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How culture may nurture institutional trust: Insights from Bangladesh and Nepal

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Abstract

Motivation: Most studies of the normative roots of political trust argue that they stem from policy performance rather than from cultural orientation. That sits at odds with the observation that institutional trust—that is, citizens' confidence in public agencies—is high in Bangladesh and Nepal despite poor policy performance.

Purpose: The article assesses the influence of policy performance and cultural orientation of citizens in Bangladesh and Nepal on institutional trust.

Approach and Methods: The article draws on country representative surveys (Governance and Trust Survey 2) in Bangladesh and Nepal carried out in 2014–15. It identifies cultural preferences and specifically authoritarian cultural orientation (ACO)—characterized by deference to authority, unquestioning obedience, and reliance on authorities—and compares this to institutional trust.

Findings: High authoritarian cultural orientation (ACO) can lead citizens to trust public institutions. People's submissiveness to the country's authorities can obstruct critical thinking and even create positive impressions of the authorities, which in turn generates institutional trust. Institutions that are more visible and exert more authority may attract greater trust among citizens who exhibit ACO.

Policy Implications: When assessing citizens' perceptions of policy performance, their cultural orientations must be considered. Trust in public agencies cannot be treated as proxy for their policy performance.

KEYWORDS

authoritarian cultural orientation, culture, policy performance, South Asia, trust

1 | INTRODUCTION

This article analyses whether citizens' authoritarian cultural orientation (ACO) in Bangladesh and Nepal affects their political or institutional trust. Various studies argue that the normative roots of political trust are located mainly in policy performance rather than in the cultural hypothesis. According to Mishler and Rose (2001), citizens' higher institutional trust is an indicator of good governance,

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legitimacy, regime stability and democratic consolidation, especially in new democracies. This is not always true, however, in the case of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) where, despite lower policy performance and poor governance, trust in public institutions may be surprisingly high (Askvik, et al. 2011; Jamil & Askvik, 2015; Shi, 2001; Wang, 2005). Thus, there is no automatic match between better policy performance and higher institutional trust, which is why Van de Walle and Bouckaert (2003, p. 891) said that “this is a very rational and mechanistic reasoning, only part of which corresponds to reality”. What explains this mismatch? This is the question this article seeks to answer. Our point of departure is to revisit citizens’ cultural orientation and higher institutional trust and whether this could explain why institutional trust is high in Bangladesh and Nepal despite poor policy performance.

2 | INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

Institutional trust is a measurement of citizens’ confidence in public institutions and indicates how far these successfully meet citizens’ needs (Bouckaert et al., 2005; Grönlund & Setälä, 2012; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008). Higher institutional trust suggests that public institutions meet citizens’ needs and aspirations. In other words, trust reflects the extent to which citizens consider public institutions to be legitimate, valid, and acceptable. According to Jamil and Askvik (2016, p. 647), “trust is claimed to be the foundation of democratic societies”. Citizens’ positive evaluation of public institutions may encourage them to participate more in public affairs and they also tend to comply more with rules and regulations (Van Ryzin, 2011; Wong et al., 2011), while lower trust creates a political environment in which it is difficult for leaders to succeed (Hetherington, 1998). Given its importance in governance, various studies have sought to explain institutional trust.

The most dominant factors in explaining trust in institutions have been the variables of institutional performance and the quality of governance; that is, better performance of public institutions and a higher quality of governance are claimed to enhance citizens’ trust in them (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Jacob & Schenke, 2020; Mauk, 2019; Mishler & Rose, 1997, 2001; Rohrschneider & Schmitt-Beck, 2002; Yang & Holze, 2006). From the perspective of rational choice theory, these two factors are assumed to be the main explanatory variables for institutional trust (Mishler & Rose, 2001), but it may not be possible to explain higher institutional trust in developing and transitional democracies where weak or poor governance is the political order. The two countries selected for this study face the same challenges—despite poor performance (for example, low ranking in the Human Development Index¹ (HDI) published by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2016) and poor governance (for example, low ranking in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) published by Transparency International) (2016) (Table 1), different public institutions enjoy greater confidence among citizens of both countries. In the HDI, Bangladesh and Nepal are ranked 142 and 145 respectively out of 188 countries, indicating relatively low policy performance. Similarly, in terms of the CPI, both Bangladesh and Nepal can be regarded as corruption-prone countries as they are ranked 139 (Bangladesh) and 130 (Nepal) out of 168 countries. Observing inflated trust of this kind, Norris et al. (2019) refer to these

¹The HDI is a measure “of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living” (UNDP, 2016). The health dimension is captured by life expectancy at birth while the education dimension is measured by mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more and expected years of schooling for children of school-entry age. The standard of living dimension is calculated by gross national income (GNI) per capita (UNDP, 2016).

TABLE 1 Relation among Institutional Trust, Performance and Quality of Governance

Institutional Factors	Indicators	Bangladesh	Nepal
Trust	Central Government	70	65
	Parliament	73	63
	Civil Service	70	69
	Higher Judiciary	75	74
	Police	58	71
	Army	81	75
	Anti-Corruption Commission	64	75
	Political Parties	62	56
	NGO	72	66
Performance	Human Development Index	0.57 (142)*	0.548 (145)*
Governance Quality	Corruption Perceptions Index	26 (139)**	27 (130)**

Note: Trust data are from Governance and Trust Survey 2 (2014–15) conducted under a project funded by the Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development (NORHED) and the mean trust levels are converted to 1–100 scale on a 1–4 scale.

The figures in parenthesis indicate the country's ranking out of a total of 168 countries.

*Source: UNDP (2016); the figures in parenthesis indicate the country's ranking out of a total of 188 countries.

**Source: Transparency International (2016).

as “false positive” and ‘compliant trust’. In order to understand this, we revisit the explanations of institutional trust based on cultural orientation.

3 | CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

The cultural perspective views “social capital” as one of the main explanatory variables (Fukuyama, 2001; Newton & Norris, 2000; Putnam, 1993, 2001) in determining institutional trust. According to the logic of this variable, people with higher generalized trust may engage more with civic life, which in turn may create a sense of ownership of public institutions and also contribute to better institutional performance. The argument follows that better performance and citizens' sense of ownership can then contribute to generating greater institutional trust; those with higher generalized trust tend to believe other people, and this personal optimistic view may also affect their evaluation of institutions. Putnam (1993, 2001) is a leading proponent of this assumption, which he explained in his study of regional governments in Italy. Some scholars have found support for Putnam's assumption (e.g. Fukuyama, 2001; Newton & Norris, 2000), while others found little or no significant relationship (e.g. Bäck & Kestilä, 2009; Dowley & Silver, 2002; Kaase, 1999; Newton, 2001; Rohrschneider & Schmitt, 2002) or even a negative relationship (e.g. Kim, 2005) between these two factors.

Rothstein and Stolle (2008, p. 444) raised questions about the appropriateness of generalized trust to explain institutional trust, arguing that there is no plausible causal relationship between them, since “we do not know *how* trusting people creates better service performance and better local politicians who are more responsive”. Moreover, lower performance and poor governance, particularly unfair treatment, may destroy or impede generalized trust. Kumlin and Rothstein (2005) found that contact with universal state welfare institutions tends to increase generalized trust, perhaps because people perceive that the decisions made by “needs-testing” institutions are less impartial or opaque since they

test individual eligibility for the services. These findings indicate that trust is a consequence of institutional outcomes. So, the countries with poorer institutional performance and poor governance may struggle to form social capital. As the two sample countries—Bangladesh and Nepal—have problems with both factors, it is difficult for them to generate generalized trust. Cultural aspects, as indicated in most of the current literature, appear to be problematic as a means to explain institutional trust in these countries. The findings of Jamil and Askvik (2015) also confirmed that generalized trust had no effect on institutional trust in the two countries.

4 | UNDERSTANDING AUTHORITARIAN CULTURAL ORIENTATION

Ma and Yang (2014) use “authoritarian orientations” to explain institutional trust in 13 East Asian societies that are considered to be hierarchical—meaning that group norms and preferences are more important than individual preferences in explaining how people behave and relate to each other (Hofstede et al., 2010). People are constrained to choose of their own free will, and leaders’ wishes and directions are the key for most actions. This cultural attribute may be useful in order to understand institutional trust in Bangladesh and Nepal because of their hierarchical culture (Baniamin, 2019; Baniamin et al., 2019). The hierarchical nature of social arrangements in these two countries formed the basis of political structures and governance through patron–client ties (Jamil et al., 2013; Kochanek, 2000; Neher, 1994), political exclusion (Lawoti, 2005), and centralized authority (Riaz & Basu, 2010). As a result, citizens’ deference and loyalty to authority are “natural” phenomena in relations between individuals, and in individuals’ relationship to public institutions. According to the Hofstede centre, scores for power distance² are 80 for Bangladesh and 65 for Nepal, which is relatively high, meaning that citizens do not consider themselves as equals and prefer a hierarchical social order (Hofstede, n.d.). The greater power distance in these two countries may suggest the need to test whether their higher authoritarian orientation generates institutional trust.

The concept of “authoritarian cultural dimension” is connected with the power distance described in Hofstede et al. (2010), which indicates that the less powerful members of a society expect power to be distributed unequally and therefore accept a more hierarchical social order. Ma and Yang (2014, p. 326) defined authoritarian orientations as “deference to authority, unquestioning obedience, and reliance on authorities”. By authority, they refer to various institutions and actors such as the government, political leaders, teachers, elders, parents, or anyone with a high social standing or reputation. These attitudes of submissiveness and obedience to authority may obstruct people’s critical thinking and even create a positive impression on the authorities, which can in turn contribute to generate higher institutional trust. This trust may not, in fact, measure the “real” effectiveness of these institutions, which is why it may be called “blind trust”. In contrast, a culture characterized by “lower ACO” may promote more egalitarian values and lead citizens to challenge the authorities and their activities. Citizens who are more assertive may also be more critical, which may in turn lead to lower institutional trust. Thus, citizens of a given country possessing one of these two contrasting types of cultural traits may assess the effectiveness of an institution differently, which may contribute to their degree of institutional trust. Based on the ACO, along with the logic of institutional performance, we develop the following matrix (Figure 1) to understand their linkages with institutional trust.

²The higher the score the higher the Power Distance.

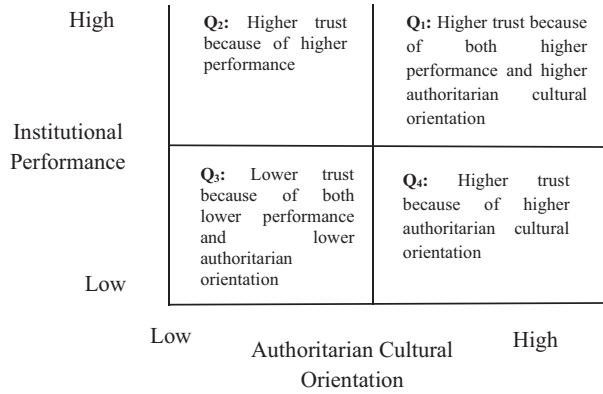


FIGURE 1 Relationship among Authoritarian Cultural Orientation, Institutional Performance and Trust

In the Q₁ quadrant, there will be greater trust because of both higher performance and higher ACO. This may be visible in an authoritarian culture (benevolent dictator or in a quasi-democracy), which may perform better, particularly in the economy. This is the situation in some East Asian countries, as explained by Ma and Yang (2014). In Q₂, people may have greater trust because the institutions perform well; here citizens may assess institutions more objectively and may be less influenced by ACO. In such a society, when institutions fail to perform according to citizens’ expectations, this may lead them to become more cynical towards institutions in general, which may be reflected in their degree of institutional trust (situation of Q₃). In Q₄, people may have greater institutional trust despite poor institutional performance. This may emanate from higher ACO that fosters citizens’ loyalty to those institutions. Like the logic of institutional performance, we may also find a similar type of relation between ACO and governance quality. Our puzzle lies in Q₄, that is whether higher ACO also enhances institutional trust.

5 | HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

In South Asia, formal institutional mechanisms and standard operating procedures are overshadowed by informal relations between citizens and higher authorities leading to patron–clientelism (Jamil et al., 2013). In these countries, citizens generally accept a more hierarchical social order and seldom oppose the existing power structures. Owing to this submissiveness (higher ACO), citizens may have positive attitudes to and beliefs about their political leaders.

In contrast, a culture characterized by “lower ACO” norms may lead to people being more assertive and encourage them to raise questions of the authorities and the effectiveness of different institutions. Norris (1999) and Blind (2007) argue that the emergence of “critical citizens” in advanced industrialized societies is causing the decline of political support. In the same vein, Wang and You (2016) explained declining political trust in China—despite rapid economic growth—by the modernization of Chinese political culture. One of the main mechanisms of such processes may be that acquiring more liberal democratic values can make citizens more critical of public institutions (ibid.). This transition may indicate the situation that many advanced industrialized societies have already reached. Thus, the degree of this cultural orientation may be important in explaining institutional trust; people with higher ACO may have higher institutional trust owing to their submissiveness while those with lower ACO may have lower institutional trust owing to their assertiveness. Based on these logics, the study postulates that:

H1: People with higher ACO may have higher institutional trust.

A low level of education and poverty can contribute both to sustaining and to propagating ACO. In the context of economic difficulties and lack of education, people can easily be dependent on others, which can lead to submissiveness to authority. Greater economic capacity can create the possibility of becoming less dependent, and also can help people to afford a better education, which may make them more assertive and likely to challenge authority. Thus, both factors (economic development and education) may contribute to reducing a blind trust in authority and is why different studies (such as Kim, 2010; Johnson, 2005) found a negative relationship between education and political trust—or that higher education reduces political trust. Authoritarian cultural orientation may diminish with economic development as more people can afford an education. Hakhverdian and Mayne (2012) indicated two mechanisms through which education can affect institutional trust: a) *a norm-inducing function*—better educated people are more likely to be morally troubled about poor institutional quality; and b) *an accuracy-inducing function*—better educated people may develop better skills and sophistication to judge institutional performance and processes. Based on these logics of the possible effects of education and economic development on institutional trust, we can establish the following hypothesis:

H2 (a): Higher education may reduce institutional trust.

H2 (b): Economic development may contribute to reducing institutional trust.

Structures and institutions play important roles in shaping people's attitudes towards authority (Shi, 2001). Ma (2007) claimed that in a traditional culture, the government has significant authoritative status (cited in Wong et al., 2011). Such an authoritative position in a hierarchical society can contribute to generating greater trust, although not all of a country's institutions are equally powerful or located close to citizens. These variations can also contribute to the variation in how citizens form impressions about institutions, which may contribute to the differences in institutional trust among them. The government institutions that are closer and more visible to citizens probably have a better opportunity to impress their authoritative status upon them. For example, the police are usually more visible than the army at the local level and so may have more opportunities to create an impression of their authority on local citizens. Thus, the visibility or proximity factor can be important in how people form impressions of certain institutions and thus to the degree of institutional trust. Therefore, people with a higher ACO may have greater trust in the institutions that are more visible. Based on these factors, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Institutions which are more visible to citizens may attract more trust among the people with higher authoritarian cultural orientation.

Along with the “degree of visibility or proximity”, the “degree of power” may also be a factor, since if one institution exerts more power than others in a hierarchical society, it probably has an advantage in earning greater loyalty. For example, in Bangladesh and Nepal, the civil service has more administrative power than educational institutions and is relatively visible to ordinary people. Greater administrative power refers to more discretionary decision-making power. Most educational institutions in the two countries operate under the instructions of the civil administration, which controls their different activities, and education budgets are also channelled through government agencies that are staffed by civil servants. For example, the civil administration monitors public examinations and issues directives to teachers. On the occasion of important events, such as school national day

TABLE 2 Means and Cronbach's Alphas on the Measure of Authoritarian Cultural Orientation Index

Country	Valid N	Authoritarian cultural orientation Index (1–4 Scale)	
		M	Cronbach's Alphas based on Standardized Items
Bangladesh	2,653	2.759	.690
Nepal	2,295	2.269	.682

Note: Don't Know is excluded

celebrations, civil servants attend as the main or special guest and preside over the programme. Given the discretionary powers of civil servants, they exert an influence over citizens' everyday lives and so are more visible as institutions that wield substantial authority. This discretionary and authoritative power is an essential part of the colonial legacy. Although it has been curtailed over the years, and in a democratic setting politicians have gained considerable power vis-à-vis civil servants, the latter still play important roles in central and local governments. An institution's authoritative position can affect the public level of trust, particularly among those who are submissive and obedient to authority. The stronger the authority, the stronger their obedience to it is likely to be, and accordingly a higher level of trust. Based on these logics, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H4: Institutions which exercise more authority may attract more trust among the people with higher authoritarian cultural orientation.

6 | RESEARCH DESIGN AND SOURCE OF DATA

The study tests the proposed hypotheses based on responses to the "Governance and Trust Survey 2" in Bangladesh and Nepal. As part of a NORHED-funded project, a survey was conducted in these countries over the 2014–15 period.³ First, the survey sought to measure the extent of ACO in these countries. To capture this concept, the study created a composite index based on three statements: 1) people with power, money and high family status should be respected; 2) top officials in government/private-sector/non-government organizations (NGOs) are like head of the family, and everyone should follow their decisions; and 3) it is natural that those with power, money and from a high-status family background should be respected and obeyed. The Cronbach Alpha of this measure is .690 for the data from Bangladesh and .682 for the data from Nepal (Table 2), which are higher than the conventional 0.6 (Armah-Attoh et al., 2007). It can therefore be argued that the index is internally consistent. The answers are ranged from 1 to 4 where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 4 "strongly agree", meaning that higher values indicate higher "authoritarian cultural orientation".

This ACO variable is then correlated with the "political loyalty index" variable to further check the robustness of the ACO measurement. If the measure is more precise then it is expected to have a positive correlation with political loyalty; that is, people with higher ACO should have greater political

³In this survey, 20% of the electoral constituencies of the countries were covered, in which different socio-economic characteristics such as geographic variations (Nepalese Hill, Mountain and *Terai* (plain land)), sex, religion, etc. were considered so the sample size is representative of the countries' diversity. From each constituency, one polling booth was selected from which 50 respondents were randomly selected from the electoral list. If someone was not available at a particular address a person from the next house was selected. This means that the survey data can be treated as randomized and representative of the respective country's population.

TABLE 3 Correlation between Authoritarian Cultural Orientation and Degree of Political Loyalty

	Authoritarian cultural orientation (Low–High)	
	Bangladesh (N = 2,748)	Nepal (N = 2,404)
Political Loyalty Index (Low–High)	.275*	.225*

* $p < .01$

loyalty. This loyalty index is based on two variables derived from two statements: “politicians are competent and know what they are doing” and “politicians do what is right” where again 1 represents “strongly disagree” and 4 “strongly agree”. Table 3 shows statistically significant positive correlations between the political loyalty index and ACO. These positive correlations (as shown in Table 3) indicate that with the increase of ACO, people are inclined to believe that politicians are competent and that they are doing the right things. These linkages may support the reliability of the measure of ACO as both the variables move together in the expected direction.

To test the main assumptions about the effect of ACO on institutional trust, it maps institutional trust on the basis of citizens’ perception of confidence from low to high (1 = No confidence at all and 4 = A great deal of confidence) on a number of key institutions such as central government, parliament, the judiciary, the police, local government, NGOs, and so forth.

To make a more robust analysis of the possible effect of ACO on institutional trust, the study constructed a dependent variable “trust in government” by combining citizens’ trust (composite index) in the three main branches of government: executive, judiciary and legislature. To explain the trust level of this dependent variable, the study also included key performance and governance measures along with cultural explanations. The performance variable is measured through two key indicators: success in improving the general economic situation and success in reducing poverty. The quality of governance is also measured through two indicators: success in reducing corruption and success in ensuring citizens’ safety and security. All these performance and governance indicators are measured on a 1–4 scale where higher values indicate greater success. The study also includes the measure of generalized trust in this model, which is captured by a widely used measure—whether or not most people can be trusted.

TABLE 4 Categorization of the Institutions into Pairs

Dimensions	Pair	Institutions	Expected outcome based on Hypothesis 3 and 4	Rationales
Degree of Visibility or Proximity	Pair 1	Central government vs. Local government	H3: Local government may have higher positive correlational value	Local government is closer to citizens than the central government
	Pair 2	Higher judiciary vs. Lower judiciary	H3: Lower judiciary may have higher positive correlational value	Lower judiciary is closer to citizens than the higher judiciary
	Pair 3	Army vs. Police	H3: Police may have higher positive correlational value	Police are more visible than the Army
Degree of Power	Pair 4	Civil Service vs. Education institutions	H4: Civil service may have higher positive correlational value	Civil service has more administrative power than educational institutions

TABLE 5 Correlation between Institutional Trust and Authoritarian Cultural Orientation

	Institutional Trust (Low–High)	Authoritarian Cultural Orientation (Low–High)	
		Bangladesh (N = 2,748)	Nepal (N = 2,404)
Pair 1	Central Government	.342*	.186*
	Local Government (Bangladesh)		
	<i>Upazila (Sub-District)</i>	.368*	
	<i>Union Parishad (Rural local government)</i>	.381*	
	<i>Pauroshova (Urban local government)</i>	.287*	
	Local Government (Nepal)		
	<i>District Development Committee⁴(DDC)</i>	-	.223*
	<i>VDC⁵</i>	-	.139*
Pair 2	Higher Judiciary	.179*	.187*
	Lower Judiciary	.277*	.176*
Pair 3	Army	.063*	.103*
	Police	.388*	.190*
Pair 4	Civil Service	.350*	.176*
	Education Institutions	.083*	.116*
Others	Parliament	.267*	.110*
	Anti-Corruption Commission	.290*	.33
	NGOs	.193*	.215*

* $p < .01$

To measure the possible variation of the trust level based on the degree of proximity or visibility and the degree of power exerted, the study clusters different types of institutions into pairs based on their similarities, such as central government vs. local government. Although there are huge differences between the institutions in each pair, there are also some kinds of similarities. The details of the cluster and their rationales are given in Table 4.

7 | FINDINGS

The extent of ACO in two countries is presented in Table 2, which indicates that ACO is higher in Bangladesh ($M = 2.76$) than in Nepal ($M = 2.27$). This is consistent with the findings of Hofstede (n.d.), which showed that Bangladesh has higher power distance than Nepal (80 and 65 respectively).

Table 6 indicates that ACO has a positive correlation with the trust level of all the institutions in the two countries, apart from trust in the anti-corruption commission in Nepal. The effects of ACO are higher in Bangladesh than in Nepal. In the same way as for trust in “central government”, the ‘ r ’ value is higher in Bangladesh ($r = .342$ and $p < .01$) than in Nepal ($r = .186$ and $p < .01$) (Table 5).

⁴DDCs are replaced by District Coordination Committee (DCC) in 2017.

⁵The Village Development Committee (VDC) was dissolved in 2017 to be replaced by the *Gaunpalika*.

TABLE 6 Summary of the Linear Regression Models of Confidence/Trust in Civil Service in Bangladesh and Nepal (standardized beta coefficients)

	Bangladesh	Nepal
<i>Performance</i>		
Success in improving general economic situation (Low–High)	.114*	.039
Success in reducing poverty (Low–High)	.096*	.065
<i>Quality of Governance</i>		
Success in reducing corruption (Low–High)	.111*	.032
Success in ensuring safety and security of the people (Low–High)	.137*	-.031
<i>Culture</i>		
Generalized trust (1 = Yes and 2 = No)	.029	-.008
Authoritarian cultural orientation (Low–High)	.187*	.122*
<i>Socio-Economic Factors</i>		
Gender (Ref: Men)	-.049***	-.108*
Age (Low–High)	-.010	-.062
Education (Low–High)	-.050***	-.095***
Monthly income (Low–High)	-.023	-.003
Satisfied with life (Low–High)	.153*	.110**
Constant (Unstandardized coefficients)	1.481	2.616
Adjusted R ²	.247	.046
N	2,748	2,404

Note: Dependent variable is 'Trust in Government Index' (composite index based on trust level in executive, judiciary and legislative)
 *** $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ and * $p < .001$, (two-tailed tests)

These values indicate that those who demonstrate higher ACO also display higher institutional trust, and indicate the support for Hypothesis 1 (H1). In Bangladesh, the largest correlation coefficient is for the police as $r = .388$ ($p < .01$) and in Nepal it is for the District Development Committee (DDC) (local government) as 'r' value is $.223$ ($p < .01$) (Table 5).

In order to have more robust analysis of the effect of the ACO on institutional trust, the study also conducted a regression analysis. Table 6 indicates that in both countries, this cultural dimension is a key explanatory factor to explain trust in government as for Bangladesh $\beta = .187$ and $p < .01$; and for Nepal $\beta = .122$ and $p < .01$. This analysis also provides stronger support for hypothesis 1(H1) on the effect of ACO on institutional trust in the two countries. The study does not find any statistically significant relationship with the other cultural dimension—generalized trust—but does find a statistically significant relationship between performance and quality of governance indicators in Bangladesh, although not in Nepal.

Table 6 also indicates that in both countries, as the level of education rises, the level of trust declines as $\beta = -.050$ and $p < .05$ for Bangladesh and $\beta = -.095$ and $p < .05$ for Nepal. This supports hypothesis H2(a), but does not support hypothesis H2(b). Although the correlation in Table 7 indicates that higher income can reduce ACO ($r = -.047$, $p < .01$ for Bangladesh and $r = -.078$, $p < .01$ for Nepal), income does not show any effect on institutional trust in the regression models. This is probably because higher income works through other variables such as education, whose effect is not visible in the regression models. Table 7 also shows that with the increase of education, the ACO norms reduced as correlation coefficients between these two variables are -0.205 ($p < .01$) in Bangladesh

TABLE 7 Correlation between Socio-economic Attributes and Authoritarian Cultural Orientation

Socio-Economic Attributes (Low–High)	Authoritarian Cultural Orientation (Low–High)	
	Bangladesh (N = 2,748)	Nepal (N = 2,404)
Age	.094*	.138*
Education	-.205*	-.247*
Income	-.047**	-.078*

* $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$

and -0.247 ($p < .01$) in Nepal (Table 7). Education may have such effect as it can encourage citizens' assertiveness and awareness, and so to raise their voices against authority.

The study also finds that older people have higher ACO since correlation coefficients between these two variables are 0.094 ($p < .01$) in Bangladesh and 0.138 ($p < .01$) in Nepal (Table 7). This is probably the result of social learning. Although this age variable reflects only a generational variation, age groups with different levels of ACO do not map ACO for particular individuals and this age variable does not show a statistically significant relationship in regression. Table 6 indicates that in both countries, women have less trust than men, i.e. $\beta = -.049$ and $p < .05$ for Bangladesh and $\beta = -.108$ and $p < .01$ for Nepal. The regression models also indicate that life satisfaction has a positive effect on trust in government in both countries, showing positive β values ($\beta = .153$ and $p < .001$ for Bangladesh and $\beta = .110$ and $p < .01$ for Nepal).

The third hypothesis states that institutions which are more visible to citizens may attract more trust among those who demonstrate higher ACO. First, the study compares similar types of institutions with a different degree of public visibility. If we compare central government with local government institutions, we observe that in both countries, local governments have higher 'r' values than those of the central government. In the case of Bangladesh, the correlational coefficient between ACO and trust in central government is $.342$ ($p < .01$), which is lower than the trust levels of any local government units; for *Upazila Parishad* (Sub-district), the correlation coefficient is $.368$ ($p < .01$) and even higher for Union *Parishad* (rural local government) at $.381$ ($p < .01$), and for *Pourashova* Municipality (urban local government) it is $.287$ ($p < .01$) (Table 5). This provides support for hypothesis 3 (H3). Interestingly, in Bangladesh the effect of ACO on institutions is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. The lower correlation coefficient value for the municipality (urban local government) may be because there are more educated people in the urban areas than the rural areas, and who may assess institutional performance against a more demanding standard. This is also supported in the regression analysis in Table 6, that educated people have less trust.

In Nepal, the correlation coefficient for central government is $.186$ ($p < .01$) while for DDC it is $.223$ ($p < .01$) and for Village Development Committee (VDC), it is $.139$ ($p < .01$) (Table 5). Although the correlation coefficient value for VDCs is lower than that of central government, DDCs' value is higher, which supports the assumptions of hypothesis H3. The study does not show a higher coefficient for VDCs, perhaps because they are institutionally too weak and given the long absence of local elections lost importance as an institution in the local community. Most of the VDC's functions are now performed by the DDC (headed by a deputizing central-level bureaucrat).

The next pair compares higher judiciary and lower judiciary. Between these two institutions, the data of Bangladesh support Hypothesis 3 (H3) as the lower judiciary has higher coefficient value ($r = .277$, $p < .01$) than the higher judiciary ($r = .179$, $p < .01$). This is possibly due to the proximity of the lower judiciary to ordinary people (local presence) and its greater interaction with the general public

than the higher judiciary. However, the Nepalese data on the judiciary do not support hypothesis H3, as the higher judiciary has higher coefficient value. This is probably due to the dominant roles of the higher judiciary during the political crisis in Nepal.

Between the army and the police, the latter are usually more visible to local people. This may contribute to higher trust in the police among the people with higher ACO. In Bangladesh, for the army, the correlation coefficient is .063 ($p < .01$) while for the police it is .388 ($p < .01$). Similarly, in Nepal, police have a higher coefficient (.190, $p < .01$) than the army (.103, $p < .01$). So, with regard to pairwise comparison of trust, in Bangladesh and Nepal these findings support the assumption of Hypothesis 3 (H3). These findings are interesting; in many countries, the army enjoys higher trust and the two countries are no exception. Despite aggregate higher institutional trust in the army, it appears that trust in police rises more than the army with the increase of ACO.

In terms of the degree of power, generally the civil service should have higher administrative power than educational institutions and at the local level its exercise of power is quite visible on various occasions and local events. In Bangladesh, the correlation coefficient value for the civil service is .350 ($p < .01$) while for educational institutions it is .083 ($p < .01$). Similarly, in Nepal, the civil service has higher correlation coefficient values .176 ($p < .01$) than educational institutions (.116, $p < .01$). Thus, the pairwise comparisons from the two countries indicate that the institutions which exert more power tend to attract higher trust among those citizens who have higher ACO, which provides support for hypothesis 4 (H4).

8 | DISCUSSION

The main objective of this article was to explore empirical evidence of the effects of cultural attributes in generating citizens' trust in public institutions. The most common cultural variable adopted in most studies to explain institutional trust is generalized trust. This may be appropriate in mature democracies where there is a higher degree of civic engagement. This variable may not, however, be suitable in new democracies where the system of governance is in a process of transforming from an authoritarian to a democratic system. Generalized trust may generate more institutional trust in a more equitable and fair society in which citizens' demands and suggestions are entertained and taken into consideration. If this happens, institutional trust grows further. In contrast, an ACO is not based on democratic engagement and co-operation, but on loyalty and a culture of following the authorities' directives rather than being engaged in healthy debates. It even employs repressive measures to quell disobedience or challenges to the authorities. The governance in such society may be characterized by patronage rather than rights-based or meritocratic system, whereby obedience, deference, loyalty and allegiance become essential elements of the social order. This obedience norm and an assertive culture create different worldviews among citizens, so their evaluation of and level of trust in the authorities also vary.

The study found that citizens who have higher ACO have more institutional trust, and that this cultural orientation generates more trust in institutions that are more visible and closer to them, for example, local government rather than central government. The study also found that the police enjoy more trust than the army among those with higher ACO, again explained by the proximity and visibility factor. In order to test the effect of the dimension of "exercise of power", a comparison was also made between "civil service" and "educational" institutions. The study found that the civil service, which traditionally exercises more authority and power, attracts more trust than educational institutions. Although these findings are based on correlational analyses, they provide food for thought. For further confirmation of the effect of these two factors on ACO, we need more rigorous studies.

The empirical evidence from the study also indicates that older people have higher ACO, which may be explained by processes of social learning. Younger people may be more critical but become less so in the course of time, as social learning may encourage greater institutional loyalty and hence trust. On the other hand, education and income may help to reduce such attitudes, although the measured effects of age, education and economic development are based only on correlation. The possible negative effect of education on ACO may indicate that in the long run, as today's younger adults gradually replace the current older generation, blind trust may gradually decline. For a better understanding of the associations of the different variables with ACO, such as degree of power and the proximity of an institution, or socio-demographic factors such as age and education, there would need to be a more rigorous study, and an experimental study may be helpful in obtaining more convincing results.

9 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

From this study, it can be inferred that culture does matter in explaining institutional trust in the two countries but depends on what kind of cultural values are used in the analysis. Our findings from Bangladesh and Nepal suggest that ACO as an element of culture does affect citizens' trust in institutions. Cultures that value authority and power tend to trust public institutions more, particularly those institutions which exercise more authority and power and are more visible. So, we need to consider this cultural attribute to analyse institutional trust in a hierarchical society.

The regression models used do not include a number of factors due to lack of available data on other aspects that might also affect the level of trust in the government in these two countries, such as the amount of media exposure, caste in Nepal, urban–rural divides, political scandals, respondents' political affiliations, among others. For a better explanation and understanding of institutional trust, these factors need to be incorporated in future studies.

The findings presented in this article could have significant implications in the field of policy evaluation. If institutional trust is used as a proxy to map policy performance or institutional performance and governance quality, such a measure may be problematic as in some countries it is influenced by traditional values like authoritarian cultural orientation. As a result, higher institutional trust may not in fact reflect actual policy performance or governance quality.

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APPENDIX

TABLE A1 Respondents' Socio-Economic Profile

	Bangladesh	Nepal
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	1378 (50.2)	1218 (50.7)
<i>Female</i>	1368 (49.8)	1186 (49.3)
Age		
<i>Min–Max</i>	17–100	18–92
<i>Average</i>	40.84	41.88
Religion		
<i>Buddhist</i>	50 (1.8)	140 (5.8)
<i>Christian</i>	31 (1.1)	25 (1.0)
<i>Hindu</i>	212 (7.7)	2162 (89.9)
<i>Muslim</i>	2445 (89.2)	44 (1.8)
<i>Others</i>	3 (.1)	33 (1.4)
Education		
<i>Illiterate</i>	671 (24.4)	359 (15.1)
<i>Literate</i>	498 (18.1)	424 (17.8)
<i>Primary level</i>	550 (20.0)	135 (5.7)
<i>Lower secondary level</i>	369 (13.4)	178(7.5)
<i>Secondary level</i>	265 (9.6)	398 (16.7)
<i>Higher secondary level</i>	233 (8.5)	418 (17.6)
<i>Graduate degree</i>	115 (4.2)	330 9(13.9)
<i>Master's degree or higher</i>	46 (1.7)	137 (5.8)
Income		
<i>Min–Max</i>	0– 500,000BDT*	200–600,000NRS**
<i>Average</i>	7,714 BDT (98 USD)	15,972 NRS (148 USD)
N	2748	2404

Note: *BDT Bangladeshi Taka; **NPR Nepalese Rupee