



## Ethnic Diversity and Generalized Trust in Europe: A Cross-National Multilevel Study

### KEYWORDS

**trust; ethnic and cultural diversity; social cohesion; immigration; Europe**

### WHAT'S THE STORY?

Trust is a fundamental aspect of what makes societies work. It facilitates commerce, political participation and is a key indicator of social cohesion. Does increasing diversity in Western societies threaten levels of trust among citizens? Research to date suggests that it might. Ethnic and racial diversity have been linked, particularly in research based in the United States, to a decline in generalized trust. The conventional view, then, is pessimistic about the relationship between diversity and trust.

The authors of this study challenge that paradigm, using a cross-national study of 20 European countries. Generally speaking, they find similar results to existing research concerning the relationship between sociodemographic factors such as age, sex, education and generalized trust. Men, older people, lowly educated, the unemployed and ethnic minorities are less trusting on average. Contrary to others, however, the authors find little evidence to support the claim that

increased diversity through immigration is negatively related to a country's level of generalized trust. The comparative scope, statistical methods, and diversity measures, are three advances this study makes in the research on the effects of diversity.

Using 26 different measures of immigration and

### HEADLINES

#### **Most people can be trusted?**

Men, older people, lowly educated, the unemployed, and ethnic minorities are *less* trusting on average.

#### **Poverty, inequality and mistrust**

Wealthier countries, and from countries with low levels of income disparity, are more trustful.

#### **Rising diversity, no problem for trust**

Comparative analysis of 20 European countries finds no evidence that rising diversity decreases trustfulness of citizens.

diversity, the authors find virtually no evidence of negative relationship with trust. Only two of the measures for a country's diversity – the inflow of foreign workers, and the increase in the inflow of foreign workers – had a negative effect on trust, and those cases are driven mainly by Germany and Italy. On balance, however, the evidence does not corroborate existing theories about the influence of diversity on trust.

### HOW WE DID IT?

This study examines patterns of diversity and reported levels of generalized trust in 20 European countries. For indicators of trust and sociodemographics the authors rely on the European Social Survey (ESS), collected in 2002-2003. For measures of immigration and diversity, the authors use data collected by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) between 1996 and 2002. Measures of diversity include, for instance, the inflow and ethnicity of foreigners, inflow of foreign workers, ratio of immigrants from developing countries, number of immigrants from countries where Islam is the dominant religion, as well as the proportion and average increase in requested and granted asylum for each country. Multilevel regression is the primary statistical technique used to test the relationship between trust and diversity.

### FOR PUBLIC DEBATE

One of the defining characteristics of developed democracies in the past decades is

## “the full-blown negative relationship between ethnic diversity and generalized trust does *not* hold across Europe”

the drastic changes in population as a result of immigration. As Western countries receive more immigrants from non-European source countries, much public debate has emerged about integration of newcomers and the effect of rising diversity on the stability and democratic practices of the host countries. This article speaks directly to that debate. Despite widespread academic and public cynicism about the consequences of diversity, Hooghe and colleagues demonstrate that we cannot assume that increasing ethnic diversity is responsible for declines in generalized trust across democracies

### LEARN MORE

Marc Hooghe, Tim Reeskens, Dietlind Stolle and Ann Trappers. 2009. “Ethnic Diversity and Generalized Trust in Europe: A Cross-National Multilevel Study. *Comparative Political Studies* 42(2): 198-223.

<http://cps.sagepub.com/content/42/2/198.abstract>

