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## Democracy and Institutional Political Subjectness: Comparative Study for Europe and Central Asia

**Abstract:** This article presents the results of a comparative analysis of political institutions in different types of regimes through indicators of their political subjectness, namely governance effectiveness, government's future orientation and institutional trust. The correlation between these indicators and the level of democratisation for 50 countries in Europe and Central Asia as of 2021 and in the dynamics of the last 15 years is calculated on the basis of a broad empirical database. The influence of new world order trends, such as the development of a network society, the digitalisation of the political field and the influence of international financial institutions, on institutional political subjectness is explored. The author concludes that consolidated democracies and autocracies have a higher level of political subjectness than hybrid regimes. Democracies are more effective in governance, but autocracies are more perceived by their citizens as capable of providing political stability and a long-term vision for the future. As a result, autocratic regimes have a higher dynamic of institutional trust. Hybrid regimes demonstrate a greater propensity for authoritarian political institutions and traditions than for democratic ones.

**Key words:** political subjectness, institutions, government effectiveness, democracy

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### Introduction

The crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath was a test for all countries, and especially for democracies in search of a balance between the principles of democratic governance and the preservation of their political subjectness. The viability of the current political democracy has been debated for at least the last 50 years (Crozier, Huntington, Watanuki, 1975). A profound institutional crisis has become an integral part of the political life of developed Western countries, as well as engulfing the entire international political-institutional system (Ikenberry, 2018). It is expressed in a lack of trust in political institutions, declining voter participation in the legal political process, growing support for populist parties, and in the rise of mass protest non-institutionalised movements such as Occupy Wall Street, the Yellow Vests (Foa, Mounk, 2017) or Black Lives Matter.

While elections remain the most common mechanism for electing authorities worldwide, they are increasingly perceived as unfair and their potential as an instrument of control is limited (*World*, 2017, p. 24). According to the UN, worldwide voter turnout has fallen by an average of 10% since the early 1990s, and 'a widening trust gap between people, institutions and leaders threatens us all' (*Tackling*, 2020). Political parties are also gradually losing their role as drivers of the articulation of political interests. Their membership "is in its third decade of slow and steady decline" (Scarrows, 2017). The rapid development of digital communications is fundamentally

changing the format of political processes. The international bureaucracy and most national bureaucracies are simply unable to do their jobs with the speed and efficiency that modern citizens need. In an age when people can buy a pair of shoes with one click or voice their opinion by checking a box on a smartphone, the excessively lengthy procedures of modern democratic bureaucracies can seem burdensome and outdated (Applebaum, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has only reinforced doubts that modern institutions of representative democracy can discern articulated public interest and accountability (Farrell, Han, 2020). According to the international organisation Freedom House's *Nations in Transit* project,<sup>1</sup> the Balkans, Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia are experiencing an "authoritarian turn". The average democracy score (DS) for the 29 countries decreased by 10 per cent between 2005 and 2021. The states that were classified as consolidated democracies in 2021 have seen their scores deteriorate by -4% over those 15 years, and consolidated authoritarian regimes by nearly a third (-30%). Poland (-1.43 DS) and Hungary (-2.33 DS) lost their status as consolidated democracies. The Balkan countries Serbia (-0.36 DS), Montenegro (-0.39 DS), and North Macedonia (-0.29 DS) moved from semi-consolidated democracy status to hybrid regimes. Overall, the number of hybrid transit regimes in the region increased from 4 to 10. Among the 7 regimes assessed as semi-consolidated autocracies in 2005, only 2 have improved slightly and also fall into the category of hybrid states: Moldova (+0.18 DS) and Kosovo (+0.46 DS). In contrast, four countries consolidated authoritarian regimes: Russia (-1 DS), Kyrgyzstan (-0.5 DS), Tajikistan (-1.1 DS) and Azerbaijan (-1.07 DS). Those regimes that already had consolidated authoritarian status by 2005 (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) reduced their democracy scores by -0.21 on average.

Thus, over the last 15 years authoritarian trends in Europe and Central Asia have had an upward dynamic, in contrast to democratic ones. Similar trends can be observed in the Middle East and North Africa, where formerly authoritarian countries such as Iraq and Libya have tilted not towards democracy, but towards the formation of archaic social structures and relations (Lebedeva, Harkevich, 2016, p. 28). This list was completed in 2021 by Afghanistan, which has become a prime example of the precariousness of democracy established "from above".

The purpose of this article is to analyze political institutions in different types of political regimes in terms of their political subjectness, i.e. their capacity for effective governance, ensuring political stability and shaping the agenda for the future. As a methodological framework, the assemblage method (Low, 2004, p. 154) is used to highlight trends in the contemporary world order that affect the subjectivity of political institutions. The method of comparative-institutional analysis is used to study the political institutions of 50 countries in Europe and Central Asia. Of these, 29 belong to Nations in Transit (Freedom House) and 21 are consolidated democracies of the so-called "old

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<sup>1</sup> The Nations in Transit survey annually scores 29 countries on a scale of 1 to 7 (the highest) in seven categories: Democratic Governance, Electoral Process, Civil Society, Independent Media, Local Government, Judiciary and Independence, and Corruption. Category scores are averaged to obtain a 'democracy score', where 1.00–2.00 is consolidated authoritarian regime; 2.01–3.00 is semi-consolidated authoritarian regime; 3.01–4.00 is transitional/hybrid regime; 4.01–5.00 is semi-consolidated democracy; 5.01–7.00 is consolidated democracy (*Nations*, 2021).

Europe". The analysis is based on empirical data from Nations in Transit and Freedom of the Net (Freedom House), Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank), Global Competitiveness Index (World Economic Forum), Legatum Prosperity Index (The Legatum Institute Foundation), The World Bank Open Data and The Polity Project (Center for Systemic Peace) for the period 2005–2021. The IBM SPSS Statistics software was used to carry out the correlation.

### **The theoretical framework and categorical apparatus of the study**

The category of political subjectness used in this study is based on the concepts of the “death of the subject” in poststructuralism (M. Foucault), the categories of intersubjectivity (J. Habermas, H. Arendt) and “multitude power” (Sh. Mouffe, E. Laclau), the idea of dual agency of the agent and structure (P. Bourdieu, E. Giddens, A. Etzioni, P. Sztompka). The *political subject* is defined as an agent of productive political decisions and actions, capable of modernising political space, shaping collective meanings and values, institutionalising processes, and constructing social reality. The main criterion of political subjectness is not only the intention for political action and the availability of relevant resources, but also the results of such actions and the ability to cause political change (Krasnjakova, 2014, p. 47). Political subjectivity can be an attribute of both individual actors, macro groups and political institutions.

Despite the differences in interpretations of the term, almost all schools of institutional analysis interpret *political institutions* as relatively stable characteristics of political and social life (rules, norms, procedures) that structure behaviour and cannot be easily or instantly changed (Stojko, 2016, p. 41). In studies of political changes, institutions are viewed a) as the context in which individual and group actors operate and b) as the distinct actors of such changes which carry out productive political action. In the second approach, institutions are autonomous drivers of political dynamics (Huntington, 1968; Skocpol, 1979). In contemporary studies, political subjectivity of institutions, that is, their ability to manage change, is reflected through the *concept of governance*, defined as the traditions and institutions through which power is exercised in a country. Namely, the ability of government to effectively form and implement sound policies and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions between them (*Worldwide*, 2021).

*Institutional changes*, according to the postulates of neo-institutionalism, is a constant process of quantitative and qualitative changes, modifications of various political, social, economic, legal institutions. They can occur naturally (according to T. Verlaine, there is a constant selection of those institutions that are beneficial to the maximum number of agents) or rationally – participants choose a particular model or rule based on their own interests and expectations about the future (Stojko, 2016, p. 62). In addition, institutions can change because of pure randomness or unpredictable circumstances (Goodin, 1986). J. Robinson and D. Acemoglu use a large body of historical material to prove that sustainable economic development is only possible with inclusive institutions (allowing the majority of the population to benefit from state development), but their formation largely depends on historical randomness (Acemoglu, Robinson, 2012).

While earlier democratic transitions were mostly determined by internal dynamics, the transitions of the “third wave” demonstrated another way for states of catch-up modernisation. It was the formation of new political institutions “from above”, under patronage or pressure from more developed donor countries. As historical experience shows, numerous attempts to “transplant” Western-established institutions to societies with a different cultural and civilizational base invariably ended either in failure or in a radical “reshaping” of these institutions to local socio-cultural specifics (Pantin, Lapkin, 2018, p. 53). Such external pressures have led to an unprecedented number of “partial” or “incomplete” transitions in the new states, which have proved insufficiently integrated to consolidate democratic procedures and retain a hybrid status or exacerbate autocratic tendencies.

The concept of “critical junctures” leading to institutional change suggests a certain “*path dependence*” effect, due to which these changes are maintained later on. Critical moments are presented “as relatively short periods of time during which there is a significantly increased probability that the choice of agents will affect the outcome of interest” (Capoccia, Kelemen, 2007, p. 348). Constructivists supplement this concept with ideational path dependence (Hay, 2006; Schmidt, 2008). When there is political competition, a struggle for the right interpretation of events comes to the fore. From this, further institutional changes take place (Newman, 2018, p. 9). Consequently, according to neo-institutionalism, politics involves some elements of *randomness* (agency, choice), but once the path is chosen, it can be ‘locked in’ as all relevant actors adjust their strategies to accommodate the prevailing model. This concept coincides with the theoretical basis of the synergetic paradigm or complexity theory (I. Prigogine, H. Haken, S. Kurdyumov and others). According to it, political space can be represented as a non-linear dissipative structure, which is characterized by a dynamic synthesis of chaos and order. If there are political actors (institutions, interest groups, individuals) in the political space, their subjectness, i.e. their influence on the systemic transformation of political space, is possible only at bifurcation points and has a random and unpredictable character. Thus, we can speak of *political subjectlessness*. This interdisciplinary category is sporadically used in studies by economists, sociologists, philosophers to evaluate the current political state of the system by studying the effectiveness of the implementation of managerial competences of power and the level of social passivity (absenteeism) of the masses (*Problema*, 2010). The subjectlessness of order is contrasted with the subjectness of social change (Zlobina, 2004).

### **Correlation between democracy and institutional political subjectness**

To verify the relationship between the dynamics of a country’s democratic performance and the level of political subjectivity of its institutions, the latter category was operationalised through the following indicators:

The *Government Effectiveness (GE)* indicator assesses the effectiveness of governance, including the quality of public services provided to citizens and the degree of independence from political pressure in the formulation and implementation of the adopted course. It is one of the indicators of the Worldwide Governance Indicators survey

(*Worldwide*, 2021), conducted since 1996 under the auspices of the World Bank for more than 200 countries and territories in 6 different dimensions of governance. The GE indicator ranges from  $-2.5$  (low) to  $2.5$  (high) governance performance.

The *Future orientation of government (FOG)* indicator is a composite component of the Institutions pillar in the Global Competitiveness Index compiled annually by the World Economic Forum.<sup>2</sup> The FOG indicator ranges from 0 to 100 and contains separate indicators on: 1) government ensuring political stability; 2) government ownership of change; and 3) long-term vision of government. The indicator is calculated for 45 of the 50 countries selected for this study (except Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Belarus, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan).

The *Institutional Trust (IT)* indicator from the Legatum Prosperity Index (*The Legatum*, 2021) reflects the population's trust in politicians and government, financial institutions and banks, the judiciary and the military. The indicator is based on the results of the Gallup Dailies, World Values Survey, European Values Survey, Global Barometer Surveys, etc. The scale of the index ranges from 0 (low) to 100 (high). The indicator is presented for 48 countries out of 50 (except Kosovo and Liechtenstein).

The type of political regime was determined by the *Democratic score (DS)* of the Nations in Transit project for the 29 countries included, as well as by *The Polity scale*<sup>3</sup> for the remaining 21 countries belonging to the consolidated democracies of "old Europe".

The results of the correlation analysis showed that the level of democratisation (DS) has a high positive correlation (0.786) with governance effectiveness (GE) indicators, but a very weak correlation (0.148) with future orientation of government (FOG) and an average inverse correlation ( $-0.313$ ) with institutional trust (IT) indicators.

**Government Effectiveness.** The average GE index for consolidated democracies on the Nations in Transit list is 0.99. The lowest score is in Slovakia (0.54) and the highest one is in Estonia (1.34). For the semi-consolidated democracies, the GE index averages 0.13 (from 0.38 for Poland to  $-0.22$  for Romania). On this indicator, they are closer to hybrid regimes, with an average score of  $-0.08$  GE. Georgia (0.79), Hungary (0.58), and North Macedonia (0.14) have the best governance among this group, with Bosnia and Herzegovina ( $-0.98$ ), Moldova ( $-0.46$ ), and Ukraine ( $-0.36$ ) the weakest. Overall, hybrid regimes show the greatest dispersion in this indicator (Figure 1).

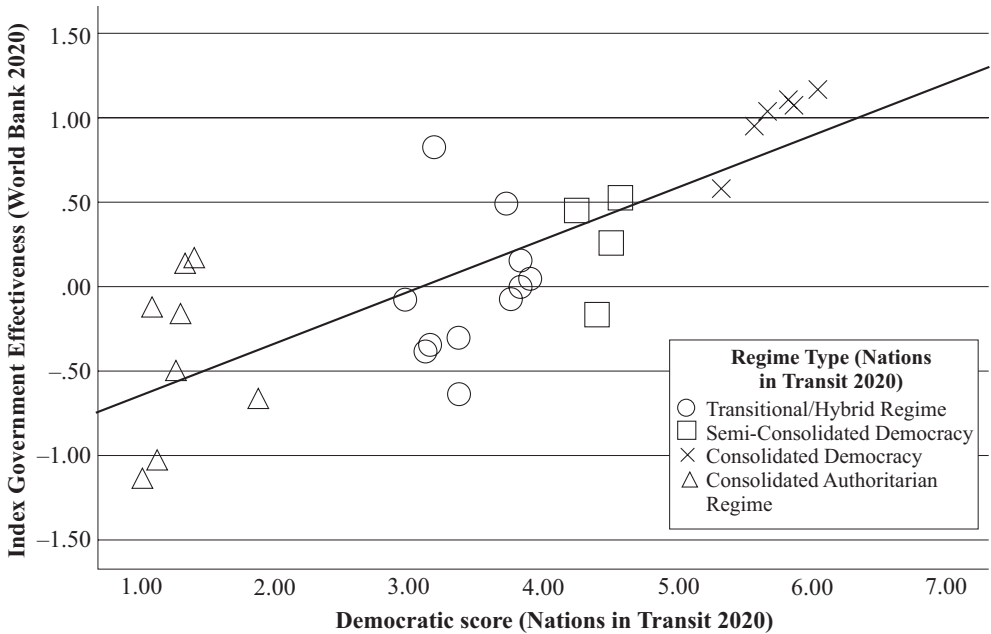
Consolidated authoritarian regimes have an average GE score of  $-0.45$ . Turkmenistan ( $-1.16$ ) and Belarus ( $-0.73$ ) show the worst government in this group of countries, with Kazakhstan (0.16) and Russia (0.03) showing the most effective. By comparison, the average GE index score for the "old Europe" countries is 1.4.

If we look at the GE index over the period 2005–2021 (Figure 2), it has deteriorated by  $-10\%$  for the "old democracies" of Europe. Greece ( $-37.8\%$ ), Belgium ( $-34.3\%$ ), Italy ( $-28.7\%$ ), Spain ( $-25.9\%$ ) and France ( $-25.3\%$ ) recorded the largest declines over

<sup>2</sup> Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Global Competitiveness Index 2020 was partly conducted online. The authors of the report have not released country-by-country details for that year. This article uses the 2019 survey figures. See for more details (*The Global*, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> The Polity data series includes coded information on the quality of institutionalised regime power for all independent countries with populations over 500,000 from 1800 to 2016 and is updated annually. The scale ranges from  $-10$  (fully institutionalised autocracy) to  $+10$  (fully institutionalised democracy). For more details see (Marshall, Elzinga-Marshall, 2017).

Figure 1. Correlation between Democracy Score and Government Effectiveness



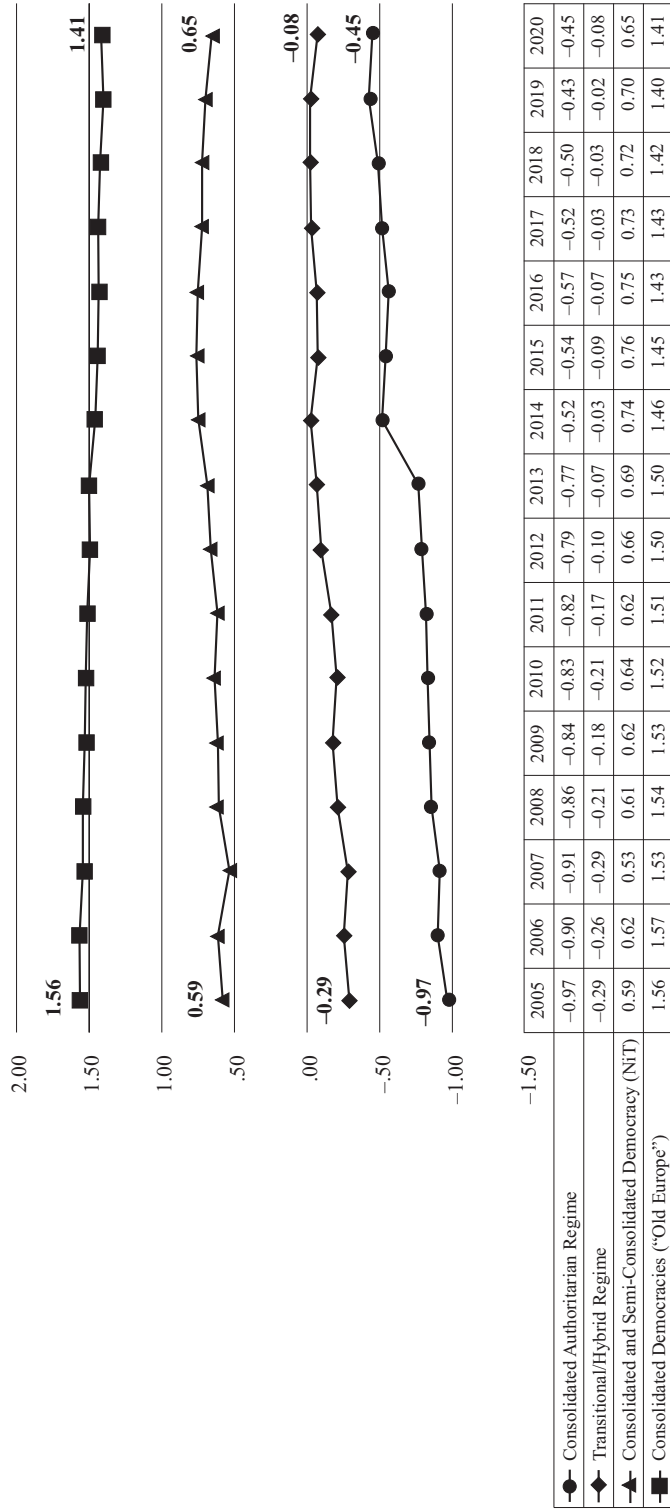
R = 0.786 p < 0.001 N = 29

Source: Nations in Transit 2020 (Freedom House), scale from 1 to 7 (highest); Government Effectiveness Index from Worldwide Governance Indicators 2020 (World Bank), scale from -2.5 to 2.5 (highest). The sample is 29 countries and the correlation coefficient is R=0.786.

those 15 years. By contrast, consolidated and semi-consolidated democracies on the Nations in Transit list improved the GE index by +10% on average over the period. However, while the Baltic countries, Slovenia and Romania have improved the quality of governance at +25–50%, some have significantly deteriorated: Bulgaria (-139%), Slovakia (-41%), Poland (-21%). Regimes classified in 2021 as hybrid and consolidated authoritarian increased in the GE index during this period compared to 2005 figures by +73.7% and +53% respectively.

Only 2 of 10 hybrid regimes showed a marginal improvement in both indices over 15 years (Moldova and Kosovo). Two others (Armenia and Georgia) showed a marginal increase in democracy (+0.14 DS) but a decline in governance efficiency (-0.22 GE and -0.32 GE respectively). Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina deteriorated both of them. The 13 countries with fragile regimes recorded declines in their democracy indicators against a backdrop of increasing government effectiveness. Thus, Ukraine showed the greatest increase in the quality of governance (+1.22 GE), while DS indicators decreased by -0.14 points. In Hungary (-2.33 DS), where democratisation indicators have decreased the most since 2005, the quality of governance has improved insignificantly (+0.02 GE). For consolidated authoritarian regimes, the general trend is for the GE index to increase against a background of falling democracy indicators. Kazakhstan (+0.77 GE, -0.39 DS) and Uzbekistan (+0.7 GE, -0.32 DS) increased the most GE scores. Russia improved its governance indicators by 0.53 amid a -1.00 drop in DS. Thus, the strength-

Figure 2. Dynamics of the Government Effectiveness Index for Europe and Central Asia, 2005–2020



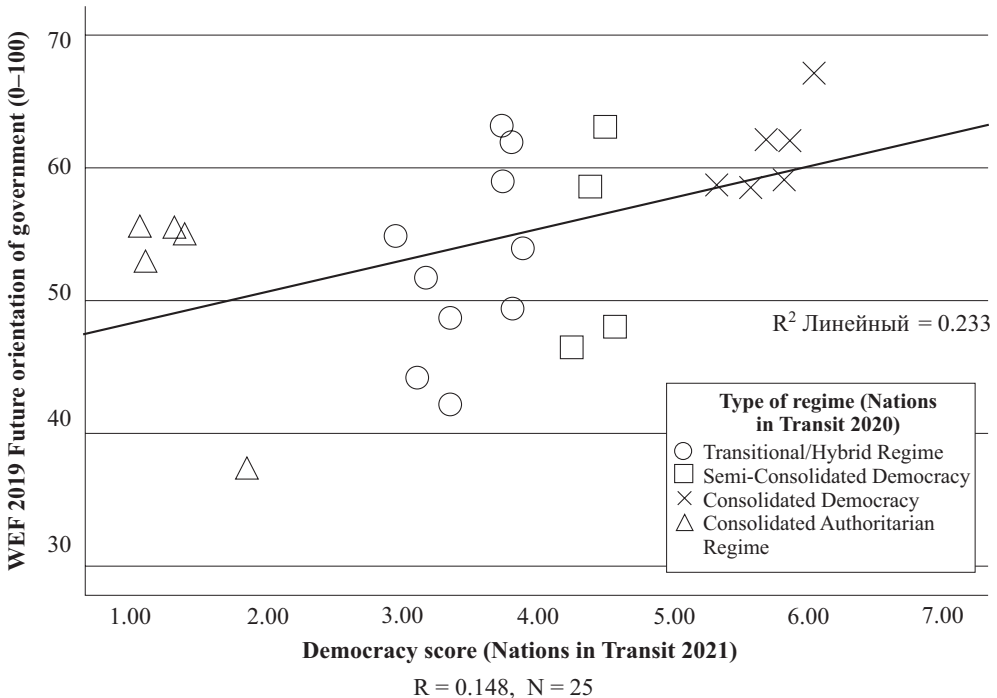
Source: Government Effectiveness Index from Worldwide Governance Indicators 2005–2020 (World Bank), scale from -2.5 to 2.5 (highest). The ranking by regime type is based on the Democracy Score of the Nations in Transit study (Freedom House) and the Polity Project scale as of 2021. The number of countries is 50.



ening of authoritarian tendencies coincides not with a deterioration, but rather with an improvement in the effectiveness of governance (an increase in subjectivity).

**Future orientation of government (FOG).** There is a very weak positive correlation (0.148) between the FOG index and the democracy score (DS). With an average of 54.7 for countries on the Nations in Transit list, the average FOG index for consolidated democracies is 61.2 (and 69 for the “old Europe” countries). Consolidated autocracies are almost indistinguishable from democracies on average FOG (52), except for Kyrgyzstan (37). Semi-consolidated democracies and hybrid regimes show a rather large dispersion in this indicator (Figure 3). Bulgaria (63), Hungary (63.4) and Montenegro (61) are the most subjectness in terms of having a vision for the future government. Bosnia and Herzegovina (42.2), Moldova (44), Croatia (46), Ukraine and Poland (48) have the lowest scores.

**Figure 3. Correlation between the Democracy Score and the Government’s Future Orientation**



**Source:** Democracy Score from Nations in Transit 2020 (Freedom House), scale from 1 to 7 (highest); Future Orientation of Government Index from Global Competitiveness Index 2019 (World Economic Forum), scale from 0 to 100 (highest). Sample of 25 countries, correlation coefficient R=0.148.

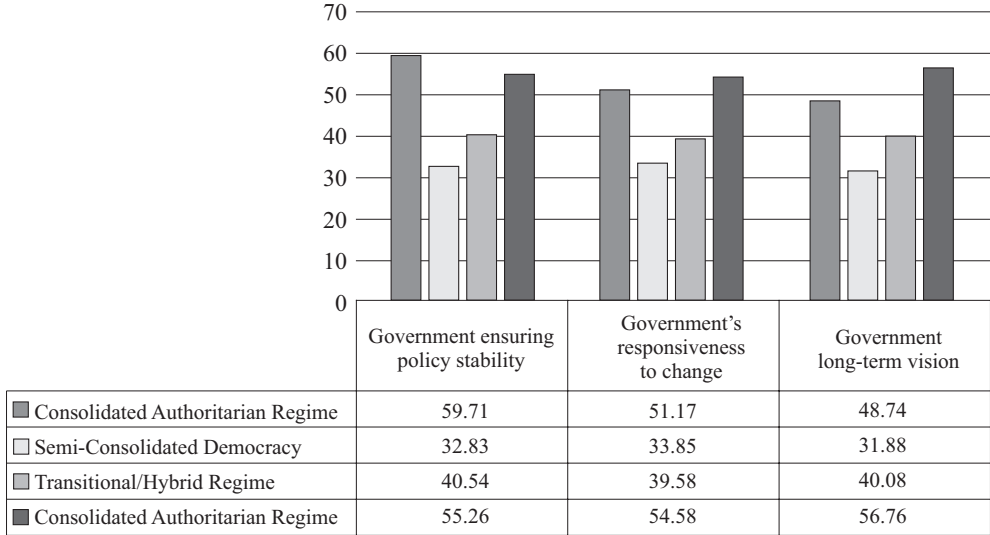
Looking at the individual components of the FOG index (Figure 4), *the government’s ability to ensure political stability* significantly prevails in consolidated democracies (average 59.7) and consolidated autocracies (55.2). While in semi-consolidated democracies and hybrid regimes it is rated significantly lower (32.8 and 40.5 respectively). The highest scores for this indicator are shown on the one hand by the countries of “old



Europe” – Switzerland (89), Luxembourg (86), Austria and Finland (81), Ireland (71), and on the other by autocracies that have significantly deteriorated their democratic performance over the last 15 years – Azerbaijan (73), Tajikistan (62), Kazakhstan (58). The lowest scores are in Greece (19), Bosnia-Herzegovina (21), Croatia (27), Romania (30), Poland (31), and Italy (31).

**Figure 4. Distribution of the FOG Index components by type of regime**

**Components of Future Government Orientation Index by regime types**



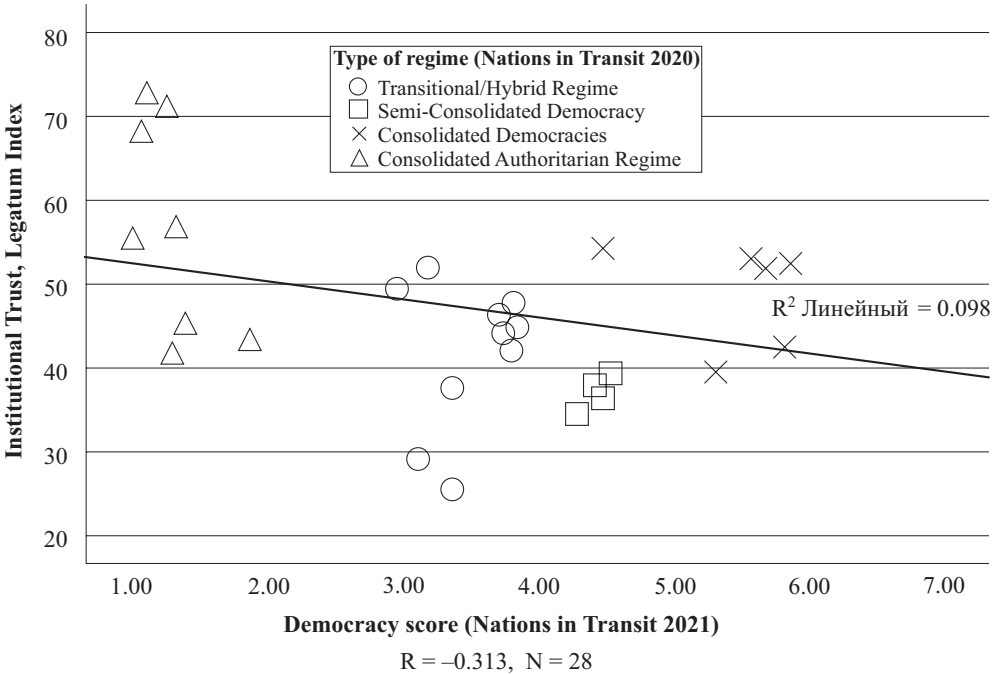
**Source:** Future Orientation of Government index by Global Competitiveness Index 2019 (World Economic Forum), scale from 0 to 100 (highest). The ranking by regime type is based on the Democracy Score of the Nations in Transit study (Freedom House) and the Polity Project’s scale as of 2020. The sample consists of 46 countries.

State institutions of consolidated autocracies are seen as more responsible for change (54.5) and able to offer a long-term vision (56.7) than consolidated democracies (51.1 and 48.7 respectively) and hybrid regimes (39.5 and 40). Tajikistan (71.7), Azerbaijan (72.1), Kazakhstan (56), Russia (51) are seen by their citizens as most capable of offering a vision for the future. Thus, modern autocracies are perceived by their citizens as capable of providing political stability and have higher scores on having a long-term vision for government than democracies. Hybrid regimes show a low ability to offer their citizens a convincing vision for the future.

**Institutional trust (IT)** shows a positive correlation with governance effectiveness (0.589), but an inverse average correlation with democratisation indicators (-0.313). IT levels are higher in “old European” democracies (64 on average) and authoritarian regimes (56) than in hybrid regimes (41) and semi-consolidated democracies (37). Among the hybrid regimes, lower average group IT levels were recorded in Ukraine (25.8) and Moldova (2.1). In “old Europe”, the highest levels are in the Nordic countries, Switzerland and Luxembourg (above 70) and the lowest one are in the South: Italy (40.7), Cyprus (39.4), Greece (39) and Spain (45.9). In consolidated autocracies, the countries with

the greatest regression in democratic indicators have the highest levels of IT: Tajikistan (72.3), Uzbekistan (70.7), Azerbaijan (67.9) and Kazakhstan (67.9).

Figure 5. Correlation between democratisation index and institutional trust



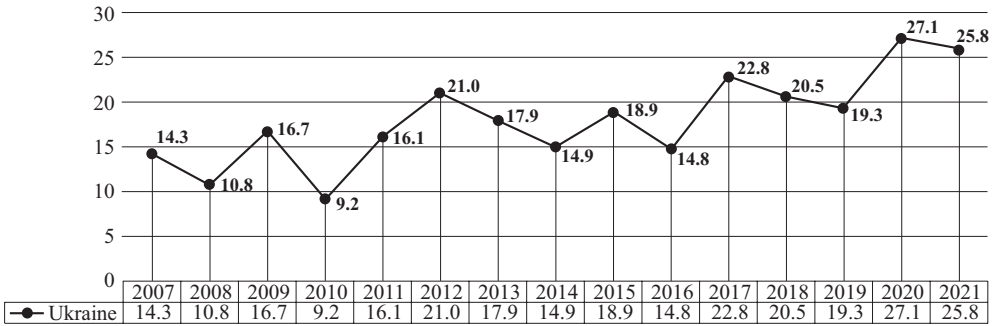
Source: Democracy Score from Nations in Transit 2020 (Freedom House), scale 1–7 (highest); Institutional Trust Index from The Legatum Prosperity Index 2021, scale 0–100 (highest). Sample: 28 countries, correlation coefficient  $R = -0.313$ .

Over the period 2007–2021, authoritarian regimes demonstrated a greater increase in IT over this period (+32.7%) than democracies (+13%) and hybrid regimes (+25%). The largest increases among authoritarian regimes were recorded in Russia (+136%), Kyrgyzstan (+64%) and Azerbaijan (+55%). Among consolidated democracies, Cyprus (–31%), Denmark (–9%) and Greece (–5%) saw the biggest falls in IT index. Among the new democracies, Lithuania (+80%), the Czech Republic (+78%), Estonia (+42%), Latvia (+35%) and Slovakia (+33%) showed the greatest increases in this indicator.

Among the hybrid regimes, Ukraine has shown the most dynamic growth in IT level during this period (+80%), but as of 2021 has the lowest indicator among all the countries under consideration (25). If we consider the dynamics of institutional trust in Ukraine as a special case (Figure 6), its lowest levels were recorded in 2008 and 2010. This coincides with the global financial crisis and the presidential elections that V.Yanukovich won.

IT Index in Ukraine saw a rise in 2012 (stabilization of the economy, the Euro 2012 football championship with Poland), 2015 (after the change of power and the start of

Figure 6. Dynamics of institutional trust in Ukraine, 2007–2021



Source: Institutional Trust Index from The Legatum Prosperity Index 2021, scale from 0 to 100 (highest), period: 2007–2021.

the military conflict), 2017 (obtaining visa-free regime with EU) and 2020 (victory in the presidential elections of Vladimir Zelensky). However, the country doesn't have stable periods of increasing institutional trust (the longest period was registered in 2010–2012). After a period, usually associated with certain external events or elections, a year or two of "rolling back" takes place. The periods of increasing institutional trust are twice as short as the periods of decline. Thus, according to neo-institutional theory, the country has constant endogenous and exogenous crises (bifurcation points), but due to their large number the institutional path dependence cannot be formed for a long period of time.

### Impact of the New World Order Trends on the Subjectness of Institutions

The trends of the new emerging world order indisputably influence the level of political institutions' subjectness. Using empirical indicators for a selected group of countries, let us consider three following trends: 1) strengthening the role of network structures in the political field; 2) the influence of digital technologies; and 3) the influence of international financial institutions.

**A network society.** With the development of digital information and communication technologies, a fundamental shift is taking place in the nature of power itself. It is shifting into multi-dimensional and amorphous networks that influence the actions of states and the global community (*Global*, 2012, p. 48). Horizontal network communications play an increasingly prominent role in the political field. A multitude of multi-level actors emerge, acquiring political subjectivity, but without an institutionalised status. These include new social movements, non-profit web.2.0 organizations, various hybrid forms of political institutions (networked political parties) and multi-layered forms of networked public governance (Miroshnichenko, 2012). Informal networks based on interpersonal trust and non-institutional mechanisms of political decision-making have become permanent elements of governance not only in developing countries, but also in the world's most established democracies, including the structures of the European Union (White, 2021). Non-governmental non-institu-

tionalised networks, such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), which publishes information on the offshore accounts of the world's leading politicians and includes over 600 investigative journalists from over 117 countries, are becoming new influential actors in the world order.<sup>4</sup>

The *Social Capital (SC) indicator*<sup>5</sup> from the Legatum Prosperity Index (*The Legatum*, 2021) can be used to trace the link between the development of network society and the subjectivity of political institutions. As the results show, the level of SC in a state has a high positive correlation with the effectiveness of governance (0.584) and a weak inverse correlation with democratisation indicators (−0.206). Consolidated democracies have an average SC score of 61.8, while autocracies score 56.7. Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have the highest scores among autocracies (66, 63 and 60 respectively), in direct contrast to the dynamics of their democratic scores. Belarus has the lowest SC score among authoritarian regimes (47.86). For semi-consolidated democracies and hybrid regimes, the average SC level is 50.9 and 52.7 points, respectively.

For the group of countries from Nations in Transit list, a weak inverse correlation is observed between democracy scores (DS) and such SC components (Figure 7) as civic and social participation (−0.237), institutional trust (−0.313), interpersonal or generalised trust (−0.121). A weak positive relationship is observed with the indicators of personal and kinship relationships (0.24) and social networks (0.093). The Government Effectiveness index (GE) shows a higher correlation with the SC indicators. The correlation with both interpersonal trust and generalised trust as well as social networks is at the 0.4 level. At the same time, the correlation between GE and civic and social participation is significantly weaker (0.198).

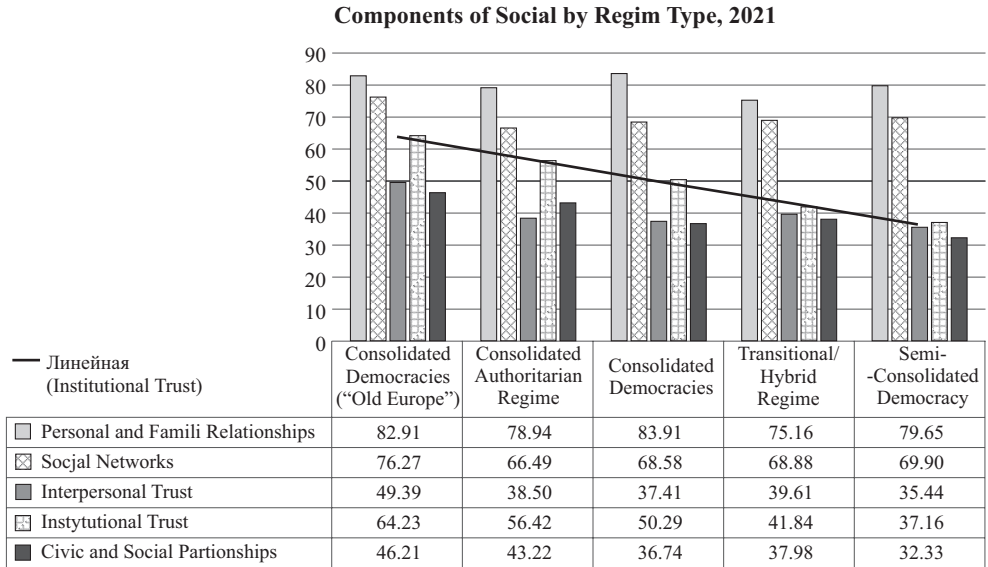
Thus, there is no direct correlation between the level of social capital and a country's democratic performance. Authoritarian countries score higher on the civic participation indicator than hybrid countries, but have weaker social networks and interpersonal trust. While interpersonal and generalised trust contribute to the effectiveness of governance, in contrast, civic participation and activism have little correlation. This can be explained by the fact that the involvement of macro-groups in the political field through the expansion of digital technologies introduces a certain degree of chaos into it. As S. Tang points out, the excessive number of agents with their own preferences about the desired content and form of the institutional arrangement makes consensus building quite difficult (Tang, 2011, p. 8–9).

The development of **digital technologies**, originally perceived as a factor in the expansion of democratic space, has now moved to the status of threats. For example, F Fukuyama, who 30 years ago proclaimed “the end of history” and the triumph of de-

<sup>4</sup> In 2021, for example, 30 world leaders and around 300 officials were targeted because of the ‘Pandora’s Archive’ published by this network. Such investigations have had both obvious and indirect consequences, such as the loss of legitimacy and institutional trust of individual political leaders. For example, Iceland’s Prime Minister S. Gunnlaugsson resigned in 2016 after the Panama Papers were published. In the Czech elections of 2021, held just after the publication of the investigation, Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, who was leading in the polls and the support of President Miloš Zeman, lost the election, the country began a political crisis.

<sup>5</sup> The *Social Capital Index* measures national outcomes in three dimensions: 1) social cohesion and inclusion (bridging social capital); 2) community and family networks (bonding social capital); and 3) political participation and institutional trust (linking social capital).

**Figure 7. Distribution of Social Capital indicator components by regime type**



**Source:** Social Capital Index by component from The Legatum Prosperity Index 2021, scale from 0 to 100 (highest). The ranking by regime type was based on the Democracy Score of the Nations in Transit study (Freedom House) and the Polity project scale as of 2020. Sample: 48 countries.

mocracy, now wonders “how to save democracy from technology” (Fukuyama, Richman, Goel, 2021). Contemporary political reality has demonstrated the ways in which technology can also undermine citizenship, democracy and the international liberal world order. Succeeding in the new media ecosystems, populist voices in European democracies have established themselves as influential political actors (Polarisation, 2019, p. 6).

Governments are taking steps to rein in the recalcitrant digital sphere. According to a Freedom of the Net (Freedom House) report, authorities in at least 48 countries have developed new rules for technology companies on content, data or competition in 2020–2021. In at least 20 countries, officials have suspended access to the internet and 21 states have blocked access to social media platforms (Freedom, 2021). Only 13 of the 50 countries studied in this publication are included in the Freedom of the Net Index, so the correlation between the digital freedom indicator and institutional political subjectivity will not be fully relevant. Only a general trend can be identified: authoritarian regimes have lower scores on Freedom of the Net (35 out of 100 on average) than consolidated democracies (77) or hybrid regimes (70).

Two indicators from World Economic Forum (WEF) research were chosen as indicators for correlation: 1) the *ICT adoption index* – the level of adoption of information and communication technologies 2) the *E-Participation* indicator, which assesses online political participation. Both scales range from 0 to 100 (best). According to the analysis, the ICT indicator has a high positive correlation with both government effectiveness (0.78) and democratisation (0.552). The E-Participation indicator correlates with GE scores (0.663), but much less with the democratic nature of the political regime (0.296).

Leaders with e-participation are expected to be consolidated democracies (in particular, Finland and Denmark have the highest 100 scores). Consolidated autocracies and hybrid regimes have the lowest average ICT Adoption scores among the group of countries studied (58 out of 100) and almost identical average levels of e-participation (70 and 68.9 respectively). The empirical indicators do not allow a clear conclusion as to whether digital technologies limit or facilitate the subjectivity of political institutions. Rather, it can be argued that online networks are becoming a new political institution of participation, shaping a new political culture, which is reflected in the way political institutions function as a result.

**The influence of international financial institutions.** Official development assistance (ODA) or 'external aid' has become one of the most prominent policy instruments that developed countries have used to induce developing countries since the Second World War (*World*, 2017, p. 24). While there is a considerable body of literature on foreign aid, it is by and large inconclusive as to its effectiveness. According to E.Reinert, the World Bank and the IMF offer developing countries the opposite of the reforms that have shaped the national wealth of developed countries (Reinert, p. 80). As of 2017, aid accounts for over 10% of GDP in half of all low-income countries and over 30% of total government revenue in 26 countries (*World*, 2017, pp. 26–27).

According to the World Bank,<sup>6</sup> of the group of countries studied, all authoritarian, hybrid and semi-consolidated democracies except Poland, Hungary and Croatia were receiving IMF lending as of 2021. The total amount of IMF lending for the 20 countries in Europe and Central Asia over the entire period is \$31 billion. The largest volume of lending was used by Ukraine (\$12.8 billion), Russia (\$8.1 billion) and Romania (\$1.4 billion). In exchange for the loans, the financial institutions are demanding from the national governments a significant change in institutional design. For example, among the IMF requirements for Ukraine as of 2020 were: a law on privatization of state assets, pension reform, creation of an anti-corruption court and an increase in gas prices for the population, the need for land reform and permission to sell land, the reform of the High Council of Justice, etc. (*Jaki vimogi*, 2020). In November 2021, Ukraine pledged in a memorandum with the IMF not to change the income tax to a tax on withdrawn capital, which was part of President Zelenski's 2019 election programme.

In addition to the reform roadmap, external donors also influence personnel policies and various aspects of governance. This influence tends to be extra-institutional. For example, representatives of G7 countries most often give advice to the Ukrainian authorities via Twitter.

As the survey results show, the country's external debt indicators have an average inverse correlation with the indicators of effective governance and democratisation (−0.217 and −0.297 respectively), as well as institutional trust (−0.215). Hence, the demands of international financial organisations for "reforms in exchange for loans" significantly limit the level of political subjectivity of recipient states, undermine citizens' trust in their political institutions and do not contribute to the democratisation of transit states.

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<sup>6</sup> The use of IMF credit and External debt stocks, total, as of 2021 are taken from the World Bank's Open Database containing 331 global development indicators for 213 countries and territories since 1960 (*The World*, 2021).

## Conclusions

According to the study, the level of democratisation for states in transition has deteriorated over the past 15 years. Autocracies have consolidated further, and hybrid regimes show a greater tendency towards authoritarian political institutions and traditions than towards democratic ones. Consolidated democracies and autocracies have a higher level of political subjectivity than hybrid regimes. The level of governance efficiency in democracies in the dynamics of 2005–2021 shows a downward trend, while in autocracies, on the contrary, it is increasing against the backdrop of declining democratic indicators. Consolidated autocracies are virtually indistinguishable from democracies in terms of future-oriented government. They are perceived by their citizens as capable of ensuring political sustainability, unlike hybrid regimes. As a consequence, autocratic regimes have shown a high rate of growth in institutional trust, ability to secure political order and confidence in the future for their citizens, despite cuts in civil rights and freedoms for the opposition. The potential of “imperfect” regimes in terms of liberal theory, especially in crisis situations, is clearly underestimated, and it is not insignificant, as the Chinese experience or institutional analysis of post-communist autocracies shows (Mel'vil', Stukal, Mironjuk, 2013).

These factors provide a strong argument for the further de-democratization of hybrid regimes and semi-consolidated democracies. For political elites in these countries, joining the ‘democratic club’ may seem too lofty and sometimes an unnecessary goal. Today’s world order resembles a huge shopping mall where different states can ‘roam’ and choose which political institutions are more acceptable to them (Ikenberry, 2020). Hybrid regimes show a multidirectional and unstable dynamic between indicators of governance and democratisation. The development trajectory of these countries contains many bifurcation points, which each time lead the system to a new direction of movement and prevent the formation of a stable institutional path dependence. Institutional weakness and relatively low levels of institutional trust in these states are deepened by pressure from external financial donors. According to empirical data from the Polity project, as of 2017, 50 of the 167 countries studied were classified as hybrid regimes. This may indicate increased vulnerability and ‘unrealised’ potential for political instability and volatility in the global system (Marshall, Elzinga-Marshall, 2017, p. 13). Long-term projections suggest that many countries will still zigzag on the road to democratisation until 2030 (*Global*, 2012).

However, even relatively stable regimes also balance on the edge of institutional weakness in a constantly turbulent external environment. Globalisation, the development of a network society, new digital technologies and mediatised communication are creating an increasingly turbulent world in which events change very quickly and inconsistently. As seen from the findings, the development of the network society and the intensification of the role of macro groups in political action do not correlate meaningfully with democratisation, but they do weaken the subjectness of political institutions. The new polarised chaotic world order offers the public sector and the bureaucratic apparatus that was formed to solve routine problems a simple choice: “change or die”. Adapting to the ‘new normal’ and the turbulence of the political field can only be achieved through ‘robust strategies’ involving flexible networks between



the state apparatus, the private sector and civil society (Ancell, Sorensen, Torfing, 2021). In practical political terms, there is an objective need for timely adaptation of political institutions (both state and international) to the conditions of instability and turbulence of political change.

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## Demokracja i instytucjonalna subiektywność polityczna: studium porównawcze dla Europy i Azji Środkowej

### Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono wyniki analizy porównawczej instytucji politycznych w różnych typach reżimów poprzez wskaźniki ich politycznej subiektywności, a mianowicie efektywność rządu, orientację rządu na przyszłość oraz zaufanie instytucjonalne. Korelacja między tymi wskaźnikami a poziomem demokratyzacji dla 50 krajów Europy i Azji Centralnej na rok 2021 oraz w dynamice ostatnich 15 lat obliczana jest na podstawie szerokiej bazy danych empirycznych. Badany jest wpływ trendów we współczesnym porządku światowym, takich jak rozwój społeczeństwa sieciowego, cyfryzacja pola politycznego i wpływ międzynarodowych instytucji finansowych, na instytucjonalną agenturę polityczną. Autor dochodzi do wniosku, że skonsolidowane demokracje i autokracje mają wyższy poziom politycznej agencji niż reżimy hybrydowe. Demokracje charakteryzują się wyższym poziomem skuteczności rządu, natomiast autokracje są bardziej postrzegane przez swoich obywateli jako te, które są w stanie zapewnić stabilność polityczną i długoterminową wizję przyszłości. W rezultacie reżimy autokratyczne charakteryzują się wyższą dynamiką zaufania instytucjonalnego. Reżimy hybrydowe wykazują większą skłonność do autorytarnych instytucji i tradycji politycznych niż do demokratycznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** subiektywność polityczna, instytucje, skuteczność rządu, demokracja