

## **POLITICAL TRUST AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN NAGALAND**

**kikrunainuo kuotsu**

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### **Abstract**

Democracies function more effectively when citizens support key institutions. This indicates a need to probe questions designed to measure people's trust and confidence in key institutions and agents of the state. The present paper examines the nature and level of political trust among voters in Nagaland towards key institutions and agents of the state. Such an examination is supplemented by the respondent's assessment of the performance of the present government as well as the performance of the MLA who represent their constituency. The findings of the study have important implications. High level of trust is essential to both institutions as well as agents because trust is an important component of political support. This study also adds to our understanding of what can increase political trust.

### **Concept of Political Trust**

Political scientists attach great significance to the existence of political trust among citizens and its relevance to the survival of a political system. Political trust is most commonly conceptualized as an individual's confidence in government institutions based on perceptions of their performance<sup>1</sup>. It is considered one of the primary indicators of state legitimacy within the political behaviour literature because it measures society's overall confidence in the political institutions that comprise the state<sup>2</sup>. Trust in government and confidence in institutions signifies the degree of legitimacy ascribed to the state by the individual. Political trust is the ratio of

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<sup>1</sup> Newton, Kenneth (2007). 'Social and Political Trust'. In: Russell J Dalton & Hans-Dieter Klingemann (eds) Oxford Handbook of *Political Behavior*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp.342-361.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

people's evaluation of government performance relative to their normative expectations of how government ought to perform<sup>3</sup>.

Political trust is usually defined as citizen's belief or confidence that the government or political system will work to produce outcomes consistent with their expectations<sup>4</sup>. It is an essential component of "political support", which constitutes the basis of political system's legitimacy<sup>5</sup>. The existence of distrustful citizens is a barrier to the realization of the "democratic idea". Leaders in a representative democracy cannot be successful unless they have gained the trust of the citizens<sup>6</sup>.

People who trust government are more likely to comply with laws, support government initiatives, and follow political leadership without needing to be coerced<sup>7</sup>. Lack of trust in government has also been associated with participation in riots<sup>8</sup> and in other political activities aimed against the existing system. Moreover, long term absence of popular trust in government can also lead to a breakdown of trust for the regime and its founding principles<sup>9</sup>. In fact, scholars have found that many established democracies are suffering a long-term crisis of a low level of political trust, and worry that the democratic system could eventually collapse<sup>10</sup>.

In general scholars have found that political trust depends on a number of factors. For instance, political trust can depend on citizens' satisfaction with policy<sup>11</sup>, evaluations of incumbents and

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<sup>3</sup> Marc J. Hetherington, (2005). *Why Trust Matters: Declining Political Trust and the Demise of American Liberalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Marc J. Hetherington, (1998). 'The Political Relevance of Political Trust'. *American Political Science Rev.* 92, 4: 791-808.

<sup>5</sup> David Easton, (1975). "A Re-assessment of the Concept of Political Support." *British Journal of Political Science* 5: 435-57.

<sup>6</sup> Richard L. Cole, (1973). 'Toward a Model of Political Trust: A Causal Analysis'. *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 17, No. 4, Nov, pp. 809-817. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2110610>

<sup>7</sup> Mark Warren, (ed.) (1999). *Democracy and Trust*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Paige, (1971). "Political Orientation and Riot Participation." *American Sociological Review*. 36, 5: 810-20.

<sup>9</sup> S. Joseph Jr., (1997). "Introduction: the Decline of Confidence in Government." Pp. 1-18 in Joseph S. Nye Jr., Philip D. Zelikov, and David C. King (eds.), *Why People Don't Trust Government*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>10</sup> Blind PK., (2006). 'Building Trust in Government in the Twenty-first Century: Review of Literature and Emerging Issues'. <http://unpanl.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN025062.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur H. Miller, (1974). "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964-1970." *American Political Science Review*, 68(3):951-972.

institutions<sup>12</sup> political scandals and corruption<sup>13</sup>. Political trust therefore depends on the ability of the government to deliver good policies in the eyes of the people. Once government has earned the trust of its citizens, it follows that it will receive more leeway to pursue policy goals. However, if the government has lost this trust, it will be more difficult for it to gain policy support. Trust is one of the traits or dispositions people develop and crystallize as they would grow up from childhood to being teenagers and adults<sup>14</sup>.

## DATA AND METHODS

The study is based on a field investigation conducted among the electorate selected from four urban areas and four rural areas in Nagaland. Kohima, Mokokchung, Peren and Tuensang represent the four urban areas and Mezoma, Chare, Mokokchung village and Ngwalwa village represent the four rural areas respectively. The study sample was drawn from the above four urban and four rural areas. As it is practically not possible to make direct observation of every individual in the population a representative sample was selected from the above urban and rural units to make inferences for the entire population. The selection of the sample was made on the basis of random sampling. The study has a total sample of four hundred and two (402) respondents. Data was collected from the field by questionnaire schedule method.

## Discussion

Political trust is the ratio of people's evaluation of government performance relative to their normative expectations of how government ought to perform<sup>15</sup>. In a similar vein Easton argues that trust is a form of support directed to the political regime<sup>16</sup>. Many factors cause changes in political trust. All in all, the underlying assumption is that the public is more trusting when they are satisfied with policy outcomes, the economy is booming, citizens are pleased with

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<sup>12</sup>Erber, Ralph and Richard Lau. (1990). "Political Cynicism Revisited: An Information Processing Reconciliation of Policy-Based and Incumbency-Based Interpretations of Changes in Trust in Government." *American Journal of Political Science*, 34(1):236–253.

<sup>13</sup> Chanley, Virginia, Thomas Rudolph and Wendy Rahn. (2000). "The Origins and Consequences of Public Trust in Government: A Time Series Analysis." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64(3):239–256.

<sup>14</sup> P. Bourdieu, (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.  
Pierre\_Bourdieu\_Distinction\_A\_Social\_Critique\_of\_the\_Judgement\_of\_Taste\_1984.pdf

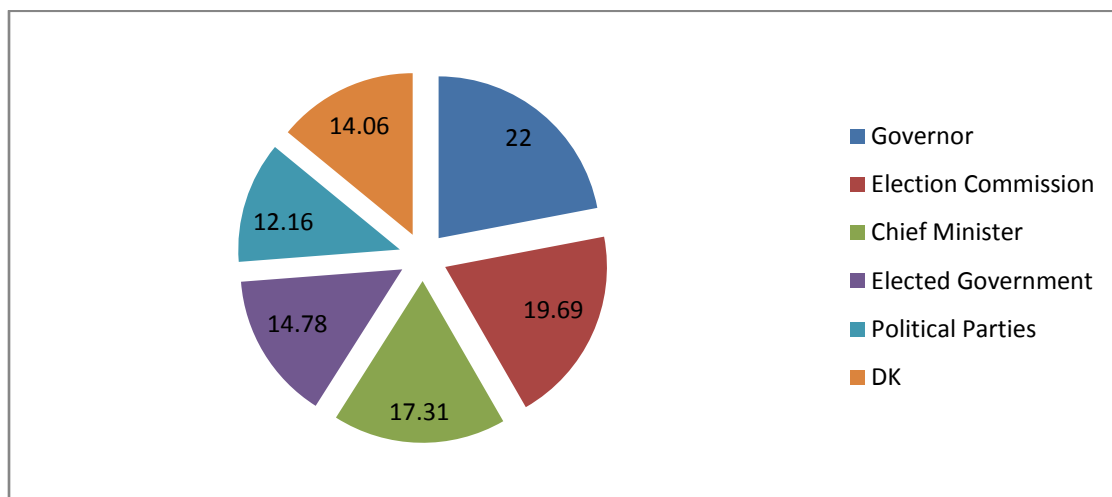
<sup>15</sup> Marc J. Hetherington, (1998). 'The Political Relevance of Political Trust'. *American Political Science Review*, 92,4: 791-808.

<sup>16</sup> Easton, David. (1975). "A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support". *British Journal of Political Science*, 5 (4): 435-457.

incumbents and institutions, political scandals are nonexistent, crime is low, a war is popular, the country is threatened, and social capital is high<sup>17</sup>.

Keeping this fact in mind the respondent's level of political trust is examined by asking them a series of questions about the performance of the present government, their level of trust towards institution and political authorities of the state such as the Governor, Election Commission, Chief Minister, Elected Government and political parties. Institution such as the Election Commission is also a component of the government, so feelings about them should help explain political trust as well. As a measure of policy satisfaction, respondents were also asked how much they are satisfied with the performance of the MLA who represents their constituency. Firstly they were asked to grade the following institutions/agents of the state the result of which is highlighted in Figure 1. Likert Scale was used to measure the level of political trust towards institutions/agents of the state.

**Fig.1 Level of Trust towards Institutions/Agents**



**Source : Field Survey,2015**

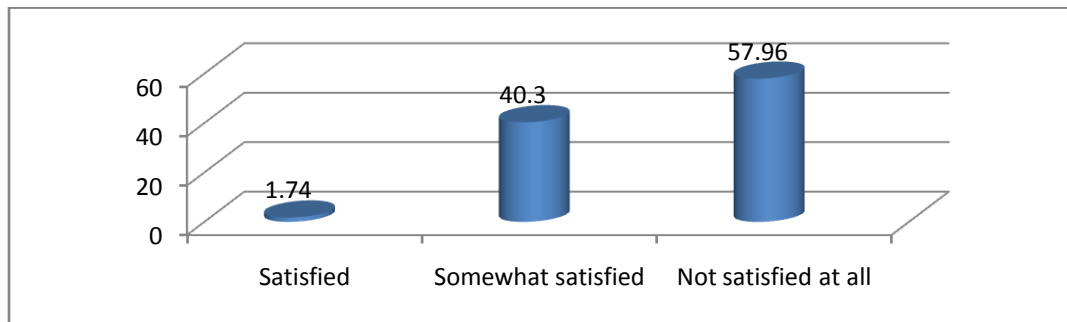
The data highlighted in the above Figure shows that voters in the state has the highest level of trust for the Governor of the state (22 %). The Governor is followed by the Election Commission (19.69 %), the Chief Minister (17.31 %), elected government (14.78 %) and political parties (12.16 %). This finding suggests a somewhat less than positive endorsement by the voters

<sup>17</sup> Suzanne L. Parker, Glenn R. Parker and Terri L. Towner, (2015). Rethinking the Meaning and Measurement of Political Trust, in Eder, Christina, Ingvill C. Mochmann, and Markus Quandt (eds), Political Trust and Disenchantment with Politics: International Perspectives. Leiden/Boston: Brill..

towards the political parties. This may be because the political parties in the state do not seek to positively connect with the voters or their concerns beyond trying to win their votes.

To supplement data acquired from the above question, the respondents were also asked to rate the performance of the present government. This examination is made because political trust is also the ratio of people's evaluation of government performance<sup>18</sup>. The result of such an examination is highlighted in Figure 2.

**Figure 2 Assessment of Performance of Present Government**



**Source : Field Survey, 2015**

As highlighted in Figure 2, the data reveals that a large number of respondents (57.96 %) revealed that they are not at all satisfied with the performance of the present government. Those who are somewhat satisfied constituted about 40.3 per cent. Very few of them (1.74 %) are satisfied with the performance of the present government. The result is a clear indication that voters are not satisfied with the performance of the existing government. Trust is higher when policies are viewed as effective or when there is perceived congruence between citizens' expectations and policy outputs<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, positive experience with policy outcomes, the competency and morality of political actors, and the political process lead to a higher level of trust, while negative experiences result in a lower level of trust or in mistrust<sup>20</sup>.

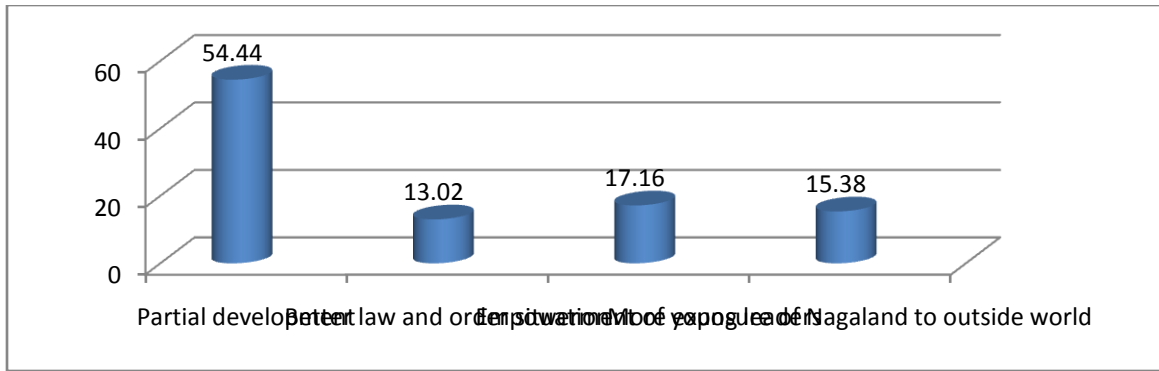
Among the many responses given to an open ended question, the respondents expressed the following opinions as to why they are satisfied with the government performance.

**Figure 3 Reasons for Satisfaction with Performance of Present Government**

<sup>18</sup> John Coleman, (1990). *Foundations of Social Theory*, Cambridge, MA :Harvard University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Hetherington, Marc J. 1998, *Op cit*

<sup>20</sup> Barber, Bernard, ( 1983). "The poverty of political culture." *American Journal of Political Science*, 40, 3: 697-716.

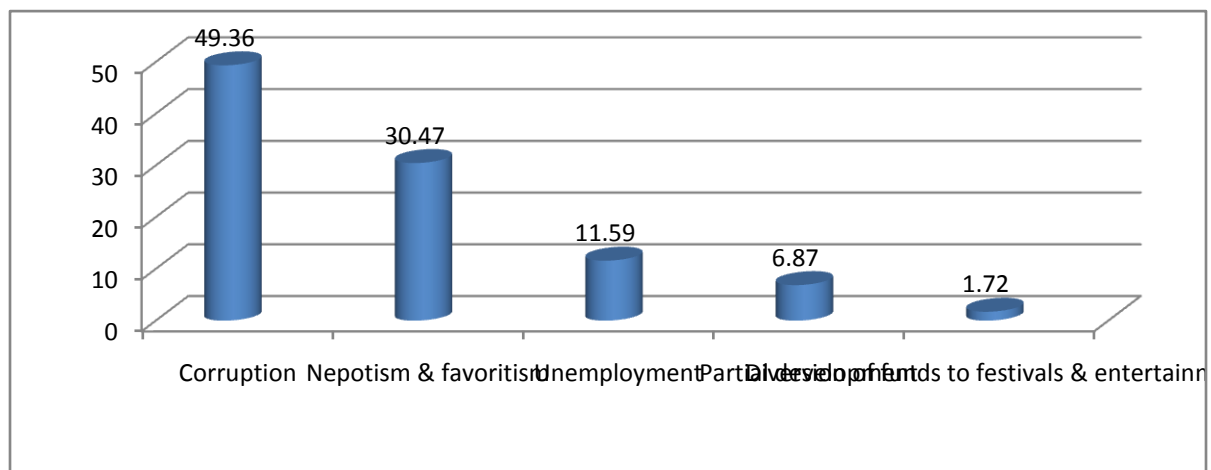


**Source : Field Survey,2015**

Data as shown in Figure 3 reveals that 54.44 per cent of the respondents said they are satisfied with the performance of the present government due to partial development in the state. Better law and order situation in the state is also the reason why 13.02 per cent of respondents are satisfied with government performance. Another 17.16 per cent of the respondents are satisfied with the government performance because of the empowerment of young leaders in the state. Lastly 15.38 per cent are somewhat satisfied with government performance because of the reason that the state government has taken steps to expose the state to outside world.

Figure 4 below highlight the reasons why some of the respondents are not at all satisfied with the performance of the present government.

**Figure 4 Reason for not being Satisfied with the Performance of Present Government**



**Source : Field Survey,2015**

As highlighted in Figure 4, issue of corruption dominate the responses for not being satisfied with the performance of the present government. A large number of respondents (49.36 %) cited corruption as the major reason for dissatisfaction with government performance. The reason why many respondents have low level of trust is not far to seek. Political trust is higher when government is not viewed as corrupt. Christopher Anderson said that political trust is higher when government is not viewed as corrupt and when officials are seen as placing citizens' interests ahead of their own<sup>21</sup>. Making a reference to corruption, some of the respondents commented how government officials misuse public funds and prioritise personal interest above public interest.

Besides corruption, respondents were not satisfied with government performance due to nepotism and favouritism. Around 30.47 per cent of the respondents cited their unhappiness over the application of nepotism and favouritism by the government. They revealed that only few people are enjoying the privileges and government benefits. The government is creating class division in the society, where rich people are becoming richer and poor are getting poorer<sup>22</sup>. When government benefits are distributed fairly and when the procedures that led to that distribution are perceived as fair, political trust increases<sup>23</sup>. Some respondents suggest that providing citizens with more opportunity to voice their concerns will lead to greater satisfaction with the political process and greater acceptance and compliance with laws that are generated.

Besides the issue of corruption, 30.47 per cent respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with government performance due to the practice of nepotism and favouritism. Attitudes concerning procedural and distributive fairness have been shown to influence political trust. When government benefits are distributed fairly and when the procedures that led to that distribution are perceived as fair, political trust increases<sup>24</sup>. Some respondents opined that the government is creating class division in the society, where rich people are becoming richer and poor are getting poorer. Some respondents also expressed their view that there is no transparency and accountability and common people are left with no benefits. They cited their unhappiness over

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<sup>21</sup>J. Christopher Anderson, and Yuliya V. Tverdova. (2003). "Corruption, Political Allegiances, and Attitudes Toward Government in Contemporary Democracies." *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(1):91-109.

<sup>22</sup> Respondent.

<sup>23</sup> Tom R. Tyler, Kenneth A., Rasinski, and Kathleen M., McGraw,(1985). 'The Influence of Perceived Injustice on the Endorsement of Political Leaders'. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 15(8):700-72.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*.

the application of favouritism in the government revealing that only few people are enjoying the privileges and government benefits.

Around 11.59 per cent of the respondents cited unemployment as the reason for dissatisfaction with government performance. Problem of unemployment is a major challenge in the state where the applicants in the live register of the State stood at 72,415 as on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015 out of which 49479 were male and 22936 were female<sup>25</sup>. The State Government is the largest employer but it could employ only 4.73 per cent of total population of Nagaland<sup>26</sup>. Due to the absence of any big industries or private players, people in the State target government job though it could accommodate only few percentage of population. Nagaland is ranked the highest in terms of Government employees against a population figure of 1, 40,000 in the North East State<sup>27</sup>.

Another 6.87 per cent of the respondents expressed the view that due to partial development they are not satisfied with government performance. And around 1.72 per cent of the respondents were not satisfied with government performance due to diversion of funds to festivals and entertainment purpose. They opined that instead of spending huge amount on festivals and entertainments, the money should be used to develop communication facilities and develop better road conditions. As furnished by the Tourism Department, Government of Nagaland, the expenditure incurred for the hornbill festival during the year 2010, 2011,2012 and 2014 was 1187.99 Crores (Rupees eleven crores eighty seven lakhs ninety nine thousand), out of which the revenue generated was only Rs 7, 01,316 (Rupees seven lakhs one thousand three hundred and sixteen) only<sup>28</sup>.

The respondent's level of satisfaction with the performance of their Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) was assessed by a question: "Are you satisfied with the performance of the MLA who represents your constituency?" with five responses - "fully satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, fully dissatisfied and Can't say/ DK".

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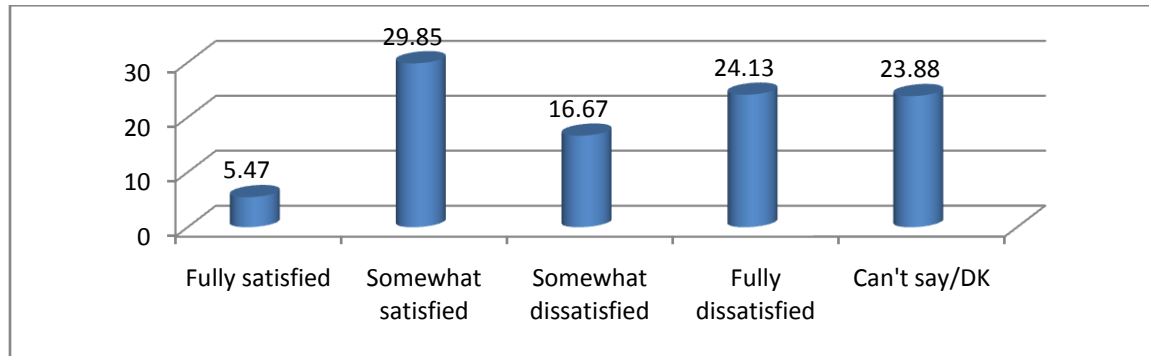
<sup>25</sup> Department of Employment and Craftsment Training, (2015), Nagaland: Kohima.

<sup>26</sup> *Nagaland Economic Survey* 2014-2015, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Nagaland.

<sup>27</sup> Public Grievances Department, NPCC Nagaland, 21/01/2016.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*



**Figure 5 Voters Assessment of Performance of MLA****Source: Field Survey, 2015**

The data presented in Figure 5 reveals that very few respondents (5.47 %) are fully satisfied with the work of their respective MLA. The data also shows that majority of the respondents are ‘Somewhat satisfied’ (29.85 %). Another 16.67 per cent of the respondents expressed that they are somewhat dissatisfied with the performance of their MLA. Some respondents (24.13 %) who said that they are fully dissatisfied with the performance of their MLA expressed the opinion that: *they did not hear anything from their representative after being elected to the Legislative Assembly*. On a similar note some said that their constituency MLA does not visit the concern constituency frequently. On the other side, those who said that they are fully satisfied with the performance of their MLA expressed that they got financial help<sup>29</sup>.

From the analysis in the foregoing pages, it appears that elected government and political parties in the state are the two political institution and agents with the lowest level of trust (Table 4.13). Moreover, majority of the respondents are not at all satisfied with the performance of the government (Fig.4.4) as well as that of the MLA (Fig 4.7). From the above results it may be assumed that level of political trust among the respondents is low.

**Conclusion**

Keeping in mind the fact that democracies function more effectively when citizens support key institutions and agents the present paper has examined the nature and level of political trust towards a number of institutions and agents of the state. Among all the institutions and agencies

<sup>29</sup> Respondent.

examined political parties appear to be the least trustful. Such an examination was supplemented by the respondent's assessment of the performance of the present government as well as the performance of the MLA who represent their constituency. As per the analysis of the study, many of the respondents are not satisfied with the performance of the government as well as their political representative. It needs to be reiterated here that trustworthiness of a government depends largely on the extent to which it produces desired economic outcomes<sup>30</sup> or when people are pleased with incumbents and institutions. Such findings have important implications. High level of trust is essential to both institutions as well as agents because trust is an important component of political support. Trust in institutions and agents also signify the degree of legitimacy ascribed to the state by the people. This study also adds to our understanding of what can increase political trust. Political trust is higher when government is not viewed as corrupt. In addition the government also need to produce desired economic outcomes.

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<sup>30</sup> Marc J. Hetherington, (2005), *Op cit*.

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