et al., 2023). Additionally, while the statistical evidence in this study offers robust insights based on the 2024 OECD Trust Survey, the cross-sectional nature of the data limits the ability to make strong causal inferences. It remains possible that preexisting levels of trust shape efficacy perceptions, rather than the reverse. Moreover, the survey's reliance on self-reported measures may introduce social desirability or measurement biases. Future longitudinal studies could help determine the directionality of these effects and track how heuristic substitution behavior evolves over time or across political events. Such work would further enrich our understanding of trust dynamics in democratic societies.

6.4 Suggestions for future research

Following these limitations, there are multiple avenues for extending this research beyond the current scope. Key directions include theoretical refinements and methodological innovations to test the robustness of the findings. An important next step would be to collect longitudinal data or panel surveys to see how the interplay between efficacy and trust changed over time. This research does not determine causality, after all. For instance, having a person interviewed on their level of trust and their level of efficacy over the course of their life, would allow insight in whether increases in internal or external efficacy precede shifts in institutional trust, or vice versa. Such designs help address the limitation of cross-sectional data and would illuminate how heuristic reliance might change in response to real-world developments.

Future research should also examine whether the observed moderated moderation holds in non-OECD contexts or under different regime types. In hybrid or authoritarian regimes, citizens could exhibit different patterns of cue reliance due to varying media environments or state propaganda. Comparing democracies with non-democracies could reveal if high internal efficacy similarly dampens cue-based trust transfer in environments where political freedoms, media systems, and civic education differ. These comparisons would test the generalizability of cue theory under varying institutional conditions.

Furthermore, beyond internal and external efficacy, other factors may condition heuristic trust formation. Partisan identity and media trust are two promising moderators to explore. For example, strong party loyalists might rely on party cues when evaluating international institutions, potentially amplifying or overriding the effect of efficacy. The effect of partisan identity does seem to have an influence on heuristic usage (Dellmuth & Tallberg, 2018). Similarly, individuals with high trust in media might be more influenced by how the media frames international organizations. Incorporating these variables would extend the theoretical model to a broader range of heuristics and information shortcuts, examining whether efficacy similarly moderates those relationships.

To complement survey research, experiments could manipulate informational cues to test their impact under varying efficacy levels. For instance, providing participants with positive or negative cues about an international organization (such as an endorsement by a trusted national figure) and observing whether high-efficacy individuals are less swayed by these cues would offer causal evidence. Experimental and survey-based mixed methods designs can thus probe the psychological mechanisms proposed, strengthening confidence in the moderated moderation effect by observing it in controlled settings. Additionally, using a mixed methods approach would help expand the latent meanings behind ‘trust in international organizations’ as this is a field that lacks much scholarship.

By pursuing these directions, future scholarship can deepen our understanding of how and when citizens use heuristics to form institutional trust. Such work will not only address current limitations but also refine the theoretical linkage between individual-level cognition and trust in multilevel governance systems.

References

- Aiken, L. S., West, S. G., & Reno, R. R. (1991). *Multiple regression: testing and interpreting interactions*. <https://lib.ugent.be/en/catalog/rug01:000241456>
- Akkerman, A., Mudde, C., & Zaslove, A. (2013). How populist are the people? Measuring populist attitudes in voters. *Comparative Political Studies*, 47(9), 1324–1353. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013512600>
- Armington, K., & Ceka, B. (2014). The loss of trust in the European Union during the great recession since 2007: The role of heuristics from the national political system. *European Union Politics*, 15(1), 82–107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116513495595>
- Bene, M., & Boda, Z. (2023). A safety net against populism? An investigation of the interaction effect of political efficacy and democratic capacities on populist attitudes. *Political Research Exchange*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736x.2023.2220385>
- Bessen, B. R. (2020). Rejecting representation? Party systems and popular support for referendums in Europe. *Electoral Studies*, 68, 102219. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102219>
- Bienstman, S., Hense, S., & Gangl, M. (2023). Explaining the ‘democratic malaise’ in unequal societies: Inequality, external efficacy and political trust. *European Journal of Political Research*, 63(1), 172–191. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12611>
- Brosius, A., Van Elsas, E. J., & De Vreese, C. H. (2020). Trust in context: National heuristics and survey context effects on political trust in the European Union. *European Union Politics*, 21(2), 294–311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116519896010>

- Bundesregierung. (2025). *Was ist der EU-Projekttag an Schulen?* | Bundesregierung. Die Bundesregierung Informiert | Startseite. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/eu-projekttag-2025-1677048>
- Carmines, E., & D'Amico, N. (2015). Emerging trends in the social and behavioral sciences. In *Wiley eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118900772>
- Casiraghi, M. C. M., Curini, L., Maggini, N., & Nai, A. (2024). Who looks up to the Leviathan? Ideology, political trust, and support for restrictive state interventions in times of crisis. *European Political Science Review*, 16(3), 317–332. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1755773923000401>
- Castro, M. S., Bahli, B., Ferreira, J. J., & Figueiredo, R. (2023). Comparing Single-Item and Multi-Item Trust Scales: Insights for Assessing trust in Project Leaders. *Behavioral Sciences*, 13(9), 786. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13090786>
- Colloca, P., Roccato, M., & Russo, S. (2024). Rally ‘round the flag effects are not for all: Trajectories of institutional trust among populist and non-populist voters. *Social Science Research*, 119, 102986. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2024.102986>
- Craig, S. C., Niemi, R. G., & Silver, G. E. (1990). Political efficacy and trust: A report on the NES pilot study items. *Political Behavior*, 12(3), 289–314. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00992337>
- Craig, S., & Maggioto, M. (1982). Measuring Political Efficacy. *Political Methodology*, 8(3), 85–109. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25791157>

- De Moor, J. (2015). External efficacy and political participation revisited: The role of perceived output structures for State- and Non-State-Oriented action forms. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 69(3), 642–662. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsv055>
- Dellmuth, L. M., & Tallberg, J. (2018). Why national and international legitimacy beliefs are linked: Social trust as an antecedent factor. *The Review of International Organizations*, 15(2), 311–337. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-018-9339-y>
- Denters, B. (2002). Size and Political Trust: Evidence from Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom. *Environment and Planning C Government and Policy*, 20(6), 793–812. <https://doi.org/10.1068/c0225>
- Devine, D. (2024). Does political trust matter? A meta-analysis on the consequences of trust. *Political Behavior*, 46(4), 2241–2262. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-024-09916-y>
- Devine, D., & Valgarðsson, V. O. (2024). Stability and change in political trust: Evidence and implications from six panel studies. *European Journal of Political Research*, 63(2), 478–497. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12606>
- Dimdins, G., Priedols, M., Austers, I., Gaina, V., & Leja, V. (2024). The Structure of Individualized and Generalized Political Trust: A Network Analysis of Data from Two Representative-Sample Studies. *SAGE Open*, 14(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241281541>
- Downs, A. (1957). *An Economic theory of democracy*. New York : Harper.
- Easton, D. (1975). A Re-Assessment of the concept of political support. *British Journal of Political Science*, 5(4), 435–457. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/193437>

- Etzel, M. (2023). Value orientation and external political efficacy: assessing the relationship between traditional values, progressive politics and political responsiveness. *Comparative European Politics*, 21(2), 258–283. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-022-00326-0>
- European Union. (2025). *Meet us, EU centres* | *European Union*. https://european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/meet-us_en
- Fitzgerald, J., & Wolak, J. (2014). The roots of trust in local government in western Europe. *International Political Science Review*, 37(1), 130–146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512114545119>
- Fuks, M., Casalecchi, G. A., & Araújo, M. M. (2017). Are dissatisfied democrats critical? Reevaluating the concept of the critical citizen. *Opinião Pública*, 23(2), 316–333. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1807-01912017232316>
- Hayes, A. F. (2024). *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach*. <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB1323391X>
- Hetherington, M. J. (2004). *Why trust matters: declining political trust and the demise of American liberalism*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA70483387>
- Hetherington, M. J., & Rudolph, T. J. (2008). Priming, performance, and the dynamics of political trust. *The Journal of Politics*, 70(2), 498–512. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381608080468>
- Hooghe, M., & Marien, S. (2012). A comparative analysis of the relation between political trust and forms of political participation in Europe. *European Societies*, 15(1), 131–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2012.692807>

- Jovanović, V., & Lazić, M. (2018). Is longer always better? A comparison of the validity of single-item versus multiple-item measures of life satisfaction. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 15(3), 675–692. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-018-9680-6>
- Karakoç, E. (2013). Ethnicity and Trust in National and International Institutions: Kurdish Attitudes toward Political Institutions in Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 14(1), 92–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2013.766986>
- Kritzing, S. (2003). The influence of the Nation-State on individual support for the European Union. *European Union Politics*, 4(2), 219–241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116503004002004>
- Lai, R., & Beh, L. (2025). The impact of political efficacy on citizens' e-Participation in digital government. *Administrative Sciences*, 15(1), 17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15010017>
- Lamprianou, I., & Charalambous, G. (2018). Cue theory and international trust in Europe: The EU as a proxy for trust in the UN. *International Studies Review*, 20(3), 463–488. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viy007>
- Luskin, R. C., & Bullock, J. G. (2011). “Don’t know” means “Don’t know”: DK responses and the public’s level of political knowledge. *The Journal of Politics*, 73(2), 547–557. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381611000132>
- Marien, S. (2011). Measuring political trust across time and space. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID2539667_code1523476.pdf?abstractid=2539667&mirid=1&type=2

- Marien, S., & Hooghe, M. (2010). Does political trust matter? An empirical investigation into the relation between political trust and support for law compliance. *European Journal of Political Research*, 50(2), 267–291. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2010.01930.x>
- Mayer, A. K. (2011). Does education increase political participation? *The Journal of Politics*, 73(3), 633–645. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s002238161100034x>
- Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited*.
<http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB05323223>
- OECD. (2024a). *OECD Trust Survey Design and Technical documentation annex to the OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions: - 2024 results*. OECD Trust Survey Design and Technical Documentation.
https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/support-materials/2024/07/oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-2024-results_eeb36452/2023%20Trust%20Survey%20-%20Technical%20annex.pdf
- OECD. (2024b). *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 results*.
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en>
- Piterová, I., & Loziak, A. (2024). A comprehensive model for predicting populist attitudes. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 12(1), 73–88.
<https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.11539>
- Prats, M., & Meunier, A. (2021). Political efficacy and participation: An empirical analysis in European countries. In *OECD. OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*.
<https://doi.org/10.1787/4548cad8-en>

ProDemos. (2023). *ProDemos; Huis voor Democratie en Rechtsstaat*. <https://prodemos.nl/>

Sanchez, G. R., & Middlemass, K. (2022, July). Misinformation is eroding the public's

confidence in democracy. *Brookings*.

[https://www.brookings.edu/articles/misinformation-is-eroding-the-publics-](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/misinformation-is-eroding-the-publics-confidence-in-democracy/#:~:text=In%20conjunction%20with%20the%20circulation,vote%20does%20not%20make%20a)

confidence-in-

democracy/#:~:text=In%20conjunction%20with%20the%20circulation,vote%20does%20not%20make%20a

s%20not%20make%20a

Turper, S., & Aarts, K. (2015). Political trust and sophistication: taking measurement

seriously. *Social Indicators Research*, 130(1), 415–434.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-1182-4>

Van Der Meer, T. (2010). In what we trust? A multi-level study into trust in parliament as an

evaluation of state characteristics. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*,

76(3), 517–536. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852310372450>

Wilson, C. W. R. W. D. C. (2024, August 6). *Race & Political Trust: Justice as a unifying*

influence on political trust. American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

[https://www.amacad.org/publication/daedalus/race-political-trust-justice-unifying-](https://www.amacad.org/publication/daedalus/race-political-trust-justice-unifying-influence-political-trust#:~:text=Sadly%2C%20Americans%E2%80%99%20trust%20in%20government)

influence-political-

trust#:~:text=Sadly%2C%20Americans%E2%80%99%20trust%20in%20government

,19

Wrighton, S. (2022). Trust in international relations, public diplomacy and soft power.

British Council. [https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/trust-international-](https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/trust-international-relations-soft-power)

relations-soft-power

Zmerli, S., & Hooghe, M. (2013). Political trust : why context matters. In *ECPR Press eBooks*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB12725657>

Zoch, G., & Wamsler, S. (2024). From rally to reality: unveiling long-term dynamics in political trust over two years of COVID-19 in Germany. *Political Research Exchange*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736x.2024.2403438>

Annex I: Email to Oecd Service Desk (govtrustinfo@oecd)

Dear OECD Trust Team,

My name is Allard Zeegers, and I am a student at the CIFE European Institute currently completing a thesis as part of my academic program. My research examines the relationship between trust in national and international institutions, with a particular focus on how internal and external efficacy moderate this relationship. The central dataset underpinning my analysis is the OECD's 2024 Survey on Public Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions.

While the report has been invaluable, I have not been able to locate the raw survey data necessary for the statistical analysis described in my thesis. I would therefore like to kindly request access to the microdata for academic use, specifically:

- Trust in national and international institutions (Q2),
- Indicators of internal efficacy (Q32, Q33),
- Indicators of external efficacy (Q8, Q10, Q16, Q19, Q31),
- Basic demographic controls (B11, D1, D2, D4).

The analysis will be conducted in SPSS, and results will be reported in line with academic standards, with full attribution to the OECD. The thesis will not be used for commercial purposes.

Please let me know if any additional documentation, such as a letter of support from my supervisor or my institution, is required to process this request.

Thank you in advance for your time and assistance.

Warm regards,

Allard Zeegers

CIFE European Institute

Email: allardzeegers@gmail.com

Date of thesis submission: July 2025

Annex II: SPSS Syntax

```
DATASET ACTIVATE DataSet2.
```

```
*Computing the operationalized variables*
```

```
COMPUTE National_Trust=q2_1.
```

```
EXECUTE.
```

```
COMPUTE International_Trust=q2_11.
```

```
EXECUTE.
```

```
COMPUTE Internal_Efficacy=q32.
```

```
EXECUTE.
```

```
RECODE National_Trust International_Trust Internal_Efficacy q8 q10 q16 q19 q31  
(97=SYSMIS).
```

```
EXECUTE.
```

```
RELIABILITY
```

```
  /VARIABLES=q8 q10 q16 q19 q31
```

```
  /SCALE('ALL VARIABLES') ALL
```

```
  /MODEL=ALPHA
```

```
  /STATISTICS=DESCRIPTIVE SCALE
```

```
  /SUMMARY=TOTAL MEANS.
```

```
COMPUTE External_Efficacy=(q8 + q10 + q16 + q19 + q31) / 5.
```

```
EXECUTE.
```

```
FREQUENCIES VARIABLES=Internal_Efficacy
```

```
  /ORDER=ANALYSIS.
```

```
DESCRIPTIVES VARIABLES=Internal_Efficacy
```

```
  /STATISTICS=MEAN STDDEV MIN MAX.
```

```
RECODE gender (2=0) (1=1) INTO Man.
```

```
EXECUTE.
```

```
*****
```

```
*Correlation table*
```

```
CORRELATIONS
```

```
  /VARIABLES=Discriminated age_quota Man National_Trust International_Trust  
Internal_Efficacy
```

```
  External_Efficacy Low_internal_Efficacy
```

```
  /PRINT=TWOTAIL NOSIG FULL
```

/MISSING=PAIRWISE.

mean centering

DESCRIPTIVES VARIABLES=National_Trust International_Trust Internal_Efficacy
External_Efficacy
/STATISTICS=MEAN STDDEV MIN MAX.

COMPUTE meanNational_Trust=National_Trust - 4.715864.
EXECUTE.

COMPUTE meanInternal_Efficacy=Internal_Efficacy - 4.933788.
EXECUTE.

COMPUTE meanExternal_Efficacy=External_Efficacy - 4.596841.
EXECUTE.

DESCRIPTIVES VARIABLES=meanNational_Trust meanInternational_Trust
meanInternal_Efficacy
meanExternal_Efficacy
/STATISTICS=MEAN STDDEV MIN MAX.

COMPUTE INT1=meanInternal_Efficacy*meanNational_Trust.
EXECUTE.

interaction variable analysis NOT using centered variables

REGRESSION
/MISSING LISTWISE
/STATISTICS COEFF OUTS R ANOVA
/CRITERIA=PIN(.05) POUT(.10)
/NOORIGIN
/DEPENDENT International_Trust
/METHOD=ENTER National_Trust INT1.

now creating two more two-way interaction variables, and one more three-way interaction
terms*

DATASET ACTIVATE DataSet2.
COMPUTE INT2=meanExternal_Efficacy * meanNational_Trust.
EXECUTE.

```
COMPUTE INT3=meanInternal_Efficacy * meanExternal_Efficacy .  
EXECUTE.
```

```
COMPUTE INT4=meanInternal_Efficacy * meanExternal_Efficacy * meanNational_Trust.  
EXECUTE.
```

Hayes (2024) PROCESS macro does not allow itself to be pasted into the Codebook