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To cite this article: Shlomo Mizrahi , Eran Vigoda-Gadot & Nissim Cohen (2020): Antecedents of trust in the judiciary: between fair process and high satisfaction, International Public Management Journal, DOI: [10.1080/10967494.2020.1819920](https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2020.1819920)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2020.1819920>



Published online: 07 Oct 2020.



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# Antecedents of trust in the judiciary: between fair process and high satisfaction

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## ABSTRACT

This article explains the antecedents of trust in the judiciary. We question both the contention that procedural justice is a main explanation of trust in the judiciary and outcome-based theories that emphasize the role of distributive justice and court decisions in explaining that trust. Using arguments from the public management literature regarding institutional trust, the paper offers a rationale for an output-based theory that adds public perceptions about the judiciary's effectiveness and performance as explanations of trust in the judiciary. We also include interpersonal trust as an independent variable. We use a sample of Israeli citizens to test our hypotheses. Findings indicate that both output variables and process variables are important in explaining trust in the judiciary. However, the direct impact of the output variables in the form of perceptions about the judiciary's performance is stronger than the process variables. This result calls for an integrated approach to explaining trust in the judiciary.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 October 2019

Accepted 2 September 2020

## Introduction

In recent decades the scholarly literature has established the idea that trust in the judiciary, and other law enforcement authorities, is an essential component of effective and sustainable democracy (Benesh 2006; Grimmelikhuijsen and Klijn 2015; Tyler 2006). These institutions depend on the cooperation of citizens and the legitimacy they accord them in order to function properly. The public's trust in these institutions is a key factor in obtaining this cooperation (Levi, Sacks and Tyler 2009).

Derived from this idea is the extensive scholarly interest in explaining the determinants of trust in the judiciary. Existing explanations tend to focus on determinants such as procedural justice (Benesh and Howell 2001; Grootelaar and Van Den Bos 2018; Tyler 2001; Tyler and Hou 2002; Vermunt and Steensma 2016), personal experience with these authorities (Benesh and Howell 2001; Grootelaar and Van Den Bos 2018; Wenzel et al. 2003), trust in other institutions (Hansen 2017), ideology and partisanship (Çakir and Şekercioglu 2016; Johnston et al. 2014) and media coverage (Gibson and Caldeira 2009; Grimmelikhuijsen and Klijn 2015; Johnston and Bartels 2010). However, these explanations often marginalize factors that the literature on institutional trust highlights – notably, the organization's performance and generalized trust, which refers to trust in other members of society.

This article explains the antecedents of trust in the judiciary, focusing on the interplay between process and output variables in explaining trust. We suggest that citizens care about the fairness of processes and procedures, but also want satisfactory judicial services. This is true not only for

those who are directly involved and have personal experience with the judiciary but also for the general public. Furthermore, we maintain that citizens establish their trust in the judiciary based not only on the system's characteristics but also on their trust in other members of society. In other words, there are relationships between institutional trust and generalized trust. This approach in the literature on trust in the judiciary is relatively rare.

The paper's contribution is threefold. First, we present a research framework incorporating the impact that both process and output variables may have on trust in the judiciary. The existing literature discusses the interplay between these variables and their combined effect on trust but only to a limited extent (Gibson and Caldeira 2007, 2009; Grootelaar and Van Den Bos 2018). Furthermore, when considering outputs and outcomes, the literature usually refers to court decisions or distributive justice rather than to citizens' satisfaction with judicial institutions and services (Dougherty et al. 2006; Ulbig 2002). Utilizing this latter definition of outputs, we consider possible relationships between these variables and test for mediation. Second, the research framework also considers the impact of generalized trust on trust in the judiciary, pointing to non-system variables that might help explain institutional trust in the judiciary. Thus, we test the relationship between a combination of variables and trust in a way that the literature rarely discusses (Gibson and Caldeira 2009). Third, while many researchers emphasize personal experience as an independent variable that influences trust and focus their empirical investigation on those who are directly involved with the system, in this article we utilize the evaluations of the general population. We suggest that these evaluations provide an accurate indication of social support for the judiciary and therefore of the strength and stability of this system in the democratic state (Benesh 2006; Gibson and Caldeira 2007; Levi et al. 2009).

The empirical analysis uses a national survey of 550 Israeli citizens. The paper measures the variables at the aggregate macro level, meaning that we refer to the procedural justice of the judiciary in general and citizens' satisfaction with the performance and services of the judiciary as a whole.

The Israeli case is interesting because for many years Israelis have expressed high levels of trust in the judicial system, especially the Supreme Court, while trust in other public institutions has been relatively low (Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi 2014). In addition, Israel is a relatively young democracy in a heterogeneous and very divided society, meaning that achieving procedural justice is extremely difficult. It is therefore challenging as well as interesting to try to explain why trust in the judiciary is relatively high.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the literature and the hypotheses derived from it. The third section describes the research model and methodology. The fourth section presents the findings, and the fifth section discusses the theoretical insights and contributions of the paper.

## **Institutional trust in the judiciary, processes, outputs and generalized trust**

The research on public opinion about the judiciary goes back decades, as the roles and independence of the legal system expanded in many democracies (Vermunt and Steensma 2016). Given that courts depend on the public acceptance of, and cooperation with, their operation and rulings, the literature has explored the sources of the public's willingness to consent to the directives of legal authorities extensively. Tyler and Huo (2002) argue that legal authorities benefit when people accept their decisions and become self-regulating, meaning that they follow legal decisions and rules because they think that they ought to do so, irrespective of whether they believe that the legal authorities might sanction them for noncompliance. Tyler and Huo (2002) then show that legal compliance depends primarily on the fairness of the processes and procedures of law enforcement authorities, and overall views about the legitimacy of these authorities. Hence, procedural justice is the process-based criterion by which individuals evaluate whether they were

treated fairly (Tyler and Wakslak 2004). Ultimately, it can mean the difference between satisfied and disaffected citizens. These views encompass the attitude that the legal authorities deserve to be obeyed and that the individual ought to defer to their judgments due to a feeling of obligation or responsibility (Tyler 1990; 2007). These authors test the impact of these two variables vis-à-vis variables related to outcomes and trust as other possible determinants of legal compliance. Extensive research in that tradition highlights procedural justice and trustworthiness or legitimacy as leading explanations of compliance with the legal authorities (Levi et al. 2009; Tyler 2007).

Nevertheless, there are indications that the dominance of procedural justice in explaining compliance may be overstated (Grootelaar and Van Den Bos 2018). Gibson and Caldeira (2007) suggest that symbolic discourse that positions the Supreme Court as different from ordinary political institutions reinforces the public esteem toward the Court as a representative of higher values. This creates a “positivity bias” among citizens meaning that citizens think more positively of the Supreme Court as compared to other political institutions. On the other hand, actual events may teach the public that the Court is not different, that its role is largely “political,” and that the “myth of legality” really is a myth (Scheb and Lyons 2000). According to these arguments, external rather than internal factors primarily explain the level of legitimacy the public accords the Court.

Indeed, given that most citizens do not frequently engage with law enforcement authorities on a daily basis, their trust in these authorities, rather than their willingness to comply, is a more important factor for the effective functioning of these authorities (Benesh 2006; Bühlmann and Kunz 2011). Public trust can empower public officials, leading to greater effectiveness and improved management (Boateng and Cox 2016; Bouckaert 2012; Cleary and Stokes 2009; Favero et al. 2016; Hardin 2006; Sønderskov and Dinesen 2016; Warren 1999). It can also motivate coordination between the various players in the public sector and reduce the transaction costs that have become prohibitive in many economic and administrative systems (Robbins 2012; Rothstein and Stolle 2008).

Trust in government and the factors influencing it have been studied extensively from various perspectives (Bouckaert 2012; Hardin 2006; Luhmann 1988; Sønderskov and Dinesen 2016). There are several working definitions, but the core idea used in public administration studies is that trust in government reflects the “faith people have in their government” (Citrin and Muste 1999; Nannestad 2008). It indicates the citizens’ overall evaluation of how government works and their confidence in the good intentions of public officials to promote the public interest (Citrin and Muste 1999; Coulson 1998; Luhmann 1988). Levels of trust are generally measured by surveys and interviews using several indicators.

The judicial system includes public organizations, such as courts, and public servants such as judges, government attorneys, prosecutors and administrators. As such, this system is an integral part of the public sector, meaning that we can analyze public attitudes about, and trust in, them in terms of institutional trust (Grimmelikhuijsen and Knies 2017; Hansen 2017; Jackson et al. 2012; Van de Walle 2009). The scholarly literature highlights various factors that may influence public trust in the judiciary.

### ***The influence of system variables on public trust in the judiciary***

Citizens may form their beliefs and expectations about the judiciary based on a wide array of factors. Basically, the process and procedures by which the judiciary system operates is the most crucial element in shaping citizens’ views and attitudes. The significance of processes and procedures for the effective functioning of organizations and the public sector has been evident since the early works of Weber (1947). Optimal models of bureaucracy explain how clear procedures can improve the functioning of organizations, and empirical studies demonstrate how this actually works in reality (Bendor 1990). Until the 1970s, both research and practice promoted the goals of

efficient and effective procedures in public sector organizations (Moe 1984; Niskanen 1971). Yet, since the 1970s, the idea of fair and just processes and procedures has migrated to research and practice in those areas. The pioneering works of Rawls (1971) and Thibaut and Walker (1975) led the way, and the seminal works of Tyler (1990, 2012) further established the major role of procedural justice in the functioning of public organizations in general and law enforcement entities in particular. From a different perspective, the analysis of Gibson and Caldeira (2007, 2009) implies that the ruling process and the challenges the Court faces may position it as a political player and hence influence the legitimacy and trust the public accords it.

Vermunt and Steensma (2016) review the history and main aspects of procedural justice, defining it as fair treatment that people experience in their interactions with public authorities (Gonzales and Tyler 2007). Thibaut et al. (1972) demonstrate how the procedures used to arrive at a court decision have strong effects on how people perceive the fairness of the judgment, independent of the favorability of the outcome. Studying procedural justice in a legal setting, Thibaut and Walker (1975) argue that people want either decision control or process control because control may help achieve desirable outcomes. Process control is also a voice channel (Folger 1977).

Procedural justice may play various roles. First, fair procedures that include consistency, the suppression of bias, accuracy, the ability to appeal, representativeness and ethical conduct may have instrumental value for organizational functioning (Leventhal 1980; Vermunt and Steensma 2016). Second, fair procedures and treatment may indicate a positive relationship between the person and the related group or authority (Lind and Tyler 1988; Tyler and Lind 1992). Third, procedural justice may play a role in providing necessary information, due, for example, to increasing transparency (Steensma and Visser 2007; Vermunt and Steensma 2016).

There is a great deal of research regarding the determinants of procedural justice. However, in this article we focus on the ways in which procedural justice may influence more generalized outputs and outcomes, particularly organizational performance and public trust. The scholarly research has identified several possible consequences of procedural justice. Fair procedures increase people's willingness to accept authoritative decisions and promote cooperation with legal, political and organizational authorities (Tyler 2012; Tyler and Lind 1992). In effect, fair procedures generate positive attitudes toward and trust in the legal system (Hough et al. 2013; Tyler 2006). In the terms of the current study, this consequence of procedural justice implies that fair procedures most likely have a positive relationship with trust in the judiciary (Dougherty et al. 2006; Grootelaar and Van Den Bos 2018). Hence, our first hypothesis states that:

**Hypothesis 1:** The perceived procedural justice of the judicial system is positively related to trust in the judiciary.

In contrast to the process-oriented perspective, studies about institutional trust in general and the judiciary in particular show that the quality and nature of the outputs and outcomes that administrative organizations produce may also influence trust. Nevertheless, as far as trust in the judiciary is concerned, the definition and measurement of outputs and outcomes differ significantly among studies. One approach defines judiciary outcomes as policy outcomes derived from court rulings, notably, distributive justice. Based on Sunshine and Tyler (2003), Dougherty et al. (2006) explain that, "Distributive fairness focuses on citizens' perceptions concerning the outcome of the dispute resolution process, particularly whether the authorities deliver outcomes fairly to people and groups" (p. 179). According to this approach, an increase in distributive justice or fairness results in increased public trust in the authorities (Ramirez 2008; Ulbig 2002). However, the logic of this approach is rather vague because many players are involved in producing such outcomes, and it is unlikely that citizens will attribute distributive fairness mainly to court decisions. Indeed, Hough et al. (2013) posit that it is harder to understand, and therefore influence and change, the sources of outcomes such as distributive justice than those of procedural justice. This difficulty explains the scholarly focus on procedural justice.

Another approach refers to specific court rulings on meaningful issues and their immediate impact on trust in the judiciary (e.g., Johnston et al. 2014; Grootelaar and Van Den Bos 2018). However, this approach is open to different interpretations as to the values and outcomes that the rulings reflect and therefore requires complex qualitative analysis over a long period of time.

A third approach views the judiciary as composed of public organizations that provide judicial services (Dougherty et al. 2006). As such, judicial organizations have to provide services that meet high standards of effectiveness and efficiency, or in other words, demonstrate good performance. According to this approach, improvements in the public's evaluations of judicial performance increase their trust in the judiciary. While the public management literature has supported this argument in general (Bouckaert 2012; Chanley et al. 2000; Keele 2007; Khan 2016), it is far less studied in the area of trust in the judiciary where the myth of legality may play a role (Gibson and Caldeira 2007; Scheb and Lyons 2000). In the current paper, we focus on this aspect, testing whether it is a main antecedent of trust in the judiciary.

Furthermore, we measure citizens' perceptions of judicial performance based on their satisfaction with the quality of the service and management. The public management literature has identified both factors as leading to distributive fairness (Rothstein and Uslaner 2005). We also test whether procedural justice and social trust relate to citizens' satisfaction with these two factors.

Indeed, procedural justice may influence the way people perceive outcomes and payoffs. The willingness to accept negative outcomes, such as a reduction of payment, increases if people regard the processes leading to such outcomes as fair. Such a result occurs, for example, when information and explanations about the processes and outcomes are provided (Greenberg 1993; Modde and Vermunt 2007; Vermunt and Steensma 2016). This logic most likely guides citizens when evaluating the quality of judicial services and management, meaning that procedural fairness may influence these evaluations. Hence, our second hypothesis follows.

**Hypothesis 2:** The perceived procedural justice of the judicial system is positively related to citizens' satisfaction with the judiciary.

As explained above, studies on institutional trust have established that organizational performance and service quality are positively related to trust in public sector organizations (Bouckaert 2012; Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi 2014). Specifically, an effective public sector that provides satisfactory services to citizens creates a positive atmosphere for trusting attitudes among the citizenry (Bouckaert 2012; Chanley et al. 2000; Keele 2007; Khan 2016). Nevertheless, ordinary citizens often do not have enough information to evaluate the quality of institutions and the effectiveness of managerial processes (Gilens 2011). The quality of the management and institutions in the public sector determines the effectiveness of public sector management and hence government effectiveness. These terms include both individual skills and the institutional structures that allow these skills to flourish. In many respects the quality of management and institutions is synonymous with effective management and government, which ultimately determine the quality of the goods and services provided by the government. The practical method for determining these evaluations is by measuring the level of citizens' satisfaction with public services (Boyne 2003; Mcloughlin 2015). Hence, based on the well-established association between citizens' satisfaction and institutional trust in general and in the judicial system in particular (Gibson et al. 2003), our third hypothesis follows.

**Hypothesis 3:** Citizens' satisfaction with the judiciary is positively related to trust in these authorities.

Combining Hypotheses 2 and 3, a fourth hypothesis regarding mediation emerges.

**Hypothesis 4:** Citizens' satisfaction with the judiciary mediates the relationship between perceived procedural justice and trust in the judiciary.

We should note that there might be other system characteristics that influence trust in the judiciary indirectly. Examples include the degree of trust citizens have in other institutions



(Hansen 2017), the nature of the political system (Çakir and Şekercioğlu 2016), and the scope and nature of media coverage (Johnston and Bartels 2010). However, in this article we refer only to the characteristics of the judicial system itself as variables that directly influence trust in the judiciary. Other system-oriented explanations are beyond the scope of the paper.

### ***The influence of generalized social trust on public trust in the judiciary***

The political culture approach to analyzing the exact role of institutional trust in democracies suggests that mass attitudes and social norms matter for democratic outcomes (Nannestad 2008; Parry 1976). Supported by rationales developed in the context of the social capital theory, it argues that widespread inter-personal trust is one of the most important social norms (Inglehart 1988; Keele 2007; Robbins 2012; Sønderskov and Dinesen 2016; Uslaner 2002). Generalized trust encourages moderation in political conflicts and fosters cooperation among citizens (Putnam 2000).

Nannestad (2008) reviews the research and insights related to generalized trust in various comparative settings. Survey-based studies commonly use the following question to measure the level of generalized trust – “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” Nannestad (2008) shows that there is within-country stability of the levels of generalized trust as well as the existence of relatively stable cross-country patterns in the responses to the question. He suggests that this stability may reflect the fact that respondents apply essentially the same mental frame when selecting their response, and that this mental frame has a certain stability over time. The level of generalized trust reflects social norms and culture, and thus can be understood in the context of the political culture approach to analyzing institutional trust.

Indeed, discussing the empirical evidence regarding the consequences of generalized trust, Nannestad (2008) concludes that generalized trust is essential for cooperation and most important for social integration and for positive social, economic, and political outcomes for society (Beugelsdijk et al. 2004; Uslaner 2002; Whiteley 2000). Generalized trust helps avoid or solve collective action problems and reduces transaction costs, as, for example, in principal-agent situations (Hardin 2006; Nannestad 2008). Specifically, there are indications that generalized trust has a positive effect on economic outcomes (Beugelsdijk et al. 2004; Putnam 1993; Uslaner 2002), government performance (Knack 2002; Uslaner 2002), and the continuity and effectiveness of the universal welfare state (Rothstein and Uslaner 2005; Svallfors 2002).

At the same time, trust in other people in society may affect trust in government institutions. Keele (2007) shows that social capital appears to be the factor that accounts for the decline in trust since the 1960s. Social capital refers to the social connections, networks, and interpersonal trust that occur in communities (Putnam 1993; 2000). It has two aspects – civic engagement in local and national communities, and interpersonal trust or the willingness to believe in the good intentions of others. There are indications that citizens who distrust others also tend to distrust government (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Keele 2007; Putnam 2000). Applying this rationale to the judicial system, our fifth hypothesis follows.

**Hypothesis 5:** Generalized social trust is positively related to public trust in the judiciary.

However, more focused analyses indicate that generalized trust influences specific dimensions of government performance such as performance with respect to human resources and with respect to information technology (Knack 2002). Nannestad (2008) concludes that this finding may indicate that when people in society trust each other, they tend to follow fair procedures within and between organizations instead of engaging in opportunistic behavior. In other words, high levels of generalized trust also increase procedural fairness. Uslaner (2002) finds that the level of generalized trust has a clear opposite impact on the level of corruption. In the context of

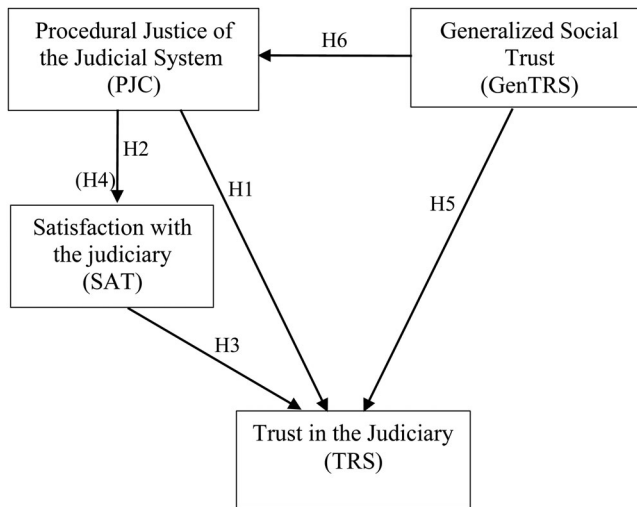


Figure 1. The research model.

our research this finding implies that generalized trust influences procedural justice, which then influences the performance of judicial organizations. Hence, our sixth hypothesis states that:

**Hypothesis 6:** The perceived procedural justice of the judicial system mediates the relationship between generalized social trust and citizens' satisfaction with the judiciary.

Finally, various studies indicate that for many people the media is their main source of information about the judiciary (Johnston and Bartels 2010). However, they may assign different levels of reliability to information provided by the media (Georg and Jakob 2010), and may think that the information is biased (Johnston and Bartels 2010). Therefore, in order to test whether the information citizens receive about the judiciary relates to their trust in it, we measured these three aspects and checked whether the interaction between them intervened in the relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

Overall, our research hypotheses attempt to explain institutional trust in the judiciary through the integration of system and non-system variables. This integration is relatively new in this research area.

## Research model and method

Figure 1 presents the research model. It portrays the relationships among four variables: citizens' trust in the judiciary (TRS) as the dependent variable, citizens' satisfaction with the judiciary (SAT), citizens' perceptions about the procedural justice of the judicial system (PJC), and citizens' perceptions about generalized social trust (GenTRS). Hypotheses 1, 2, 3 and 5 expect direct relationships between the variables, while Hypotheses 4 and 6 posit mediated relationships. We also control for demographic variables, experience with the judiciary and the type of knowledge citizens have about the judiciary.

## Sample and procedure

To test our model and hypotheses, we created a sample of 550 Israeli citizens. In order to verify that the sample was not underpowered, we used a program called GPower (link: <http://gpower.hhu.de>). It indicated that power in the size of 0.95 with 5 predictors could be achieved with fewer than 100 participants. Hence, our sample was not underpowered.



Participants were asked to report their perceptions about, and attitudes toward, the judicial system using a close-ended questionnaire and a procedure that has been developed and applied to similar populations in Israel since 2001 (Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi 2014). Data were collected in June 2017 through an Internet panel of participants from an Israeli research institute – iPanel. Panel surveys have many advantages, but also have disadvantages such as panel selection bias and panel attrition (Lohse et al. 2000). To compensate, the sample was designed so that it represented the Israeli population in most relevant dimensions. Anonymity was assured, and the response rate was 65%.

The sample represented the distribution of the Israeli population as reported by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. Of the total sample, 48% were men and 52% were women, as compared to 49% and 51% respectively in the entire population. The average age was 39.60 years (s.d.=14.3) as compared to 42 in the population above 18 years old, and the average years of education was 13.9 (s.d.=3) as compared to 13.5 in the population. Of the sample, 92% were Jews and only 6% Arabs, as compared to 78% and 21% (with 1% “others”) respectively in the population, meaning that the sample represented mainly the Jewish population. A breakdown by income showed that 22.3% had a monthly income lower than the average (around \$2,500), 43% had an average income, and 25% reported an income higher than average. With regard to involvement with the judicial system, 67% reported that they had no direct contact with the judicial system during the year prior to the survey, 23.4% reported one time of direct involvement and 9.6% reported three times or more of direct contact with the judicial system. With regard to information about the judicial system, 81.3% reported that their main source of information was media coverage, yet only 56% trusted this coverage to a certain extent, and 67.7% believed that the media coverage of the judicial system tended to be negative and critical.

In order to verify that the sample distribution corresponds to the distribution among the overall Israeli population, we applied a chi-square test for statistical differences for gender, age, income, education and ethnic origin. The test indicates good fit ( $p = 0.001$ ) in the distribution of gender, income and education, while for age and ethnicity the fit is not significant. For age the sample includes more young people than in the general population, while in the ethnic dimension the sample is clearly biased toward the Jewish population. Thus, throughout the analysis we control for age to see whether the relative bias toward the young population influence the results. We further acknowledge that in terms of ethnicity, the sample mainly represents the views of the Jewish population.

## **Measures**

We utilized established measures previously used and validated in past studies on trust in the public sector (Grimmelikhuijsen and Knies 2017; Sacks and Larizza 2012; Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi, 2014) and on attitudes toward the judicial system (Gibson et al. 2003; Hansen 2017). We conducted confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses with AMOS software and conventional Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  tests. For all variables, participants indicated their responses on a scale ranging from 1 to 5.

### ***Trust in the judiciary (TRS)***

This variable was measured by two items indicating the response to the questions: “Rate the extent to which you trust”: 1) “judges” and 2) “Supreme Court judges.” The consistency of this variable was  $\alpha=.89$ .

### ***Satisfaction with judicial services (SAT)***

This variable was measured by two items indicating the response to the questions: “Rate the extent to which you are satisfied with”: 1) “the quality of service in the court system” and 2) “the quality of the management in the court system.” The consistency of this variable was  $\alpha=.83$ .

### ***Perceptions about the procedural justice of the judicial system (PJC)***

This variable was measured by two items that encompass the various dimensions of procedural justice – fair and equal treatment, and equal representation of interests (Dougherty et al. 2006; Vermunt and Steensma 2016). The two items are: “Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement”: 1) “The courts in Israel emphasize fair and equal treatment for all people” and 2) “Among judges in Israel there is adequate representation for all groups and sectors in society.” The consistency of this variable was  $\alpha=.68$ . Although this level of consistency is not too low to allow analysis, we also analyzed the data using only the first item above as a measurement of PJC. The findings were quite similar, so we retained the two-item measurement.

### ***Perceptions about generalized social trust (GenTRS)***

This variable was measured by one item that corresponded to the question commonly used in survey-based studies (Nannestad 2008). The item we used indicates to what extent the respondents agreed with the statement: “I have a lot of trust in people who are different from me in their views and way of living.” This is the most direct wording that indicates the personal feelings of citizens about their generalized trust in society.

### ***Personal experience with the judiciary***

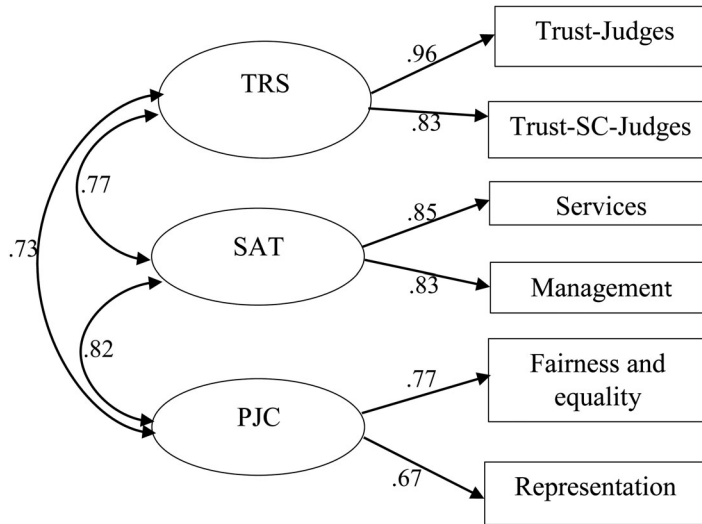
To measure this variable, we asked respondents to report how many times in the last twelve months they had direct experience with the judicial authorities. Answers could range from zero to more than five times.

### ***Information received about the judicial system***

Various studies indicate that for many people the media is their main source of information about the judiciary (Johnston and Bartels 2010). However, they may assign different levels of reliability to information provided by the media (Georg and Jakob 2010), and may think that the information is biased (Johnston and Bartels 2010). Therefore, in order to test whether the information citizens receive about the judiciary relates to their trust in it, we asked the respondents to rate their agreement with three statements on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): 1) “My main source of information about the judiciary is the mass media” (SourceMedia); 2) “The information that the mass media provide about the judiciary is reliable” (ReliabilityMedia) and 3) “Most of the time the media coverage of the judiciary is negative” (NegativeCoverage). The two last variables - ReliabilityMedia and NegativeCoverage – intervened in the direct relationship between SourceMedia and TRS as moderators. Therefore, we calculated the interaction between these three items (SourceMedia X ReliabilityMedia X NegativeCoverage) to determine the kind of information the respondents received about the judiciary and their sense about its reliability and bias. A higher score on each item indicates that for these respondents, the mass media is their only source of information. They believe that the information provided is reliable and that most of the time the coverage is negative. We then tested whether this factor related to trust in the judiciary.

In addition, the respondents reported their age, gender, income and education, which we used as control variables.

To assess construct validity, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS for SPSS based on the research model and variables presented above (Sargeant et al. 2014). For each of the three latent variables we checked how the various items loaded and eliminated those factors that indicated low loadings. Figure 2 presents the loading for each factor where all are above the cutoff point of 0.6. The fit indices are good with a chi-square of 3.958, 6 degrees of freedom, and a probability level of .682, meaning that the model is not significantly different from the data



**Figure 2.** First-order confirmatory factor analysis of perceptions of the judiciary and society with standardized coefficients using AMOS for SPSS.

and hence fits them. In addition,  $CMIN/DF=.66$ ,  $CFI = 1$ ,  $TLI = 1$ , and  $RMSEA=.00$ . All of the coefficients in the model are significant. The confirmatory factor analysis indicates that trust in the judiciary (TRS) is strongly related to satisfaction with judiciary services and management (SAT) and to procedural justice (PJC). Strong relationships also exist between satisfaction with judiciary services and management and procedural justice. Hence, the confirmatory factor analysis supports our measurement tools and the logic of our research model.

### Data analysis

We conducted a path analysis of the relevant variables to determine the sequential relationships among the sets of hypotheses presented above. The analysis also controls for age, gender, income and education, which are the most relevant individual characteristics for the research setting, and helps address potential common source bias, which has become an issue for lively debate among public administration scholars in recent years (Favero and Bullock 2015; Meier and O'Toole 2013). Common source bias is a systematic error variance that is a function of using the same method or source (Richardson et al. 2009). Meier and O'Toole (2013) argue that citizens' surveys of government performance often contain valuable information that can be gathered in no other way. Segmentation according to individual characteristics showing that these factors distribute normally can solve most of the problems in such surveys because they strengthen random effects (Gormley and Matsa 2014).

In addition, we controlled for experience with the judiciary and information received about it. We also tested whether these factors mediated or moderated the relationship.

### Findings

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, zero-order correlations and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the research variables. It indicates that Israeli citizens express low to medium levels of satisfaction with judicial services and management (Mean = 2.77, S.D=.89) and few have higher levels of trust in the judiciary (Mean = 2.96, S.D = 1.07). Respondents also rate the procedural justice of the judicial system at a low to medium level (Mean = 2.86, S.D = .94) but their generalized trust

**Table 1.** Multiple correlation matrix and descriptive statistics for the research variables (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in parentheses).

	Mean (S.D.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Citizens' Satisfaction (SAT)	2.77 (.89)	(.83)								
2. Procedural Justice of the Judicial System (PJC)	2.86 (.94)	.62***	(.68)							
3. Trust in the Judiciary (TRS)	2.96 (1.07)	.66***	.57***	(.89)						
4. Generalized trust (GenTRS)	3.30 (.92)	.13***	.16***	.20***						
5. Income	3.02 (1.11)	.06	.05	.12**	-.04					
6. Education	3.97 (1.29)	.05	-.02	.09*	-.06	.18**				
7. Age	39.6 (14.3)	.08	.10*	.16***	.09*	.14**	.01			
8. Gender		.13**	.11**	.08	.07	-.13**	-.06	.02		
9. Experience with the Judiciary (frequency)	1.48 (0.83)	-.06	-.04	-.04	.02	.04	.04	.06	-.08	
10. Knowledge (SourceMedia X ReliabilityMedia X NegativeCoverage)	28.9 (21.33)	.27***	.31***	.38***	.22***	-.002	-.005	.06	.06	-.09*

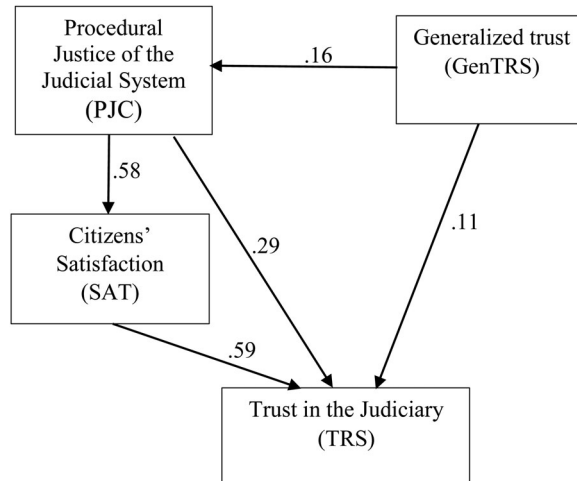
\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .\*\* $p < 0.01$ .\* $p < 0.05$ .

is relatively high (Mean = 3.30, S.D.=.92). The mean value of the variable that represents the information citizens receive about the judiciary is relatively low (Mean = 28.9 where the maximum is 125, S.D = 21.33), but it is difficult to determine the exact reason for this result. Further statistical tests of this issue are beyond the scope of this article.

As Table 1 illustrates, all of the inter-correlations hold in the expected directions. In addition, none of the inter-correlations between the independent variables exceeds the maximum level of .70, which is a good indication of the absence of multicollinearity among the variables. Indeed, the correlation between procedural justice and satisfaction with judiciary services and management is 0.62. While this result is not too low, it might indicate mediation rather than multicollinearity. In addition, income, education and age are significantly and positively related to trust in the judiciary. The variable that represents citizens' knowledge about the judiciary is also positively related to trust as well as to the three independent variables. This result means that people who get their information about the judiciary from the mass media, trust this information and believe that media coverage of the judiciary is negative will tend to trust the judiciary.

To examine the research hypotheses further and to understand the empirical relationships between the theoretical hypotheses presented above within a single framework, we used a SEM model created by the AMOS software. A SEM model tests possible path dependency and indicates the extent to which the model fits the data using statistical fit indices. If a model fits the data, its significance should be greater than 0.05. Figure 3 illustrates the empirical findings and the relationships between the variables. The fit of the path model is good. The model has a  $\chi^2$  of 9.74 with 1 degree of freedom ( $p=.324$ ), CMIN/DF = 9.74, NFI is .99 and RMSEA is .00 [90% confidence limits (CL) .00, .01], CFI = 1, and TLI = 1. In other words, the model is not significantly different from the data we collected through the survey and reflects the empirical answers strictly and properly.

The empirical model supports our hypotheses. All of the relationships presented in Figure 3 are significant. It shows that public perceptions regarding the procedural justice of the judiciary (PJC), satisfaction with judicial services and management (SAT) and generalized trust (GenTRS) are directly related to trust in the judiciary (TRS), meaning that our data support Hypotheses 1, 3



**Figure 3.** The research findings (Standardized coefficients in the SEM model using SPSS-AMOS).

and 5 respectively. However, the relationships between satisfaction with judicial services and management and trust in the judiciary are the strongest ( $\beta=.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while the relationships between procedural justice in the judiciary and trust in the judiciary are weaker ( $\beta=.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the relationships between generalized trust and trust in the judiciary are the weakest ( $\beta=.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results mean that citizens' perceptions about the performance of the judiciary are directly related to their trust in the judiciary. These perceptions are a stronger factor than process variables such as procedural justice and a much stronger factor than trust in society in general.

As H2 posits, the procedural justice of the judiciary is also directly related to satisfaction with judicial services and management. However, the data only partially support our hypotheses regarding mediation (H4 and H6). Indeed, satisfaction with judicial services and management mediates the relationship between procedural justice in the judiciary and trust in the judiciary, as H4 posits. In addition, in support of H6, the procedural justice of the judiciary mediates the relationship between generalized trust and satisfaction with judicial services and management. Nevertheless, these indirect effects co-exist with the direct effect, meaning that there is only weak mediation. Alternative models that exclude the direct relationships do not fit the data. In addition, we tested for moderation but did not find any significant moderating relations between the variables. We should also note that none of the control variables that appear in Table 1 could be integrated into a SEM model that fits the data.

Hence, our analysis shows that both output and process variables influence trust in the judiciary, but output variables have better explanatory power. Perceptions about social relations and trust in society in general also influence trust in the judiciary, at least to a certain extent.

## Discussion

This article explains the antecedents of trust in the judiciary, focusing on the interplay of process and output variables in explaining that trust. We question the contention that procedural justice is the main explanation of trust in the judiciary – a theme that has dominated the field for at least two decades.

The existing literature discusses the interplay between process and outcome variables and their combined effect on trust only to a limited extent. When considering outputs and outcomes, the literature usually refers to court decisions or distributive justice rather than to citizens' satisfaction with the effectiveness and performance of judicial institutions (Dougherty et al. 2006;

Ramirez 2008; Ulbig 2002). We posit that most citizens will most likely not attribute policy outcomes such as distributive justice to court decisions. Hence, this factor probably has a limited effect on their trust in the judiciary. In a similar vein, Ramirez (2008) argues that: "... outcome-based theories are unable to explain why support for the Court remains high despite public disagreement with Court decisions" (p. 675). He therefore suggests focusing on procedural justice as the main explanation of trust. However, we maintain that understanding judiciary outputs in terms of citizens' satisfaction with an organization's effectiveness and performance may shed new light on outcome-based theories. In effect, we establish a rationale for an output-based, rather than outcome-based, theory for explaining trust in the judiciary.

Applying rationales from the public management literature regarding institutional trust, we establish the argument that citizens' evaluations about output variables such as organizational effectiveness and performance may strongly affect trust in the judiciary. In that respect, we assume that the judiciary has a political, bureaucratic role and is not different from ordinary political institutions, meaning that there is no "positivity bias" among citizens, and the "myth of legality" really is a myth (Gibson and Caldeira 2007; Scheb and Lyons 2000).

The practical method for determining these evaluations is by measuring the level of citizens' satisfaction with public services (Boyne 2003; McLoughlin 2015). Our study also highlights the impact that social relations and interpersonal trust may have on trust in the judiciary – a research direction that has hardly been explored. The combination of citizens' satisfaction with the effectiveness and performance of the judiciary, the perceived procedural justice of the judiciary and trust in society as three possible explanations of trust in the judiciary constitutes an innovative and original theoretical framework in the field.

To test our research model, we refer to the perceptions of a representative sample of the entire Israeli population about the judiciary, rather than focusing on those who are directly involved and have personal experience with the court system, as many studies about law enforcement authorities do (e.g., Grootelaar and Van Den Bos 2018). We claim that the views of the entire population regarding the judiciary are critical for evaluating the strength of democracy, while the views of those who are directly involved with the system may provide specific information about practicalities.

The analysis shows that performance oriented variables, such as satisfaction with services and management, can explain trust in the judiciary better than process variables, such as procedural justice. They are also better explanations than trust in society in general. There are several possible explanations for the dominance of output variables in the form of performance in explaining trust in the judiciary. First, in our sample only a few respondents were directly involved with the judicial system on a regular basis. It is most likely that people who feel removed from the specific procedures and practicalities of a certain system will prioritize outputs over processes. Outputs such as the quality of service and management of the judicial system may influence their own lives much more than procedures such as equal representation or fair treatment. Therefore, such variables also influence their trust in the judiciary more than process variables do.

Second, consistent with Tyler (2001) and Tyler and Huo (2002), evaluations of procedural justice influence the evaluation of service quality and performance of the legal authorities, which then influence trust in the judiciary. The fact that procedural justice is related to trust in the judiciary both directly and indirectly reduces the direct effect as compared to output variables that have only a direct effect. It follows that the interplay between process and output variables and trust is more complex than a mere dichotomy that tries to produce one explanation. An integrated approach is a better reflection of reality and may prove more fruitful. The same rationale may apply to trust in society in general, which is related to trust in the judiciary both directly and through various indirect paths.

Third, in recent decades neo-liberal ideas and NPM reforms have established the theme that outputs and performance matter much more than processes (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2010). These

trends are evident in Israeli society as well, which probably expresses the internalization of this theme in the current survey. Fourth, given that most citizens acquire their information about the judiciary through the mass media, reports about judicial processes may be open to interpretation. In contrast, reports about judicial effectiveness and performance tend to be bit more objective. The survey provides some indications about citizens' views of the media, but this issue is beyond the scope of this article.

Israeli society is very heterogeneous. There are strong tensions between sectors and social groups, meaning that it is difficult to agree on fair and equal judicial procedures (Tyler and Huo 2002). Nevertheless, trust in the judiciary is not low. Our analysis shows that satisfaction with judicial services and management best explain this outcome.

However, despite the dominance of output variables in the form of performance in explaining trust in the judiciary, we should emphasize that process and social variables do have a direct effect as well. While the literature in the field has established the impact of procedural justice on trust in the judiciary, the impact of generalized trust is a new finding.

Generalized trust encourages moderation in political conflicts and fosters cooperation among citizens (Putnam 2000). It is essential for cooperation and, most importantly, for social integration and positive social, economic, and political outcomes for society (Beugelsdijk et al. 2004; Hardin 2006; Nannestad 2008). Trust in other people in society may impact trust in government institutions (Keele 2007). This is especially true for trust in law enforcement authorities such as the judiciary that depend heavily on the cooperation and legitimacy that citizens grant them. Citizens who trust each other will cooperate with these authorities and trust them.

The study has several practical implications. Public trust in the judiciary is essential for maintaining and strengthening democratic values, legitimacy and accountability as well as the social contract between citizens and the state. Our analysis implies that in order to improve trust in the judiciary, public officials should primarily study and evaluate the level of generalized trust in society and plan their goals accordingly. When the generalized trust in society declines, public officials can count less on internalized social solidarity and democratic cooperation. Therefore, they will have to invest more in organizational means to improve trust. As our findings indicate, among these means they should seek ways to improve judicial services and management in order to increase citizens' satisfaction, accompanied by attempts to improve the procedural justice of the judicial system. Public management research provides a rich toolbox for accomplishing these goals. Performance management tools such as setting goals and targets, activities for meeting them and measuring whether they have been achieved can improve the effectiveness of the judiciary and its accountability. Using rationales developed in the context of diversity management, public officials can also improve procedural justice by increasing representativeness and fairness in the system.

Our findings in this article are subject to at least four limitations. First, the current study examined only the Israeli case. Hence, although we may generalize from our experience to other cases, one should remember that different findings might emerge in other places around the world with different institutional settings. Therefore, additional studies should be conducted before generalizing and fully accepting our findings. However, our findings and conclusions may be relevant to societies with similar institutional characteristics.

Second, we collected our data using one survey, meaning that there is the potential of common source bias. Earlier in the paper we referred to Meier and O'Toole (2013) who argue that citizens' surveys of government performance often contain valuable information that can be gathered in no other way. Segmentation according to individual characteristics can solve most of the problems in such surveys (Gormley and Matsa 2014).

Third, in surveys such as the one we conducted there may be a problem of endogeneity, especially reverse causality whereby the dependent variable, trust in the judiciary, influences the independent variables. Indeed, critics of existing explanations of trust often refer to the problem of



reciprocity as a main theoretical challenge. They argue that since it is very difficult to distinguish between cause and effect in trust relations, the research in this area can tell us very little about the origins of trust (Hardin 2006; Keele 2007; Nannestad 2008; Sønderskov and Dinesen 2016). Mizrahi et al (2020) identify such complexities in explaining trust in healthcare organizations arguing that since there is often a strong correlation between satisfaction and trust, which works in both directions, we should re-consider the way we measure trust in surveys.

However, we may also want to recognize that reciprocity is fundamental to trust relations and think in terms of the co-evolution of trust and other variables rather than one-way relations. Indeed, the complex relations of reciprocity may express the complexity of the reality in which public policy evolves. According to this approach, public perceptions of trust, of government performance, as well as of other variables co-evolve through complex processes where each variable influences the other and vice versa. This may seem a chaotic picture of reality but in fact it improves our understanding because theory and reality converge. In practice, this approach means that research in the field of trust should devote significant effort to studying the mutual dependence of trust and variables such as the perceived performance of the public sector, managerial quality in public organizations, distributive and procedural justice, and beliefs about the social responsibility of government to provide services, as well as the ways in which they co-evolve and change simultaneously.

Fourth, the literature suggests various system characteristics that may influence trust in the judiciary indirectly. Examples include the amount of trust citizens have in other institutions, the nature of the political system, and the scope and nature of media coverage. In this article we focus attention on the characteristics of the judicial system itself as variables that directly influence trust in the judiciary. Future research will integrate such variables as well.

Despite its limitations, we feel that our study makes several significant contributions to the understanding of trust in the judiciary, an important pillar of any sustainable democracy. These contributions are thematic, analytical and empirical. Specifically, the paper's contribution is three-fold. First, we present a research framework incorporating the impact that both process and output variables may have on trust in the judiciary. The existing literature discusses the interplay between these variables and their combined effect on trust but only to a limited extent (Gibson and Caldeira 2007, 2009; Grootelaar and Van Den Bos 2018). Second, the research framework also considers the impact of generalized trust on trust in the judiciary, pointing to non-system variables that might help explain institutional trust in the judiciary. Thus, we test the relationship between a combination of variables and trust in a way rarely discussed in the literature (Gibson and Caldeira 2009). Third, while many researchers emphasize personal experience as an independent variable that influences trust and focus their empirical investigation on those who are directly involved with the system, our paper utilizes the evaluations of the general population. We suggest that these evaluations provide a more precise indication of social support for the judiciary and therefore of the strength and stability of this system in the democratic state (Benesh 2006; Gibson and Caldeira 2007; Levi et al. 2009).

We hope that future studies look into other mechanisms that increase our knowledge about trust and its effect on various aspects of democratic institutions. Ultimately, we conclude that for most people, it is the performance of the judicial system that matters the most, but the role of its processes should definitely not be underestimated. There is a need to balance these factors with a careful look at society and the trust that citizens have in one another and their willingness to cooperate.

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