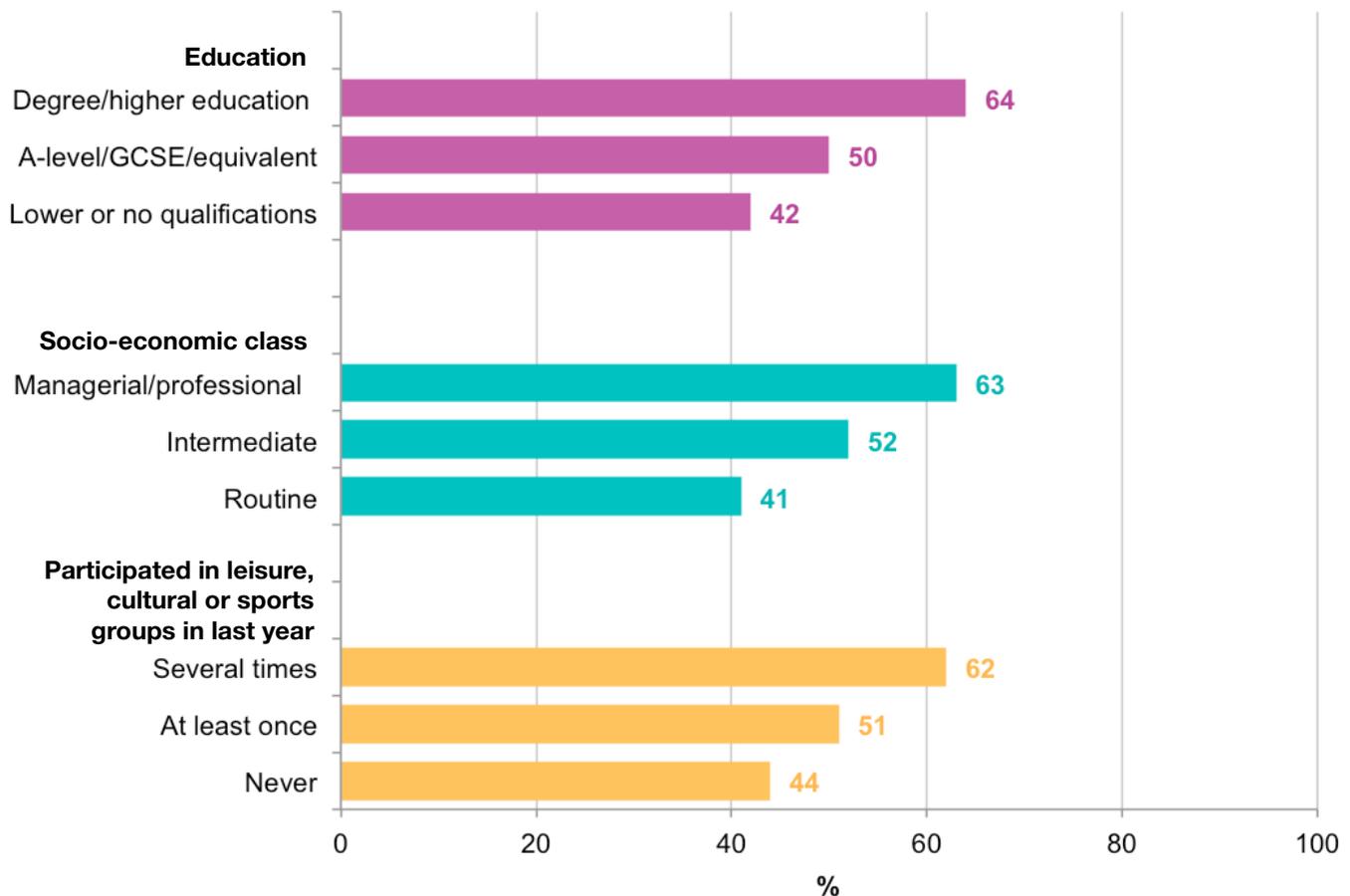# Social trust

The impact of social networks and inequality

Social trust – confidence in the moral orientation or trustworthiness of our fellow citizens – plays an important role in how secure individuals feel and how well society functions. This chapter explores levels of social trust in Britain over the last few decades and examines how social trust is related to a range of socio-economic characteristics. Trust has a social foundation: while the extent of people's social connections – through participation in social activities and social networks – mediates trust, in Britain today, these too are patterned according to social status.

Spotlight

People with higher levels of education and those in higher occupational classes are more likely to trust, as are people who regularly participate in leisure, cultural or sports groups or associations.

Social trust, by education, socio-economic class, and participation in leisure, cultural and sports groups

Overview

No sign that social trust in Britain is in decline

While levels of social trust have generally remained stable over the past two decades, they have increased since 2014.

- The proportion of people saying that people can almost always or usually be trusted has remained relatively stable (at around 45%) between 1998 and 2014.

- 54% now say people can almost always or usually be trusted, representing an increase in reported rates of trust. It remains to be seen whether this is part of an upward trend.

Doing things 'with' people engenders trust

Participation in social activities is linked to trust, but this is less the case for political activities and voluntary work.

- The more frequently one undertakes leisure, sports and cultural activities with other people, the more likely one is to hold a trusting view.

- Participation in civic or voluntary work, and with political parties, is also related to trust – but with a clearer division between activists (who participated at some point) and those who haven't participated at all.

There is a strong social foundation to trust

Education and class have a strong link to trust even when age and people's social connectedness are taken into account.

- Those with the highest level of education (degree or another higher education qualification) have levels of trust around 20 percentage points higher than those with qualifications that are lower than GCSE or who have no qualifications.

- Participation in social activities, and the extent and status of people's social networks, are also strongly linked to class and education.

- Education and social class remain significantly related to trust, even when other factors have been accounted for.

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Trust is rooted in the stratified social order of society and is shaped by education and class

Introduction

Social trust refers to the level of confidence people have in the moral orientation or trustworthiness of their fellow citizens. It is an important part of the social fabric: a high level of social trust can promote democratic governance, reduce corruption, decrease transaction costs and increase quality of life (Putnam, 1993). Given this important contribution to a well-functioning society, social trust has been a focus for academic and policy research. Academic research has been focused on the trends, sources and consequences of trust. Meanwhile policy researchers have been concerned about possible effects of declining trust on electoral turnout, confidence in public decision-making and a whole range of national policies such as those on immigration and Brexit.

This chapter explores trends in trust in Britain over the last few decades. In addition, we focus on the social underpinning of trust in Britain using data from the 2017 British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, which was collected as part of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). Our main argument is that trust has a social foundation: it is rooted in the stratified social order of society and is shaped by education and class. While the extent of people's social connections – through participation in social activities and social networks – does mediate trust, these too are patterned according to education and class.

Over the past two decades, there has been much research on the sources, manifestations and consequences of social trust and social capital. Much of the research is in debate with Robert Putnam's work on social capital, especially his ideas in the two books: *Making Democracy Work* (1993) and *Bowling Alone* (2000). Putnam's basic argument, drawing from Tocqueville (1969), is that when people get together, they learn how to work together, to be more trustworthy and to trust others, and to solve collective problems together. According to Putnam, for social networks to have value, they should involve activities "doing with" other people rather than merely "doing for". He goes on to say, "doing good for other people, however laudable, is not part of the definition of social capital" (Putnam, 2000: 117). It is the extent of these networks and shared social norms which leads to trust and co-operation which has variously been termed 'social capital'. The key feature of Putnam's work traces the declining stock of social capital including social trust in the USA since the 1960s and links it to people's increasing disengagement from socio-political and civic life.

Meanwhile, parallel work on Britain (Hall, 1999) has looked at civic participation and social trust in the period between 1959 and 1990. On the one hand, this shows a generally vibrant civic life in Britain with no across-the-board decline. On the other, it does find a growing class division in social capital with the middle class becoming increasingly more likely to participate in civic activities than the working class. However, this work is now rather old and unlikely to

be representative of the levels of social trust in Britain today. And while other studies have looked at the uneven distribution of social trust among different groups (Clery and Stockdale, 2008), a fresh analysis of the current stocks of social trust, civic participation and its interplay with socio-economic factors is much in need.

In the policy arena, over the last two decades social cohesion and trust have been the subject of several government-commissioned reports and reviews in response to events such as the Bradford riots in 2001 and the London riots a decade later. Successive government initiatives, including David Cameron's 'Big Society' and the National Citizen Service, have attempted to enhance 'community cohesion' by increasing mutual understanding, collaboration and therefore trust through promoting greater civic participation.

In the other direction, the build up to the general election of 2010 was characterised by political expense scandals, increasing mistrust and fear over state surveillance and perceived erosion of individual social freedoms. Political rhetoric surrounding a "broken society" (Driver, 2009) was seen as reflecting a divided and unequal society with diminishing trust in the state as well as between individuals. This perception has only been exacerbated by the 2016 Brexit referendum and subsequent highlighting of apparently increased social fragmentation.

The apparently deepening social division in Britain, alongside a seemingly rapid deterioration in civic health in the USA, has sent shock waves through the academic and policy-making communities, attracting heated debates. Most of the resulting empirical studies seem more intent on comparing the effects of formal (civic) versus informal (interpersonal) social connections on social trust, ignoring substantive issues such as what are the social foundations of both social networks and trust (Newton, 2001; Halpern, 2005; Pichler and Wallace, 2007). Instead of placing social factors such as age, sex and socio-economic factors at the heart of the research, they are sometimes sidelined, used as simply 'control variables' (Sturgis et al., 2015).

These issues form the structure of our exploration of social trust in BSA data which considers the following research questions:

1. What is the trend of social trust in Britain?

2. How does the level of social trust vary between social, economic or demographic groups?

3. How is trust related to acts of social participation and to strengths of social networks? And how are both trust and social networks shaped by socio-economic factors?

Understanding and analysing the nature of social trust is challenging. The most important distinction between different types of trust has been made by Uslaner (2002), who separates out 'strategic' trust from 'moralistic' trust. Strategic trust, or bonding social capital as Putnam (2000) calls it, is experience-based, 'situational' and thickly

Political rhetoric surrounding a "broken society" was seen as reflecting a divided and unequal society with diminishing trust in the state as well as between individuals

embedded in the intimate relationships, such as with family, kin, neighbours or friends (see also Li et al., 2005). It is a type of trust emanating from links to others based on a common sense of identity, or 'people like us'. By contrast, moralistic trust is trust in strangers, or in one's fellow citizens at the overall level. As such, it is more stable, socialisation-based and grounded in an optimistic disposition and a firm sense of control. It is a value-learned in the past but reinforced by the prevailing socio-economic conditions and the composition of one's social contacts and their social status.

The long-running question used by BSA pins down the expression of moralistic trust to 'generalised' trust, referring to trust in other members of society, as defined by Rosenberg (1956)[1]. We explore the trends in responses to this question from 1998 to 2017, as well as variations between demographic and socio-economic groups.

In 2017, BSA also includes questions around social participation and social networks which can hopefully help us gain a better understanding of the social foundations of trust. Our key measure of social participation refers to activities in the past year which are of the 'doing with' character, highlighted by Putnam (2000) as key to developing social trust. This year's survey also specifically focuses on capturing the social diversity of people's social networks. Taken together, these two variables enable us to understand more about the social nature of trust and how it is shaped by the social and economic situations of people's lives.

It is this detail on the differing forms and levels of social connections, coupled with our ability to simultaneously assess the contribution of socio-economic conditions and other attributes towards how trusting people are, which can hopefully help us understand the moral and social foundations of trust in Britain today.

Trends in social trust over time

Looking at how levels of social trust have changed over time requires a specific definition of trust, measured by the same question over a significant time period.

At regular intervals between 1998 and 2017, we have asked:

> *Generally speaking, would you say that people can be trusted?*

Respondents are able to give the following answer options:

> *People can almost always be trusted*
>
> *People can usually be trusted*
>
> *You usually can't be too careful in dealing with people*
>
> *You almost always can't be too careful in dealing with people*
>
> *Can't choose*

---

1   Throughout this chapter when the term 'trust' is used we mean this generalised trust measure.

In the analysis the response options were grouped into 'trusting' and 'cannot be too careful', with those who answered "can't choose" not grouped with either.

Our outcome of interest is, therefore, 'generalised' trust as defined by Rosenberg (1965), as referring to trust in other members of society. Generalised trust is closely related to moralistic trust (as defined in the previous section), with both types being based on a person's optimistic worldview. However, while moralistic trust is values-led and highly stable, generalised trust – as expressed in this question – has scope for variation according to a person's wider circumstances (Uslaner, 2002).

Between 1998 and 2014, the proportion of the public reporting that they believe that most people can be trusted was relatively stable at around 45% (see Table 1). The same question on generalised trust is included in several other major British social surveys: the British Household Panel Survey; Home Office Citizenship Survey; and UK Household Longitudinal Study (also known as Understanding Society). Rates of trust found in BSA are around five percentage points higher than those found in these other surveys. Similarly, Hall's (1999) data for 1981 and 1990 gave rates of trust at 43% and 44%, respectively. We can therefore be fairly confident that social trust has remained stable at around 40%-45% in the last four decades.

The BSA figure for 2017, at 54%, represents a statistically significant increase from 47% in 2014. Whether this reflects a genuine increase in the level of trust or a sampling variation can only be assessed against the responses to future BSA surveys.

54% think people can be trusted, an increase from 47% in 2014

Table 1 Social trust, 1998-2017

	1998	2004	2007	2008	2014	2017
Level of trust	%	%	%	%	%	%
People can be trusted	47	46	45	45	47	54
Cannot be too careful dealing with people	49	51	51	51	48	42
Unweighted base	*807*	*853*	*906*	*1986*	*1580*	*1595*

Are there social divisions in how much we trust one another?

More central to our concern in this chapter are the social differences in trust – how far might the level of social trust vary between social, economic or demographic groups. Table 2 shows the data on the propensity to trust by age, sex, class, education and ethnicity in

nine years between 1998 to 2017[2]. We need to bear in mind that our 2017 data on trust are a few points higher than in the other years, but our focus is on the relative difference between categories in each variable.

Table 2 Proportion who generally trust other people, by socio-demographic characteristics, 1998-2017

% saying people can be trusted	1998	2004	2007	2008	2014	2017
All	47	46	45	45	47	54
Age						
18-35	40	34	37	41	43	51
36-60	49	52	49	45	51	56
61+	51	45	46	50	46	53
Sex						
Men	52	45	48	46	48	53
Women	44	46	42	44	46	54
Education						
Degree or higher education	58	56	54	57	60	64
A-level or GCSE or equivalents	47	44	42	41	41	50
Lower or no qualifications	39	39	40	40	37	42
Socio-economic class						
Managerial or professional	56	53	53	54	59	63
Intermediate	48	48	42	46	42	52
Routine	37	34	39	34	39	41
Ethnicity						
Ethnic minority	‡	‡	36	46	40	49
White	48	46	45	45	48	54

‡ percentage not shown as base is under 50
The bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Older people tend to have greater faith in strangers, which is shown in most years (though the differences between age groups are smaller in 2017 and not significant)[3]. From these descriptive data, it is not possible to ascertain the extent to which this effect is generational (older generations are more trusting than those born more recently), a life-course effect (people become more trusting as they get older) or a socio-economic effect, as older people tend to be economically more secure. For instance, people tend to reach occupational

2   Social class was defined using the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) system: "managerial and professional" are relatively self-explanatory; "intermediate" is comprised of self-employed, lower supervisory or employer in a small organisation; and "routine" is comprised of those with routine or semi-routine occupations.
3   We shall see later that age is significant in our multi-variate analysis.

maturity at around age 35, beyond which drastic changes in class positions in either direction are rather uncommon (Goldthorpe, 1987). Therefore, older age may simply indicate greater economic security which then underlies greater trust.

There are also marked differences according to education and class. In each of the years, those with the highest level of education (degree or another higher education qualification) had levels of trust around 20 percentage points higher than those with qualifications lower than GCSE or no qualifications. Similar differentials are found with regard to managerial and professional occupations versus routine manual workers. Differences between White people and ethnic minorities have been mixed over time (and results for 2007 need to be treated with caution due to the small sample size involved), though the difference between White people and ethnic minorities in 2017 is not statistically significant.

Differences in trust levels between certain social groups are clear, but what, if any, explanation can we give for those patterns? It is this question we turn to next.

Those with the highest level of education had levels of trust around 20 percentage points higher than those with low or no qualifications

Are there social foundations to trust?

As demonstrated above, those in higher socio-economic positions tend to report higher levels of social trust (see also Brandt et al., 2015). It is plausible to argue that this is simply because greater levels of education, work status and financial security enable and empower people to be more optimistic in their worldview, to have a greater sense of control, and therefore to trust others more. However, it may also be possible that high levels or high quality of social participation or connectedness might provide social outlets which empower individuals to develop high levels of trust regardless of their social or economic circumstances. In this section, we explore further the potential mechanisms through which trust might be related to social status, via differing levels of social connection: is social trust related to participation in social activities and/or are levels of social trust related to the extent of people's social networks?

Is social trust linked to participation in social activities?

As Putnam's argument goes, active participation in social/civic activities generates trust – it is the 'doing with' other people that is essential here. When people participate they learn to work together and trust each other.

To explore participation in a range of social activities, we ask respondents:

In the past 12 months, how often, if at all, have you taken part in activities …

>*… of groups or associations for leisure, sports or culture?*

>*… of political parties, political groups or political associations?*

>*… of charitable or religious organisations that do voluntary work?*

The response categories range between "once a week or more", "one to three times a month", "several times in the past year", "once in the past year", and "never".

By referring to activities in the past year, the timeframe for this measure does not fit exactly with the measure on social trust (which is taken as a 'general' state of mind). However, this question forms a key measure of formal social connection because it focuses on activities which are of the 'doing with' character, highlighted by Putnam as key to developing social trust.

Table 3 explores the relationship between frequency of participation in each type of activity and trust for 2017.

Table 3 Proportion who generally trust other people, by participation in different types of group or association

% saying people can be trusted	Social (leisure, sports or culture)	Political (political parties, groups or association)	Civic (voluntary work for charitable or religious organisations)
Frequency of participation			
Never	44	53	49
Once in the past year	51	61	62
Several times in the past year	61	} 62*	62
One to three times a month	64		62
Once a week or more	63		64

* Frequency of political participation has grouped together the last three categories due to low base sizes. The base size for this combined figure is still <100 so these results need to be treated with some caution
The bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter

> **The more frequently one undertakes leisure, sports and cultural activities with other people, the more likely one is to hold a trusting view**

The data show a clear gradient of 'social' activities upon trust: the more frequently one undertakes leisure, sports and cultural activities with other people, the more likely one is to hold a trusting view. Regarding participation in 'civic' activities in "charitable or religious organisations that do voluntary work", there is a clear division between activists participating at some point and non-activists who haven't participated in the past year.

The relationship between trust and political activity is less straightforward. Most of the public (81%) are not frequent political

activists, and very few participated more than once in the last year. However, members of the public who do participate in political associations, even once in the last year, show a greater likelihood of trusting their fellow citizens (data for this group need to be treated with caution, due to the small sample size involved).

So, who participates in these activities? Table 4 shows the social and demographic characteristics of those who have participated in social, political and civic groups at least once a year. Participation is heavily stratified by class and education. The higher a person's level of education the more likely they are to have taken part in social, political and civic groups in the last year. A similar pattern holds for social class: those in the managerial and professional occupational category have a participation level that is about 10 percentage points higher than those in the intermediate occupational category and 20 percentage points higher than those in the routine manual occupational groups. However, unlike education, this pattern does not hold for political participation.

Table 4 Proportion participating in social, political and civic groups at least once in the past year, by socio-economic characteristics

% who participate at least once in the past year	Social (leisure, sports or culture)	Political (political parties, groups or association)	Civic (voluntary work for charitable or religious organisations)
All	61	12	42
Age			
18-35	65	17	44
36-60	66	12	46
61+	50	9	34
Sex			
Men	62	13	39
Women	60	12	44
Education			
Degree or higher education	71	16	54
A-level or GCSE or equivalents	62	11	40
Lower or no qualifications	42	8	24
Socio-economic class			
Managerial or professional	70	13	50
Intermediate	59	13	39
Routine	49	10	31
Ethnicity			
Ethnic minority	66	22	56
White	60	11	40

The bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Older people (aged 61+) are less likely to have participated in social, political and civic groups in the last year. This age group has a higher level of limiting health problems, which is likely to affect their levels of participation. Those from ethnic minorities are more likely to have participated in political and/or civic groups in the past year but there are no significant differences in participation for social groups.

We have identified socio-economic differences in participation in activities according to education and class which follow the differences found earlier for social trust. However, the mechanism by which trust is fostered is unclear. Understanding the social foundations of trust in British society needs a deeper understanding of how social groups interact with other factors beyond simply describing which types of activities are associated with trust. One potential pathway for generating trust is through our social networks, and it is to this which we turn next.

Do our social networks explain our levels of trust?

Our social networks are an established pathway by which we build up stocks of social capital and trust in others (Stouffer, 1949; Allport, 1954), but the meaningful measurement of such networks which captures the quantity and quality of ties is a complex task. Tapping into the social status of social networks at the population level was not possible until Lin (2001) developed the ingenious 'Position Generator' approach, which was used in the 2017 BSA survey. The Position Generator not only estimates the size of a person's social network, but also measures the social status of those within it.

A series of questions which form the Position Generator is presented to respondents in 2017 as follows:

> *Here is a list of jobs that people you know may have. These people could be family or relatives, close friends or someone else you know. By "knowing" a person, we mean that you know him/her by name and well enough to contact him/her. If you know several people who have a job from the list below, please only tick the box for the person who you feel closest to. Each of these jobs could be held by a woman or a man.*
>
> *Do you know a woman or a man who is…?*

The ten professions presented to the respondent are shown in Table 5. The number of ties for each respondent is calculated and the social status of these contacts is scored using the Cambridge Social Interaction System (CAMSIS) scale (Prandy, 1990).[4] This means that for each respondent we have two scores: an indicator of the volume of informal social connections (from which we have calculated a mean number of ties) as well as an overall indicator of the social status of the respondent's network (from which we have calculated

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4 These scores are shown in Table 5; occupations of a higher social standing have higher CAMSIS scores.

a mean score of social ties). Higher overall scores are generally indicative of networks composed of ties to higher status occupations. For reference, we have also given the overall proportion who report knowing each of the professions in the second column of Table 5.

Table 5 Proportion of people who know someone from each profession, and CAMSIS score for each profession

	% who know someone in position	CAMSIS score
Profession		
A bus/lorry driver	36	14.2
A senior executive of a large company	36	64.6
A home or office cleaner	47	11.6
A hairdresser/barber	59	31.9
A human resource manager/personnel manager	37	51.2
A lawyer	38	73.2
A car mechanic	49	21.3
A nurse	60	35.1
A police officer	41	41.4
A school teacher	66	65.1
Unweighted base	*1595*	

Both the number of ties and social status of those ties are particularly stratified by education and socio-economic class

The mean number of ties and the mean social status of those ties are broken down by demographic characteristic in Table 6. It is clear from this table that both the number of ties and social status of those ties are particularly stratified by education and socio-economic class, and to a lesser extent ethnicity. Those who have a higher level of education and those in higher social classes have more social ties and these ties are also, on average, of a higher social status. Ethnicity is interesting here. As we saw above, those from an ethnic minority are more likely to have participated in political and civic organised activities (see Table 4), but the implication is that this does not translate into more social connections or overall ties with higher social status.

Cutting across all these socio-economic and demographic factors is age. Table 6 shows that the mean number of social ties decreases steadily with age, yet the overall social status of these ties is relatively constant. The implication may be that younger people have more ties, but they tend to be with occupations of lower social status than older people who hold fewer ties but which tend to be in higher social status.

Table 6 The average number and status of social ties, by by socio-demographic characteristics

	Mean number of ties	Mean score of social ties
All	4.7	40.1
Age		
18-35	4.9	39.9
36-60	5.3	40.2
61+	3.7	40.3
Sex		
Men	4.8	39.9
Women	4.6	40.4
Education		
Degree or higher education	5.3	44.0
A-level or GCSE or equivalents	4.8	38.8
Lower or no qualifications	3.5	35.1
Socio-economic class		
Managerial or professional	5.3	44.2
Intermediate	4.6	38.0
Routine	3.5	36.0
Ethnicity		
Ethnic minority	4.6	42.4
White	4.7	39.9

The bases for this table can be found in the appendix to this chapter

Which factors are independently related to trust?

The relative influence of social ties and the status of the social networks on levels of generalised trust can be estimated using logit regression modelling. This approach has the additional benefit of allowing us to test the relative effects of social networks alongside a range of other potentially explanatory factors which might underpin trust, such as participation in social activities and socio-demographic characteristics. Five logistic regression models were used to test the effects of various explanatory factors on our trust measure. Table 7 shows a simplified version of the model (more detailed results are found in the appendix of this chapter). Our first model (Model 1) measures the effect of the number of ties a person has on their trust. At this early stage the model allows for the possibility that trust might not increase at a steady rate with increasing numbers of ties. To account for this non-linear effect the number of ties squared is also entered into the model. Model 2 estimates the effect of the overall number of ties and who they are with, and Model 3 measures the

effect of participation in social activities on trust. Finally, Models 4 and 5 explores whether socio-economic and demographic factors respectively have a significant influence on trust, while controlling for all other explanatory factors.

Where factors are in bold in Table 7, the analysis shows them to have a significant independent effect on our trust measure. That is, they emerge as important factors, when accounting for all the other factors in each model.

Table 7 Results of five regression models looking at the interaction between people's social ties, their participation in organised activities, and key demographic variables on trust

Types of factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Informal social ties (based on Position Generator)	**Number of social ties**	Number of social ties		Number of social ties	Number of social ties
	Number ties squared	**Number ties squared**		Number ties squared	Number ties squared
		Tie scores		**Tie scores**	**Tie scores**
Participation			**Social participation**	**Social participation**	**Social participation**
			Political participation	Political participation	Political participation
			Civic participation	Civic participation	Civic participation
Demographic variables				**Education**	**Education**
				Occupational Class	**Occupational Class**
					Sex
					Age
					Ethnicity
Unweighted base	*1572*	*1572*	*1572*	*1572*	*1529*

Factors in bold if some categories are significant to at least the 95% level.
Full results for the models are shown in the appendix to this chapter.

The analysis shows that, in early models, both number of ties and number squared are significant. This indicates a non-linear effect of social ties on levels of trust: having more social ties enhances one's likelihood of being trusting, but beyond a certain point (number) the propensity turns the other way around. Further analysis of our data suggests that the turning point is at 6.5 social ties based on the Position Generator scale. Overall, this suggests that a moderate (but not excessive) volume of social ties is linked to higher levels of trust.

Importantly, over and above the effects of number of ties, we also find independent and significant effects of the status position of our respondent's social ties, implying that levels of trust gained from social ties is wrapped up with who the ties are with as well as how many of them you have (see Model 2).

The status of social network, participation in social activities, education, class and, age, all have significant and independent effects on trust

Model 3 explores the contribution of participation in social, political and civic activities, while Model 4 reintroduces the social network variables, along with education and social class – both of which were shown earlier to be strongly related to trust (Table 2) and social participation (Table 3). The data in Model 3 show that when no other factors are considered, two of the three participation variables – social and civic engagement – are significantly and positively associated with trust: those who frequently partake in these activities do exhibit a higher propensity to trust their fellow citizens. Yet when other factors are taken into account in Model 4, involvement in civic activities such as donating time, or 'doing for' in Putnam's terms, is no longer significant. However, the status of social network (Tie score), participation in social activities, education, class and, in Model 5, age, all have significant and independent effects on trust.

The fact that participation in social activities with others rather than political involvement and voluntary work is independently related to trust as shown in Models 4 and 5 may be explained by wider evidence on the class gradient in volunteering; those with higher levels of managerial and professional occupations being 30 percentage points more likely to volunteer than those in routine occupations (Li, 2015: 46, Figure 3.2 on class volunteering). As people in higher classes are more likely to volunteer in charitable work and to trust, the mere act of volunteering has no independent effect on trust.

Education was also significantly related to trust, independently of social networks, social participation and social class. It is worth noting that the effect of degree-level education on trust increases considerably after accounting for differences in age, ethnicity and sex in Model 5. As people from ethnic minorities tend to have higher education than White people (43% of Black people and 51% of Asian people have a higher education qualification, compared with 38% of white people), controlling for ethnicity has brought the effect of education into sharper relief.

As well as socio-economic factors and social networking having effects on levels of trust, Model 5 shows age also predicts trust (despite this not appearing as significant in 2017 using bivariate analysis). Older people tend to be more trusting than younger people, independent of all other factors controlled for in the model (and despite the earlier finding that they are less likely to participate socially). As discussed earlier, this perhaps reflects their greater life experience and hence their greater confidence in dealing with the generalised 'others' or strangers; a stronger sense of control. Further analysis shows that, other things being equal, an increase of ten years in age would increase trust by two percentage points.

Model 5 also added ethnicity as a factor for trust. A particular issue with ethnicity analysis is the small base available for analysis, and though this is not a significant effect (at the 95% significance level shown in Table 7), it offers some evidence to suggest that Black

people have a lower level of trust, when accounting for social networks, participation rates and socio-economic factors[5]. Apart from the markedly higher rates of unemployment as mentioned in footnote 5, further analysis using data from Waves 1 and 3 of the Understanding Society survey also shows that people of Black Caribbean and Black African origins in Britain suffer much higher levels of discrimination: 10.5% of the former and 11% of the latter report that they had been rejected promotion or training opportunities in the last twelve months for ethnic or religious reasons as compared with 1% for the whole sample and less than 0.5% for White people. In spite of the various Race Relations Acts that have been enacted, ethnic minorities in Britain still encounter various setbacks in their socio-economic lives (see Li, 2018a, for further evidence) which may be having a dampening impact on generalised trust as a consequence.

Overall, Table 7 shows that while some factors, such as volume of a person's social network and civic participation, may seem to have an important effect on trust, this is likely to be more a facet of both socio-economic inequalities in education and occupation, alongside age. On the other hand, the *social position* of ties a person has and whether they participate in organised social activities are strong predictors of trust regardless of social class or education, or demographic attributes such as age, sex and ethnicity.

Conclusions

This chapter has shown that generalised trust – whether people generally think others can be trusted – has remained fairly constant in Britain in the last four decades, at around 40%-45% on the basis of some of the most authoritative datasets. This lack of an obvious decline in trust is somewhat at odds with popular discourse: there may have been declines in trust in institutions and experts, but there is little evidence this has extended to the more fundamental civic fabric of our society, namely, in how much ordinary people trust each other. Indeed, there might have even been some increase in social trust in recent years, though we will have to await the findings of future BSAs to see if this finding is confirmed.

There is some evidence that trust is related to age, with older people typically being more trusting than younger people. However, of far greater importance are wider social factors. People's class position and educational levels are closely related to trust, with people in higher social classes and with higher qualifications reporting much higher levels of trust.

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5   Taking a look at the detailed version of our analysis in the appendix of the chapter (see Table A.5), the findings in Model 5 show Black people to be less trusting (based on a 90% significance level). If this finding is accurate, this may be attributable to the marked socio-economic disadvantages, especially the higher levels of unemployment, they face in the labour market. Li (2018b: 15) shows that Black Caribbean men are around 2.5 times, and Black African men around twice as likely to be unemployed throughout their life courses from age 16 to 65 in contemporary society.

Social connection – participation in social activities (particularly joining with others in leisure, sports or cultural activities) and the extent of an individual's social networks (particularly the social status of such ties) – are also closely and significantly associated with trust. Participation in voluntary, mainly charitable, activities (which might be considered to be an expression of working *for* others), together with political engagement, have more limited roles to play in fostering trust.

In conclusion, attempts by government to encourage social engagement and organised community life, as typified by initiatives such as the Big Society and National Citizenship Service, may have a role to play in enhancing social trust. However, their effect is likely to be enhanced if people work *with* others, rather than on charitable grounds *for* others. More importantly, a focus on merely encouraging social participation, without reducing socio-economic differences is unlikely to reduce the social divisions in trust.

Lack of success in addressing socio-economic inequalities, shown here as vital to the foundations of developing trust, is the main barrier to an inclusive and prosperous society imbued with trust.

A focus on merely encouraging social participation, without reducing socio-economic differences is unlikely to reduce the social divisions in trust

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

The bases for Table 2 can be found below.

Table A.1 Proportion who generally trust other people, by socio-demographic characteristics, 1998-2017

	1998	**2004**	**2007**	**2008**	**2014**	**2017**
	Unweighted base	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
All	*807*	*853*	*906*	*1986*	*1580*	*1595*
Age						
18-35	*222*	*197*	*233*	*454*	*317*	*329*
36-60	*360*	*412*	*403*	*874*	*680*	*672*
61+	*223*	*242*	*270*	*653*	*580*	*592*
Sex						
Men	*320*	*373*	*378*	*854*	*696*	*708*
Women	*487*	*480*	*528*	*1132*	*884*	*887*
Education						
Degree or higher education	*230*	*239*	*256*	*552*	*544*	*620*
A-level or GCSE or equivalents	*259*	*309*	*273*	*627*	*572*	*539*
Lower or no qualifications	*318*	*305*	*377*	*807*	*464*	*436*
Socio-economic class						
Managerial or professional	*248*	*294*	*313*	*717*	*594*	*656*
Intermediate	*308*	*295*	*312*	*675*	*490*	*468*
Routine	*227*	*245*	*262*	*556*	*454*	*428*
Ethnicity						
Ethnic minority	*32*	*32*	*61*	*139*	*137*	*133*
White	*774*	*821*	*843*	*1845*	*1441*	*1460*

The bases for Table 3 can be found below.

Table A.2 Proportion who generally trust other people, by participation in different types of group or association

	Social (leisure, sports or culture)	Political (political parties, groups or association)	Civic (voluntary work for charitable or religious organisations)
	Unweighted base	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
Frequency of participation			
Never	588	1298	862
Once in the past year	160	106	224
Several times in the past year	223		189
One to three times a month	161	78	95
Once a week or more	387		125

The bases for Table 4 can be found below.

Table A.3 Proportion participating in social, political and civic groups at least once in the past year, by socio-demographic characteristics

	Social (leisure, sports or culture)	Political (political parties, groups or association)	Civic (voluntary work for charitable or religious organisations)
	Unweighted base	*Unweighted base*	*Unweighted base*
All	*1595*	*1595*	*1595*
Age			
18-35	*329*	*329*	*329*
36-60	*672*	*672*	*672*
61+	*592*	*592*	*592*
Sex			
Men	*708*	*708*	*708*
Women	*887*	*887*	*887*
Education			
Degree or higher education	*620*	*620*	*620*
A-level or GCSE or equivalents	*539*	*539*	*539*
Lower or no qualifications	*436*	*436*	*436*
Socio-economic class			
Managerial or professional	*656*	*656*	*656*
Intermediate	*468*	*468*	*468*
Routine	*428*	*428*	*428*
Ethnicity			
Ethnic minority	*133*	*133*	*133*
White	*1460*	*1460*	*1460*

The bases for Table 6 can be found below.

Table A.4 The average number and status of social ties, by socio-demographic characteristics

	Mean number of ties	Mean score of social ties
	Unweighted base	*Unweighted base*
All	*1595*	*1479*
Age		
18-35	*329*	*311*
36-60	*672*	*636*
61+	*592*	*530*
Sex		
Men	*708*	*660*
Women	*887*	*819*
Education		
Degree or higher education	*620*	*597*
A-level or GCSE or equivalents	*539*	*495*
Lower or no qualifications	*436*	*387*
Socio-economic class		
Managerial or professional	*656*	*628*
Intermediate	*468*	*434*
Routine	*428*	*379*
Ethnicity		
Ethnic minority	*133*	*120*
White	*1460*	*1357*

Logistic regression

The multivariate analysis technique used for the five models is a logistic regression shown in Table A.5. The dependent variable is whether the respondent says that people can generally be trusted. A positive coefficient indicates that the group is more likely than the reference group (shown in brackets) to trust, while a negative coefficient indicates the group is less likely than the reference group to trust.

Table A.5 Logit regression coefficients on trust

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Number of social ties	0.195**	-0.180†		-0.081	-0.062
Number ties squared	-0.015*	-0.017*		-0.014†	-0.014†
Tie scores		0.009**		0.048**	0.045*
Social involvement (Never)					
Once in the past year			0.203	0.198	0.221
Several times past year			0.548**	0.460*	0.501*
1-3 times a month			0.659**	0.552*	0.565*
Once a week			0.649**	0.554**	0.563**
Political involvement (Never)					
Once in the past year			-0.031	0.121	0.143
Several times past year			0.363	0.348	0.363
1-3 times a month			-0.306	-0.036	0.037
Once a week			-0.601	-0.728	-0.726
Civic involvement (Never)					
Once in the past year			0.331†	0.129	0.179
Several times past year			0.332†	0.256	0.248
1-3 times a month			0.284	0.041	0.063
Once a week			0.502*	0.317	0.282
Education (Lower or no qualification)					
Degree or higher education				0.460*	0.629**
A-level or GCSE or equivalents				0.069	0.193
Socio-economic class (Lower)					
Managerial or professional				0.410*	0.361*
Intermediate				0.304†	0.285†
Sex (Male)					
Men/Women					0.081
Age (Continuous)					0.083*
Ethnicity (White)					
Black					-0.589†
Asian					-0.349
Other					0.166
Constant	-0.289†	-0.265†	-0.304**	-0.788**	-1.335**
Pseudo R²	0.006	0.025	0.028	0.058	0.065
Unweighted base:	*1572*	*1572*	*1572*	*1529*	*1529*

† *shows significance at the 90% level, * at the 95% level of significance and ** at the 99% level of significance*

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