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## **Identifying social trust in cross-country analysis. Do we really measure the same?**

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# Identifying social trust in cross-country analysis. Do we really measure the same?

## *Abstract*

*Many see trust as an important social resource for the welfare of individuals as well as nations. It is therefore important to be able to identify trust and explain its sources. Cross-country survey analysis has been an important tool in this respect, and often one single variable is used to identify social trust understood as trust in strangers, namely: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” The question, however, is whether this variable captures the meaning of social trust equally well in all countries. This is investigated by comparing different measurements of trust across five clusters of countries in all parts of the world. The analysis shows that there are considerable problems associated with the use of the variable of “most can be trusted” as an indicator of trust in strangers, both in terms of strangers understood as “people you meet for the first time” and in terms of strangers understood as people of a different nationality and religion. These results question the validity of previous investigations of social trust based on international survey material. The analysis furthermore reveals that a new survey question about trust in people one is meeting for the first time is better suited as indicator of social trust in comparative analysis.*

## **Introduction**

To-day it has been common to see trust as an important social resource for the welfare of both individuals and nations. At the nation level trust is understood as generalized or social trust, which is trust in those one does not know, i.e. “trust in strangers”, and it is precisely this form of trust that is assumed to have beneficiary effects on the nation as a whole, as it stimulates cooperation between citizens in general, including citizens who are divided socially and culturally.

Given that there is some truth in that, it is important to be able to identify social trust and explain its sources. Cross-country survey analysis is an important tool in this respect. Based on comparisons between countries included in World Values Survey several attempts have been done to identify the explanatory variables for social trust (Alesina and LaFerrara, 2002; Delhey and Newton, 2005; Andersen and Paskeviciute, 2006; Bjørnskov, 2007). In these studies one single variable has been used to measure trust, namely: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?”

This variable, also called the standard measure of social trust, is assumed to capture the underlying meaning of “trust in strangers”. It is this form of anonymous trust. Actually, however, we know very little about what people are thinking when answering that “most people can be trusted” or “you can’t be too careful”. How do respondents interpret “most people”, and do people around the world interpret the question in the same manner? Is the trust question really able to identify “social trusters”, both in terms of trust in strangers, including trust in those who are different from oneself? These questions can be summarized in one main question, namely whether the underlying theoretical concept of “trust in strangers” is captured equally well in all countries, as it has been assumed in several comparative national studies of trust based on the World Value Study (see for instance Delhey and Newton, 2005 and Bjørnskov, 2006).

We start the analysis by discussing the concept of social trust and how it is measured as we attempt to elaborate on the questions asked above. Next we investigate whether the standard measure of trust captures generalized trust equally well in different parts of the world. This analysis is carried out by comparing the answers to the “most people can be trusted” question with the answers to a new general question about trust, namely whether one can “trust people you meet for the first time”. Then we investigate whether those who say they trust other people also include people who are different from oneself, which in this context mean people with a different nationality or a different religion. Finally, we compare and discuss the validity of the two measures of social trust.

### ***The concept of social trust and how it is measured in survey research***

**The concept.** Among researchers, there are two main perspectives on the formation of trust. From one perspective, trust is linked to a rational evaluation of the trustworthiness of others based on concrete experience or information. One example of this perspective is found in the writings of Russel Hardin (2002, 2006), who sees trust as a relation between two persons, where trust emerges

if one person assume that it is in the other person's interest to live up to one's trust. Whether one displays trust or not will therefore depend on the assessment of risk, both in relation to the concrete person and the concrete circumstances. Accordingly, Hardin rejects any concept regarding generalized trust. Positive answers to the survey question that "most people can be trusted" are, in his view, at best an expression of an optimistic perspective regarding the reliability of others and thus an indication of a certain risk-willingness (Hardin, 2006: 126). Conversely, Freitag and Tranmüller (2009) are of the opinion that it is possible to develop a concept about generalized trust on the basis of a rational perspective, namely as a type of trust formed on the basis of generalized experiences from past meetings with others.

An alternative to this rational and thus experienced-based perspective on trust is a perspective according to which trust is grounded in the moral predisposition of the truster. Eric Uslaner (2002, 2007) refers to this as "moralistic trust", which he understands as "a moral commandment to treat people as *if* they were trustworthy" (Uslaner, 2002: 18). Moralistic trust is based on the belief that most people share some fundamental values as to how people should be treated. As such, moralistic trust forms the basis for generalized trust. According to Uslaner, however, trust is also affected by one's surroundings and to a limited extent by life experiences (Uslaner, 2002: 27-28).

Putnam (1993) originally also seemed to be in line with the rational perspective on trust, where trust is based on an assessment of the reliability of others. Putnam writes that "trust entails a prediction about the behaviour of an independent actor" based on what you know about "his available options and their consequences, his ability and so forth" (Putnam, 1993: 171). In smaller communities, this prediction can rest on "intimate familiarity". In larger, more complex societies, an impersonal and indirect form of trust is required; however, Putnam's 1993 book does not clarify how such an impersonal form of trust is established. In his next book Putnam defines generalized trust as "a standing decision to give most people – even those whom one does not know from direct experience – the benefit of the doubt" (Putnam, 2000: 136). But how is it possible to trust people without having any prior knowledge? The definition appears to be moving away from an exclusively experienced based view and towards a moralistic perspective on trust.

A solution would therefore be to follow Rothstein (2003) and combine the two perspectives in a third perspective, where trust is based upon both experience and moral predispositions (Rothstein, 2003). Similar to Sztompka (1998), Rothstein defines trust as "hope about the future reliability of other actors" (Rothstein, 2003: 111 – own translation). Such hope can be both rationally and

morally grounded. *Rationally*, as it can be based on an assessment about what is most reasonable in a given situation combined with general knowledge about how actors will react; *morally*, because the hope is associated with the perception that it is good and right to display trust to the other person. To use a concrete example: When I choose to trust that a total stranger whom I ask for directions will not lure me into a trap, it can be based on an objective risk assessment involving both my knowledge of the concrete person and the place in question, but the moral belief that I ought to display trust towards the ‘friendly’ stranger can also play in.

On that background, the question as to whether a person chooses to display trust towards another person will depend partly on a relatively constant factor, which comprises the person’s moral disposition to trust others, partly a variable factor based on an assessment of the reliability of the other person in the specific situation. On the basis of the third perspective, we can therefore define generalized trust as *a standing inclination – on the basis of experience together with moral convictions – to give the other person the benefit of the doubt.*

**Measuring trust.** As a number of positive characteristics for society are attributed to generalized trust, social scientists are obviously interested in mapping trust with respect to gaining knowledge about what generates social trust. In order to map trust, however, we must be able to measure it. There are a number of different methods for doing so, including experimental research, anthropological studies and survey techniques. As regards measuring trust in all of society, as is the case in comparative national studies, we are referred to the use of the survey technique. In such cases, we are unable to map the inclination to trust strangers by studying the actual actions; instead, we rely on how our selected persons respond to a question about their inclination to trust strangers. In practice, the amount of social trust is calculated as the proportion of population who may be called social trusters.

That which is decisive for the validity of this calculation is therefore how the question(s) intended to capture social trust are formulated. The question that has actually been used to capture social trust can be traced back to the “General Social Survey of the US” and was included in the 1981 World Value Study. The question is: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” In a number of cross-country studies including countries all over the world, this question has been used as an indicator of interpersonal trust (Inglehart, 1997; Alesina and La Ferrara 2002; Delhey and Newton, 2005; Andersen and Paskeviciute, 2006; Bjørnskov, 2006; Herreros and Criado, 2008).

The formulation of the question has been criticized for being imprecise and asymmetrical (Hardin, 2006; Nannestad, 2008; Miller and Mitamura, 2003), just as it has been suggested that it is methodologically questionable to rely solely on a single question (Reesken and Hooghe, 2008). On the other hand, it has been argued that the question reasonably captures the underlying theoretical concept of “trust in strangers”; that the results have proven to be stable over time on the aggregate level; and that they are in accordance with other measurements of trust (Uslaner, 2002; Bjørnskov, 2006).

We attempt the answer the main question we raise in this paper, whether the underlying theoretical concept of “trust in strangers” is captured equally well in all countries by, firstly, investigating the degree to which the standard question about trust appears to be a precise measurement of trust in strangers across different types of societies. Secondly, to investigate the degree to which trust is generalized as a form of trust which in principle includes everyone, that is, persons from all groups in society.

However, we start by discussing what the respondents are thinking when answering that “most people can be trusted”. On the one hand, the formulation of the question, “generally speaking would you say that most people can be trusted?” is so broad that it is possible to answer “yes” to the question, even though one is aware that there are situations in which one does not display trust and persons that one does not trust. In that sense the question aptly captures the inclination to trust another person given the uncertainty that will always be present.

On the other hand, the question is formulated with such a lack of precision that it is unclear what “most people” covers. Most of whom? Of all of the people in the world? Of the residents of the nation in question? Of the people in the local area? It is conceivable that some think of “most people” in more abstract terms than others, which may influence the answer to the question. This can be part of the explanation as to why the trust question correlates strongly with education. In other words, the phrasing of the question assumes a common frame of reference, the existence of which we cannot be absolutely certain about (see also Sturgis and Smith, 2010).

A new general question about trust would appear to solve some of these problems. This new question was included in the last round of the World Values Survey (2006 to 2008), where respondents were asked whether they trust people they meet for the first time. The possible answers are: “completely trust, trust somewhat, trust only little, do not trust at all”. Off-hand, the new

question would appear better suited to capturing trust in strangers. In contrast to the standard question about trust, this question asks directly about trust in strangers, understood as persons one is meeting for the first time. Furthermore, the answer categories are symmetrical. If one is generally inclined not to let others enjoy the benefit of the doubt, one would answer “trust only little” or “do not trust at all”. As such, the question meets some of the objections raised against the standard question and may therefore be assumed to be a more valid measurement of social trust.

The first question we examine is whether the standard question about trust is able to capture generalized trust understood as trust in strangers in every society and thus function as a universal measurement of social trust. In order to do so, two criteria must be fulfilled: First, there must be a reasonably strong correlation between the standard question and the answers to the question about trusting those one meets for the first time, as it is claimed that the standard question measures trust in strangers. Second, the correlations must be more or less equally strong in all countries.

The other main question we will attempt to answer is whether the trust measured is generalized in the sense that it includes persons belonging to different groups in society, including those who are different from oneself in important areas, such as persons of a different ethnic origin. If this is not the case, then the positive answers that “most people can be trusted” are possibly not a valid expression of generalized trust. Obviously, a generalized truster, as indicated above, is not necessarily a person who trusts everyone in every conceivable situation. But it would not be consistent with the definition of generalized trust to exclude persons belonging to specific groups beforehand, e.g. persons with a different cultural background, religion etc.

The most recent values study (2006-2008) raises two questions, which makes it possible to control the validity of the answers to the standard question about trust, namely whether the respondents “trust people of another nationality” and “trust people of another religion”. We must therefore investigate whether the answer to “most people can be trusted” corresponds with trust in persons with a different nationality or religion. The same study is carried out for the new general trust question, trust in people you meet for the first time, in order to compare the degree of accordance between the two measures of trust. If the new trust question corresponds better than the standard question about trust, it indicates that the new trust question has a greater validity than the standard question.

Bringing things together, we illustrate the consequences for the ranking of the countries on the trust barometer when exchanging the standard question about trust with the new trust question as to whether one trusts those one meets for the first time. We furthermore illustrate the consequences for the ranking if we exclude “particularized trusters”, i.e. those who do not trust persons of a different nationality or religion, from the pool of “social trusters” as measured by the social trust questions.

### ***The standard measure of social trust as a measure of trust in strangers***

In this section we compare the two questions of social trust. As mentioned above it is generally assumed that the standard question, “generally speaking, do you think most people can be trusted?” measures trust in “strangers”. In cross country analysis it is furthermore assumed that positive answers to this question are valid expressions of “trust in strangers” in all countries. To test this allegation we have grouped the 52 countries that are included in the last wave of World Value Survey ([www.worldvaluesurvey.org/](http://www.worldvaluesurvey.org/)) in five country clusters: Western countries, former East Bloc, Latin America, Asia and Africa.

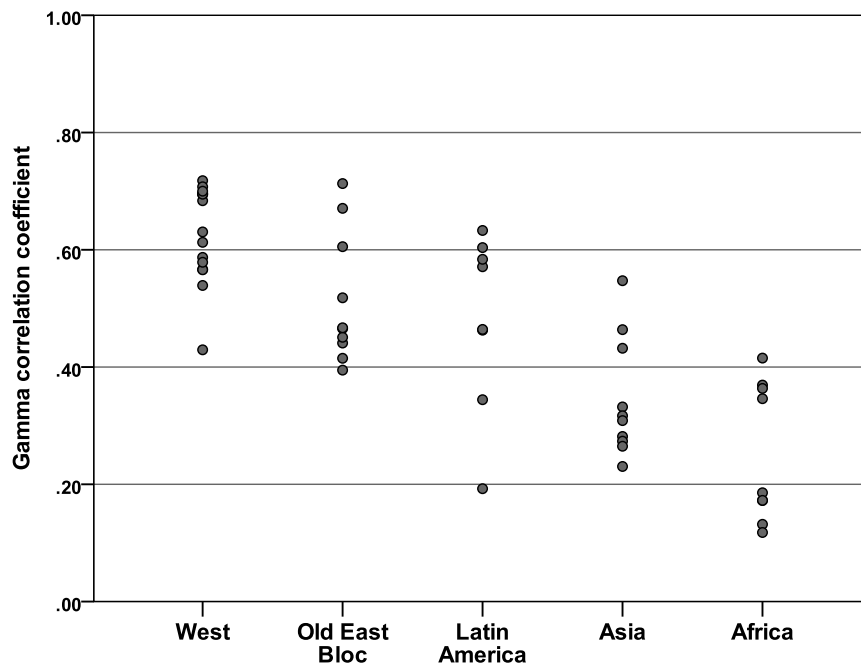
**Table 1: Social trust in five country clusters. Percent trusters**

	<i>Most people can be trusted</i>	<i>Trust people you meet for the first time (somewhat or completely)</i>	<i>Number of countries</i>
West	40.4	41.2	15
Former East Bloc	20.9	16.3	10
Latin America	12.9	17.8	8
Asia	32.3	18.7	10
Africa	15.4	27.8	9
Total	25.7	25.8	52

Note: Only countries which have included both questions in the questionnaire are included in the analysis. N is in all clusters above 10,000 respondents.

Initially, we look at the frequency of positive answers in the five clusters (Table 1) and observe that the Western countries deviate from the other country clusters in two respects. Firstly, there are considerably more “social trusters” in the case of both questions. Secondly, there are pretty much equal numbers for both questions, i.e. a good 40 percent. In the meantime, another interesting observation can also be made. While the African countries in total are at the bottom of the scale as far as generalized social trust is concerned, when ranked on the basis of the standard question, African countries occupy a clear second place after the Western countries for the question about trusting those one meets for the first time. The observation indicates that the correlation between the two questions is not as good as one might be led to expect by the theory.

**Figure 1: Gamma correlation coefficients between “trust most people” and “trust people you meet for the first time”, split by country and country cluster.**



N = 52 (countries)  
 Data source: World Values Survey, wave 2005-2008

This is confirmed in Figure 1, where the correlations are shown for each country in the five country groups (for a detailed overview, see Appendix A). We observe that the correlations coefficient for some countries is rather low, but we also notice a fairly coherent pattern for each country-group

together with rather strong variations between the groups. While the correlations are strongest for the Western countries, where they vary between gamma coefficients of 0.43 (Spain) and 0.72 (Switzerland), they are weakest for Africa, where they vary between 0.08 (South Africa) and 0.41 (Egypt). It thus appears as if it affects the strength of the correlation between the two trust questions, where in the world you are. This impression is strengthened by an analysis of variance on the aggregate country level. Using the countries' gamma values as the dependent variable and country cluster as the independent variable, an explained variance of a good 60 percent is achieved. In other words, the division of countries accounts for more than 60 percent of the variance for the correlations.

To give a more accurate picture of the correlations Table 2 shows the distribution of both positive and negative responses to the standard question of trust. As appears, there is a greater deviation in relation to what should be expected for the positive than for the negative responses. Among those who answer that "you can't be too careful when dealing with people" only a minority say they trust people they meet for the first time ("somewhat" or "completely"). In contrast a majority of those who say they generally trust most people say they do not trust those they meet for the first time. In Asian countries it is a majority of 74 percent, in the former East Bloc Africa a majority of 65, in Africa a majority of 60 percent and in Latin America a majority of 56 percent. Only among the Western countries is it a minority, namely of 33 percent.

**Table 2: Cross-tabulation of “most people can be trusted” and “trust in people you meet for the first time”. Row percent and Gamma correlation coefficients.**

	<i>Trust in people you meet for the first time</i>				<i>N</i>
	<i>No trust at all</i>	<i>Not very much trust</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Trust completely</i>	
<b>West (Gamma = .70):</b>					
You can't be too careful	28.9	46.8	23.5	.9	7,479
Most people can be trusted	4.5	28.3	63.4	3.9	5,537
Total	18.5	38.9	40.5	2.1	13,016
<b>Former East Bloc (Gamma = .47):</b>					
You can't be too careful	32.1	56.2	10.8	.8	6,245
Most people can be trusted	16.2	48.7	31.9	3.3	1,473
Total	29.1	54.8	15.5	1.2	7,718
<b>Latin America (Gamma = .54):</b>					
You can't be too careful	46.3	37.0	15.5	1.2	5,506
Most people can be trusted	18.3	37.7	38.0	6.1	909
Total	42.3	37.1	18.7	1.9	6,415
<b>Asia (Gamma = .36):</b>					
You can't be too careful	32.0	53.7	12.5	1.9	6,860
Most people can be trusted	15.5	58.4	22.4	3.7	3,474
Total	26.5	55.3	15.8	2.5	10,334
<b>Africa (Gamma = .27):</b>					
You can't be too careful	28.9	45.5	22.8	2.8	11,634
Most people can be trusted	18.7	41.4	32.9	6.9	2,156
Total	27.3	44.9	24.2	3.5	13,790

Data source: World Values Survey, wave 2005-2008. Weighted analysis.

Why is there such a considerable difference between the Western countries and the other country clusters in relation to the correlation between trusting “most people” and trusting people one “meets for the first time”? For example, why is it in Asia only one fourth of those, who say they trust “most people”, who trust people they “meet for the first time”, while it is two third in Europe? Is it possible to explain some of this difference by pointing at some structural differences between Western countries and the rest of the world? We shall examine this question in the following.

*First of all* it is conceivable that well-educated individuals are more inclined to think about “most people” in abstract terms of “total strangers” than do persons with a more limited education. Since the level of education is generally higher in Western countries than in other parts of the world, it may help explain some of the difference between the Western countries and the rest of the world. *Secondly*, it is conceivable that the same applies for people in cities. While people in cities are more inclined to think of “most people” in terms of total strangers, i.e. people you meet for the first time, people in the country interpret “most people” as people “living around here”. Since urbanization is greater in western countries than in third world countries this may also help explain the different strength of the correlations. *Thirdly*, it is conceivable that employed people are more likely to take a broader and more abstract view on trust than unemployed people. It therefore makes a difference on how “most can be trusted” is interpreted, whether one is at the labour market, or one is a “homemaker”. Since more women are outside the labour market in third world countries than in western countries, such a difference will also be associated with a difference between women and men. Appendix B presents an overview of the variables that are included in the multilevel logistic regression analysis.

**Table 3: Explaining trust in people you meet for the first time among respondents who answer “most can be trusted” on the standard question measuring generalized social trust. Multilevel logistic regression. Regression logit coefficients and country variance for constant term. N = 10,454.**

	<i>Model 0</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
<i>Fixed factors:</i>				
Constant	-.28***	.53***	-.26**	.49***
Education (1-9)			.06***	.06***
Work or study			.02 <sup>NS</sup>	.02 <sup>NS</sup>
City, plus 100,000 inhabitants			-.11*	-.11*
<i>Country cluster:</i>				
West (ref.)		–		–
Former East Bloc		-1.11***		-1.10***
Latin America		-.88**		-.80**
Asia		-1.30***		-1.26***
Africa		-1.08***		-.94***
<i>Random factor / constant term variance</i>				
<i>(standard error in brackets)</i>	.504 (.117)	.258 (.080)	.475 (.114)	.251 (.063)

Data source: World Values Survey, wave 2005-2008.

Note: Weighted analysis in MLwiN.

<sup>NS</sup> not statistically significant; \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001

Model 0, the so-called empty model (including no variables but only an intercept), displays the logit variance on the national level, which is a measure of the variation between the countries. Model 1 indicates the same as the cross-tabulated analyses in Table 1. The assumptions as to what contributes to explaining the variations between the country clusters are tested in models 2 and 3. As can be seen, they receive limited support from the analysis results. As expected, there are positive and highly significant effects of education, but there are practical no effects from being in work or study, and the effect of being a city dweller is with an unexpected sign. More important here, however, is that these individual factors account for very little of the variations between countries and therefore cannot explain the effect of the country clusters. This is clearly seen in

Model 3, which includes the controlled effects of the variables at the individual level as well as the country cluster dummies. The effects of these dummies change only marginally from Model 1 to Model 3. In other words, these dummies are pretty much the sole source of explanation of the country variation – roughly 50 pct.<sup>1</sup>

All together, we have no other explanation for the variations between the country clusters other than the standard question about trust is perceived differently in different countries, and that this varies with which part of the world one lives in. While in Western countries most respondents understand the wording that “generally most can be trusted” as “trust in strangers”, the wording has a different meaning for most people living in Asia, the former East Bloc, Africa and Latin America. We are not able to explain difference, but what we can conclude is that in some countries, the correlation is so low that the standard question about trust is not able to measure generalized trust understood as trust in strangers. This makes including such countries in comparative studies of social trust problematic. Only within the group of Western countries do we find such strong correlations and convergence between the two trust questions that it may justify cross-country studies.

### ***The inclusiveness and exclusiveness of the standard measure of social trust***

In addition to trust in strangers, generalized trust must in principle include everyone. If persons with specific characteristics are excluded, then we are dealing with particularized trust – not generalized trust. We can get a sense of the extent to which the standard measure of social trust excludes representatives of certain groups by scrutinizing the degree of correlation between the answers to the standard question and the questions as to whether one trusts people of another nationality or religion.

Table 4 shows how “generalized social trusters” are distributed in relation to the question about trust in persons with a different religion and nationality than the respondent. The distribution of answers is roughly the same in the two subtables. We note that in the Western countries most people who say that they trust most people also trust people of another religion and nationality. It is quite another general situation in the Asian countries. Here, only 42 percent of those indicating that they generally trust people also say that they trust people with a different nationality or religion. We

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<sup>1</sup>  $(.504 - .251)/.504 = .501$ .

also observe smaller – though still considerable – discrepancies in the former East Bloc, in Africa as well as to some degree in Latin America.

**Table 4: Trust people of another religion and nationality among “social trusters” in five country clusters. Row percent.**

	Trust people of another religion				N (= 100 pct.)
	<i>No trust at all</i>	<i>Not very much trust</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Trust completely</i>	
West	2.8	15.6	70.8	10.8	6,691
Former East Bloc	12.2	36.2	46.7	4.9	2,071
Latin America	13.5	26.3	47.5	12.8	1,355
Asia	14.3	43.8	37.3	4.6	4,176
Africa	13.5	28.7	42.8	15.0	2,314

	Trust people of another nationality:				N (= 100 pct.)
	<i>No trust at all</i>	<i>Not very much trust</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Trust completely</i>	
West	2.4	15.6	71.0	11.0	6,703
Former East Bloc	10.1	34.0	50.4	5.6	2,072
Latin America	17.4	27.7	45.0	9.8	1,355
Asia	17.9	48.7	29.0	4.3	4,117
Africa	19.9	34.0	37.0	8.1	2,306

Weighted analysis

Closer scrutiny of the figures reveals sizeable differences between the Western countries. In Sweden 94 percent of the generalized trusters also trust people of another religion and nationality, while the corresponding figures in the former West Germany and the Netherlands are only 61 and 57 respectively. Also in Italy and Spain many who say they “trust most” do not trust people of another religion/nationality. On the opposite side with a high degree of convergence, together with Sweden, we find countries such as the USA, Australia, France, Andorra, and the UK. In the other country clusters we also find countries in which most of those claiming that they generally trust

people say at the same time that they do not trust people with a different nationality or religion, e.g. countries such as China and Morocco. In Appendix C we have listed all countries in the data set on four different measures of trust: 1) the standard variable of general trust in most people, 2) trust in people one meets for the first time, 3) the standard variable adjusted for not trusting people of another religion and/or nationality, 4) trust in people one meets for the first time adjusted for not trusting people of another religion and/or nationality.

In other words, on the background of this relatively simple analysis, we are able to conclude that there are persons in all countries who are classified as social or “generalized trusters” but who would be more correctly classified as “particularized trusters”. The variation is great, however: While it is less than 10 percent for Sweden, it is more than 80 percent for China.

The next question is whether the “new survey question” about trust in those one is meeting for the first time is better able to distinguish “generalized trusters” from “particularized trusters”. This seems to be the case as 75 percent of those responding that they trust those they meet for the first time also trust people with a different religion or nationality, while the corresponding figure for respondents answering that you can trust most people is only roughly 55 percent. However, we cannot exclude that some of this difference is owing to “response set” as the questions regarding trust to those one is meeting for the first time and trust in people with a different religion and a different nationality are lumped together in the survey. Nevertheless, the difference is so great that this can hardly be the entire explanation.

**Table 5: Trust people of another religion and nationality among respondents answering that they trust people they meet for the first time. Classified in five country clusters. Row percent.**

	<b>Trust people of different religion</b>				<i>N</i> (= 100 pct.)
	<i>No trust at all</i>	<i>Not very much trust</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Trust completely</i>	
West	1.4	6.7	78.8	13.1	6,925
Former East Bloc	3.6	15.9	71.6	8.9	1,659
Latin America	6.1	13.3	65.2	15.4	1,852
Asia	5.6	21.6	60.2	12.7	2,555
Africa	4.4	17.2	58.8	19.6	4,215

	<b>Trust people of different nationality:</b>				<i>N</i> (= 100 pct.)
	<i>No trust at all</i>	<i>Not very much trust</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Trust completely</i>	
West	1.2	6.9	78.6	13.3	6,934
Former East Bloc	3.0	14.1	73.8	9.1	1,655
Latin America	9.4	15.5	62.7	12.4	1,847
Asia	9.5	25.4	54.6	10.6	2,520
Africa	8.7	23.5	55.1	12.7	4,197

Weighted analysis

As illustrated in Table 5, the greater correspondence between the new trust question and trust in people of a different religion and nationality applies to all of the country clusters and furthermore to more or less the same degree. The result indicates that the new trust question, “trust people you meet for the first time” could be a more valid measurement of generalized trust than the previously used measurement as to whether one “trusts most people”.

## ***Discussion***

The discrepancies presented above between the country clusters conceal some degree of variation between the countries within the clusters. In the following discussion, we attempt to cast light on some of these differences. We do so on the background of Table 6, which reveals how the ranking in the top of the “trust meter” changes by going from the one measure of trust to the other (for a ranking of all of the countries, see Appendix C). The three first columns show the score and rank for the standard question for social trust (“trust most”) for the ten highest placed as well as the four countries that enter the top-ten for the new measure of trust (“trust first”). The fourth column presents the ranking for the traditional measure of trust after we have accounted for the “particularized trusters”, i.e. excluded those indicating that they do not trust people of a another nationality and religion. The fifth column shows the score for the new trust question (“trust first”), and the sixth column shows the placing for the “trust first measure”. Finally, column 7 is a correction of the ranking for the “trust first measure” after having excluded “particularized trusters”.

**Table 6: Score, ranking and corrected ranking.**

	<i>Trust most</i>	<i>Rank of trust most</i>	<i>Corr. rank of trust most</i>	<i>Trust first</i>	<i>Rank of trust first</i>	<i>Corr. rank of trust first</i>
Norway	74	1	2	67	2	2
Sweden	68	2	1	69	1	1
Finland	59	3	3	52	3	6
Switzerland	54	4	4	52	4	4
China	52	5	41	11	49	52
Vietnam	52	6	25	22	25	34
Australia	46	7	5	49	7	7
Netherlands	45	8	9	20	32	28
Canada	43	9	6	51	5	5
Indonesia	43	10	15	20	34	31
Great Britain	31	16	8	49	6	3
France	19	30	16	45	8	8

USA	39	13	7	40	9	9
Mali	17	36	21	37	10	10

Table 6 reveals that four countries are pushed out of the top-ten by using “trust first” instead of “trust most”: China, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Netherlands. These countries are replaced by the UK, France, USA and Mali. It can be noted that China falls from number 5 to 52 on the corrected scale, i.e. last place on the list for the corrected measurement of “trust first”; conversely, Great Britain leaps from 31 all the way up to number 3.

More than the correction for “particularized truster”, it is replacing the “trust-most measure” with the “trust-first measure” which gives the change in the ranking although for some countries the ranking is almost the same. This is the case for Norway, Sweden, Finland and Switzerland. Nor do countries such as Australia and Canada have major changes. The changes are primarily in the case of the Asian countries (China, Vietnam and Indonesia) as well as the Netherlands, which scores considerably lower on the “trust-first measure” than on the “trust-most measure”; on the opposite end, we find Great Britain and France, which had a somewhat higher score on “trust first” than “trust most”.

We also observe somewhat greater correlation between the ranking on “trust first” and the corrected ranking on “trust first” than between ranking on “trust most” and the corrected ranking for “trust most”, which supports the perception that the “trust-first measure” is a more valid measure for generalized trust than the standard measure on social trust.

For China, applying the new measure for social trust entails a drastic change. It has surprised many that China is categorized as “high trusting” country. An average calculated on the basis of the first three waves of the World Value Study and based on the standard question of social trust thus places China in fourth place after Norway, Sweden and Finland (Rothstein and Stolle, 2003:22). But as appears from this study, the vast majority of the Chinese respondents saying that they generally trust most people do not trust people with a different nationality or people with a different religion. Nor do they trust people they are meeting for the first time. In the case of China it is obvious that the standard question regarding trust does not measure generalized or social trust. But the same would also appear to be the case for a number of other countries, particularly in Asia and Africa.

As mentioned above, there are remarkably large internal differences in the Western country cluster regarding the degree of correlation between the answers as to whether one can trust people and whether one can trust those with a different nationality or religion. It is conceivable that these differences can be accounted for to some extent with reference to the differences in the degrees of ethnic and religious homogeneity. It can be hypothesized that the correlation is greater in homogenous countries than in heterogeneous countries, as respondents with limited contact with people of a different ethnicity or religion will primarily think of people of their own ethnicity and religion when confronted with the question as to whether they generally trust most people. More respondents in homogenous countries than in heterogeneous countries will therefore be inclined to say that they trust most people, even though they do not actually trust people of a different nationality or religion. The diverse context can possibly contribute to explaining the very high measurement of social trust in the Nordic countries, as these countries have been and continue to be more homogenous than many of the other Western societies.

However, it is not possible to confirm such a hypothesis. Sweden is actually the country in which there is greatest correlation between the answer to the general trust measure and the trust in people of a different nationality and religion. In Norway and Finland, the correspondence is less, though not greater than that both countries remain at the top of the corrected ranking (column 4).

At the same time, Sweden belongs to the countries renowned for strong or moderate multicultural politics (Banting, Kymlicha and Soroka, 2009). The same is the case for Australia, Canada, Great Britain and USA. These countries also share in common that they have a relatively limited deviation between having general trust and trusting people of a different nationality and religion. However, the pattern is not unambiguous. The Netherlands is also placed within the group of countries with strong or moderate multicultural policies (Banting, Kymlicha and Soroka, 2009), but as already mentioned, the Netherlands is the Western country in which the lack of correspondence is the greatest. It is tempting to attribute this discrepancy to the conflict surrounding immigration and Islam in the Netherlands in recent years. However, the pattern is not unambiguous here, either. France and Great Britain have undergone ethnic and religious conflicts without corresponding effects being registered.

## ***Conclusion***

The comparative analysis of the standard question for trust seen in relation to the new question about trust in those one meets for the first time and trust in persons of another nationality and religion shows that the standard question about trust is not measuring the same in different societies. It is not the same kind of trust that is measured in for example Sweden and China via the standard question. But China is not the only country where it is possible to raise questions regarding the validity of the standard measure for trust. The same is the case for other countries in Asia and Africa, but partially also for countries in the former East Bloc. In these country clusters, we find both a considerable lack of correspondence between trust in most persons and trust in those one is meeting for the first time and a considerable discrepancy between trust in most persons and trust in people of a different nationality or religion. For many countries, it is thus not merely the capacity of the standard question to measure social trust understood as trust in strangers, which can be questioned but also its capacity to measure trust across cultural divides.

We can therefore conclude that there are considerable problems associated with the use of the measurement of “most can be trusted” as indicator of trust in strangers, both in terms of strangers understood as “people you meet for the first time” and in terms of strangers understood as people of a different nationality and religion. In particular one should be careful with comparisons between countries belonging to different geographic blocs and/or cultural settings. While it is possible to compare answers to the question of “most can be trusted” within the Western hemisphere, it is not equally possible to compare between Western countries and countries in Asia and Africa. The results therefore also questions the validity of all previous studies of social trust based on the standard survey question of “most can be trusted” and a random selection of countries included in World Values Survey.

Finally, the analysis shows that that the new survey question about trust in people one is meeting for the first time is better suited as indicator of social trust. It thus strengthens the validity of the new question about social trust that the correlation between answers to this question and answers to the questions about trust in persons belonging to different groups of society is something greater and more uniform than is the case for the standard question. We therefore recommend that this question is included in future survey-based comparative research of social trust.



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**Appendix A: Correlation between “trust most people” and” trust people you meet for the first time”**

<b>Country Cluster</b>		<b>Country</b>	<b>Gamma</b>
West	1	Norway	.72
	2	Switzerland	.71
	3	Andorra	.70
	4	USA	.70
	5	Sweden	.69
	6	France	.69
	7	Italy	.68
	8	Netherlands	.63
	9	Canada	.61
	10	West Germany	.59
	11	Finland	.58
	12	Britain	.57
	13	Australia	.57
	14	Cyprus	.54
	15	Spain	.43
Total	N	15	15
Old East Block	1	Slovenia	.71
	2	East Germany	.67
	3	Poland	.61
	4	Serbia	.52
	5	Georgia	.47
	6	Ukraine	.47
	7	Russia	.45
	8	Romania	.44
	9	Bulgaria	.41
	10	Moldova	.39
Total	N	10	10
Latin America	1	Argentina	.63
	2	Uruguay	.60
	3	Peru	.58
	4	Mexico	.57
	5	Colombia	.46
	6	Brazil	.46
	7	Trinidad and Tobago	.34
	8	Chile	.19
Total	N	8	8
Asia	1	Indonesia	.55

	2		Taiwan	.46
	3		Turkey	.43
	4		S Korea	.33
	5		Vietnam	.32
	6		Malaysia	.31
	7		India	.28
	8		Thailand	.27
	9		Jordan	.26
	10		China	.23
	Total	N		10
Africa	1		Egypt	.42
	2		Morocco	.37
	3		Zambia	.36
	4		Mali	.35
	5		Ethiopia	.19
	6		Rwanda	.17
	7		Burkina Faso	.17
	8		S Africa	.13
	9		Ghana	.12
	Total	N		9
Total		N		52

## Appendix B: Variable list

### Variables

(labels from tables and text)

Scale

Comments and origin in WVS, rnd. four

TRUST VARIABLES:

*Most can be trusted*

Ordinal (0-1)

Question formulation:

0: Need to be very careful

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?

1: Most people can be trusted

Original variable: v23 (original values was 1 and 2).

*Trust people you meet for the first time*

Ordinal (1 – 4)

Question formulation:

1: Do not trust at all

I'd like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups. Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? ... People you meet for the first time

2: Do not trust very much

3: Trust somewhat

4: Trust completely

Original variable: v128 (The coding is reversed from the original variable)

*Trust people you meet for the first time (dummy)*

Dummy

Recoding of the above variable v128

0: Do not trust (1 or 2 in the above variable)

1: Trust (3 or 4 in the above variable)

*Trust people of another religion*

Ordinal (1 – 4)

Question formulation:

1: Do not trust at all

I'd like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups. Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? ... People of another religion

2: Do not trust very much

3: Trust somewhat

4: Trust completely

Original variable: v129 (The coding is reversed from the original variable)

<b>Variables (labels from tables and text)</b>	<b>Scale</b>	<b>Comments and origin in WVS, rnd. four</b>
<i>Trust people of another nationality</i>	Ordinal (1 – 4)  1: Do not trust at all  2: Do not trust very much  3: Trust somewhat  4: Trust completely	Question formulation:  I'd like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups. Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? ... People of another nationality  Original variable: v130 (The coding is reversed from the original variable)
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES IN TABLE 3:		
<i>Education</i>	Ordinal (1 – 9), treated as an interval scaled variable	Original variable: v238
<i>Work or study</i>	Dummy  0: Not in work or studying  1. In work or studying	Recoded from v241: 1, 2, 3 and 6 → 1 (other values equal to zero).
<i>City, plus 100,000 inhabitants</i>	Dummy  0: Up to 100,000 inhabitants  1: 100,000 or more inhabitants	Several countries did not include the common variable for urbanization. In some of these there was instead included a country specific variable. Our measure of urbanization is a recoding from original variable v255 and several country specific variables. In one of the countries, Japan, the value 1 indicate a city of 150,000 inhabitants or more.
<i>Country cluster</i>	1: West  2: Former East Bloc  3: Latin America  4: Africa	Recoded from original variable v2A

**Variables  
(labels from tables  
and text)**

**Scale**

**Comments and origin in WVS, rnd. four**

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*Appendix C: Trust in most people (trust most) and trust in people one meets for the first time (trust first) adjusted for not trusting people of another religion and/or nationality and a new ranking of the countries.*

	Country	Trust most	Trust first	Adj. trust most	Adj. trust first	Rank of trust most	Rank of trust first	Rank of adj. trust most	Rank of adj. trust first
1	Norway	.74	.67	.63	.60	1	2	2	2
2	Sweden	.68	.69	.64	.67	2	1	1	1
3	Finland	.59	.52	.46	.45	3	3	3	6
4	Switzerland	.54	.52	.44	.48	4	4	4	4
5	China	.52	.11	.06	.04	5	49	41	52
6	Vietnam	.52	.22	.11	.12	6	25	25	34
7	Australia	.46	.49	.39	.43	7	7	5	7
8	Netherlands	.45	.20	.24	.17	8	32	9	28
9	Canada	.43	.51	.38	.47	9	5	6	5
10	Indonesia	.43	.20	.17	.15	10	34	15	31
11	West Germany	.42	.31	.23	.25	11	14	10	14
12	Thailand	.42	.17	.13	.09	12	36	18	41
13	USA	.39	.40	.34	.38	13	9	7	9
14	East Germany	.32	.22	.18	.19	14	26	13	19
15	Jordan	.31	.24	.10	.15	15	22	29	30
16	Britain	.31	.49	.28	.51	16	6	8	3
17	Italy	.29	.19	.19	.18	17	35	11	24
18	Uruguay	.28	.36	.19	.29	18	11	12	11
19	S Korea	.28	.15	.11	.12	19	40	26	35
20	Ukraine	.28	.20	.15	.18	20	31	17	25
21	Russia	.26	.14	.12	.12	21	44	23	36
22	Ethiopia	.24	.27	.09	.19	22	18	33	20
23	Taiwan	.24	.21	.10	.14	23	27	27	32
24	India	.23	.26	.09	.17	24	21	32	27

	Country	Trust most	Trust first	Adj. trust most	Adj. trust first	Rank of trust most	Rank of trust first	Rank of adj. trust most	Rank of adj. trust first
25	Bulgaria	.22	.20	.12	.17	25	33	22	26
26	Romania	.20	.13	.08	.11	26	48	36	37
27	Andorra	.20	.26	.18	.25	27	20	14	15
28	Spain	.20	.31	.13	.28	28	13	19	12
29	Poland	.19	.23	.11	.19	29	24	24	22
30	France	.19	.45	.16	.38	30	8	16	8
31	S Africa	.19	.31	.09	.22	31	15	34	18
32	Egypt	.19	.27	.06	.09	32	19	38	42
33	Georgia	.18	.14	.10	.11	33	42	31	38
34	Slovenia	.18	.10	.10	.09	34	50	28	46
35	Moldova	.18	.14	.06	.08	35	45	40	48
36	Mali	.17	.37	.12	.32	36	10	21	10
37	Argentina	.17	.30	.13	.27	37	16	20	13
38	Mexico	.16	.16	.06	.10	38	39	37	40
39	Serbia	.15	.21	.10	.19	39	28	30	21
40	Burkina Faso	.15	.29	.08	.24	40	17	35	17
41	Colombia	.14	.14	.06	.08	41	47	39	49
42	Morocco	.13	.21	.02	.12	42	30	52	33
43	Chile	.13	.14	.05	.09	43	46	42	43
44	Zambia	.12	.16	.05	.09	44	38	44	44
45	Cyprus	.10	.09	.05	.07	45	51	43	50
46	Brazil	.09	.17	.03	.11	46	37	46	39
47	Malaysia	.09	.14	.03	.08	47	43	47	47
48	Ghana	.09	.23	.04	.17	48	23	45	29

	Country	Trust most	Trust first	Adj. trust most	Adj. trust first	Rank of trust most	Rank of trust first	Rank of adj. trust most	Rank of adj. trust first
49	Peru	.06	.09	.02	.05	49	52	49	51
50	Rwanda	.05	.35	.02	.25	50	12	50	16
51	Turkey	.05	.15	.02	.09	51	41	51	45
52	Trinidad and Tobago	.04	.21	.03	.18	52	29	48	23