

WHERE YOU STAND DEPENDS UPON WHERE YOUR GRANDPARENTS SAT

THE INHERITABILITY OF GENERALIZED TRUST

ERIC M. USLANER

Abstract Generalized trust is a stable value that is transmitted from parents to children. Do its roots go back further in time? Using a person's ethnic heritage (where their grandparents came from) and the proportion of people of different ethnic backgrounds in a state, I ask whether your own ethnic background matters more than whom you live among. People whose grandparents came to the United States from countries that have high levels of trust (Nordics, and the British) tend to have higher levels of generalized trust (using the General Social Survey from 1972 to 1996). People living in states with high German or British populations (but not Nordic populations) are also more trusting (using state-level census data). Italians, Latinos, and African Americans tend to have lower levels of trust, but it is not clear that country of origin can account for these negative results. Overall, there are effects for both culture (where your grandparents came from) and experience (which groups you live among), but the impact of ethnic heritage seems stronger.

Political culture is enduring over many generations (Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam 1993). A key part of political culture is social capital and especially generalized trust.

There are at least two views of trust, experiential and cultural. One sees trust as reflecting others' trustworthiness. Hardin (2002, p. 13) argues: "... my trust of you must be grounded in expectations that are particular to you, not merely in generalized expectations." On this account, trust is fragile, since new

ERIC M. USLANER is with the Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742, USA. This research was supported by a grant from the Russell Sage Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation under the Social Dimensions of Inequality Project. I am also grateful to the General Research Board, University of Maryland, for support on related projects, to M. Mitchell Brown for research assistance, and to Karen Kaufmann, Geoff Layman, Bo Rothstein, Dietlind Stolle, and the editor and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments. Some of the data come from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, which is not responsible for any of our interpretations. Address correspondence to Eric M. Uslaner; e-mail: euslaner@gvpt.umd.edu.

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experiences can change one's view of another's trustworthiness (Bok 1978, p. 26). Thus, trust might not be stable over time. If we do see continuity in trust, it is because some societies have more trustworthy people than others—and there are fewer situations where people exploit each other for private gain.

The alternative view of trust is that *generalized* trust, the belief that “most people can be trusted,” is learned early in life from your parents and school. It is largely stable throughout one's life (Uslaner 2002, Chapters 2 and 4; Stolle and Hooghe 2004).¹ Generalized trust is *not* shaped by immediate experiences and does not refer to faith in specific persons, in contrast to Hardin's (2002) claim. Instead, it reflects a more general notion that people, especially those who may be different from oneself, have a shared fate. Survey respondents interpret the trust question as a general predisposition toward others (Uslaner 2002, pp. 52–54, 72–75). This view of trust is more of a cultural approach, since one can trace parental trust back to grandparents' trust, and even further (Putnam 1993). When immigrants from a trusting country come to their new homes, they carry on their cultural traditions of trust rather than simply adapting to the new realities of their adopted environment.

The experiential view of trust holds that trust should be higher where there are lots of trustworthy people. The alternative (cultural) view sees trust as a more enduring individual value that is not so dependent upon others' behavior. I test these alternative accounts here, using the General Social Survey (GSS) from 1972 to 1998 to investigate how trust “travels” across geographic boundaries.² Data on trust levels in other countries from the 1990 and 1995–96 World Values Survey permit comparisons between ethnic groups' trust in the United States and the trust levels of their families' country of origin. The cultural account would predict that the most trusting people in the United States would be of Nordic background, regardless of where they live.

People from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden are the most trusting in the world (Delhy and Newton 2005), so we would expect that people of Nordic background in the United States would also be the most trusting. In addition to the Nordic countries, we find high levels of trust in countries with mostly Protestant populations (Great Britain) or a large Protestant share of the population (Germany) while strongly Catholic countries such as Italy, France, and Latin American nations have much lower levels of trust (Uslaner 2002, Chapter 8). There is a strong in-group identity in most Catholic countries, and this depresses trust in strangers (LaPorta et al. 1997, pp. 336–7; Delhy and Newton 2005). Communism made trust in others a very risky gamble: formerly Communist countries such as Russia or the states in Central and Eastern Europe

1. There are differing positions on *how* stable trust is. Stolle and Hooghe (2004) believe that later experiences also shape trust much more than Uslaner (2002) does. But both hold that the roots of trust begin early in life.

2. The years included here are 1972 through 1978, 1980, 1982 through 1991, 1993, 1994, and 1996. Years not listed had no GSS: after 1996, many of the key determinants of trust were not included in the survey.

are substantially less trusting. Many of these countries have long histories of either authoritarian rule or ethnic conflict, both of which reduce trust (Sztompka 1999; Gibson 2001; Uslander 2003).

African Americans and people of Spanish background have high in-group trust, but low generalized trust. African and Latino ethnicities have long faced discrimination: “[t]he history of the black experience in America is not one which would naturally inspire confidence in the benign intentions of one’s fellow man” (Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers 1976, p. 456; cf. Uslander 2002, Chapter 4). When groups face discrimination, they are likely to conclude that others do not see a shared fate with them—and thus they are likely to look inward to their own group rather than outward to people who are different. Contemporaneous trust in African nations is lower than that in other nations.³ The history of exploitation of black Africa by white colonizers does not provide a rationale for trusting (at least many) strangers.

The experiential approach would agree that Nordic folks are trusting. Yet, it is not simple Nordic identity that promotes trust, but living among trustworthy people, who may happen to be Nordic. The Nordic population may serve as a surrogate for the proportion of a state’s population that is trustworthy. The Nordic share of a state’s population, rather than a simple ethnic identity, ought to be a stronger prediction of trust. So living in an area with mistrusting people, who happen to be Italians, French, or Latinos, might make you more wary of strangers.

I test for the effects of ethnicity on trust in this paper. The cultural view would expect that ethnicity shapes trust through socialization. People whose families came from high (low)-trusting countries will continue to be trusters (mistrusters) generations later. Trust becomes a cultural heritage, much as we “inherit” our religion and ethnic traditions from our families. The experiential view of trust leads us to expect that family background should not be as important in shaping trust as day-to-day experiences are. So living among people who behave honestly and are trusting is more likely to shape your own level of faith in other people than is your ethnicity. Your own ethnicity reflects the *cultural* foundation of trust; the ethnicity of people living near you (in your state) reflects the *experiential* foundation of trust. Which matters more: whether your ancestors came from a trusting society or whether you live among people who are likely to be trusting? Are you better off being Nordic or living among Nordics?

I estimate models of trust and include both ethnicity and statewide ethnic populations based upon Census Bureau data.⁴ There are substantial effects

3. The mean for trust in black African nations is .20, compared to .28 for other countries.

4. The web site with most of the data is <http://www.euroamericans.net>. For Italian Americans, I obtained data from http://www.niaf.org/research/2000_census_4.asp and for Latinos and African Americans from <http://www.eagleton.rutgers.edu/News-Research/NewVoters/Ethnicity.html>. The ethnicity data are only available for the 2000 census. However, there is little reason to believe that there would be much variation in *any* ethnic group’s share of a state population from 1980 or

for several ethnicities: Nordic, German, and British heritage lead to greater trust, and African and Spanish/Latino background to less trust. These effects are often powerful. The impact of state ethnic population proportions is more uneven. Most ethnic proportions have little impact on trust. Nordic population is an exception. Living among descendants of Nordic immigrants does seem to boost trust. For Nordics and Germans, there is a surprising effect from the standpoint of the experiential thesis. The boost in trust from surrounding yourself with Nordics (Germans) is much greater for fellow ethnics (Nordics or Germans) than for out-groups, while the opposite seems to hold for living among people of British heritage.

The boost in trust that comes when you surround yourself with fellow ethnics might make sense if the issue were trusting people like yourself. Close ties with people very much like yourself might reinforce in-group ties and make you less likely to trust people who are different from yourself (Levi 1996). Using data on corruption and crime rates in the states, there is little evidence that living among honest people creates more trust among others in the society—or that states with higher levels of crime and corruption are associated with low-trusting ethnic groups. Overall, it seems that where your ancestors came from matters more for trust than who your neighbors are now.

Trust over Time

It would be nice if we could match the levels of trust in the home countries when grandparents immigrated to the United States with contemporary estimates of how trusting people are in Sweden, Italy, Germany, or Latin America. But we can't. There were no public opinion surveys in the 1890s or 1920s, so there is no firm way to establish a direct link between grandparents' homeland experiences and their successors' beliefs in the United States. In some cases, there are contradictory indicators of how we might characterize grandparents' trust levels. Sweden in the 1920s was marked by a world record for days lost in labor disputes and strong class conflict, suggesting a low level of generalized trust. But the leaders who ultimately brokered a historic agreement that ended the labor strife and led to the creation of the famed Swedish welfare state benefited from a "spirit of trust" and honest, uncorrupt institutions (Elvander 1980; Rothstein 2005). Since low corruption is strongly connected with high trust (Uslaner 2005, 2006), Sweden might have been a far more trusting society than the labor conflicts suggest. Without clear evidence on what happened long ago, the most plausible foundation for the inheritability of trust is the continuing importance of ethnic identity in the United States. In the 1996 GSS,

1990, except for Latinos. And, even here, the states with the largest Latino populations in 1980 and 1990 would also be those with the greatest share of Latinos (including new immigrants) in 2000. I am grateful to Robert D. Putnam for providing the state-level codes for the GSS, with the kind assistance of Tom W. Smith of the National Opinion Research Center.

78 percent of respondents said that they felt “close” or “very close” to their ethnic group; in the 2002 survey, 58 percent indicated that their ethnic identity was “important” or “very important” to them—and in the same year 83 percent agreed or strongly agreed that “society should recognize the right to ethnic traditions.”

Americans have high rates of attendance at religious services—and religious identification often follows ethnicity: Germans and Nordics are Lutherans, the English Episcopalians, and the East Europeans and Russians Orthodox. The large Catholic population—from Latin countries, Italy, and France, among others—prays in churches dominated by others from their home country. And churches are strongly segregated by race, so African Americans are not likely to encounter Germans or English people in the pews. The socialization in religious life undoubtedly plays a large role in shaping world views such as trust.

Other forms of cultural heritage, such as neighborhood associations and the approach of each community’s dominant faith toward outsiders may shape the trust levels of American ethnic groups. Two of the most trusting ethnic groups are Nordics and those of English background. Nordics are overwhelmingly Lutheran and in these countries, the Lutheran Church’s charities gave their bounty directly to the state, which distributed these resources without respect to religion and with no evangelical message. The Anglican Church in the United Kingdom has also stressed the importance of working with, and giving to, people of different backgrounds and faiths.⁵ Continuing identification with the home country, as well as the historical legacy of one’s cultural heritage, may lead to the absorption of current levels of trust.

If trust is in some way “inherited” from your ancestors, then it must not vary dramatically over time. If trust is fragile, easily broken, then there would be less reason to believe that ethnic heritage, rather than immediate experiences, should shape current levels of trust. The belief that “most people can be trusted” is stable over time. The aggregate levels of trust across countries from 1981 to 1990 are strongly correlated ($r^2 = .81, n = 22$). From 1981 to 2001, despite some low values of trust for English-speaking countries, there is still a remarkable

5. On optimism and control, see Uslaner (2002, Chapters 2 and 4). I owe the interpretation of Lutheran charitable giving to Marja Liisa Swantz of the University of Helsinki (private conversation, June 18, 2005). On the Anglican outlook, see <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/lambeth/lc015.html>. Even the stories that parents tell their children reflect tales of optimism and trust (or, perhaps, pessimism and struggle). African-American stories reflect this struggle and mistrust. The Swedish story of Pippi Longstocking, on the other hand, reflects sunny optimism, as do most English fairy tales. Russian tales, on the other hand, may have happy endings, but they often reflect good luck rather than the optimism and sense of control that underlies trust. The message of the Russian stories comes from discussions with students at Novosibirsk State Technical University in Russia in May 2005. A group not considered here is the Jewish population, which in the United States (and elsewhere other than Israel) is far more trusting than the average. Jewish tradition teaches treating the stranger as oneself (“We were strangers in the land of Egypt so we should welcome the stranger into our midst”) and optimism even in the face of danger (a Chanukah song gives the optimistic message that “in every age a hero or sage arose to our aid”).

stability ($r^2 = .726$, $n = 18$; $r^2 = .711$, $n = 36$ between 1990 and 2001). For the 1972–74–76 American National Election Study (ANES) panel, there is a strong support for trust in people as a stable predisposition. Of 17 questions considered, social trust ranks fourth in overall stability. Across the three waves of the panel, about 75 percent of the respondents take the same position.⁶ Elizabeth Smith (1999) reports a “stability coefficient” of .82 for trust among 389 10th grade students in the fall and spring of 1996, higher than that for most civic values. In the 1998–2000 ANES panel, 79.2 percent gave consistent answers on trust.⁷

There is also evidence that trust is stable over extended periods of time and across generations. High school students’ levels of trust shape their faith in others as adults 17 years later, from the Niemi–Jennings parent–child socialization panels. The 1965 level of trust was one of the strongest predictors of 1982 faith in others. Even controlling for one’s own trust in 1965, *parental trust* in 1973 remained a powerful predictor of faith in others for these young adults (Uslaner 2002, pp. 164, 102).

If trust is stable across a generation, it should not be surprising to find that it has an even longer lineage. Rice and Feldman (1997) and Putnam (2000) have argued, similar to my claim here, that a cultural account of trust has a longer time horizon—and it is reflected in one’s ethnic heritage. Putnam (2000, p. 294) has noted that social capital is higher in states with large shares of Nordic immigrants (Minnesota and the Dakotas). Rice and Feldman (1997, pp. 1154, 1159) have made the most explicit argument about the inheritability of social capital—using the GSS to track linkages across cultures and family background in the United States. There is clear evidence that trust/social capital “follows the flag” in the American melting pot, even more so than in multicultural Canada.⁸

The GSS makes this study possible for two reasons: it has asked the generalized trust question continuously since 1972, permitting a large sample; and it

6. Party identification, favoring marijuana legalization, and running your life as you wish display greater stability than does generalized trust. Questions with less stability are: when abortion should be allowed, whether progress on civil rights has been too fast, whether people like me have no say in politics, whether public officials don’t care about ordinary people, whether voting is the only way to have an impact on politics, whether politics is too complicated for people like me to understand, favoring equal rights for women, whether members of Congress lose touch with ordinary people, whether one’s life plans are generally realized, trust in the federal government, ideology, whether the federal government should guarantee everyone a job, and the rights of the accused scale (see Uslaner 2002, Chapter 3).

7. For 1972–74, 73.1 percent gave the same responses to the trust question ($\text{tau-b} = .426$, $\text{gamma} = .762$); for 1974–76, 76.1 gave the same response ($\text{tau-b} = .521$, $\text{gamma} = .826$); and for 1972–76, 73.4 percent gave the same response ($\text{tau-b} = .473$, $\text{gamma} = .784$). For 1998–2000, $\text{tau-b} = .590$, $\text{gamma} = .882$, $n = 26$.

8. Soroka, Helliwell, and Johnston (2006) report that “parental trust” for immigrants is a strong predictor of generalized trust, but the effect “wears off” more quickly than in Canada than in the United States.

asks respondents their ethnic heritage (country of immigration of ancestors).⁹ Ethnicity is tough to measure. Many Americans have a mixed ethnic heritage and, especially among them, there is much ambiguity in identification. The ancestry measure seems less troublesome, but it may overestimate the share of respondents with no identification and cannot measure the strength of ethnic identification (Smith 1985, pp. 123–5). State-level estimates of ethnic populations are crude surrogates for our patterns of interaction. However, only the GSS has good measures of ethnic heritage, but data on the community of residence are not available.

Putnam, and Rice and Feldman examine indices of social capital including a wide range of participation measures as well as perceptions of government responsiveness, postmaterial values, honesty, and fairness. However, it is far from clear that all of these indicators of social capital constitute a unified “syndrome.” Most of the benefits of social capital—tolerance, good deeds, support for programs that benefit those who are less well off, and openness to people of different backgrounds—stem from trust rather than from civic engagement or other forms of participation (Uslaner 2002, Chapters 4, 5, and 7). States with high levels of trust also have less corruption and better functioning governments more generally (Uslaner 2006). High levels of generalized trust are also associated with less political polarization—and with legislative productivity (Uslaner 2002, Chapter 7; 2000).

Trust matters for many things we believe to be important in a society and some of these valued goals such as volunteering and giving to charity and political compromise seem to be in shorter supply than they were when faith in other people was stronger (Uslaner 2002, Chapter 7). In the early 1960s, almost 60 percent of Americans believed that “most people can be trusted,” while barely a third do so now. The issue of how trust develops and whether it changes readily with new experiences—or with experiences with different people—or is largely stable over generations is critical.

DOES TRUST TRAVEL WELL?

I use the GSS data to examine how well trust travels across generations. The generalized trust question is a dichotomy: “Generally speaking, do you believe that most people can be trusted, or can’t you be too careful in dealing with people?” It is often combined with other measures of “misanthropy,” such as helpfulness and fairness to form a scale. However, survey respondents do not

9. The variable “ethnic” asks “From what countries or part of the world did your ancestors come?” Clearly, many people come from mixed heritages. However, the answer to this question indicates the ethnicity with which people identify.

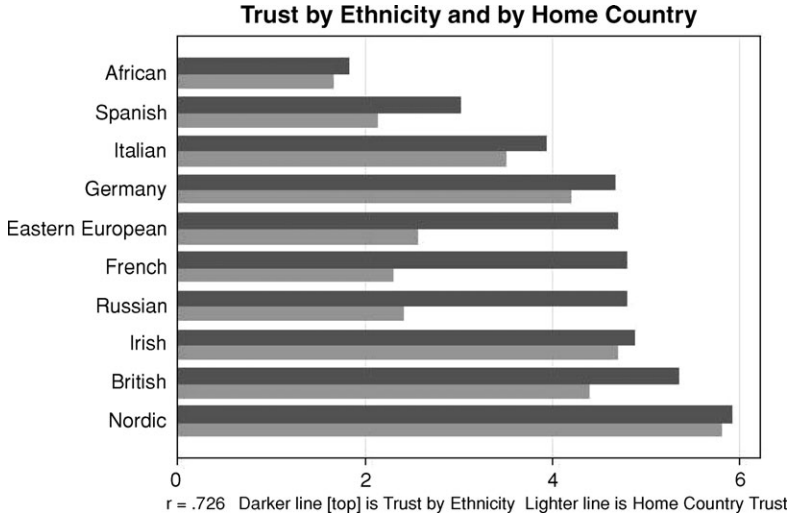


Figure 1. Trust by Ethnicity and Home Country.

NOTE.—Nordic home countries and ancestry: Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark. German home country: West Germany; ancestry: Germany, Austria. British home country: England, Scotland, Canada (Anglophone), Australia; ancestry: Great Britain, Scotland, Wales. French home country: France, French Canadian; ancestry: France. Spanish home country: Spain; ancestry: Spain, Latin America. Eastern European home country: Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, Yugoslavia; ancestry: Armenia, Czech, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine.

SOURCE.—General Social Survey, 1972–98; World Values Survey, 1990, 1995.

interpret the questions in the same way and the time trends for these questions are very different (Uslaner 2002, pp. 70–75).¹⁰

In figure 1, I present levels of trust among people of several nationalities in the 1972–98 GSS and the mean levels of trust in their “home countries” in the World Values Survey (as well as the home countries I used for each aggregation). The most trusting groups are the Nordics, the British, and the Germans, all above the national mean of .434 over the almost three decade period.

Immigrants from France, Eastern Europe, and Russia are more trusting than people from their homelands. Immediate alternative accounts—these immigrants are more highly educated or otherwise of higher status (or Jewish in the

10. Sometimes the question is asked on an 11-point scale (as in the European Social Survey and the Citizenship, Involvement, and Democracy surveys). Responses on this broader scale tend to clump toward the middle on a wide range of trust questions—and it becomes difficult to distinguish different types of trust. See www.europeansocialsurvey.org and <http://www.uscdsurvey.org/> for the surveys.

case of Russian or Eastern European immigrants)—do not help in explaining these higher levels of trust since measures of both high school and college education are included in the model I estimate. There is some evidence that context matters: most groups are at least slightly more trusting in the United States than we would “expect” if trust were perfectly inheritable. However, there does generally seem to be a connection between trust levels of your ethnic heritage and your ancestors’ homelands. The r^2 between “ethnic” trust (based upon one’s ancestry) and the aggregate level of trust in the home country is .726 across the nine groups.

My model for trust (see the estimates in table 1) is based upon Uslaner (2002, Chapter 4), who argues that generalized trust rests upon the beliefs that the world is a benevolent place with good people, things are going to get better, and you are the master of your own fate. When people are optimistic and believe that they can control their own lives, trusting strangers seems less risky. The best measures of optimism/pessimism are believing that the lot of the average person is getting worse and that it is unfair to bring a child into the world. My measures of a sense of control are confidence in science, which reflects a conviction that we can control the world (Uslaner 2002, pp. 100–101); and the belief that leaders pay attention to you. Other factors that should lead to higher levels of trust are satisfaction with friends, religious fundamentalism (especially for people who are active in their churches), education, and age.¹¹

Since income generally drops out when measures of optimism and control are included, I do not add income to the equations. Nor do I include inequality in the estimates shown here—it was also consistently insignificant in the models I estimated—but the reason is likely different. Inequality is an aggregate level indicator and it tracks levels of trust very well at the state, national, and cross-national levels as well as over time in the United States (Putnam 1995, pp. 65–78; Uslaner 2002, Chapters 2, 4, 6, and 8; Uslaner and Brown 2005).¹²

I include nine measures of ethnicity (in italics) in the equation. I expect African Americans; Spanish/Latinos, Italians, French, and Eastern Europeans; and Russians to have lower levels of trust, based upon their countries of origin or histories in the United States. People of Nordic, German, or British ancestry should have *higher levels of trust*. The GSS codes for ethnicity are broader,

11. Satisfaction with friendships indicates a comfort level that makes trusting more rational. Fundamentalists, especially people who regularly interact with others of their faith (by attending services), tend to view strangers as outside their moral community—and they are less likely to trust them (Uslaner 2002, pp. 98–100). I include two measures of education: a measure of high school education set at zero for respondents who had more or less than a high school education and the number of years of education for people who had been through high school, and the other is a measure of college education set at zero for below 13 years of education and the number of years of education for the college educated since college education is consistently the strongest demographic correlate of trust (Putnam 1995). Younger people are less trusting (Putnam 1995; Uslaner 2002, Chapter 4), so I include age.

12. On the level of analysis problem as it relates to inequality and trust, see Uslaner and Brown (2005).

Table I. Trust by Ethnicity and State Ethnic Populations: Hierarchical Linear Model

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	Z ratio	Effect
Lot of the average person getting worse	-.107***	.013	-8.26	-.103
Not fair to bring child into the world	-.133****	.013	-10.04	-.132
Officials not interested in average person	-.320****	.038	-8.46	-.111
Confidence in science	-.067****	.009	-6.98	-.131
Satisfied with friendships	.035****	.005	7.16	.216
Service attendance* fundamentalist	-.006****	.001	-4.64	-.088
High school education	.006****	.003	4.46	.071
College education	.010****	.001	9.32	.195
Age	.004****	.0004	10.21	.208
<i>African ethnicity</i>	-.158****	.023	-7.02	-.169
<i>Spanish/Latino ethnicity</i>	-.059**	.028	-2.13	-.055
<i>Italian ethnicity</i>	-.031	.027	-1.18	-.033
<i>French ethnicity</i>	-.004	.033	-.12	-.006
<i>British ethnicity</i>	.059***	.018	3.31	.048
<i>Nordic ethnicity</i>	.107****	.028	3.82	.096
<i>German ethnicity</i>	.027*	.018	1.55	.014
<i>Eastern European ethnicity</i>	-.014	.026	-.55	-.022
<i>Russian ethnicity</i>	-.037	.050	-.73	-.028
Constant	.585****	.034	17.35	
Random effects parameters				
Nordic population in state	.003**	.001	2.16	.049
German population in state	.00001	.001	.21	.100
British population in state	.00005	.004	.01	.070
Italian population in state	.003	.002	1.33	-.031
Constant (aggregate level)	.004	.064	.63	

NOTE.—Number of states: 42, number of observations: 6,309.

SOURCE.—General Social Survey, 1972–98 and sources in footnote 4.

Wald chi-square: 1380.71, log-restricted likelihood = -3991.410.

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, **** $p < .0001$ (all tests one tailed except for constants).

but I used only these nine groups since there were very few respondents for some other nationalities (such as Dutch and Japanese). The varied groups of nationalities with too few responses constitute a “reference” group, reflected in the constant.

I include aggregate measures for Nordic, German, British, and Italian populations in the state of residence for the respondent (in bold). While there is considerable collinearity with the German and Nordic measures ($r = .727$), it was important to include them both since they are two of the highest trusting groups in both the United States and in their home countries. Including other indicators led to severe collinearity, so I dropped Irish, French, Spanish/Latino, Italian, Eastern European, and African. There are basically three clusters of ethnic concentration in the American states: German/Nordic, Italian/Irish, English/French, and Latino (with African Americans scattered throughout each). So it is difficult to include too many measures without having all of them fall to insignificance. I later estimate the impacts of other groups on their fellow ethnics and others and here include measures for the relevant group in expanded regressions.

I estimate the trust model by a hierarchical linear model (see table 1). I also estimated a probit model to obtain “effects” (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993) for each variable, which are the changes in probability from the minimum to maximum values of the independent variable, letting all of the other variables take their “natural” values.¹³ The model in table 1 shows that all of the core variables are significant, mostly at $p < .0001$. This is not surprising given the large sample, but it is reassuring. The largest effects come from satisfaction with friendships, age, college education, believing that it is not fair to bring a child into the world (negative), and confidence in science (the measure of control).

Latinos are 5.5 percent less likely to have faith in others ($p < .05$). Blacks are almost 17 percent less trusting ($p < .0001$)—an effect greater than any single measure of optimism or control and approaching that of age.

People of Nordic ancestry, on the other hand, are more likely to be trusting. If your heritage is Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, or Finnish, you will be almost 10 percent more likely to believe that “most people can be trusted” ($p < .0001$). British heritage makes you almost 5 percent more likely to trust others ($p < .001$). There are no significant effects (even with such a huge sample) for people with Eastern European, Russian, French, Italian, or even German ethnicity.

The aggregate measures tell a somewhat different story and here I focus on the hierarchical model. Living among people of British, German, or Italian heritage has no effect on trust. However, there is a significant effect of state-level Nordic population and it rivals the impact of being Nordic. Both the probit and hierarchical models suggest that being Nordic makes a person 10 percent more likely to trust others—and living among Nordics leads to a similar boost in faith in others. This model suggests that both culture (ethnicity) and experience (living among the most trusting ethnic group) matter for trust. However,

13. For age, I restrict the range of the computed effects from 18 to 75 since very few respondents are above that age. For the individual-level variables, the significance levels (and t - and z -ratios) are virtually identical in the two estimations. They differ somewhat in the aggregate level variables, and the hierarchical model (estimated with Stata's `xtmixed` module) is more reliable.

Table 2. Impact of Ethnic Density on Trust by Ethnic Status

Ethnicity	Effect on in-group	<i>n</i>	<i>R</i> ^{2a}	Effect on out-groups	<i>n</i>	<i>R</i> ²⁺
Nordic	.185*	341	.360	.019	5,968	.261
German	.149**	1,230	.220	.080**	5,079	.274
British	.109	1,198	.268	.112**	5,111	.266
Irish	.173	781	.247	.017	5,528	.271
French	-.057	226	.335	.090*	6,083	.261
Spanish/Latino	-.065	335	.353	-.007	5,570	.275
Italian	-.052	376	.263	-.045**	5,933	.265
Eastern European	-.149	510	.285	.049	5,759	.262
African	-.045	580	.542	.099*	5,729	.246

NOTE.—Effects are from probit analyses with the same predictors as the probits in table 1 except for the ethnic identity variables. Each ethnic identity variable served as a filter for the “own group” and “other group” equations in this table. The equations all include the aggregate shares of Italians, British, Germans, and Nordics and the specific group for each equation.

SOURCE.—General Social Survey, 1972–98 and sources in footnote 4.

^aMcKelvey–Zavoina estimated *R*².

p* < .10, *p* < .05.

state-level effects matter only for one ethnic group, Nordics, while ethnicity affects trust for most groups in this analysis.

HOW DOES TRUST SPREAD?

Context cannot be dismissed. Do highly trusting ethnicities become even more favorably disposed to others when surrounded by people like themselves? Do people in states with large numbers of people with German, British, and Nordic ancestries become more trusting because they emulate the law abidingness of these cultures? Is there evidence that living among Italians *lowers* levels of honesty?

I present evidence in table 2 that tries to answer these questions more directly.¹⁴ I estimated probit equations based upon the model in table 1, first for each ethnic group and then for people who are not group members. Does living

14. I also estimated a model to test for joint contextual and individual effects. This model is similar to that in table 2 but replacing the aggregate shares of ethnic groups in a state with an interaction between ethnic shares and ethnic identities (results not shown). These results show that Nordics living in states with high Nordic populations, Germans living in states with large German populations, and people of English background living among many of their fellow Anglos are all more trusting than when each group is surrounded by fewer of their fellow ethnics. These impacts *control for trust by ethnic heritage (also in the model)*—and are greater for Nordics (18 percent) than for Germans (6 percent), or the English (10 percent). Italians living surrounded by *paisans* are no less trusting.

among Nordics promote trust among other Nordics and among people who do *not* have Scandinavian (and Finnish) ancestry? For ethnicities where aggregate scores were not included in the model in table 2, I added the statewide group shares for the models. The entries in table 2 are the probit effects for the ethnic group in question, first for group members and then for nonmembers, as well as the n 's and the probit R^2 values.

Living among the Irish, Spanish/Latinos, or Eastern Europeans has no significant effects on the level of trust of either in-groups or out-groups. The effects of living among Nordics are substantial, but only for Nordics themselves. The high levels of trust for people from Scandinavia and Finland do not seem to “rub off” on their neighbors. However, Germans’ high levels of trust *do* seem to influence others who live in their states. If you live in a state with a large German population, you will be 8 percent more likely to have faith in others if you are not German and 15 percent more likely to trust others if you are German. Living among Nordics and Germans matters a lot more if you are a member of the high trusting ethnic group than if you are part of the out-group.

On the other hand, living among British matters more for out-groups than for in-groups. There is some evidence that living among people of French heritage leads to increased trust even though the French are somewhat lower trusting than average. Outside Louisiana, the states with large French populations are in New England (Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire in increasing order). These states also have lower levels of economic inequality. When I add economic inequality to the model, French heritage becomes insignificant.¹⁵ When whites live in areas with high concentrations of blacks, they are *more* trusting, but this effect is significant only at $p < .10$ and it vanishes when controls for region (mid-Atlantic and Pacific states) are added.

The greater impact of ethnic density on people of Nordic and German heritage seems puzzling because the “Nordic” case was presumably the most clear-cut test of the impact of how experiences with honesty might lead to greater trust. What sorts of experience lead to greater trust? To the extent that trust *does reflect experience*, the foundation of trust seems to reflect honesty (Dasgupta 1988; Rothstein 2001, p. 492). Indeed, Putnam (2000, pp. 135–6) uses honesty as a surrogate measure for trust.

The Nordic countries and (West) Germany rank among the highest of any countries on trust, confidence in the legal system, and the impartiality of the legal system.¹⁶ States with high proportions of each group have lower levels of political corruption and lower rates of assault (high Nordic shares also lead

15. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this.

16. Aggregated scores for trust and confidence in the legal system are modestly correlated ($r^2 = .165$, $n = 41$), while trust and the impartiality of the courts are more strongly related ($r^2 = .346$, $n = 63$). Confidence in the legal system is aggregated from the World Values Surveys, while court impartiality comes from <http://www.freetheworld.com>.

to lower rates of robbery).¹⁷ So larger Nordic and German populations are correlated with more honesty and fewer crimes. But there is only minimal evidence that living in an “honest state with honest people” leads to greater trust. Larger English populations are related to more trust by out-groups. States with more British people have lower robbery rates, but not less corruption or fewer assaults or less larceny.

There is little reason to expect that people living in states with high Italian populations are less trusting because these states are “more crooked.” The correlations of the share of Italian Americans in a state with corruption, honesty, larceny, robbery, or assault rates are small. There are similar minuscule correlations for states with high shares of people of French heritage (where there seems to be a spillover effect) or with many Eastern Europeans (no effects at all). African Americans live in states with higher crime rates (assault and robbery), as do Spanish/Latinos (assault, larceny, and robbery). Yet, in one case, there is a *positive* spillover to other groups on trust (for blacks) and in another no effect. Whatever is driving these aggregate effects, it does not appear to be levels of honesty, as measured by state-level crime and corruption indicators.

Reprise

There is evidence, though perhaps not as strong as Rice and Feldman (1997) or Putnam (2000) found, that trust is inherited across space and time, but through cultures. People of Nordic, German, and British background are more trusting than other Americans. African Americans and Spanish/Latinos have less faith in their fellow citizens. Since each of the more trusting groups also is more optimistic for the future and believes that people have greater levels of control over their lives, the effects of cultural history are probably greater than I have reported here.

There is less evidence that all cultures carry over so clearly. French, Eastern Europeans, Russians, Irish, and Italians do not appear to be less trusting in the United States even though people in their native lands rank lower on faith in other countries. The tests I have applied are rather strong, since they test for ethnicity effects *over and beyond other factors that shape trust*. There seems to be only modest support for the argument that living among people from high-trusting cultures with low levels of crime and corruption leads one to emulate their values. It is unclear whether demographic change has contributed—and if so by how much—to the decline in trust since the 1960s. It is unlikely to be nearly as important as other factors such as growing economic inequality. The persistence of the ethnic roots of trust suggests that it will be more difficult to build faith in our fellow citizens. Fostering faith in others may be a major

17. The corruption measure comes from Boylan and Long (2001). The crime measures come from data on the State Politics and Policy web site (I aggregated the data by decade) at <http://www.unl.edu/SPPQ/datasets/crime.xls>.

challenge, especially if the “inherited” trust of the most high-trusting groups (Nordic and German Americans) spreads more strongly within rather than across groups.

If trust is culturally transmitted, then suggestions that we can boost it by joining more clubs or watching less television (Putnam 2000) may be, in Samuel Johnson’s characterization of second marriages, “the triumph of hope over experience.” Generalized trust is rather stable over time because it has deep social roots and does not shift with each new experience. Other factors that may seem more malleable—such as economic inequality—also do not change so readily (the correlation of state-level Gini indices from 1970 to 1990 is .737). Building trust is not so easy, especially if it follows people from their family’s “old country.”

Trust has been declining in the United States as economic inequality has been rising—and also as immigrants from historically disadvantaged (and lower trusting) groups make up a larger share of the population. If we worry about the decline in trust, we might pay less heed to the waning of league bowling and dinner parties—and more to understanding why people from some cultures are less trusting than others. And this is likely to lead back to economic inequality in the home country (Uslaner 2002, Chapter 8) and discrimination in the new homeland.

Overall, there is evidence for both culture and context. Where you live shapes your level of trust. But the evidence is far stronger that where your grandparents came from shapes your values. Who you are seems to matter more than who your neighbors are.

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