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Abstract

Using Ukraine as an example, this study explores how performance-based and ideational factors interact in shaping institutional trust under wartime conditions. Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) is employed to analyse their joint presence in configurations associated with high and low levels of trust in state institutions. The findings suggest that trust is primarily shaped by performance indicators—economic satisfaction, perceived corruption, and personal safety—while ideational factors such as national identity, war-related ideologies, and democratic values play a secondary role. However, misalignment with dominant ideational narratives tend to exacerbate distrust during conflict, especially when institutional performance is perceived as weak. These results are used to argue that a divergence may appear between regime and institutional legitimacy in conflict-affected regions.

Keywords: Institutional trust, interstate conflicts, legitimacy, Ukraine, fsQCA.

JEL Classification: C1, K4, P2.

Introduction

Ukrainian society has long maintained a complex and often ambivalent relationship with state institutions, primarily characterized by deep-rooted distrust. Empirical studies consistently report low levels of public confidence in state structures, even prior to the onset of the armed conflict (Izha et al., 2020). In comparative perspective, Ukraine frequently appears as an outlier among post-communist democracies, with significantly lower institutional trust than in other countries of the region (Mishler & Rose, 2001).

This persistent deficit of institutional trust in Ukraine raises important questions about its underlying causes. To address these questions, scholars have employed two primary theoretical frameworks: values-based and performance-based. The values-based perspective presents trust as grounded in shared values, norms, and identities that shape citizens' perceptions of institutions (Long & Sitkin, 2024; Pop-Eleches & Robertson, 2018). By contrast, the performance-based approach links trust to institutions' capacity to deliver tangible outcomes, including economic development, impartial public services, and security (Akimova & Ishchenko, 2025).

Despite the apparent explanatory power of the two perspectives, a significant gap persists in empirical research evaluating their relative importance in shaping institutional trust within the unique wartime context of Ukraine. This type of analysis is particularly necessary given the inherently ideational nature of the ongoing conflict (Leaf, 2023) and systematic underperformance of state institutions in economic and political domains. This situation likely contributes to a paradox, evident since the onset of the conflict with Russia: while Ukrainians are committed to defending democratic values and state sovereignty, the majority remains deeply distrustful of the institutions that embody these ideals (Tamilina & Ma, 2025).

The current research attempts to explore the patterns of institutional trust formation within Ukrainian society in the specific wartime context. The novelty lies in departing from the conventional approach of focusing on individual predictors of trust by employing fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA). This method seeks to identify potential combinations of dominant value-based and performance-based conditions that are associated with either high or low levels of institutional trust.

In particular, the analysis shows that high institutional trust is primarily driven by various combinations of performance-related factors. In these configurations, economic satisfaction and security emerge as core elements linked to increased levels of institutional trust. In contrast, values-based factors appear to play a minimal role in fostering high trust. However, their absence contributes to the erosion of institutional trust, particularly when institutional performance is perceived by citizens as poor.

These findings contribute to the literature in two principal ways. First, they demonstrate how roles of values- and performance-based factors of trust are reconfigured in the context of protracted conflict. Second, they provide clear policy-relevant insights for conflict-affected and post-conflict societies by highlighting the most important combinations of conditions under which institutional trust can be sustained in wartime. These insights can be used to formulate empirically grounded recommendations for enhancing institutional legitimacy during and after the war.

Literature Review

Institutional trust refers to the belief that the state will uphold its responsibilities and refrain from actions that could harm citizens. While different cultural and political contexts vary

in how they define these responsibilities and what constitutes harmful behavior, they largely overlap on the key factors that shape both. These factors broadly fall into two main perspectives: values-based and performance-based. The first sees institutional trust as rooted in culture, bearing on long-standing, deeply embedded values and beliefs (Long & Sitkin, 2024; Pernia, 2022). The second assumes that trust stems from the political realm, shaped by how well institutions perform (Haponenko et al., 2024; Mishler & Rose, 2001).

More specifically, the values-based perspective conceptualizes institutional trust as an integral component of broader national culture (Inglehart, 1997). From this standpoint, individuals are regarded as predisposed to either trust or distrust state institutions, based on deeply embedded cultural orientation towards the state, dominant within their society. Similar to general cultural frameworks (Kiley & Vaisey, 2020), institutional trust is understood to form during pre-adult socialization and remain relatively stable over the life course. Change, according to this view, is primarily driven by intergenerational replacement (Inglehart, 2008) or triggered by major exogenous shocks such as crises or armed conflicts. However, even in this case, the evolution of values, beliefs, and attitudes toward the state often follows a path dependent pattern (Putnam et al., 1993).

An alternative perspective focuses on the alignment between the population's culture and the ideological foundations of state institutions (Mizrahi & Krup, 2025). The central premise of this view is that citizens can trust state institutions only when those institutions reflect and uphold their personal values (Long & Sitkin, 2024). A commonly cited example is that democratic institutions, despite underperforming in the economic realm, may still yield trust from individuals who prioritize freedom and participation (Inglehart, 1997). However, these

same institutions may fail to inspire trust among those who place greater value on economic outcomes than on democratic freedoms.

Furthermore, this alignment is viewed as more likely to emerge when societies are characterized by common values, beliefs, and attitudes (van den Berghe, 1967). Shared value systems facilitate both intergroup and intragroup cooperation (Schwartz, 2006), enabling the development of a unified vision regarding values public institutions should represent. In contrast, societies marked by significant cultural heterogeneity tend to experience social tensions and misunderstandings (Hofstede et al., 2010), particularly in times of crisis (Li et al., 2022), failing to introduce a shared value framework across the population that can be applied to institutions.

Value heterogeneity is viewed as especially problematic when it leads to polarization. In polarized societies, individuals experience difficulties to engage with different viewpoints, which may cause a divergence between the values of public institutions and those held by certain social groups (Sunstein, 2007). This tension is further intensified by political extremism, which often frames the values upheld by public institutions as inherently biased or hostile to certain groups. Extremist ideologies tend to portray institutions as part of an "elite" or "mainstream" establishment that deliberately works against the interests of marginalized or opposing groups (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). As a consequence, individuals begin to interpret even neutral or well-intentioned institutional actions as signs of discrimination or unfairness, which may undermine institutional trust in society (Hanitzsch et al., 2018).

The performance-based perspective relies on an alternative view of culture, positing that values, beliefs, and attitudes are not static but can evolve throughout an individual's life. These changes are believed to occur in response to shifting circumstances and personal experiences (Tormos, 2019). Within this framework, institutional trust is conceptualized as a dynamic and

strategic construct, rooted in personal experiences with state institutions. Trust is thus formed through a process of evaluation, where citizens assess how well institutions perform and whether they meet their expectations and interests (Akimova & Ishchenko, 2025). The degree of trust that individuals place in these institutions is, hence, largely determined by the perceived quality of their performance and their ability to fulfill the needs of the citizenry (Mishler & Rose, 2001).

Most studies identify economic satisfaction as a critical criterion in the evaluation of state institutions, suggesting that when the economy is performing well, citizens are more inclined to trust institutions and public officials (Akimova & Ishchenko, 2025). Furthermore, the perceived impartiality of institutional structures is crucial in shaping trust. Corruption, in particular, is understood to significantly erode institutional trust by making fair treatment contingent upon personal exchanges or favors. This creates a sense of unfairness and undermines confidence in the legitimacy of state institutions, as citizens perceive them as biased or ineffective (Mishler & Rose, 2001).

Both the values-based and performance-based approaches offer a robust framework for examining the impact of conflict on institutional trust. From the values-based perspective, collective exposure to violence may provoke a rally-around-the-flag effect, leading to the unification of values and increased public support for the state and its institutions (Kulyk, 2023). Conflict can also enhance in-group solidarity, often through increased national identification, which subsequently strengthens trust in institutions, particularly among those who remain aligned with or loyal to the broader objectives of the war (Fiedler, 2023).

From the performance-based perspective, conflict is viewed as able to weaken institutional trust through multiple negative repercussions. Individuals living in affected regions who feel unsafe often perceive the state as failing to protect them, which undermines their

institutional trust (Hong & Kang, 2017). Conflict also disrupts economic activity and causes widespread destruction, leading to personal economic losses and increasing poverty (Bida, 2022). Finally, conflict places considerable strain on the state's capacity to govern, diminishing public confidence in its ability to uphold fairness and justice when needed (Frizell, 2025).

Thus, the impact of conflict on institutional trust can be understood as manifesting through two main channels: values and performance. This study conceptualizes the values-based channel as ideational and limits its composition to factors related to symbolic commitment to the state during conflict such as alignment with pro-war ideologies, national identification, and extreme positions on war-related values. The second bears on the performance perspective by focusing on individuals' evaluations of how effectively state institutions function in key areas, including economic performance, corruption control, and security. The following section examines the relevance of these two channels—and their underlying components—for understanding institutional trust in Ukraine.

Determinants of Institutional Trust in Ukraine

Following the attainment of independence in 1991, two dominant ideological mainstreams emerged in Ukraine's political landscape. The first, rooted in national aspirations for sovereignty, emphasized Ukraine's historical autonomy and distinct cultural identity, framing the shared past with Russia as an occupation (McGlynn, 2020). In contrast, the second mainstream—advanced by domestic actors aligned with Russia—highlighted the deep historical and cultural ties between the two countries (Pop-Eleches & Robertson, 2018). The two ideological mainstreams reflected the existence of an ethnocultural cleavage within Ukrainian society, characterized by the predominance of two principal ethnic groups: Ukrainians and

Russians (Kulyk, 2018). Ethnic identification primarily correlated with linguistic preferences or regional residence, often simplified to the East-West divide.

Throughout the period between Ukraine's independence in 1991 and 2014, when Russia invaded eastern regions of Ukraine, political power alternated between the two political mainstreams. Despite their divergence in political narratives—primarily in relation to ideational aspects—policy formulation of both camps shared two key characteristics. First, both mainstreams promoted the entrenchment of oligarchic influence within the political system, introducing legislation that disproportionately favored elite interests (Trochev, 2018). Second, both failed to invest sufficient effort in cultivating democratic norms within society (Haponenko et al., 2024). Democratic values remained overshadowed by ideological narratives (Gylfason et al., 2022), as a result of which many citizens expressed a preference for stability and economic development over participatory governance (White et al., 2010).

Given this context, the alignment between individual ideologies and those supported by ruling political elites should have, in theory, shaped institutional trust (Long & Sitkin, 2024). Citizens holding pro-Ukrainian ideologies would have a normative basis for placing greater trust in pro-Ukrainian governments, whereas individuals adopting pro-Russian views would exhibit trust in pro-Russian governments. Yet, this ideational alignment proved insufficient to create high levels of trust within Ukrainian society in practice: Institutional trust remained, at best, modest throughout the entire period, regardless of ideological orientations of ruling elite (Izha et al., 2020).

Russia's initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014 marked a profound transformation in Ukrainian society. The external threat encouraged the formation of a sense of national unity and solidarity (Kulyk, 2018). Ukrainians united around the Ukrainian state and reinforced support for

the government (Aliyev, 2019). This fostered the expansion of pro-Ukrainian attitudes and Ukrainian national identity. Political discourse and public sentiments increasingly centered on the idea of national unity in resistance to Russian aggression, strengthening the ideational foundation of state legitimacy (Crisp & Henderson, 2018).

In addition, the growing authoritarianism of the Russian regime reshaped the conflict as not only a struggle for territorial sovereignty, but also as a defense of democracy (Leaf, 2023). Nonetheless, this shift did not translate into a widespread internalization of democratic norms as integral to national identity (Haponenko et al., 2024). The political elite made only limited efforts to embed democratic principles into national narratives, leaving the development of democratic values relatively under-institutionalized (Haponenko et al., 2024).

In theory, these ideational aspirations could serve as a powerful mobilizing force for institutional legitimacy after 2014 (Aliyev, 2019). In practice, they appeared insufficient to generate high levels of institutional trust. Trust remained moderate to low (Izha et al., 2020) largely constrained by continued perceptions of poor economic performance and widespread corruption (Schwartz, 2020). Citizens continued to prioritize performance-based criteria over ideational considerations (Habibov et al., 2017) in assessing institutions. Tangible outcomes—particularly economic ones—often outweighed symbolic or identity-based considerations (Akimova & Ishchenko, 2025) in producing trust in state institutions. Voter behavior increasingly reflected a preference for candidates with credible economic policy platforms (Sasse & Lackner, 2018). As a result, a clear disjuncture emerged between state legitimacy—fostered by symbolic national unity—and institutional legitimacy, which continued to suffer from perceived governance failures (Boichak & Jackson, 2019).

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has reinforced these trends while bringing forward security concerns (Bocquillon et al., 2024). In this regard, Ukrainian institutions performed relatively well, both in defending against Russian aggression and in managing the complex logistics of war (Grytsenko, 2023). This satisfactory performance bolstered both state and institutional legitimacy (Kulyk, 2023). Institutional trust increased in the initial months of the war to the unprecedented levels, with about 80 percent of the population declaring trust in the majority of state institutions (Akimova & Ishchenko, 2025).

However, as the war progressed, longstanding systemic deficiencies—including income inequality, pervasive poverty, and corruption—became more pronounced, contributing to a growing perception of the unequal distribution of conflict burdens. War-related material victimization further reinforced demand for state support (Frizell et al., 2025), which was constrained by scarce resources available during the conflict (Bida, 2022). This eroded initial gains in institutional trust and returned their levels to the prewar baseline within less than a year (Akimova & Ishchenko, 2025).

Additionally, the conflict has produced two potentially destabilizing tendencies. First, the extreme circumstances of violence have intensified nationalist sentiments to unprecedented levels (Oleinik & Paniotto, 2024). Second, the war made the pre-existing ethnic division within Ukrainian society more salient (Kurapov et al., 2024). The ongoing conflict has reinforced a binary ethnic and, hence, ideological cleavage—broadly framed as "Ukrainian" versus "Russian"—each associated with divergent political views and narratives (Whitt & Page, 2025). This cleavage further constrained trust formation as individuals tended to adopt ethno-political identities to evaluate the state's action and conflict resolution attempts (Prior, 2013).

In summary, Ukraine's history of independence has strengthened the ideational foundation of state and institutional legitimacy—particularly in the form of national identity, pro-Ukrainian orientations, and, to some extent, adherence to democratic values. These ideational foundations may have proven sufficient to support the state. However, they have not translated into trust in state institutions—even in the context of war. Performance-based considerations remained crucial in shaping institutional trust. The war made the enduring problems of weak economic performance and limited institutional effectiveness more salient. Even if military success in resisting Russian aggression has generated positive perceptions regarding institutional performance, these achievements could only partially offset dissatisfaction with economic hardship and limited corruption control. As a consequence, institutional trust within Ukrainian society remained persistently low since 2023 (Akimova & Ishchenko, 2025).

Furthermore, the countrywide expansion of the conflict has intensified nationalist sentiments, fostering political extremism. Coupled with salient ethnic divide, this trend hindered the development of a shared value framework across the population that could be used for the evaluation of institutional performance during the conflict between the two nations that constituted the key ethnic groups in Ukraine.

Despite this extensive research on state institutions of Ukraine, a significant gap remains in empirical investigations of key drivers of institutional trust among Ukrainians. Existing analysis does not rigorously test key trust theories within the country's specific context, particularly during the conflict. None of the studies use an integrated approach, focusing primarily on single predictors and their individual effects (Habibov et al., 2017; TAMILINA & MA, 2025). They fail to include multiple ideational and performance-based determinants into a unified model to estimate their combined impacts on institutional trust scores. As a result, the

findings on Ukraine continue to remain inconclusive regarding which of the ideational and performance based factors play a more important role in yielding institutional trust in wartime.

This gap can, in part, be attributed to methodological limitations of the current research. Most studies base their analysis on methods favoring the estimation of individual effects (Akimova & Ishchenko, 2025; Izha et al., 2020) and ignore whether their influences can be combined. At the same time, literature on Ukraine highlights the existence of a complex interplay between ideational and performance-based factors throughout the country's entire history. The conventional regression-based methods cannot capture this complexity, suggesting that more rigorous methods aimed at analyzing combined influences of multiple factors should be used instead.

This study seeks to address the existing gaps by employing Fuzzy-Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) as the primary methodological framework to model the relationship between institutional trust and a broad range of ideational and performance-based factors. The main objective of this exploration is to identify the possible combinations of key predictors associated with either high or low levels of trust during Ukraine's recent conflict with Russia. Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypotheses can *a priori* be formulated regarding the nature of these potential combinations:

Hypothesis 1: Positive perceptions of institutional performance, including economic satisfaction and corruption control, are expected to be primary conditions in the combinations associated with high institutional trust.

Hypothesis 2: Given the context of conflict, safety perceptions are anticipated to be present in the combinations associated with high institutional trust, while increased safety concerns should dominate in the combinations producing low institutional trust.

Hypothesis 3: Ideational factors such as national identity, ideological alignment, and democratic values are expected to play a secondary role in the formation of institutional trust, relative to performance-related conditions.

Hypothesis 4: Extreme ideological positions are expected to be more consistently present in combinations associated with low institutional trust.

Data and Method Description

The analysis is based on data collected by the author through an online survey conducted between November 2024 and March 2025 across all regions of Ukraine, excluding areas temporarily occupied by Russia. The questionnaire was developed in Ukrainian and targeted individuals aged 18 to 35. This age range was selected due to the relative ease of accessing this demographic group. A total of 1044 individuals participated in the survey.

Comparative analysis with official demographic statistics confirms that the sample is broadly representative of the Ukrainian population within the specified age range. The mean age of the respondents is 28 years ($SD = 5.22$), with 57.01% of the participants holding at least a bachelor's degree. Females constitute 53.44% of the sample, while 58.62% report a monthly income below 20,000 Ukrainian hryvnias. The majority of the respondents (73.56%) were employed at the time of the survey.

The empirical investigation is based on fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA). This method allows for the examination of how multiple factors interact to produce specific outcomes. In doing so, fsQCA assumes that change results from combinations of factors that may exhibit asymmetry and, hence, configurations leading to a positive outcome may differ from those associated with a negative outcome. In the context of institutional trust, this suggests that the combinations associated with high trust differ from those that produce low trust.

Additionally, fsQCA allows multiple combinations of conditions to yield the same outcome and, hence, more than one combination can lead to high or low institutional trust, with some of the factors representing core conditions and others playing only a peripheral role.

Conventionally, fsQCA generates three types of solutions: complex, intermediate, and parsimonious (Brush et al., 2024). The complex solution encompasses all empirically strong combinations of conditions, usually producing a large number of configurations. In contrast, the intermediate solution gives a balanced view between parsimony and conservativeness by incorporating only those logical remainders that are consistent with the theoretical expectations and excluding challenging counterfactuals from the analysis. Finally, the parsimonious minimization uses all available logical remainders to reveal only the core causal conditions essential to any solution while excluding peripheral conditions.

Considering that each solution type possesses certain advantages and disadvantages, all three solutions are estimated and interpreted. This strategy aims to ensure that the analysis is rigorous and transparent, allowing, in parallel, a deeper theoretical interpretation of how conditions relate to outcome and which of them constitute core conditions. The solutions are estimated in the R-package *QCA*, while using consistency and coverage as the main criteria for the evaluation of their quality (Dusa, 2019).

The response variable in this analysis is trust in state institutions, including the main political bodies (courts, government, local government, and parliament), civic institutions (election commissions, state apparatus and bureaucrats), and protective agencies (police). Participants rated their confidence in each of the above institutions on a seven-point scale, with 1 representing "No trust at all" and 7 representing "Complete trust." A principal component

analysis confirmed that the selected sub-measures load on a single construct (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92), calculated by averaging the responses to all the trust items.

The conditions assessed in the analysis include seven ideational and performance-based factors. The ideational group encompasses democratic values, political ideologies, extreme positions on ideologies, and national identity. Democratic values (*DemocrVal*) are measured through conformity, anti-political pluralist views, and support for strong leaders, as defined by Pernia (2022). The conformity dimension is assessed with the statements: "Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions," and "The government should decide whether certain ideas should be allowed to be discussed in society." Anti-political pluralism is captured by the following questions: "The harmony of the community will be disrupted if people organize lots of groups" and "If people have too many different ways of thinking, society will be chaotic." Support for strong leaders is measured with the statement: "A strong leader does not have to bother with parliament or elections." Each item is rated on a scale from 1 (Strongly agree) to 7 (Strongly disagree), with higher values indicating more pro-democratic ideals and lower values corresponding to more authoritarian attitudes. A combined measure of democratic values is an average of all item responses, calculated for each participant (Cronbach's alpha = 0.96).

Political ideologies (*IdeoLgy*) are operationalized through questions asking respondents to indicate their agreement with the statement that achieving each of the five below objectives is important to them personally: (1) preserving democracy in the country, (2) ensuring independence of Ukraine as a state, (3) preserving the territorial integrity of Ukraine, (4) promoting Ukrainian as an official language, and (5) promoting the importance of the Ukrainian

identity. Responses vary from 1 “Not at all important” to 7 “Very important.” A combined ideology score is calculated by averaging responses to the five items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92).

This single ideology score is further used to compute how extreme one’s ideological views are. A binary variable, *ExtrStance*, assigns the value of 1 to respondents who gave consistently either the minimum (1) or maximum (7) score to all the five ideology-relevant items, corresponding to extreme stances on either pro-Russian or pro-Ukrainian ideologies. The remaining response values are assigned zero, reflecting a rather moderate ideological position. Lastly, the level of identification with Ukraine (*IdenTY*) is assessed by asking the respondents to specify the extent to which they feel to belong to the Ukrainian nation, while using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (“Do not belong at all”) to 7 (“Entirely belong”).

The performance-based conditions include economic satisfaction, corruption perception, and safety. Economic satisfaction (*EconomySAT*) is measured by averaging respondents’ current level of satisfaction with the overall economy, labor market conditions, and poverty levels while using a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (“Not at all satisfied”) to 7 (“Completely satisfied”). Perceived corruption (*NoCorrupt*) is estimated by asking the respondents to indicate how widespread corruption, such as bribe-taking, is among politicians and public officials in Ukraine. Responses vary from 1 (“Very high corruption”) to 7 (“No corruption at all”). Lastly, safety (*SaFty*) is measured by asking respondents to specify whether they feel safe in their place of residence, with 1 corresponding to “Entirely unsafe” and 7 corresponding to “Entirely safe.” The descriptive statistics for the above variables are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 near here.

Calibration of the selected variables - the transformation of the raw numeric data into degrees of membership in the target set – is performed by specifying three thresholds: the level

of membership for the full inclusion, full exclusion, and the crossover point reflecting maximum ambiguity. Considering that the majority of the variables are ordinal and hence not normally distributed, the conventional strategy is applied by selecting the 80th percentile as an anchor for the full membership, the 50th percentile as the cross-over point, and the 20th percentile as an anchor for the full non-membership, as suggested by literature (Dusa, 2019). The binary variable, *ExtrStance*, is calibrated into a crisp type. For transparency, the anchor values for each variable are reported in Table 1.

Analysis and Results

The fsQCA procedure includes the implementation of a necessity and sufficiency analysis. Table 2 summarizes the results from the necessity analysis. In particular, economic satisfaction (*EconomySAT*) meets the thresholds of at least 0.80 for consistency and 0.60 for coverage. This predictor appears to be necessary for the formation of high institutional trust while its opposite outcome (\sim *EconomySAT*) is a necessary condition for low institutional trust. The presence of corruption (\sim *NoCorrupt*) additionally acts as a necessary condition for low institutional trust. Necessary implies that the condition consistently occurs whenever individuals exhibit either high or low levels of institutional trust, as determined by consistency and coverage scores (Dusa, 2019).

Table 2 near here

However, the sufficiency analysis indicates that high institutional trust cannot be reduced to any single factor. Instead, specific combinations of multiple predictors (conditions) yield trust as summarized in Table 3. Across all the solutions, three conditions emerge as particularly

influential: economic satisfaction (*EconomySAT*), absence of corruption (*NoCorrupt*), and low political extremism (\sim *ExtrStance*).

Table 3 near here

Specifically, the conservative solution provides nine configurations, with economic satisfaction (*EconomySAT*) appearing as a near-universal condition. Additionally, the conservative solution encompasses both non-extreme and extreme political orientations (*ExtrStance*), but with differing combinations of conditions. In configurations involving more moderate or non-extreme political positions (\sim *ExtrStance*), trust is facilitated either through economic satisfaction (see C1 in Table 3), alignment with democratic values and/or national identity (see C2 and C3 in Table 3), perceptions of low corruption (see C6 and C9 in Table 3), or through less ideologically rigid pathways that rely on economic satisfaction and personal safety perceptions (see C4 and C5 in Table 3). Conversely, when more extreme political stances are present, trust emerges under a strong congruence with the pro-Ukrainian ideology, a strong Ukrainian identity, and commitments to democratic values (see C7 or C8 in Table 3). However, economic satisfaction (*EconomySAT*) still persists, combined in some cases with safety (*SaFty*) or the absence of corruption (*NoCorrupt*). The overall consistency ($\text{inclS} = 0.846$) and coverage ($\text{covS} = 0.705$) of the conservative model indicate that the nine configurations collectively provide a robust explanation of institutional trust.

The intermediate solution offers, in turn, three distinct but interrelated pathways. The first reflects a pragmatic route, whereby individuals who are not politically extreme (\sim *ExtrStance*) and are satisfied with the economy (*EconomySAT*) develop institutional trust, emphasizing a performance-based rationale (see I1 in Table 3). The second expands this pragmatic logic by adding perceived safety (*SaFty*) to economic satisfaction, pointing to the relevance of personal

security concerns in reinforcing trust during conflict (see I2 in Table 3). The third adds the ideological alignment (*IdeoLgy*) to the performance based considerations (see I3 in Table 3) and, in the most elaborate case, a strong identity and commitment to democratic values (see I4 in Table 3). However, these combinations still retain concerns for safety (*SaFty*) and/or corruption control (*NoCorrupT*), implying that institutional trust stems from the combination of the ideational and performance-based conditions among individuals with strong national ideology. Again, economic satisfaction (*EconomySAT*) emerges, as a dominant condition, involved in three out of four configurations. This intermediate solution performs well in terms of empirical adequacy, with high consistency (inclS = 0.838) and overall coverage (covS = 0.757).

Finally, the parsimonious solution reduces the model to the most influential and frequent conditions across the data. Again, satisfaction with the economy and perceived safety form a key pragmatic configuration (*EconomySAT*Safty*) (see P3 in Table 3), while the absence of political extremism combined with economic satisfaction (\sim *ExtrStance*EconomySAT*) highlights the role of moderate political values and performance-based trust (see P2 in Table 3). Importantly, the presence of *NoCorrupT* as an independent, stand-alone condition mirrors the importance of impartial institutions, even in isolation from other factors, as a sufficient condition for high institutional trust (see P1 in Table 3). While the parsimonious solution does not contain ideational conditions found in the conservative and intermediate models, it offers a straightforward view of the most robust and broadly applicable conditions for institutional trust. Its slightly lower consistency (0.823) is offset by the highest coverage (0.771), suggesting that it captures a broad portion of the empirical variation in the outcome.

Overall, the three solutions converge on one point: high institutional trust is primarily driven by economic satisfaction, lack of corruption and perceived sense of safety. While the

conservative solution differentiates the configuration composition between those with extreme and non-extreme political views, the intermediate and parsimonious models simplify this to emphasize that performance-relevant factors are key to yielding high institutional trust.

The results for low institutional trust (*~InstTr*) are largely inverse yet not simply the mirror image of those associated with high trust. Across the conservative, intermediate, and parsimonious solutions, dissatisfaction with the economy (*~EconomySAT*) again emerges as the most dominant condition, but not as consistently as in the case of high trust. Additionally, the ideational dimension captured by democratic values, identity and ideologies is more salient here than before.

Table 4 near here

The conservative solution offers six combinations, involving both ideational and performance-related conditions. One core pathway (see C1 or C2 in Table 4) links political moderation (*~ExtrStance*), dissatisfaction with the economy, and perceptions of high corruption (*~NoCorruptI*), suggesting that non-extreme citizens may withdraw trust when they observe both economic and institutional underperformance. Other paths, however, bring in stronger normative predictors (see C3 and C4 in Table 4)—such as the co-presence of strong identity (*IdentY*) and ideology (*IdeoLgy*) in addition to safety concerns. Remarkably, they suggests that low trust can also result in the presence of pro-Ukrainian ideology and national identity if it is misaligned with performance-based outputs. Even in cases involving extreme political orientations (*ExtrStance*) (see C5 and C6 in Table 4), low trust arises when these are coupled with safety concern and/or perceived corruption, suggesting that the ideological commitment may still result in distrust when institutional performance in terms of ensuring impartial treatment and safety is seen as compromised.

The intermediate solution preserves much of the conservative model's explanatory range while focusing on five distinct configurations (see from I1 to I5 in Table 4). It retains economic dissatisfaction, and combines it with either identity or ideology. Also, low safety perceptions (*~SaFty*) appear in nearly every path, suggesting that feelings of personal insecurity contribute substantially to institutional distrust, especially when combined with the lack of democratic values or weak identification with Ukrainian nation. Overall, weak national identification (*~IdenTY*) and absence of democratic values (*~DemocrVal*) appear here much more often than in the case of high institutional trust.

In turn, the parsimonious solution further reduces the explanatory model, identifying three primary routes to low trust. First, the combination of political moderation (*~ExtrStance*) and economic dissatisfaction reoccurs, covering the majority of respondents (See P1 in Table 4). This means that for individuals with moderate political positions, dissatisfaction with the economy alone can result in low trust. Second, individuals with strong identity (*IdenTY*), who also feel dissatisfied with the economy and unsafe, form another key group likely to express low trust (see P2 in Table 4). Finally, a more ideologically and politically alienated profile—characterized by extreme political views (*ExtrStance*), weak national identification, and rejection of democratic values (see P3 in Table 4)—is associated with low trust, especially when coupled with safety concerns, suggesting that trust also depends on normative alignment, not just institutional performance. The optional configurations (see P4 and P5 in Table 4) also point out that distrust is likely to occur when ideological rigidity combines with perceptions of corruption and unsafety, though these are less consistently covered.

The three solutions of low institutional trust perform well in terms of empirical adequacy, with high consistency and overall coverage. They all converge on the idea that perceived

institutional failure to perform satisfactorily is a trigger, but its translation into distrust is conditioned by individual identity, ideological orientation, and democratic values. Their configurations reveal a dual dynamic: while some individuals withdraw trust out of dissatisfaction with institutional performance despite ideological moderation, others—especially those ideologically committed—do so out of perceived misalignment with the nation (identity) or governance structures (democratic values).

In summary, the findings reveal that institutional trust in Ukraine is an outcome of both the performance-based conditions and the ideational factors. Even if economic and safety conditions serve as central predictors for high and low institutional trust, the underlying ideational and impartiality aspects are crucial in differentiating between the two. For high trust, political moderation and the absence of corruption seem to play reinforcing roles, while for low trust, political extremism, weak national identity and non-democratic values become important conditions supplementing economic dissatisfaction and safety concerns in forming combinations with high coverage.

To assess the robustness of our findings, strategies from the prior fsQCA studies have been applied such as varying the calibration anchors or excluding irrelevant cases from calculations (Brush et al., 2024). Due to space limits, only the parsimonious solution has been subjected to robustness tests (see Annex 1). Since the logic of these combinations remains largely stable and consistent with the baseline solution, the results are considered robust.

Discussion

The analysis confirms a configurational and asymmetric structure in the determinants of institutional trust and provides support for both ideational and performance-based theories.

Across all solution types, economic satisfaction (*EconomySAT*) and perceived absence of corruption (*NoCorruptT*) emerge as core conditions for high institutional trust, consistently appearing in the majority of configurations with high inclusion and coverage scores. They also dominate—though in inverse form—for low trust. These findings support Hypothesis 1, suggesting that Ukrainians are pragmatic in nature and primarily consider performance-related criteria in forming their institutional trust.

Sense of safety (*SaFty*) is an additional core condition, particularly when combined with economic satisfaction (*EconomySAT*). Furthermore, it appears to act as a critical deficiency when absent ($\sim SaFty$), contributing to distrust. This supports Hypothesis 2 that safety becomes an additional performance-based condition considered by individuals in forming their institutional trust during conflict.

Ideational conditions play a secondary role compared to the central role of performance-relevant conditions, especially in the case of high institutional trust. Extreme political views (*ExtrStance*) and ideological orientations (*IdeoLgy*) are more peripheral, shaping trust outcomes primarily in conjunction with performance-related factors. Similarly, democratic values (*DemocrVal*) and national identity (*IdenTY*) can influence trust when aligned with favorable performance perceptions (*EconomySAT*) but are largely insufficient alone. The absence of democratic values ($\sim DemocrVal$) or weak national identity ($\sim IdenTY$) become important in creating configurations leading to low institutional trust. However, the majority of these configurations retain performance-relevant conditions. Therefore, the results support Hypothesis 3.

Lastly, the findings suggest that extreme political views (*ExtrStance*) are more frequently present in configurations leading to low institutional trust while moderate political positions

(~*ExtrStance*) are more frequently present in solutions for high institutional trust. This supports Hypothesis 4, indicating that individuals holding extreme political positions are more likely to display distrust in state institutions.

In summary, the analysis suggests that even in the context of the war with a pronounced ideological dimension, institutional trust cannot be primarily contingent on citizens' alignment with the conflict's underlying values, ideologies, or identity. These ideational factors do not serve to legitimize institutions in the eyes of the public. Instead, institutional legitimacy remains fundamentally rooted in performance-based evaluations. However, the absence or weakness of ideational conditions may still contribute to distrust, especially when institutional performance is perceived as inadequate.

Applied to Ukraine, this asymmetry suggests that the surge in the ideational factors triggered by Russia's initial and full scale invasions is not sufficient to yield institutional trust. The ongoing war may have reinforced pro-Ukrainian political orientations and strengthened collective national identity. As a confrontation with authoritarianism, it may have intensified public discourse around democratic values. However, these ideational shifts cannot translate into a general increase in institutional trust. Performance-related shortcomings continue to significantly constrain the formation of institutional trust within Ukrainian society.

These findings align with broader theories suggesting that conflict environments foster pragmatism, leading individuals to prioritize tangible outcomes—such as safety and material well-being—over abstract ideological commitments when evaluating state institutions (Arendt, 1970; Tilly, 2003). However, the absence of the alignment with the normative dimension can still worsen the decline in institutional trust. Citizens who do not support conflict-relevant values,

ideologies or identities are more likely to distrust state institutions, particularly in the context of perceived institutional underperformance.

Conclusions

This study investigates the key pathways underlying the formation of both high and low institutional trust in Ukraine. Using fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), the research identifies main combinations of conditions associated with divergent trust outcomes. The findings show that institutional trust is predominantly shaped by performance-based factors, including perceptions of economic stability, security, and corruption control, whereas ideational variables—such as alignment with war-related identities, values, and ideologies—play a more limited, secondary role in yielding trust. However, the absence of ideational alignment with the war effort can amplify distrust, particularly when accompanied by perceived institutional underperformance.

This nuance offers broader implications for understanding the effects of interstate conflicts on institutional legitimacy. In particular, such conflicts can be expected to reduce institutional trust, primarily due to the degradation of institutional performance under conditions of war. While external threats may lead citizens to shift from performance-based to survival-based legitimacy when evaluating regimes—recognizing the state as legitimate insofar as it safeguards national survival—this shift does not appear to extend to institutional legitimacy. As the Ukrainian case shows, even if citizens continue to perceive the governing regime as legitimate for its role in resisting an existential external threat, they simultaneously express distrust toward the state's institutions, which are often seen as failing to meet basic expectations in ensuring institutional accountability and economic prosperity for the broader population.

This implies that, under conditions of performance deficit during armed conflicts, a disjunction can emerge between regime legitimacy and institutional legitimacy. The state may successfully cultivate regime legitimacy through ideational appeals. However, these symbolic resources cannot translate into institutional legitimacy. The latter remains contingent on performance. Consequently, citizens may support the regime while simultaneously distrusting the institutions through which this regime governs—an apparent paradox currently observable in Ukraine.

In light of these insights, policies aimed at enhancing institutional legitimacy must prioritize improvements in institutional performance. Accordingly, substantial improvements in economic governance, anti-corruption measures, and public safety should be recognized as essential in building institutional trust in Ukraine. Such reforms are not only necessary for institutional legitimacy during the ongoing conflict, but might also be foundational for ensuring durable regime legitimacy in the post-war period.

Given the centrality of institutional performance in shaping trust during conflict, future research should aim to expand the scope of performance-relevant conditions considered in empirical models. Such refinement is essential for the development of targeted and effective policy interventions designed to enhance institutional trust in conflict-affected settings. Furthermore, future studies should address demographic limitations by incorporating more age-diverse samples as reliance on data derived primarily from younger cohorts may constrain the generalizability of findings. An age-inclusive analytical framework would enhance the robustness of conclusions regarding the configurations of factors that produce high or low institutional trust in wartime contexts, ensuring that results are reflective of the broader population.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Calibration Anchors for the Key Variables Used in the Analysis

Variable	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max	Calibration Anchors			Abbreviation
					Low	Ambiguity	High	
Institutional Trust	2.805	1.300	1	7	1.57	2.71	3.85	InstTr
Extreme Political Stance	0.282	0.450	0	1		0.50		ExtrStance
National Identity	5.770	1.635	1	7	4.00	6.50	7.00	IdenTY
Ideology	5.907	1.294	1	7	5.00	6.40	7.00	IdeoLgy
Democratic Values	3.616	1.230	1	7	2.60	3.60	4.60	DemocrVal
Economic Satisfaction	2.413	1.378	1	7	1.00	2.20	3.60	EconomySAT
Perceived Absence of Corruption	1.833	1.402	1	7	1.00	3.10	5.00	NoCorrupT
Perceived Safety	3.759	1.654	1	7	2.00	3.51	5.00	SaFty

Notes: The logistic function has been used for the calibration process.

Table 2. Analysis of Necessary Conditions for High and Low Institutional Trust

Conditions	High Institutional Trust		Low Institutional Trust	
	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
DemocrVal	0.653	0.643	0.493	0.484
~ DemocrVal	0.476	0.606	0.636	0.646
IdeoLgy	0.611	0.653	0.543	0.537
~ IdeoLgy	0.532	0.539	0.601	0.607
ExtrStance	0.282	0.501	0.281	0.499
~ ExtrStance	0.718	0.500	0.719	0.500
NoCorrupT	0.376	0.861	0.174	0.396
~ NoCorrupT	0.736	0.472	0.939	0.600
EconomySAT	0.801	0.822	0.340	0.347
~ EconomySAT	0.363	0.356	0.826	0.806
SaFty	0.737	0.659	0.519	0.463
~ SaFty	0.399	0.454	0.617	0.701
IdenTY	0.641	0.571	0.588	0.523
~ IdenTY	0.465	0.531	0.517	0.589

Table 3. fsQCA Solution for High Institutional Trust

	Conservative solution									Intermediate solution				Parsimonious solution		
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	I1	I2	I3	I4	P1	P2	P3
ExtrStance	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●		○					○	
IdenTY	○	●	●			●	●		○				●			
IdeoLgy	○			○		●	●	●	●			●	●			
DemocrVal		●				●		●	○				●			
EconomySAT	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●
NoCorrupT			○		○	●		●	●			●	●	●		
SaFty				●	●	●	●		○		●		●			●
Consistency	0.864	0.864	0.824	0.881	0.866	0.927	0.877	0.962	0.902	0.834	0.874	0.932	0.941	0.861	0.834	0.874
PRI	0.799	0.795	0.725	0.819	0.795	0.858	0.830	0.939	0.664	0.783	0.827	0.885	0.891	0.802	0.783	0.827
Solution coverage	0.301	0.262	0.270	0.353	0.331	0.093	0.137	0.068	0.073	0.593	0.607	0.217	0.147	0.376	0.593	0.607
Unique coverage	0.034	0.020	0.022	0.007	0.027	0.002	0.084	0.015	0.004	0.109	0.074	0.016	0.005	0.035	0.092	0.074
Overall solution consistency					0.846						0.838				0.823	
Overall solution coverage					0.705						0.757				0.771	

Notes: The black circles (●) denote the presence of a condition, while the empty circles (○) indicate the absence of it; empty cells correspond to a “does not matter” situation in which the condition may be either present or absent. Every column represents a separate configuration of conditions meeting sufficiency criteria. All the configurations should be combined in one solution with the logical “AND.”

Table 4. fsQCA Solution for Low Institutional Trust

	Conservative solution						Intermediate solution					Parsimonious solution				
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
ExtrStance	○			○	●	●	○			●	●	○		●	●	
IdenTY		○	●	●	○	○		●	○	○	○		●	○	○	○
IdeoLgy			●	●	●	●		●		●	●					●
DemocrVal		○		●	○	●			○	●	○			○		
EconomySAT	○	○	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	●	●	○	○		●	●
NoCorrupT	○	○	○		●	○			○	○	●				○	○
SaFty		○	○	●	○	○		○	○		○		○	○		○
Consistency	0.835	0.891	0.911	0.829	0.873	0.842	0.827	0.899	0.891	0.831	0.873	0.827	0.900	0.848	0.799	0.759
PRI	0.793	0.844	0.846	0.611	0.538	0.565	0.782	0.827	0.844	0.529	0.538	0.782	0.846	0.753	0.546	0.368
Solution coverage	0.579	0.252	0.230	0.109	0.022	0.026	0.600	0.231	0.252	0.028	0.022	0.600	0.310	0.049	0.036	0.093
Unique coverage	0.265	0.017	0.090	0.005	0.004	0.006	0.330	0.090	0.017	0.009	0.004	0.402	0.090	0.018	0.005	0.005
Overall solution consistency				0.846						0.836				0.835		0.823
Overall solution coverage				0.749						0.749				0.752		0.752

Notes: The black circles (●) denote the presence of a condition, while the empty circles (○) indicate the absence of it; empty cells correspond to a “does not matter” situation in which the condition may be either present or absent. Every column represents a separate configuration of conditions meeting sufficiency criteria. All the configurations should be combined in one solution with the logical “AND.”

Annex 1. Summary of Robustness Tests

	Robustness test strategy	Number of conf.	Solution	Solution consistency	Solution coverage
High Institutional Trust	Initial solution (20%, 50%, 80%)	3	NoCorrupT + ~ExtrStance*EconomySAT + EconomySAT*SaFty	0.823	0.771
	New calibration anchors (15%, 50% 80%)	6	NoCorrupT + ~ExtrStance*EconomySAT + DemocrVal*EconomySAT + EconomySAT*SaFty + ExtrStance*~IdenTY*DemocrVal + ~ExtrStance*IdenTY*~DemocrVal*IdeoLgy*SaFty	0.819	0.803
	New calibration anchors (20%, 50% 85%)	3	NoCorrupT + ~ExtrStance*EconomySAT + EconomySAT*SaFty	0.809	0.781
	New calibration anchors (5%, 50% 95%)	3	NoCorrupT + ~ExtrStance*EconomySAT + ~DemocrVal*EconomySAT*SaFty	0.637	0.837
	Irrelevant cases removed	7	~ExtrStance*~IdenTY*~IdeoLgy*~NoCorrupT*EconomySAT + ~ExtrStance*IdenTY*~NoCorrupT*EconomySAT*~SaFty + ~ExtrStance*~IdenTY*~DemocrVal*~NoCorrupT*EconomySAT*SaFty + ~ExtrStance*~DemocrVal*~IdeoLgy*NoCorrupT*EconomySAT*SaFty + ~IdenTY*~DemocrVal*IdeoLgy*NoCorrupT*EconomySAT*~SaFty + ~ExtrStance*IdenTY*DemocrVal*IdeoLgy*NoCorrupT*~EconomySAT*SaFty + ExtrStance*IdenTY*DemocrVal*IdeoLgy*~NoCorrupT*EconomySAT*SaFty	0.823	0.507
Low Institutional Trust	Initial solution (20%, 50%, 80%)	5	~ExtrStance*~EconomySAT + IdenTY*~EconomySAT*~SaFty + ExtrStance*~IdenTY*~DemocrVal*~SaFty + ExtrStance*~IdenTY*~NoCorrupT*EconomySAT + ~IdenTY*IdeoLgy*~NoCorrupT*EconomySAT*~SaFty	0.835	0.752

New calibration anchors (15%, 50% 80%)	5	$\sim\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{EconomySAT} +$ $\text{IdenTY}^*\sim\text{EconomySAT}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{IdenTY}^*\sim\text{DemocrVal}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{IdenTY}^*\sim\text{NoCorrupT}^*\text{EconomySAT} +$ $\sim\text{IdenTY}^*\text{IdeoLgy}^*\sim\text{NoCorrupT}^*\text{EconomySAT}^*\sim\text{SaFty}$	0.825	0.767
New calibration anchors (20%, 50% 85%)	10	$\sim\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{EconomySAT} +$ $\sim\text{EconomySAT}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\sim\text{DemocrVal}^*\text{NoCorrupT}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\text{IdenTY}^*\sim\text{IdeoLgy}^*\sim\text{NoCorrupT}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\sim\text{ExtrStance}^*\text{IdenTY}^*\sim\text{DemocrVal}^*\text{NoCorrupT} +$ $\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{IdenTY}^*\text{DemocrVal}^*\sim\text{NoCorrupT} +$ $\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{IdenTY}^*\sim\text{NoCorrupT}^*\text{EconomySAT} +$ $\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{IdenTY}^*\sim\text{NoCorrupT}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\sim\text{IdenTY}^*\text{IdeoLgy}^*\sim\text{NoCorrupT}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\text{IdenTY}^*\sim\text{DemocrVal}^*\sim\text{IdeoLgy}^*\text{NoCorrupT}$	0.816	0.786
New calibration anchors (5%, 50% 95%)	8	$\sim\text{EconomySAT} +$ $\sim\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{DemocrVal} +$ $\sim\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\text{DemocrVal}^*\sim\text{NoCorrupT} +$ $\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{IdenTY} +$ $\sim\text{IdenTY}^*\text{IdeoLgy} +$ $\sim\text{DemocrVal}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\sim\text{NoCorrupT}^*\sim\text{SaFty}$	0.786	0.954
Irrelevant cases removed	8	$\sim\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{NoCorrupT}^*\sim\text{EconomySAT} +$ $\sim\text{IdenTY}^*\sim\text{DemocrVal}^*\sim\text{NoCorrupT}^*\sim\text{EconomySAT}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\text{IdenTY}^*\text{IdeoLgy}^*\sim\text{NoCorrupT}^*\sim\text{EconomySAT}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\sim\text{ExtrStance}^*\text{IdenTY}^*\text{DemocrVal}^*\text{IdeoLgy}^*\sim\text{EconomySAT}^*\text{SaFty} +$ $\sim\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{IdenTY}^*\sim\text{DemocrVal}^*\sim\text{IdeoLgy}^*\text{NoCorrupT}^*\text{EconomySAT}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\sim\text{ExtrStance}^*\text{IdenTY}^*\sim\text{DemocrVal}^*\sim\text{IdeoLgy}^*\text{NoCorrupT}^*\text{EconomySAT}^*\text{SaFty} +$ $\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{IdenTY}^*\sim\text{DemocrVal}^*\text{IdeoLgy}^*\text{NoCorrupT}^*\text{EconomySAT}^*\sim\text{SaFty} +$ $\text{ExtrStance}^*\sim\text{IdenTY}^*\text{DemocrVal}^*\text{IdeoLgy}^*\sim\text{NoCorrupT}^*\text{EconomySAT}^*\sim\text{SaFty}$	0.847	0.773
