Varieties of Trust*

Eric M. Uslaner

Department of Government and Politics

University of Maryland–College Park

College Park, MD 20742

euslaner@gvpt.umd.edu

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A bond of trust lets us put greater confidence in other people's promises that they mean what they say when they promise to cooperate. The "standard" account of trust presumes that trust depends on information and experience. Offe (1999) states: "Trust in persons results from past experience with concrete persons." If Jane trusts Bill to keep his word and if Bill trusts Jane to keep her word, they can reach an agreement to cooperate and thus make both of them better off.

If Jane and Bill did not know each other, they would have no basis for trusting each other. Moreover, a single encounter will not suffice to develop trust. Even when they get to know each other better, their mutual trust will be limited to what they know about each other. Jane and Bill may feel comfortable loaning each other a modest amount of money. But Bill won't trust Jane to paint his house and Jane will not trust Bill to repair her roof–since neither has any knowledge of the others' talents in this area (Hardin, 1992, 154; Coleman, 1990, 109; Misztal, 1996, 121ff.).

The decision to trust another person is essentially *strategic*. Strategic (or knowledge-based) trust presupposes risk (Misztal, 1996, 18; A. Seligman, 1997, 63). Jane is at risk if she does not know whether Bill will pay her back. Trust helps us solve collective action problems by reducing transaction costs–the price of gaining the requisite information that Bill and Jane need to place confidence in each other (Putnam, 1993, 172; Offe, 1996, 27). It is a recipe for telling us *when* we can tell whether other people are trustworthy (Luhmann, 1979, 43).[1]

Beyond the strategic view of trust is another perspective. Moralistic trust is a moral commandment to treat people *as if* they were trustworthy. The central idea behind moralistic trust is the belief that most people share your fundamental moral values (cf. Fukayama, 1995, 153). Moralistic trust is based upon "some sort of belief in the goodwill of the other" (A.

Seligman, 1997, 43; cf. Mansbridge, 1999; Yamigishi and Yamigishi, 1994, 131).

Strategic trust cannot answer why people get involved in their communities. The linkage with moralistic trust is much more straightforward. Strategic trust can only lead to cooperation among people you have gotten to know, so it can only resolve problems of trust among small numbers of pepole. We need moralistic trust to get to civic engagement.

The Varieties of Trust

Moralistic trust is a value that rests on an optimistic view of the world and one's ability to control it. Moralistic trust is not a relationship between specific persons for a particular context. If the grammar of strategic trust is "A trusts B to do X" (Hardin, 1992, 154), the etymology of moralistic trust is simply "A trusts."[2]

Strategic trust reflects our expectations about how people *will* behave. Moralistic trust is a statement about how people *should* behave. *People ought to trust each other.* The Golden Rule (which is the foundation of moralistic trust) does *not* demand that you do unto others as they do unto you. Instead, you do unto others *as you would have them* do unto you. The Eighth Commandment is *not* "Thou shalt not steal unless somebody takes something from you." Nor does it state, "Thou shalt not steal from Bill." Moral dictates are absolutes (usually with some exceptions in extreme circumstances).

Strategic trust is not predicated upon a negative view of the world, but rather upon uncertainty. Levi (1997, 3) argues: "The opposite of trust is not distrust; it is the lack of trust" (cf. Hardin, 1992, 154). But moralistic trust must have positive feelings at one pole and negative ones at the other. It would be strange to have a moral code with good juxtaposed against undecided.

Beyond the distinction between moralistic and generalized trust is the continuum from

particularized to generalized trust. Generalized trust is the perception that *most* people are part of your moral community. Its foundation lies in moralistic trust, but it is not the same thing.[3] The difference between generalized and particularized trust is similar to the distinction Putnam (1993, 93) drew between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital.

While I have pictured particularized and generalized trusts as parts of a continuum, reality is a bit more complex. Generalized trusters don't dislike their own kind. Generalized trusters don't abjure contacts with people like themselves. Indeed, much of civic life revolves around contact with people like ourselves. Bowling leagues are composed of people who like to bowl and choral societies are made up of people who like classical music.[4] We are simply unlikely to meet people who are different from ourselves in our civic life. Now, choral societies and bird-watching groups (among others) will hardly *destroy* trust. And there is nothing wrong with such narrow groups. They bring lots of joy to their members and don't harm anybody. But they are poor candidates for creating social trust (Rosenblum, 1998).

And you are not likely to get trust in people you don't know from most of civic life. Stolle (1998, 500) argues that the extension of trust from your own group to the larger society occurs through "mechanisms not yet clearly understood." An even more skeptical Rosenblum (1998, 45, 48) calls the purported link "an airy 'liberal expectancy'" that remains "unexplained." Stolle and Rosenblum challenge the idea that we learn to trust people we don't know by observing people we do know.

Strategic and moralistic trust have very different foundations. We *don't* form moralistic trust on experiences–so no amount of social interaction is likely to reshape our values. This is not to say that trust is immutable and that we can't learn to have faith in others even as adults. But our civic life is not likely to be the place where we change our fundamental values: Most people

spend minuscule amounts of time in voluntary organizations and even the most committed activists rarely devote more than a few hours a week to group life–hardly enough time to shape, or reshape, an adult's values (Newton, 1997, 579).

Why and How Trust Matters

We measure trust by the "standard" survey question: "Generally speaking, do you believe that most people can be trusted, or can't you be too careful in dealing with people?" This question has been asked in surveys for more than four decades, most notably in the World Values Survey (cross-nationally) and in the General Social Survey and American National Election Studies in the United States, where we have the longest time series on trust. While the question is controversial, elsewhere I provide strong support for its use–*and for the claims that it represents both generalized trust (rather than strategic trust or particularized trust) and moralistic trust* (Uslaner, 2002, ch. 3).

There is a presumption that trust and civic engagement are intrically connected. Putnam (2000, 137) wrote:

> ...people who trust others are all-around good citizens, and those more engaged in in community life are both more trusting and more trustworthy....the critically disengaged believe themselves to be surrounded by miscreants and feel less constrained to be honest themselves. The causal arrows among civic involvement, reciprocity, honesty, and social trust are as tangled as well-tossed spaghetti.

The evidence for any link, much less a reciprocal link (trust → civic engagement → trust), is weak. Most forms of civic engagement neither produce nor consume trust. But the more demanding forms, those that really tie us to people unlike ourselves, both depend upon generalized trust *and* reinforce it. In Uslaner (2002, ch. 5), I use data from a variety of surveys in

the United States to investigate the reciprocal linkages between trust and civic engagement.[5] These estimations show that Putnam's "virtuous circle" is at most a "virtuous arrow." Where there are significant relationships between trust and civic engagement, *almost all of the time*, the causal direction goes from trust to civic engagement rather than the other way around. Even these results are based upon a presumption that the causal arrow usually goes *somewhere*. Some social connections might even reinforce particularized rather than generalized trust. Much of the time social networks, both informal and formal, are moral dead ends. They neither consume nor produce trust. They just happen.

This is certainly true of all forms of informal social ties, ranging from playing cards to joining choral societies to going to bars, restaurants, or bingo parlors. Our social ties are with people like ourselves and do not (dare I say "cannot") lead to trust in strangers. People who play cards have more faith in their neighbors–the people they play with–but not in strangers. There is some evidence that trusters are more likely to talk to more neighbors–but they are *less* likely to see their best friends often and *less* likely to spend a lot of time with parents and relatives. They are no more likely to go to parades, sports events, or art shows often; spend a lot of time with friends from work or simply to hang out with friends in a public place; visit chat rooms on the World Wide Web a lot, or even to play lots of team sports. People who trust folks they know–their neighbors–*are* more likely to go to parades and join sports teams frequently. But overall, the major reason why people socialize a lot is that they have many friends, not that they trust strangers. Misanthropes have friends too. Nor is there *any* evidence that these activities *produce* generalized trust.

Joining civic groups, for the most part, is not linked to trust either. Of 20 types of civic groups included in the 1996 American National Election Study, my analysis showed that: (1) no

group membership *led to trust*; and (2) trust only had significant effects on four types of group membership. Generalized trusters are more likely to join business and cultural organizations, but *less likely to belong to ethnic and church groups*. And this makes sense: Ethnic associations reinforce in-group ties, as do some religious ties.

There are also very weak (and insignificant) ties between trust and political engagement. And this is not surprising either. Politics is often confrontational. It thrives on mistrust (Warren, 1996). Trust in strangers brings forth a very different disposition, a desire to cooperate and work with others.

Trust matters for the type of civic activities that tap this sentiment of reaching out to people who are different from ourselves–and to helping them. Where faith in others matters most is in volunteering and giving to charity. And not just for any type of volunteering or giving to charity. If I volunteer at my son's school or give to my house of worship (or other religious cause), I am strengthening *in-group* ties. Christian fundamentalists (a far more important group in the United States than in Europe).[6] And when Christian fundamentalists join voluntary organizations or give time to others, they almost exclusively associate with those who share their faith. They do not reach out to people who think differently. Indeed, religious volunteering and giving to charity is the mark of particularized trust. Giving time or money to *secular* causes, where we are more likely to help people who are different from ourselves, is the hallmark of generalized trusters (Uslaner, 2001, 2002, ch. 7. Wuthnow, 1999).

Generalized trust matters because it helps connect us to people who are different from ourselves. Generalized trusters are tolerant of immigrants and minorities and support equal rights for women and gays. But they are not fuzzy multiculturalists. They believe in a common core of values and hold that ethnic politicians should *not* represent only their own kind. Trusting societies

have more effective governments, higher growth rates, less corruption and crime, and are more likely to redistribute resources from the rich to the poor (LaPorta et al., 1998; Uslaner, chs.5 and 7).

But not all trust is the same and not all civic activity is the same. Some forms of civic engagement may lead to more in-group trust and *less* trust in people who are different from ourselves (cf. Berman, 1997; and Roßteutscher, 2002). Trusting your own kind may be part of a more general positive syndrome of faith in others or it may inhibit generalized faith in others. Trusting people you know does *not* lead to trust in strangers. Loving my wife and son will not make me better disposed toward the men who haul away my garbage.[7] We need strategic trust to make do in our daily lives: Should I trust the contractor who proposes to rewire my house? How do I find an honest mechanic? In earlier days, when generalized trust was scarce, particularized trust (in people of your own background) helped cement business deals in a world where any sort of trust seemed highly risky (Greif, 1993). Yet, the benefits of these types of trust are limited (Woolcock, 1998). The big pay-offs come from generalized trust. Faith in strangers is a matter of faith, not based on experience. It is a risky gamble, asking a lot of us, but promising much more in return.

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NOTES

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1. The term "strategic trust" is mine. Most of the people I cite would like find the terminology congenial. Hardin (1992, 163) emphatically holds that "there is little sense in the claim of some that trust is a more or less consciously chosen policy..." Trust based on experience can be strategic even if we do not make a deliberate choice to trust on specific occasions.

2. A more formal statement would be:

$\forall$ B and $\forall$ X: A trusts B to do X.

As I note below, it is foolish to trust all of the people all of the time. Moralistic trust doesn't demand that. But it does presume that we trust most people under most circumstances (where most is widely defined).

3. I am indebted to Jane Mansbridge for emphasizing this distinction.

4. This result comes from an analysis of the 1993 General Social Survey in the United States, where performing music is best predicted by liking classical music–as well as looking for opportunities to meet others with similar preferences–other predictors are age (young) and income (high).

5. I use either two- or three-stage least squares estimation to investigate reciprocal linkages.

6. In the 2000 American National Election Study, 40.7 percent of all Americans called themselves "born-again Christians," rising to 57.9 percent in the South.

7. In Uslaner (2002, ch. 5), I show that there is no statistical linkage between trust in people you know and trust in strangers.