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Lustration Systems and Trust: Evidence from Survey Experiments in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland

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Dealing with personnel inherited from prior regimes in the administration of transitional states is critical for democratic consolidation, a problem traditionally addressed by the dichotomy of continuation or dismissal. However, major organizational innovations to deal with tainted officials appear in postcommunist Central Europe. Using the concept of lustration systems, this study differentiates three archetypes: dismissal, exposure, and confession. The authors propose that each system carries different symbolic meanings, which produce different outcomes for citizens’ trust in government and in tainted officials. The hypothesized effects of different lustration systems on trust are tested by an experiment embedded in nationwide representative surveys conducted in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. The results show that dismissal and confession increase citizens’ trust in government and trust in tainted officials. However, exposure reduces citizens’ trust in tainted officials.

INTRODUCTION

How should states undergoing the transition from authoritarianism to democracy deal with state personnel tainted by their past? Satisfactory

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answers to this question have not been provided, although they are vital for trust in the new government and its tainted officials in the context of democratic consolidation. Dismissal of compromised personnel may diminish the organizational expertise and administrative skills that are critical for effective governance, exacerbate historical divisions, and provoke new conflicts (Schwartz 1994, p. 398; Šiklová 1996, p. 60; Offe 1997, pp. 95–96). Retaining compromised personnel in key positions may undermine the legitimacy of the new state in the eyes of victims, condone historical injustices, and affect the implementation of fundamental political and social reforms (Loś 1995, pp. 143–54; David 2003, p. 392; Posner and Vermeule 2004, pp. 765–66).

However, dismissal and continuation of inherited personnel are not the only two possible solutions to this dilemma. Major organizational innovations in dealing with inherited personnel have been developed in Central and Eastern European countries undergoing the transition from authoritarianism to democracy in the last two decades. Many of these countries have introduced so-called lustration (screening, vetting) laws (see, e.g., Kritz 1995; Stan 2009). While Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Germany resorted to the traditional method of dismissal of compromised officials, Hungary, Poland, and Romania developed alternative methods that offered the discredited personnel a second chance based on the process of exposure or confession of tainted officials.

In order to distinguish between various methods of dealing with inherited personnel and to assess their outcomes, this article presents the concept of a lustration system as a theoretical abstraction of lustration laws (David 2006). “Lustration system” allows us to differentiate strategies of dealing with inherited personnel into three core categories of dismissal, exposure, and confession. Drawing insights from cultural sociology about the “symbolic-expressive aspect of social behavior” (Wuthnow 1987, p. 4; see also Edelman 1964; Bergesen 1977; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009), we propose that lustration systems are instances of public rituals that convey messages about the legitimacy of the new government and the malleability of tainted officials. Dismissal represents a ritual of sacrifice, which can purify the government of its “tainted officials” but further demeans their social standing. Exposure aims to increase the transparency of government but inadvertently creates a shaming ritual that stigmatizes tainted officials in the eyes of the public. Confession is a self-sacrificing ritual that signifies the moral rebirth of the tainted official under new conditions. Consequently, each lustration system is seen as a “trust base”

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(Simmel 1950) having a different propensity to influence citizens’ trust toward the new government and its officials. In order to test our hypotheses about lustration systems and trust, we developed an experimental vignette and embedded it in nationwide representative surveys in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. These three countries provided optimal sites for a comparative analysis because they had each adopted one of the three paradigmatic lustration systems: dismissal, exposure, and confession, respectively.

The next section begins with a review of the sociological, legal, and political science studies that have addressed the topic of lustration and identifies conceptual and empirical gaps in the existing literature. We then present the concept of a lustration system, explore the symbolic meanings of each system, and hypothesize their different impacts on trust in government and trust in tainted officials. The empirical parts of the article situate the problem of lustration into the context of the pre- and post-transitional politics in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland; explain the experimental design; and present its results. The final part discusses the implications of our study for sociology and transitional justice.

CONCEPTS, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, AND HYPOTHESES

Lustrations: A Review

Some measure of trust in the political regime and in its representatives is argued to contribute to citizens’ compliance and ethical reciprocity, thus helping to sustain democracy (Parry 1976; Mishler and Rose 1997; Braithwaite and Levi 1998; Daunton 1998; Tyler 1998). However, one of the consequences of totalitarian rule is widespread mistrust toward the regime and its representatives (Hardin 1998, pp. 17–19; Sztompka 1999, pp. 148–50; Uslaner 2002, p. 225). The lack of legitimacy of prior regimes creates a culture of rampant distrust that may spill over to shape the attitudes of citizens toward the new democratic state (Rose-Ackerman 2001, p. 436; Kornai, Rothstein, and Rose-Ackerman 2004). How to rebuild trust in the government and renew citizens’ trust in its tainted officials after transition is thus an important issue confronting transitional societies.

Trust in government is defined as “a basic evaluative orientation toward the government founded on how well the government is operating according to people’s normative expectations” (Hetherington 1998, p. 791). Trust in the tainted official is accordingly defined as a basic evaluative orientation toward a government official who has been involved in the illegitimate activities of the previous regime. Representatives of institutions constitute the “access point” through which individuals come into contact with institutions, and it is from them that people form opinions.
about the trustworthiness of the institutions (Giddens 1991). Consequently, the elimination of discredited bureaucrats is expected to eliminate the objects of mistrust in situations of endemic mistrust (Hardin 1998). It seems logical that, in order to reform their administrations, address security concerns, and establish accountability, many transitional countries in postcommunist Central and Eastern Europe turned against the officials tainted by their pasts. They did so by adopting so-called lustration (screening, vetting) laws.

“Lustration laws” refer to transitional public employment laws that stipulate particular conditions for holding public office in the new democracy by persons associated with former regimes (David 2003, p. 388). Alongside international tribunals, truth commissions, reparation programs, and other measures of transitional justice (Kritz 1995, 1:xxi; Teitel 2000, p. 6; Elster 2004, p. 1), lustration laws were designed to deal with abuses of power by previous regimes and as a means of rebuilding society after transition.

Although lustration was a major institutional arrangement in postcommunist societies in the process of government reform, the topic of “lustration and trust” has not been empirically addressed. Most studies by sociologists have indirectly addressed lustration as a part of their wider inquiry into the formation of the new power elite after transition. Lustration laws have been viewed as an obstacle to the capital conversion process, through which the old nomenklatura exchanged their privileged political positions for economic capital in order to regain political power (Łos and Zybertowicz 2000, pp. 145–50; see also Róna-Tas 1994; cf. Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsley 2001, p. 1123). Concurrently, lustration has been seen as a tool of horizontal struggle among the political elites over “the making of the new power-elite in the early years of post-communism” and the creating of “capitalism from above” (Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsley 1998, p. 183).

Political scientists have mainly attempted to explain why postauthoritarian regimes use lustration to settle past wrongs. Some have argued that the choice of lustration was shaped by the severity of repression in the former regime, its illegitimacy, and ideological rigidity (Moran 1994; Nedelsky 2004; Stan 2009) or its “mode of exit” (Huntington 1991),

To our knowledge, the only piece of work that directly addressed this issue theoretically was a book chapter by Horne and Levi (2004), who hypothesized that lustration is a tool used against political opponents, creates political scandals, and consequently undermines trust in government.

Political scientists have nevertheless reflected on the “traditional methods” of dismissals in the aftermath of World War II, such as attempts at de-Nazification of Germany, de-Fascification of Italy, and dealing with collaborators in postwar Europe (Novick 1968; Di Palma 1982; Herz 1982; Elster 2004).
whereas others saw lustration as a function of present political factors and the struggle for power (Welsh 1996; Szczerbiak 2002). The sociolegal scholarship largely adopted an integrated approach to study the controversies surrounding the implementation of lustration laws and to examine their purported benefits and procedural deficiencies (Misztal 1999; Tucker 1999; Barrett, Hack, and Munkácsi 2007; Přibáň 2007). Lawyers initially criticized lustration for being based on the principle of collective guilt and for being retroactive and discriminatory (see Kritz 1995, 3:322–45, 461–83; Boed 1999). However, later legal research found many of these criticisms unwarranted (Gillis 1999; Posner and Vermeule 2004), and the recent rulings of the European Court of Human Rights confirm that lustration laws per se do not violate human rights (Horne 2009).

An overview of previous studies on lustration suggests that there is a scarcity of empirical evidence to assess the effects of different lustration laws on democratic consolidation (Letki 2002). More important, earlier scholarship on lustration failed to differentiate between various lustration models. Most studies treated lustration laws as a single category of transitional justice, assuming that all countries pursued lustration policies aimed at blanket dismissals. They rely on the traditional conceptual apparatus developed in political science and law and view lustration laws as “noncriminal sanctions” (Kritz 1995), “administrative justice” (Teitel 2000), “purge” (Elster 2004), and “vetting” (Mayer-Rieckh and de Greiff 2007). For instance, Teitel sees lustration indiscriminately as a form of politicized administrative justice, which is a function of power. The Polish lustration law, according to her, is a “self-purge” (2000, p. 171). But lustration in Poland did not necessarily lead to disqualification; it provided grounds for a second chance. Lustrations in these countries differ fundamentally in the methods used to deal with inherited personnel.

Lustration Systems

Naturally, lustration laws in different countries vary in their scope, opportunity for judicial review, and implementation (see Mayer-Rieckh and de Greiff 2007; Stan 2009). However, we argue that the institutional innovation of lustrations does not rest in these technical and operational differences, but in their respective methods of dealing with tainted personnel (David 2006). In order to shift focus from the substantive and procedural provisions of specific lustration laws in order to capture their essence and variety in dealing with inherited personnel, we present the concept of a lustration system. This is an abstraction of a lustration law in the same way that the term “electoral system” is an abstraction of an electoral law. Each lustration system is defined by a particular method of dealing with tainted officials. While the Czech Republic pursued the
traditional method of dismissal, Hungary and Poland can be credited with more sophisticated inclusive methods, which allowed the continuation in office of tainted officials in exchange for their exposure and confession, respectively. Thus, the three Central European countries addressed the same problem with three archetypal systems.

The first lustration law was approved in Czechoslovakia in 1991. The law provided for the dismissal of officials in key state positions (Ellis 1996; David 2003; Williams 2003; Nedelsky 2004; Příbáň 2007). It effectively disqualified high-ranking communist cadres, members of the secret police, and their collaborators from senior posts in the new administration and security forces and barred them from returning. Once the fact of collaboration was established, the law did not provide any space for discretion or mitigating circumstances. The only alternative to dismissal was to downgrade the tainted official to a position that was not subject to lustration. After the breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the amended law was incorporated into the legal system of the Czech Republic and was extended indefinitely.

In 1994, Hungary adopted a lustration law that was based on the exposure of past collaboration by public officials (Halmai and Scheppele 1997; Sólyom and Brunner 2000; Barrett et al. 2007). The revelation of the identity of tainted officials resembles the practice of “naming the guilty” by most truth commissions (Hayner 2001, pp. 107–8). Officials who had been involved in the previous regime could retain their positions but on the condition that their names would be officially publicized. Officials were given the option of resigning without being exposed or of retaining their position but being exposed to the public.

After several initial lustration bills had failed in Parliament, the Polish lustration law was approved in 1997 (Misztal 1999; Calhoun 2002; Szczerskiak 2002; Czarnota 2007). The law resembled the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission: as amnesty was exchanged for truth in South Africa, public offices were exchanged for truth in Poland. The main feature of the law was the verification of affidavits submitted by persons in prescribed public positions. The affidavits represented a form of confession: they required public officials to answer questions about their past. If the affidavit was found to be true, the persons concerned were allowed to hold a public office regardless of their past. Nevertheless, their names and involvement in the past were officially publicized in a government gazette. If the affidavit turned out to be false, the person was also officially exposed and barred from holding public office for 10 years. The law therefore sanctioned the present dishonesty, instead of past involvement, of public officials. It effectively offered tainted officials a second chance in exchange for the confession of their past involvement with the repressive apparatus of the former regime.
The major difference between the Czech lustration system and the other two systems is that the former adopted an exclusive method whereas the latter adopted an inclusive method in the effort to deal with tainted officials. The major difference between the Hungarian lustration system and the Polish lustration system rests in the fact that exposure was conducted top-down and was externally imposed on the tainted officials in Hungary, whereas in Poland confession took a bottom-up approach and was initiated by the tainted officials who submitted an affidavit.

The Symbolic Meanings of Lustration Systems and Their Effects on Trust

One of the core insights of cultural sociology suggests that, in addition to its alleged instrumental purpose, every social arrangement communicates certain messages and meanings about social relations (Meyer and Rowan 1977). The distinction between the expressive properties of social behavior and its instrumental purposes brings an important analytic dimension to our study, directing our attention from the “intended messages” of lustrations to their “unintended or latent forms of communication” (Wuthnow 1987, p. 105). In the pursuit of political objectives, government policies often send ideological messages to civil society that either reproduce or transform social relationships (Edelman 1964; Kertzer 1988). In order to understand the social importance of law, one thus needs to go beyond considerations of “the concrete manifestations of legal institutions” to the understanding of law “in connection with the patterns of belief evoked by legal symbols” (Scheingold 1974, p. xi; see also Silverstein 2003).

The expressive power of political and legal processes is particularly strong in times of regime transitions (Eyal 2000). Criminal tribunals are argued to have a “deterrence effect” (Roht-Arriaza 1995), and truth commissions are mandated to promote reconciliation within an entire society (Hayner 2001, p. 30), although both processes concern only a limited number of perpetrators and victims. The etymological origin of lustration attests its deep symbolic meaning. The Latin *lustratio* translates not only as “review,” “survey,” and “examination” but also as “ritual sacrifice” and “purification by sacrifice” (Lewis and Short 1879). In ancient Rome, lustration referred to both a “census” and “ritual cleansing” (Ogilvie 1961).4

Indeed, purification, cleansing, and washing rituals are interwoven with various types of transition and restoration in many cultures and religions. A study of ancient Greek religions concluded that purification that removes “dirt from the past and so makes ready for the future, is ideally suited as a ritual to mark transition, ... satisfy the urge periodically felt by most people to make a new start, and feel a tainted environment grow fresh again” (Parker 1983, p. 24). Similarly, spring cleaning marks a seasonal transition, serves as a renewal rite, makes a home from a house, and creates boundaries...
Indeed, the legislators in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland not only sought to approve a new employment law for the public sector but also aspired to purify public life (Kavan 1991; Boross 1993) and revive a destroyed morality (Romaszewski 2006). Thus, lustration—throughout ancient as well as modern history—has carried a dual meaning. In addition to their instrumental purpose—the screening of public officials—lustrations can be understood as “symbolic acts” (cf. Wuthnow 1987, p. 99) that serve as a rite of transition: they mark discontinuity with the past. Different lustration systems represent different transition rituals through which the government asks to be reassessed as a new government that is worthy of public trust.

In parallel to their temporal message of transition, lustration systems also redefine social boundaries in different ways. As a census may result in either inclusion or exclusion, lustration systems may exclude or include the tainted. Different lustration rituals communicate different ideological messages about the tainted to society, about the gravity of their wrongdoing, and about the malleability of their character, all of which determine the prospects for their eventual social acceptance and trust. Thus, lustration systems may have an impact not only on trust in government but also on trust in the tainted officials.

*Lustration Systems and Trust in Government*

Critics of lustration laws based on dismissal have seen dismissals not as a means of discontinuity but as the continuation of past practices, just as purges were frequently used by the communist regimes to eliminate “class enemies” in the past (e.g., Schwartz 1994; Teitel 2000, p. 172). It was not former communists but the continuation of the communist way of thinking that was seen as a danger to the new system (see Łos 1995, pp. 138–39; Šiklová 1996, p. 62). However, security concerns and the trustworthiness of the state apparatus were major considerations for members of Parliament approving the Czech lustration law (Williams 2003, pp. 9–12). People associated with the former regime were often viewed by the public as corrupt, inefficient, and loyal to the previous regime (see Teitel 2000, pp. 164–67). By changing state personnel, a lustration system based on dismissals draws a clear line between past and present and unequivocally distances the new government from the old system and its practices (David 2003, pp. 394–97). It sends messages to citizens that the...
new state is not an instrument of oppression but a trustworthy administration that would serve the interests of society. Consequently, we hypothesize (hypothesis 1) that

\[
\text{dismissal increases trust in government.}
\]

**Exposure** aims at the disclosure of the identity of officials associated with former regimes. Opponents of exposure, however, argue that it perpetuates continuity with the past because of its reliance on the archives of the old regime (Teitel 2000, p. 172), which might not be reliable (Michnik and Havel 1993, p. 23) and which may “morally poison” the atmosphere in society (see Łoś 1995, pp. 125–26). While hailed by some as a human-rights-friendly response to human rights violations (Halmai and Schepele 1997, p. 179), lustration systems characterized by exposure have also been criticized as being toothless and inefficient (Vásárhelyi 2003). However, exposure resembles other truth processes of transitional justice. “Naming perpetrators” is a form of truth revelation that manifests a change in political practices (Hayner 2001, pp. 107–32). The new democracy demonstrates discontinuity with the past through ending the secrecy that is typical of authoritarian regimes. Exposure may also allow the public to scrutinize public officials with a questionable past (Williams 2003, pp. 10–11), helping to bridge the gap that existed between the majority of the oppressed and the elite (Gauck 1994, p. 283). Because of its potential to end secrecy and increase transparency, hypothesis 2 states that

\[
\text{exposure increases trust in government.}
\]

**Confession** by persons associated with the former regime signifies a second chance and an offer of forgiveness and reinstatement in public employment. Confession is similar to the exposure of the past conduct of public officials. However, unlike externally administered truth revelation, confession implies the individual’s own public revelation of his or her past collaboration. This bottom-up approach gives “truth” a normative meaning: it is the tainted official rather than the system who conveys a message about the of the previous regime. Confession by tainted officials thus symbolizes a change of heart and attitudes within government (see Posner and Vermeule 2004, pp. 782–83). The confessions by officials of their own wrongdoings demonstrate the change in their loyalty to the new system, delegitimize the past regime, and provide discontinuity with the past (David 2006, p. 360). This in turn may increase public trust in the new government. Hypothesis 3 states that

\[
\text{confession increases trust in government.}
\]

**Lustration Systems and Trust in Tainted Officials**

By excluding compromised officials from the new government, **dismissals** resemble witch-hunting and scapegoating (Offe 1997, p. 95) and inevitably produce stigmatizing effects (Posner and Vermeule 2004, pp. 802–5). The
tainted officials lose their reputation not only as a result of their past wrongdoing but also as a result of their present dismissal. Lustration based on dismissal officially certifies them as tainted, strengthening their negative image among the public. The loyalties, identities, and characters of excluded officials are assumed to be firmly fixed and determined by their past behaviors, actions, and associations. Dismissal preserves the inimical view of wrongdoers as intractable and incapable of moral development. The absence of a second chance conveys the message that “these people, who spent most of their working lives under communism, are no longer fit to work, they cannot be trusted to work, hence to participate in society” (Eyal 2000, p. 56).\(^5\) In sum, as a result of the negative messages that dismissal conveys to society about people associated with the former regime, we hypothesize that *dismissal decreases citizens’ trust in tainted officials* (hypothesis 4).

There is disagreement about the effects of exposure on shaping citizens’ trust in tainted officials. The lack of consensus might be attributed to the dual nature of “truth” in transitional societies (Łos´ 1995). Truth might help clarify the past (pp. 143–46), disarm unwarranted suspicions and rumors, have a healing effect (Tutu 1999), and contribute to social reconciliation (Gibson 2004). The absence of dismissals that accompanied exposures in the Hungarian model of lustrations may thus signify a “re-integration ceremony” that, proponents of restorative justice believe, provides a shaming of the offenders but also gives them a voice that may facilitate their eventual social acceptance (Braithwaite and Mugford 1994). Other scholars have argued that truth revelation might defame and ostracize former collaborators (Klingsberg 1993, p. 9), reminiscent of the smear campaigns of the communist era (Šiklová 1996, p. 61). Exposure may be an instance of a “degradation ceremony” that transforms the public identity of the individual to reduce him or her to a lower social position (Garfinkel 1956), embarrasses him or her, and creates stigmatizing publicity (see Kahan 1996, pp. 632–33). Because of the salience of the shaming penalty, we hypothesize that *exposure decreases citizens’ trust in tainted officials* (hypothesis 5).

The impact of confessions on citizens’ trust in former wrongdoers may be that they may represent self-debasement, or contrition, penalties that might generate stigmatizing effects (cf. Kahan 1996, pp. 633–34). Most scholars, however, have argued that confession might lead to the reha-

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\(^5\) One may argue that it does not matter whether citizens trust or do not trust dismissed officials because they will no longer serve in the government. This is true only when one ignores the fact that political exclusions may spill over to society and result in social marginalization of the former personnel, thus indirectly hindering social reconciliation among old adversaries.
bilitation of the wrongdoer (Posner and Vermeule 2004, p. 783) and forgiveness (Michnik and Havel 1993, p. 22). By stipulating the conditions of the continued employment and giving the old personnel a second chance to serve the new democracy, a lustration system based on confession sends a message about the changeable nature of human character. It fosters a spirit of social forgiveness and soothes retributive desires among the formerly oppressed, thereby encouraging them to be reconciled with former oppressors (David and Choi 2005). By confessing, wrongdoers symbolize their disassociation from their past actions and are thus no longer defined by their past (Govier 2002, pp. 46–47; Murphy 2003, p. 80). Disassociation from their former roles makes wrongdoers more acceptable to the public, who may be willing to grant them a second chance and reestablish a relationship of trust with them. The ritual nature of confession purifies the tainted, serves to forge a moral community, and indicates the means of atonement and reintegration (Eyal et al. 1998, p. 108). These considerations lead us to hypothesize that confession increases trust in tainted officials (hypothesis 6).

METHODS

The Research Site

Prior to 1989, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland experienced more than four decades of communist rule. Important positions in the state apparatus were staffed according to ideological criteria, loyalty to the Communist Party, and commitment to Marxism-Leninism (Łos and Zybertowicz 2000, p. 232, n. 3). Each regime developed systems of official and clandestine reporting to make sure that only conformist personnel were selected for nomenklatura posts and that “the enemies of the people” were discovered. Political witch hunts, forced confessions, show trials, and purges were commonplace in all these countries (Bergesen 1977, p. 231). Although the intensity of repression varied over time, Czechoslovakia was considered the most ideological and repressive of the trio, whereas the regimes in Hungary and Poland were less dogmatic and more reformist (Stan 2009, p. 268). This may explain the differences in their modes of exit from communism in 1989, the different public perceptions of their former communist parties, and the implementation of different lustration systems to address the same problem.

In Czechoslovakia, a sudden revolutionary wave forced the communist regime to give up power without significant concessions (David and Choi 2005, p. 397). The former Communist Party (KSČM) was politically isolated before the approval of the lustration law, and it remained marginalized thereafter (David 2003, p. 415). In all probability, the main reason
the KSČM remains in political isolation is its lack of efforts to change its dogmatic ideological approach and its refusal to apologize. Consequently, the party has been perceived as a risk to the new system. Opinion polls conducted between 1992 and 1995 showed that nearly 60% of Czechs supported the removal of Communist Party members from positions of influence (CEU 1992–96).

It is therefore not surprising that the Czechs approved a lustration system based on dismissal and that the meaning of “lustration” has become synonymous with “dismissal.” However, the system did not meet societal needs for truth. Although in 1996 Czechs gained the opportunity to access the files held on them by the secret police (David 2003, p. 424), the names of informers were redacted. The lack of institutionalized channels for exposure prompted radical members of the former anticommunist opposition to publish a leaked list of persons who had allegedly collaborated with the secret police and their cover names (Šíklová 1996, p. 61). This prompted the government to expand the access to secret police files and officially publish the names of informers on its website. When past collaboration was revealed, with some rare exceptions (Hosmanová 2008), denial and offering excuses were typical responses of those implicated (see Salivarová-Škvorecká 2000).

Hungary exited socialism through political “transformation” from above, which enabled the successor party to gain a more favorable position than the Czech communists enjoyed during transition. Even before the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party had pursued a series of measures to disassociate itself from the past. In 1989, it changed its name to the Socialist Party (MSZP), pursued internal reforms, and reoriented its policies (Grzymala-Busse 2002). It further disassociated itself from its past by forming an opposition coalition with the mainstream dissident party. Consequently, survey results from 1992–95 showed that, in contrast to 60% of Czechs, only 39% of Hungarians supported the removal of Communist Party members from positions of influence in the new government (CEU 1992–96).

The Hungarian lustration system based on exposure was launched in 1994. However, instead of “increasing the transparency of government,” the role of exposure has been seen as creating political scandals in Hungary (Horne and Levi 2004). In 2002, one of the largest scandals in postcommunist Hungary broke out after the newspaper Magyar Nemzet revealed that the country’s premier and 10 ministers in post-1989 governments were associated with the secret police and published their cover names. Premier Péter Medgyessy (MSZP) eventually admitted that he was a communist counterintelligence officer from 1977 until 1982 (Tomiuć 2002). Defying the media and the opposition’s demand for his resignation, Medgyessy maintained that he did not violate the lustration law. Most cases
of exposure ended in denials by the exposed person, but sanctions for denial were extremely rare (Tomiuc 2002).

Poland exited socialism through the roundtable negotiations with Solidarity, which resulted in institutional power sharing between the old and new elites. The willingness to engage in dialogue provided the Socialist Party in Poland an opportunity to present itself in a new light and to demonstrate its departure from ideological dogmatism. As in Hungary, the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) changed its name to the Polish Social Democratic Party (SDRP) in 1990, reoriented its program, and formed a social democratic coalition (SLD; Grzymala-Busse 2002, pp. 205–14). Similarly to Hungarians, only around 37% of Poles supported the removal of Communist Party members from positions of influence in the new governments between 1992 and 1995 (CEU 1992–96).

After a difficult start, the Polish lustration system based on confession was relatively well implemented between 1999 and 2006. On the positive side, it increased the transparency of public offices and offered a way out of political tension and mutual mistrust (David 2003; Czarnota 2007). Two former presidents, Lech Wałęsa and Aleksander Kwaśniewski, were allegedly collaborators of the secret police. Both were ridiculed in the press, which published their cover names; but the lustration court did not find any evidence of dishonesty in their confessions (David 2003, p. 417). On the negative side, the launch and implementation of the lustration system based on confession in Poland was marred by controversies, political disputes, and concerns over its inconsistent implementation (Czarnota 2007). Despite the fact that the Polish lustration law has stipulated a second chance for those who confessed, a few of them were dismissed at the onset of the law (David 2003, p. 413).

In 2007, when this study was conducted, the Czech lustration law was still being implemented. The role of exposure of the Hungarian lustration system was, however, superseded by historians who gained access to the archives of the secret police and have subsequently exposed the past of many public figures since 2004 (Barrett et al. 2007, p. 272). Whether exposure was conducted by the lustration authority appointed by the state or by historians, it brought the same outcome in Hungary: tainted officials have seldom been forced to leave their posts. In Poland, the opening of secret archives (Czarnota 2007, p. 253) has not invalidated the method of confession. Any “new discoveries” of tainted officials in Poland are dealt with by the lustration law, which requires a process of judicial verification of their confessions to be conducted.
Research Design

Our hypotheses about lustration and trust were tested by means of an experimental vignette embedded in representative surveys in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. Proponents of experiments argue that experiments are able to eliminate alternative explanations and establish causal relations (Sniderman and Grob 1996; Druckman et al. 2006). Vignette-based experiments have provided evidence about similar social problems, such as social rejection (Link et al. 1987), and have been applied in similar transitional contexts (Gibson and Gouws 1999).

The experimental vignette manipulated dismissal, exposure, and confession (the core elements of the three lustration systems) in a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ fully crossed factorial design. Each item was contrasted with the corresponding orthogonal versions: “dismissal–no dismissal,” “exposure–no exposure,” and “confession–no confession.” Since the three factors were not mutually exclusive in reality, the vignette manipulated their various combinations. However, confession after exposure might not have the same meaning as confession before exposure; thus, the order of exposure and confession was also manipulated into two sequences. In the first sequence, the vignette started either with “confession” or with “no confession.” In the second sequence, the vignette started either with “exposure” or with “no exposure.” This resulted in the $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design, which required 16 versions of the questionnaire in total. Each respondent heard only one combination of the factors. The most affirmative version in sequence 1 manipulated confession, exposure, and dismissal. The most negative version in sequence 2 manipulated the absence of exposure, denial, and the continuation of employment.

Independent Variables: Experiment

The experimental vignette had two parts. The first part was situated in the prior communist regime and described the wrongdoing of a particular person. The second part of the vignette was situated in the present and offered various solutions to the problem of the wrongdoing. The respondents follow a story of “Mr. Novák,” which is one of the most common Czech surnames (the corresponding common surnames in Polish and Hungarian were Nowak and Kovács, respectively; we use Novak throughout). We consulted local researchers to ensure that these names do not resemble any high-profile lustration cases. The choice of Novák’s gender was motivated by the need to provide a realistic vignette since few women were informers in the past in these countries.

The first part of the vignette described Mr. Novak as an expert who in the past worked in an enterprise. The reference to his “expertise” elim-
inated the option that he was a *nomenklatura* cadre who held his position without being properly qualified. This in itself would constitute a reason for dismissal. Then, a typical wrongdoing committed in the past was described. Since lustration laws always targeted members of the communist-era secret police and their collaborators but did not always target the officials of the former Communist Party, Mr. Novak was described as an informer who secretly reported on his colleagues in his workplace. The selection of “secret informer” does not weaken the applicability of this research to other wrongdoers. Although holding a public office in authoritarian regimes is not secret, the officeholder may have been involved in secret activities.

The focus is on the methods of dealing with the fact of collaboration. In doing so, we intentionally exclude mere rumors, politically exploited allegations, and unconvincing evidence, which may affect respondents’ judgments on both dimensions of trust. The method of determining collaboration is a matter of the law of evidence (see Gillis 1999). The vignette did not describe the motives of Mr. Novak and did not attach to them any particular consequences for the lives of his colleagues. Most lustration laws assess neither the informers’ motives nor the consequences of their actions. The latter may become a subject of criminal investigation if they resulted in gross violations of human rights. Thus, the only known consequence of Mr. Novak’s actions was the breach of interpersonal trust. This research nevertheless determined the respondent’s perception of Mr. Novak’s past. After the first part of the vignette, respondents answered questions about their perceptions of Mr. Novak’s past position, his motives of collaboration, and the circumstances of his collaboration (i.e., whether he was forced to collaborate or acted independently).

The second part of the vignette announced that Mr. Novak had been recently employed in a government ministry. For the purpose of the experiment it was crucial that he had been affiliated with a ministry in order to test perceptions about the trustworthiness of the government. It was also necessary to mention that his employment was recent because it would have been unrealistic to expect anyone to keep his job at that level as a result of the changes that have swept ministries after every election.

The three experimental variables, or their absence, were each operationalized and summarized at the end of the vignette. The operationalization of versions that would be orthogonal to “dismissal” and “confession” was quite straightforward. However, the orthogonal version to exposure had to overcome the fact that respondents already knew that the person was an informer. Truth revelation in this situation would have been redundant. For this reason, exposure was conceptualized as a revelation that adds a new piece of information that stigmatized the wrongdoer.
Since many informers in the three countries chose, or were assigned, a “cover name” (see Žáček 2000, p. 41), the additional information related to the publication of the informer’s cover name. Thus, the affirmative version stated that all the information about Mr. Novak’s past, including his cover name, had been published. The negative version stated that no information had been published. Each version represented a realistic situation that may have happened at any time during the transition. The experimental variables were coded as dummy variables (dismissal = 1, no dismissal = 0; exposure = 1, no exposure = 0; confession = 1, no confession = 0; and sequence 1 = 1, sequence 2 = 0).  

Dependent Variables: Trust in Government and Trust in Tainted Officials

Owing to the nature of experimental research, this project could not rely on existing operationalizations of trust in government. For instance, the first of four questions routinely used in most surveys, including the American National Election Studies and the World Values Surveys, asks, “How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?” However, the question is too general to be applicable to the concrete, real-life situation simulated by the experimental vignette. Governments may have “hundreds of thousands of employees,” and one could readily “distrust all these people as a class” and therefore distrust the government because only a few of them may take one’s interests seriously (Cook, Hardin, and Levi 2007, p. 11).

In order to measure the effects of dismissal, exposure, and confession, a new scale that captures trust in government had to be developed. To ensure its theoretical relevance, the scale had to take into account the definition of trust that had previously served as a prerequisite for the above-quoted classic survey questions. According to Donald Stokes, the original survey questions were developed to capture such evaluations: “The criteria of judgment implicit in these questions were partly ethical, that is, the honesty and other ethical qualities of public officials. . . . But the criteria extended to other qualities as well, including the ability and efficiency of government officials and the correctness of their policy de-

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6 In order to ensure that the manipulation was successful, manipulation checks were included in the questionnaire. The manipulation check openly asked whether it was true or untrue that the person confessed, was exposed, and was dismissed. Respondents were given four response categories on the Likert scale. Some incorrect answers to the manipulation check were given by respondents concerning dismissal (17.1%), exposure (18.5%), and confession (21.4%). Judging by standards set in research using the same methodology in similar contexts (Gibson 2002), the experimental manipulation was very successful.
The trust in government scale (TGS) was developed to capture the practices of governance, including that of competence, integrity, and motivation (see Hardin 2006, p. 36). Respondents were asked questions about their (1) trust in the government ministry in general and about three specific items: belief that the ministry would act (2) efficiently, (3) legally, and (4) loyally to democracy.7 Each item had five response categories, ranging from “definitely not” (coded 0) to “definitely yes” (coded 4), allowing for a neutral response in the middle. Scores of the four items were summed to form the TGS, which had scores ranging from 0 to 16 and had an alpha value of 0.95. The mean score of TGS for all the respondents was 7.20 (SD = 4.64). The mean scores of TGS for respondents in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland were 7.68 (SD = 4.58), 7.28 (SD = 4.73), and 6.65 (SD = 4.52), respectively.

The trust in the tainted official scale (TTOS) was developed as a scale that mirrors the four attributes of trust in government at the personnel level. It captures citizens’ perceptions about the tainted official’s general trustworthiness, expertise, law-abiding capacity, and commitment to democracy. Respondents were asked about (1) the general trustworthiness of Mr. Novak and whether they (2) trust his expertise, (3) believe that he would act in accordance with the law, and (4) believe that he is committed to democracy. Scores of the four items were summed to form the TTOS, which ranged from 0 to 16 and had an alpha value of 0.90. For all respondents, the mean score of TTOS was 5.81 (SD = 4.06). The mean scores of the scale for Czech, Hungarian, and Polish respondents were 5.44 (SD = 3.72), 6.49 (SD = 4.36), and 5.30 (SD = 3.86), respectively.

Control Variables

This research was conducted in divided societies, in which a minority may still sympathize with the previous regime and the majority opposes it. The results may therefore reflect responses that are attributable only to the majority. For instance, the hypothesis that the dismissal of a wrongdoer from government increases trust in government may be valid only in the eyes of the majority. An analysis that ignores historical divisions may produce biased results. Experimental researchers looking at transitional justice have attempted to overcome this problem by incorporating the so-called objection precondition (Gibson and Gouws 2003). This, however, has threatened the internal validity of their results because the as-

7 Trust is a cognitive category that allows one to project a future behavior on the basis of available knowledge. Thus, the relational substitute for trust is “to believe” (see Hardin 2006, p. 17). For this reason, the questions started with either “Do you trust . . . ?” or “Do you believe . . . ?”
Assignment of each respondent to a particular experimental treatment was not random.

In order to satisfy our theoretical interest in divided societies without compromising the internal validity of our study, we have incorporated the objection precondition directly into the experimental vignette. We split the experimental vignette into two parts. After the first part, we gained critical information about the respondents’ attitudes toward Mr. Novak’s past. This enabled us to determine whether or not the respondents saw the breach of trust that had occurred in the past as a problem. After this, the experimental vignette continued with possible solutions to the wrongdoing. Thus, the control variables were exogenous to the experimental variables, and they were not correlated. As forgiveness is a variable that captures the position of a respondent with regard to human rights violations as well as transitional justice (David and Choi 2006), we have used the willingness of the respondents to forgive Mr. Novak’s past as an indicator of the extent of their objections or lack thereof.

Both trust in government and trust in Mr. Novak may also be affected by the respondents’ perceptions of Mr. Novak’s past, especially his position in the hierarchy of the state apparatus and his motives for collaboration (see Gibson and Gouws 1999). It would be impossible to experimentally manipulate and analyze so many variables. For this reason, this research also controlled for the respondents’ perceptions of Mr. Novak’s past. The respondents were asked whether Mr. Novak held a low position or a high position (coded 0–3), was motivated by self-interest or ideology (coded 0–3), and was forced by the system or acted independently (coded 0–3).

Data Collection

In 2006, 12 focus group sessions with members of various political groups were conducted in the three countries to ensure that the topics of the past were still considered important and to understand how people described and interpreted them. Thereafter, 16 in-depth interviews with fellow academics, university students, and student assistants inside and outside Central Europe were conducted to prepare the first version of the questionnaire. Double-blind reverse translations of the questionnaire were then solicited from English into Czech, Hungarian, and Polish and vice versa. The questionnaire was piloted in spring 2007 by means of 20 face-to-face interviews in each country.

Thanks to support from the U.S. Institute of Peace, our questionnaire was embedded in surveys conducted by three of the most internationally renowned survey agencies in the region: CVVM in the Czech Republic, Tárki in Hungary, and OBOP in Poland. These agencies used a nation-
Data Analyses

The analysis of each dependent variable consisted of separate ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression models with experimental independent variables and control variables. We conducted analyses on the merged data set and also separately for each country. The merged data set enabled us to detect any evidence about the effect of lustration systems in a large number of cases. Separate country analyses add information about the impact of dismissal, exposure, and confession on trust within three distinct contexts each of which gave birth to a particular lustration system. Dismissal and continuation, exposure and the lack of transparency, and confession and denial may appear in various combinations when used in a particular lustration case in a particular country. We have also examined if there are interaction effects, for instance, whether the effect of dismissal depends on exposure and confession. However, adding the second-, third-, and fourth-order interaction terms to our models did not improve the adjusted $R$-square. For reasons of parsimony, we present the models without the interaction terms in this article. Weighted data were used in the analysis.

RESULTS

Factors Affecting Trust in Government

In the merged data set, dismissal was the most powerful predictor of trust in government (table 1, model 1A). Other things being equal, it increased trust in government by 3.11 points ($B = 3.11$, $P < .001$) on a 16-point scale. Confession also significantly increased trust in government. Other things being equal, confession increased trust in government by 0.79 points
TABLE 1  
PREDICTORS OF TRUST IN GOVERNMENT: OLS LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Merged Data Set Model 1A</th>
<th>Czech Republic Model 1B</th>
<th>Hungary Model 1C</th>
<th>Poland Model 1D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>3.11*** .19</td>
<td>3.88*** .33</td>
<td>3.16*** .31</td>
<td>2.17*** .37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure</td>
<td>.14 .19</td>
<td>.42 .33</td>
<td>-.02 .31</td>
<td>.08 .37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confession</td>
<td>.79*** .19</td>
<td>.90** .33</td>
<td>.98** .31</td>
<td>.32 .37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequence</td>
<td>.08 .19</td>
<td>.46 .33</td>
<td>.08 .31</td>
<td>-.32 .37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High position</td>
<td>-.20* .12</td>
<td>-.37* .20</td>
<td>-.03 .18</td>
<td>-.20 .24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motive (self-interest)</td>
<td>-.64*** .12</td>
<td>-.55** .21</td>
<td>-.64** .20</td>
<td>-.84*** .24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>-.16 .12</td>
<td>-.22 .21</td>
<td>-.20 .19</td>
<td>.00 .26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>.53*** .08</td>
<td>.32* .15</td>
<td>.78*** .13</td>
<td>.36* .16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>-.91*** .24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>-1.48*** .26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>6.73 .50</td>
<td>6.48 .81</td>
<td>5.04 .79</td>
<td>6.71 .93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| R²                | .162                      | .223                    | .181            | .090           |
| Adjusted R²       | .158                      | .213                    | .173            | .077           |
| Observations      | 1,943                     | 608                     | 768             | 567            |

* P < .10.  
* * P < .05.  
* * * P < .01.  
* * * * P < .001.

(B = 0.79, P < .001). These results provide preliminary support for hypotheses 1 and 3. However, we did not have any evidence in support of hypothesis 2 about the effect of exposure on trust in government. The other variables that were significantly correlated with trust in government included the perceived position and motive of Mr. Novak, the willingness of the respondents to forgive, and the country variables. Other things being equal, the more Mr. Novak was perceived as occupying a high position in the previous regime, the lower the citizens’ trust in the new government that he now served (B = -.20, P < .05). The more the respondents considered Mr. Novak as pursuing self-interest in the past, the lower the citizens’ trust in the new government that he now served (B = -.64, P < .001). A unit increase in the respondents’ forgiveness score was correlated with a 0.53-point increase in their trust in the government score (B = 0.53, P < .001), other things being equal. Compared with Czechs, Hungarians (B = -0.91, P < .001) and Poles (B = -1.48, P < .001) had a significantly lower level of trust in their governments (model 1A).

Results from separate country analyses (models 1B, 1C, and 1D) add information on the impact of dismissal, exposure, and confession on trust
TABLE 2
PREDICTORS OF TRUST IN THE Tainted Official: OLS LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Merged Data Set Model 2A</th>
<th>Czech Republic Model 2B</th>
<th>Hungary Model 2C</th>
<th>Poland Model 2D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure</td>
<td>-.44***</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.38</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confession</td>
<td>1.31***</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>1.23***</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequence</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High position</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motive (self-interest)</td>
<td>-.63***</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>-.47***</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.56***</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>1.46***</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>1.29***</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>-1.23***</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.284</td>
<td></td>
<td>.270</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td></td>
<td>.260</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1,898</td>
<td></td>
<td>563</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $P < .10$.
** $P < .05$.
*** $P < .01$.

in government within the contexts that gave birth to these three distinct lustration systems. Other things being equal, in the Czech Republic, dismissal increased trust in government by 3.88 points ($B = 3.88$, $P < .001$), in Hungary by 3.16 points ($B = 3.16$, $P < .001$), and in Poland by 2.17 points ($B = 2.17$, $P < .001$). These results provided consistent support for hypothesis 1. Confession significantly increased trust in government in the Czech Republic ($B = 0.90$, $P < .01$) and in Hungary ($B = 0.98$, $P < .01$), but not in Poland. This result is surprising given the fact that Poland is the country where the lustration system based on confession was developed. The surprising result, however, may also reflect the skepticism Poles have developed toward their own lustration system because of the controversies surrounding its launch and its inconsistent implementation by the state.

Factors Affecting Trust in the Tainted Official

Model 2A in table 2 shows the effects of dismissal, exposure, and confession on the respondents’ trust in tainted officials in the merged data set. We hypothesized that dismissal would have a negative impact on trust.
in tainted officials because it projected an image of an unchangeably
tainted character (hypothesis 4). This hypothesis is not supported by the
data. Not only did dismissal not have a negative effect on trust in the
tainted official, it had a significant and positive effect on it \( B = 0.31, P < .05 \). Our hypothesis that exposure would create a shaming penalty and reduce trust in the tainted official (hypothesis 5) is supported by the merged data. All else being equal, exposure reduced trust in the tainted official by 0.44 points on a 16-point scale \( B = -0.44, P < .01 \). Confession, however, significantly increased trust in tainted officials by 1.31 points \( P < .001 \). This provides support for hypothesis 6. Other variables that were significantly correlated with trust in tainted officials included the perceived position, motives, and agency of the tainted official; the respondents’ forgiveness scores; and the country variables. All other things being equal, the higher the perceived position of the tainted official in the previous regime, the lower the level of trust in him now \( B = -0.21, P < .05 \). If the respondents considered Mr. Novak’s actions in the past to have been motivated by self-interest, they were less likely to trust him now \( B = -0.63, P < .001 \), all else being equal. The more the respondents perceived Mr. Novak as acting independently in the past, the less likely they were to be prepared to trust him now \( B = -0.47, P < .001 \), all else being equal. A unit increase in the respondents’ forgiveness score increased their trust in the tainted official by 1.46 points \( B = 1.46, P < .001 \), all else being equal. Compared with the Czechs, the Polish respondents had a significantly lower level of trust in the tainted official, all else being equal \( B = -1.23, P < .001 \).

Separate country analyses, presented in models 2B, 2C, and 2D in table 2, demonstrate how the effects of dismissal, exposure, and confession on trust in tainted officials may vary in different contexts. In all of the countries in question, confession had a positive and highly significant effect on trust in tainted officials, thus providing support for hypothesis 6. These countries, however, displayed some surprising differences. Although dismissal and exposure had no significant effects on trust in tainted officials in the Czech Republic, these factors had unexpected effects in Hungary and Poland. In Hungary, dismissal surprisingly had a positive and significant effect on trust in the tainted official \( B = 0.58, P < .05 \). In Poland, exposure had a marginally significant and negative effect on trust in the tainted official \( B = -0.52, P = .07 \). These results should be considered within the contexts in which respective lustration systems were implemented. As mentioned in our discussion of our research sites, the major problems facing the implementation of the Hungarian lustration system based on exposure were that exposure was usually met with denial and that sanctions (i.e., dismissal) for denials were extremely rare. The positive effect of dismissal on trust in tainted officials among Hungarians may be
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read as reflecting their desire for sanctions against those who have denied wrongdoing and those who are tainted. However, in Poland, the major problem with the implementation of its lustration system based on confession was that confession did not prevent uncontrolled media exposure of the alleged collaborators as a result of political rivalries. Although some of the allegations in question were later cleared, the shaming effect of exposure, and particularly the exposure of very high profile political figures, such as the Polish president, seemed to have left an inerasable mark on the collective memory of the public regarding the past.

DISCUSSION

This article examined the potential of lustration to rejuvenate trust in the aftermath of regime change. Insights from cultural sociology into the symbolic expressive dimensions of social practice offered a new angle from which to understand lustration systems and theorize their effects. The classification of different lustration laws into the categories of dismissal, exposure, and confession provided a useful conceptual and analytical tool with which to test their effects on trust in governments and trust in tainted officials using survey experiments in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. This comparative approach enabled us to identity commonalities and differences and to answer the question, under what conditions do different lustration systems undermine or promote public trust in state institutions and their tainted personnel in the aftermath of a regime change?

Dismissals have the strongest positive effect on trust in government. This result was consistent across all of our models. Moreover, contrary to our hypothesis, we have found that the effect of dismissal on trust in tainted officials may even be positive. In Hungary, a country that has pursued exposure without any consequences, dismissal increased the willingness of citizens to trust the tainted official. Although our evidence regarding the effect of dismissal on trust in tainted officials is context dependent, it contradicts the assumptions presented in several previous studies on lustration in transitional societies. It is nevertheless in line with a recent study that has suggested that, under certain circumstances, the impact of punitive methods on the willingness of former political prisoners to forgive wrongdoers may be positive (David and Choi 2006). This finding regarding dismissal and trust in tainted officials requires the symbolic meaning of exclusive systems to be revisited. Instead of condemning and marginalizing the wrongdoer in the eyes of the public, dismissal may actually express a meaning that is similar to that of punishment. It may send a retributive message that quells vengeful feelings toward the wrong-
doer. Dismissal may signal that justice has been done and that the wrongdoer has paid his debt to society. The gratification of observing that justice has been done makes it easier for members of the public to renew trust in tainted officials.

Second, our results suggest that, compared with dismissal and confession, exposure is the least efficient method of dealing with inherited personnel. Our hypothesis that exposure demonstrates discontinuity with the past and may therefore increase trust in government was not supported. Our hypothesis that exposure may create a shaming penalty and reduce citizens’ trust in tainted officials was supported by the merged data. This finding runs contrary to theories of restorative justice and their extensions to transitional political contexts, which maintain that truth can lead to reconciliation.

Third, confession significantly increased the citizens’ trust in government in all but one of our models. Although the effect of confession on trust in government was not significant in Poland, this does not invalidate its potential. A further analysis revealed that confession did increase trust in government in Poland, but only when confession preceded exposure. When exposure came before confession, the positive effect of confession on trust in government became insignificant. This may suggest that the positive effect of confession may be undermined by government action to expose tainted officials.

More important, confession was found to significantly increase citizens’ trust in tainted officials, regardless of the political context. A comparison between the results of exposure and confession suggests that the effects of a personal revelation of the truth are more convincing than the effects of disclosure of the truth by the government. Both exposure and confession are forms of truth processes. However, the former is external to the tainted official whereas the latter is a form of self-expression. Although both exposure and confession give the wrongdoers a second chance, citizens are willing to grant it only to wrongdoers who confess and demonstrate a change of heart. In line with the research about the utility of the truth and reconciliation process in South Africa (Gibson and Gouws 2003), our findings on confession and trust suggest the possibility of employing individual-level experiences with confessions in order to buttress complicated macropolitical processes. Confession may therefore be a viable alternative to dismissals for countries that are poor in human resources and that cannot afford to lose qualified personnel following a transition.

These findings introduce grounds for a cautious optimism about the controversial and relatively unexplored topic of lustrations. They may be relevant to scholars in the fields of transitional justice, cultural sociology, political sociology of postcommunist societies, and law and society. For scholars in transitional justice, our research demonstrates that the three
lustration systems represent three strategies of postconflict justice: dismissal represents retribution, exposure is a form of truth revelation, and confession provides a reconciliatory strategy. Although these strategies have been pursued through a variety of domestic and international trials, truth commissions, and reconciliation committees, their impacts at the country level have not been systematically compared and explored. Our study fills the gap and offers some evidence about the impacts of different strategies on the political and social landscape after transition. For scholars in cultural sociology, our findings suggest that only dismissal and confession are able to convey a message that signals the purification of the state apparatus. For political sociologists, our findings shed new light on the potential of lustration to rejuvenate trust in government and facilitate democratic consolidation but also contain a warning about their different impacts on the social landscape. Finally, scholarship on law and society may appreciate our conceptualization of lustration systems, which allows an effective study of various lustration laws using the instruments of sociology.

However, for every gain in our research steps, we have also incurred some costs. We developed the concept of lustration system to classify different lustration laws. Its strength lies in its simplicity, which allows us to classify and test empirically the effects of different methods on trust. Simplicity is a double-edged sword, however. It ignores the complexity involved in the actual implementation of lustration policies in different contexts. In the real world, each lustration system is a large and complex process. At least in the initial stages, each has been plagued by political disputes, problems in implementation, and inconsistent enforcement. We agree with those who believe that the survey experiment has greater internal validity than nonexperimental methods and enables identifying causal relationships. But we are also aware of those critics of experiments who argue that the operationalization of real-life situations into simple experimental vignettes may generate distortions because some real-life variables may not be captured in the experimental design. Readers are therefore urged not to generalize uncritically from the findings of this article to all real-world situations but to treat them as possible avenues for future research.

REFERENCES


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Lustration Systems and Trust


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