Uncertain Times
Divided Societies
- some findings from HDR2021/2022

Yanchun Zhang, UNDP/HDRO
Expert Group Meeting: “Rethinking social development policies and frameworks”
25 August 2023, UN/DESA, New York
Trilogy of reports

Human Development Report 2019
Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century

Human Development Report 2020
The next frontier
Human development and the Anthropocene

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2021/2022
Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World
Figure 6.1 A two-tier framework for transformation

Three layers of uncertainty:
- Planetary change
- Transition uncertainty
- Polarization

Inadequate institutions and policies

Gaps

Cultural mismatches (values, beliefs and social norms)

Responses
- Enhancing social arrangements
  - Motivating principles: flexibility, creativity, solidarity and inclusion
- Changing culture (values, beliefs and social norms)
  - Education
  - Recognition
  - Representation

Uncertain times, divided societies

• Why societies fail to craft the needed collective responses?
  
  • **Individual uncertainty** *(proxied by perceived human insecurity)* is putting people under stress and pulling people apart *(divided societies).*

  • Greater human insecurity is associated with
    
    • Diminishing agency
    
    • Lack of trust in others
    
    • More extreme political beliefs – polarization harms public deliberation in uncertain times
Even before the pandemic, more than 6 in 7 people felt insecure, and it has increased, even in very high HDI countries.

Figure 1.5 Perceived insecurity is on the rise in most countries, even in some very high Human Development Index countries.

Change in Index of Perceived Human Insecurity value:
- Low HDI countries
- Medium HDI countries
- High HDI countries
- Very high HDI countries

Human Development Index (HDI) value, 2021

Note: Bubble size represents the country population.  
a. Refers to the change between waves 6 and 7 of the World Values Survey for countries with comparable data.  
Source: Human Development Report Office based on World Values Survey data.
Feel insecure? Feel losing control?

Figure 4.1 Greater insecurity is associated with lower personal agency

A breakdown of trust: globally, fewer than 30 percent of people think most people can be trusted, lowest on record.

Figure 4.2 Trust declines with social distance more steeply at lower incomes and higher insecurity

People with extreme political preferences is twice as large among very insecure.
HDR2023 explores

- Why polarizations are rising;
- How polarizations can diminish the space for the imaginative, inclusive, just, and effective collective actions needed today;
- How to address governance mismatches to foster cooperation and collection actions.