

The Social Contract Under Threat: Social Trust in a Changing World

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Outline

- 1 Definitions and Descriptions
- 2 Implications and Correlations
- 3 Key Takeaways
- 4 Appendix

What is Trust?

Trust: the expectation that others will act in ways that are beneficial - or at least not detrimental - to us [1][2][4]

Institutional Trust

- Captures vertical interactions between individuals and a superior entity and relates to how citizens perceive the legitimacy, fairness, and efficiency of institutions and governments

Interpersonal Trust

- Captures the horizontal interactions occurring across and between individuals and refers to the extent to which a person believes other individuals have their interests at heart

Operationalisation

World Value Survey data: cross-national time-series dataset

Interpersonal Trust

Binary variable: *Would you say that most people can be trusted or do you need to be very careful in dealing with people?*

- Trust measured as average of responses

Institutional Trust

4-scale variable: *How much confidence you have in the government: a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?*

- Trust measured either as average of responses or as percentage of respondents who express confidence in government

Institutional Trust

Trust in **national governments**, **national parliaments**, and **the United Nations** has been in global decline over the last two decades

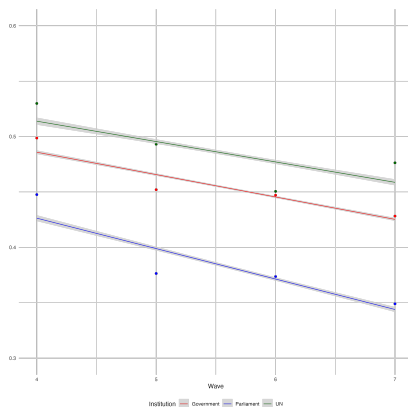


Figure: Average institutional trust, WVS (1999-2022)

Institutional Trust

Meanwhile, the percentage of respondents who do not at all trust the government has been rising, especially since the mid-2000s

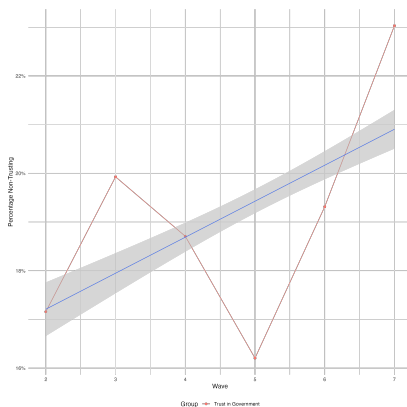


Figure: Percentage non-trusting of government, WVS (1990-2022)

Institutional Trust

Across high-, mid-, and low- income states, low income countries have experienced the sharpest decline in institutional trust

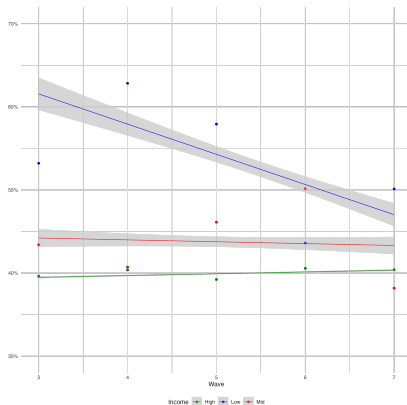


Figure: Percentage trusting of government by income group, WVS (1990-2022)

Institutional Trust

A generational divide also appears to exist, with **younger** respondents generally less trusting of government than **older** respondents

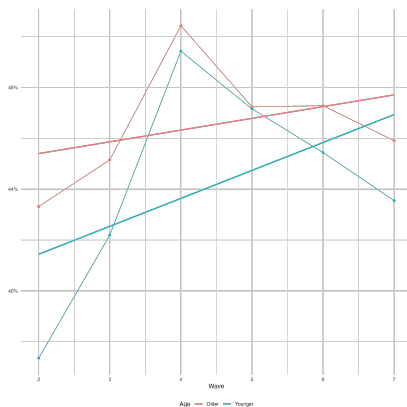


Figure: Percentage trusting of government by age, WVS (1990-2022)

Interpersonal Trust

Interpersonal trust has also been in decline, although less sharply than institutional forms of trust

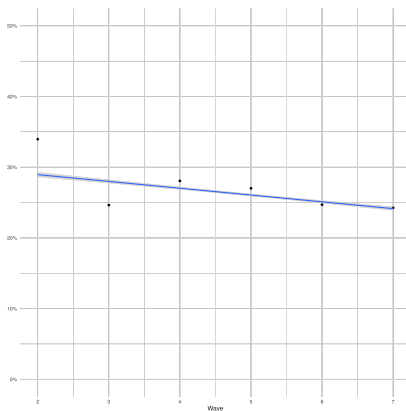


Figure: Average interpersonal trust, WVS (1999-2022)

Interpersonal Trust

High-income states are most trusting of one another, while low income countries again have experienced the sharpest decline in trust over time

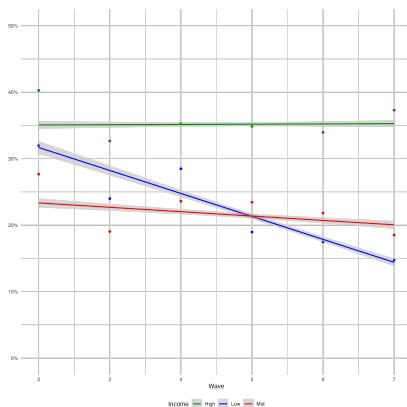


Figure: Average interpersonal trust by income group, WVS (1990-2022)

Interpersonal Trust

A generational gap also exists in interpersonal trust, with **younger** respondents again exhibiting less trust than **older** respondents

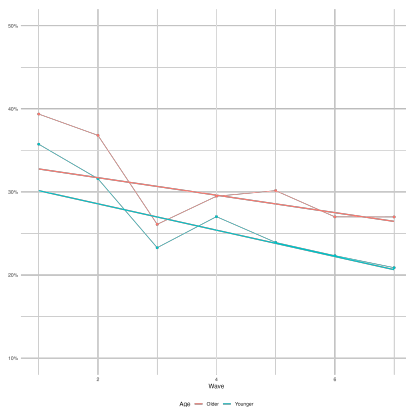


Figure: Average interpersonal trust by age, WVS (1990-2022)

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Interpersonal and institutional trust are mutually reinforcing [4][3]

- Those with high levels of interpersonal trust are more likely to become politically involved and increase their trust in institutions
- Conditions of high institutional trust cultivate opportunities for greater interpersonal trust building
- Declining trust across either dimension can therefore have serious social, economic, and political impacts

Correlations: Inequality

At the national level, as interpersonal trust declines, social inequality tends to increase (higher GINI score)

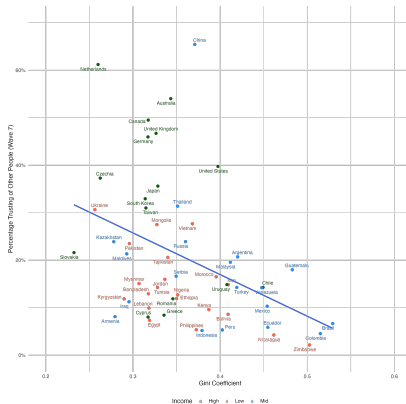


Figure: Average Interpersonal Trust (WVS, 2017-2022) and GINI coefficient (World Bank, 2006-2022)

Correlations: Job Security

Countries where respondents feel more confident about job security are also those with higher levels of interpersonal trust

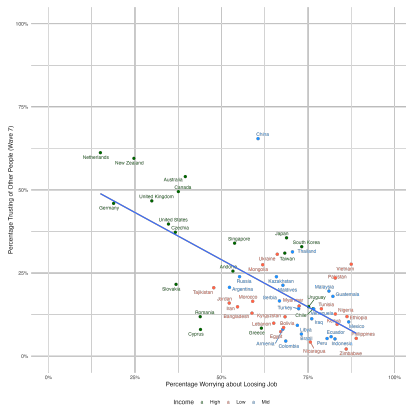


Figure: Average Interpersonal Trust and Average Worry About Losing One's Job (WVS, 2017-2022)

Correlations: Political Stability

Similarly, countries with higher levels of interpersonal trust are also those with the greatest levels of political stability

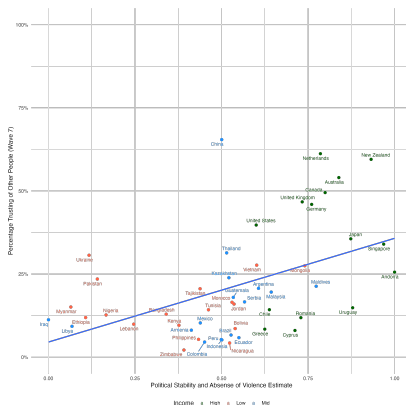


Figure: Average Interpersonal Trust (WVS, 2017-2022) and Political Stability and Absence of Violence Estimate (WGI, 2022)

Correlations: Media Transparency

The role of media as a mediating factor is important, as more trusting societies tend to have greater media transparency and openness

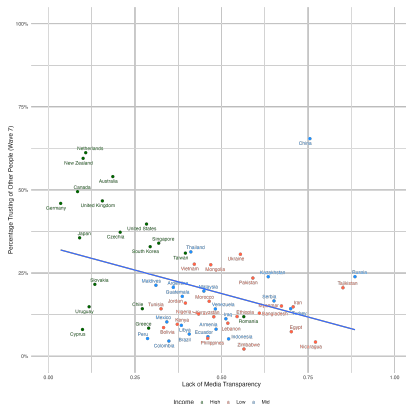


Figure: Average Interpersonal Trust (WVS, 2017-2022) and Lack of Media Transparency (V-DEM, 2022)

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Key Messages

- Social trust has declined over the last two decades worldwide, especially in developing countries in Latin America and Africa
- Interpersonal trust has been more resilient than institutional trust, especially within high-income countries
- A strong generational gap exists: younger people are overall less trusting than older generations
- Economic vulnerability and uncertainties, uneven progress in poverty reduction, shifts in the nature of work, and changes in the media landscape have contributed to declining trust
- Changes in trust shape civic and political participation, affect perceptions about the effectiveness and transparency of institutions, and impact political instability and socio-political polarization

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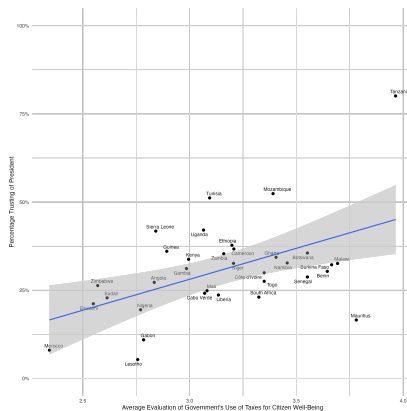


Figure: Percentage trusting of president and evaluation of government use of taxes (Afrobarometer, 2019-2021)

Appendix

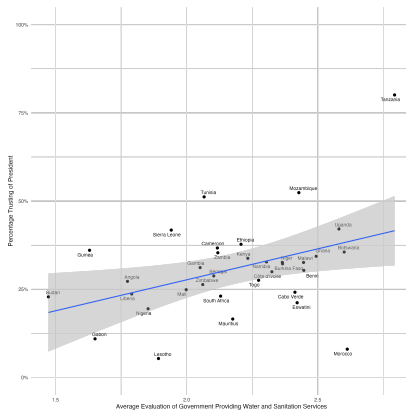


Figure: Percentage trusting of president and evaluation of government water and sanitation services (Afrobarometer, 2019-2021)

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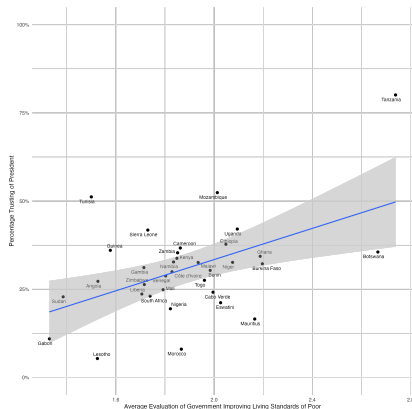


Figure: Percentage trusting of president and evaluation of government efforts toward living standard of poor (Afrobarometer, 2019-2021)

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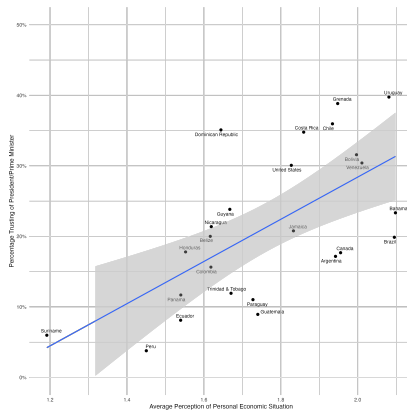


Figure: Percentage trusting of president/prime minister and evaluation of personal economic situation (LAPOP, 2023)

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