

Social and Political Trust:

a longitudinal and comparative perspective


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SAPT papers

- Long-term trends in trust (various data sets)
- Predictors of change over time (BHPS)
- Comparative analysis (ESS)
- Investigating the meaning of commonly used trust questions
- A genetic basis for trust (twin data)
- Intelligence and trust (cohort studies)
- Gender and trust (linked studentship)



What is Social Trust?




“the role of social trust and cooperativeness as a component of the civic culture cannot be overemphasized. It is...a generalized resource that keeps a democratic polity operating” (Almond & Verba 1963)

“a key social resource that seems to oil the wheels of the market economy and democratic politics” (Stolle 2003 p19)

“the attitudinal dimension of social capital” (Paxton 2007)


“the chicken soup of social life” (Uslaner 2002)



A means of overcoming collective-action problems, where there are incentives for free-riding

Trust-based cooperation is more gainful than operating in isolation

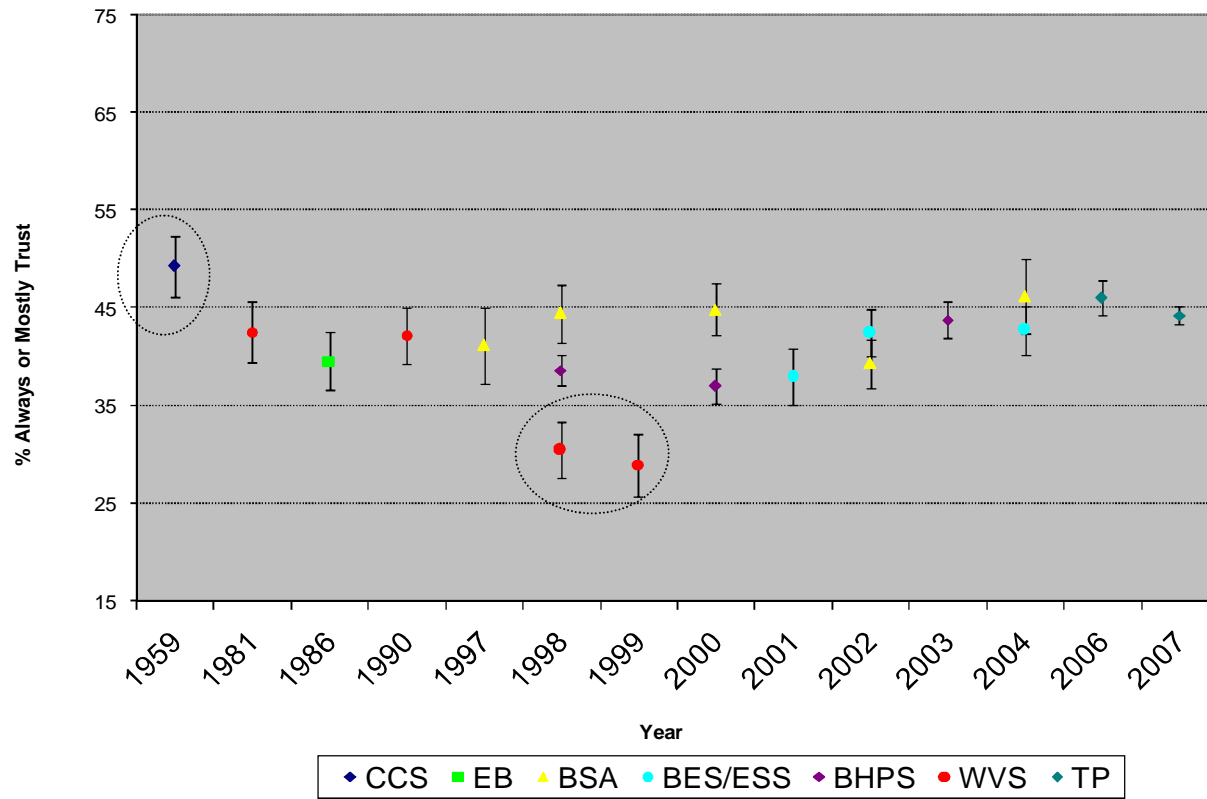
But if our trust is betrayed, we would have been better off not trusting in the first place



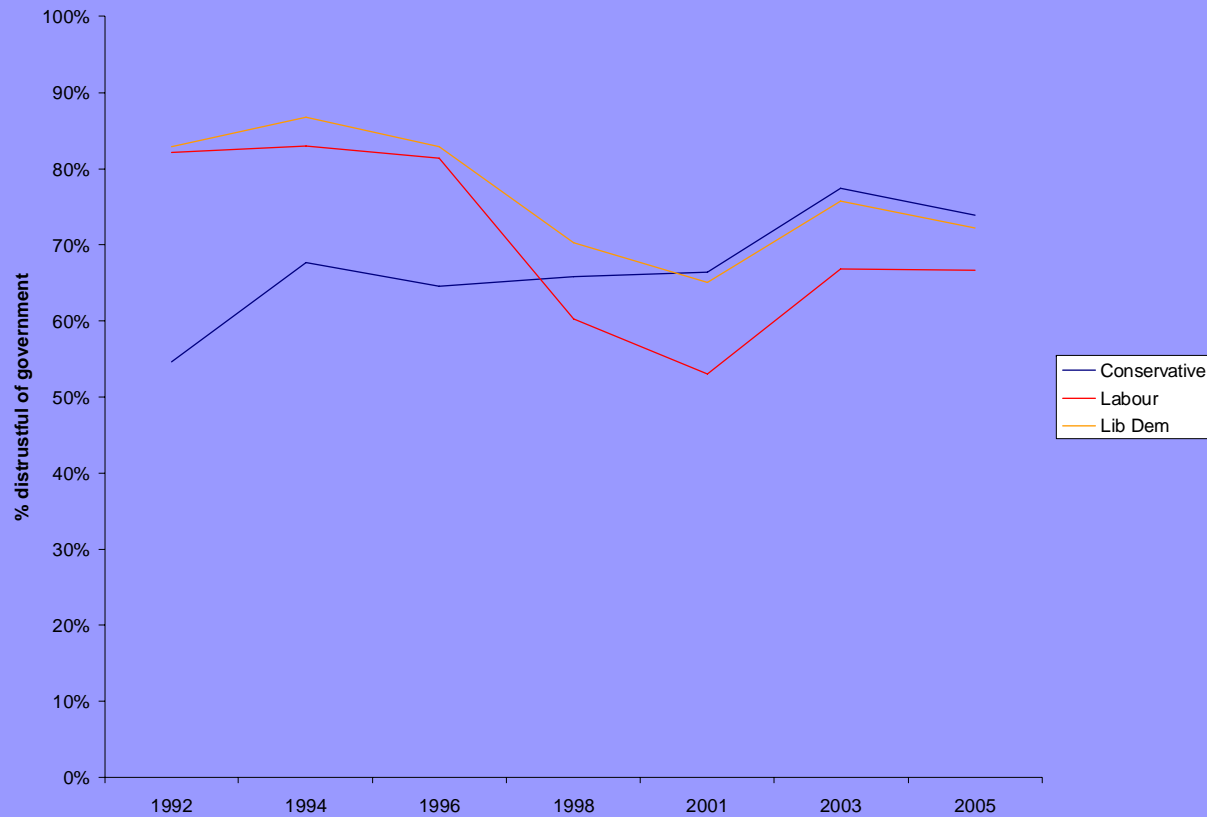
Trust is irrational
(from a rational choice perspective)

Trust People in General?

British Trend: 1959 to 2007



Governments can be trusted to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own party 1992-2005






Ethnic diversity and trust

- Greater diversity associated with less civic behaviour and lower provision of public goods
- People less trusting of others
- Diversity causes people to ‘hunker down’, “*to withdraw from collective life, to distrust their neighbours, regardless of the colour of their skin*” (Putnam 2007 p151).
- “*high levels of racial and ethnic heterogeneity are accompanied by lower levels of trust and other civic attitudes*” (Stolle et al. 2008 p58)



Data

- Taking Part survey – continuous survey of UK households, circa 26000 per year
- Data are from 2005-2007
- Clustered design, individuals within postcode sectors
- Neighbourhoods=Middle Super Output Areas (MSOA), containing, on average 1500
- Sample data = 3927 MSOAs, 6.3 respondents per MSOA



Trust Questions

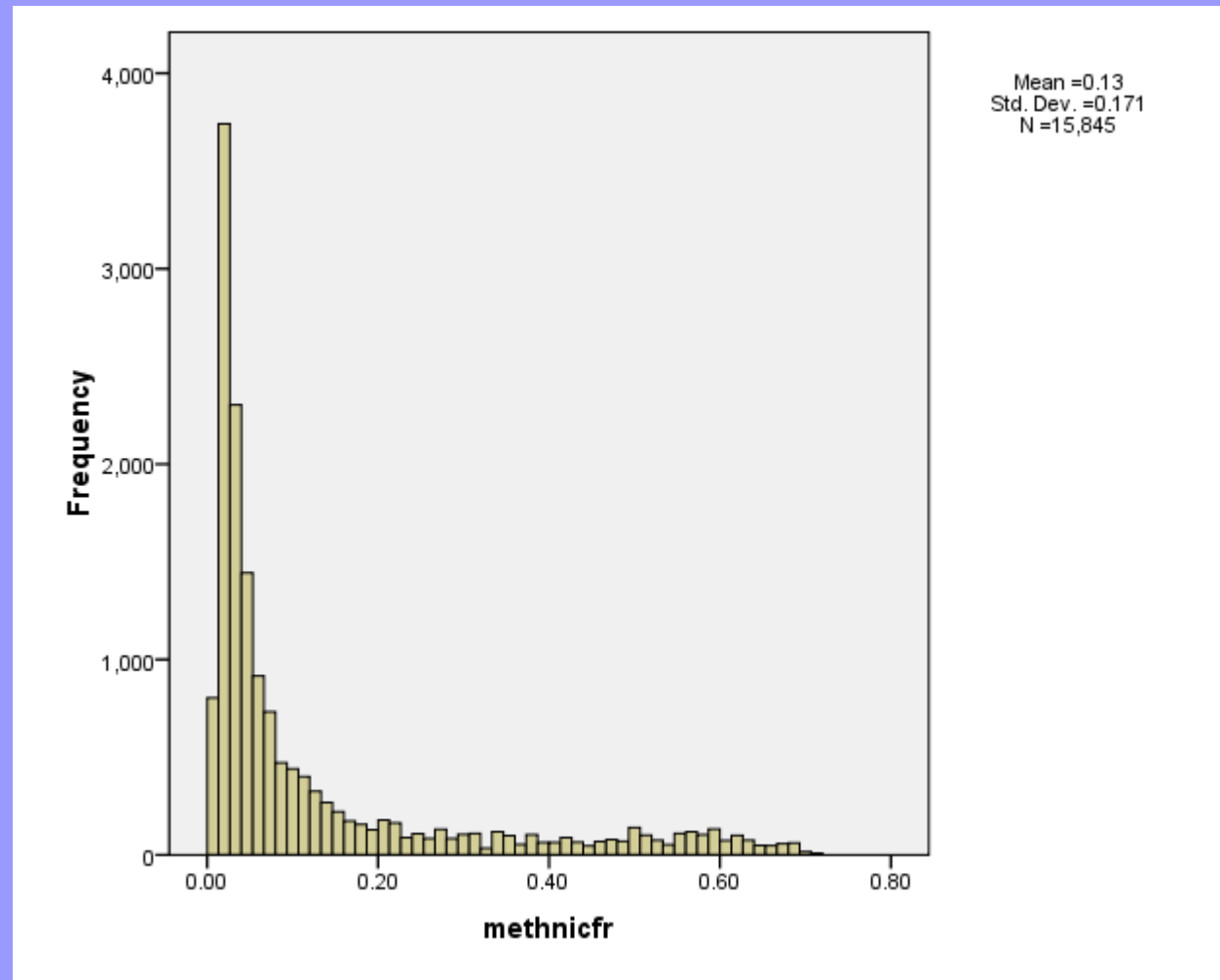
■ Generalized Trust

- *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?*

■ Strategic Trust

- *Would you say...Many of the people in your neighbourhood can be trusted, 2. Some can be trusted, 3. A few can be trusted, 4. (or that) No-one can be trusted (?)*

Ethnic diversity across neighbourhoods





Findings

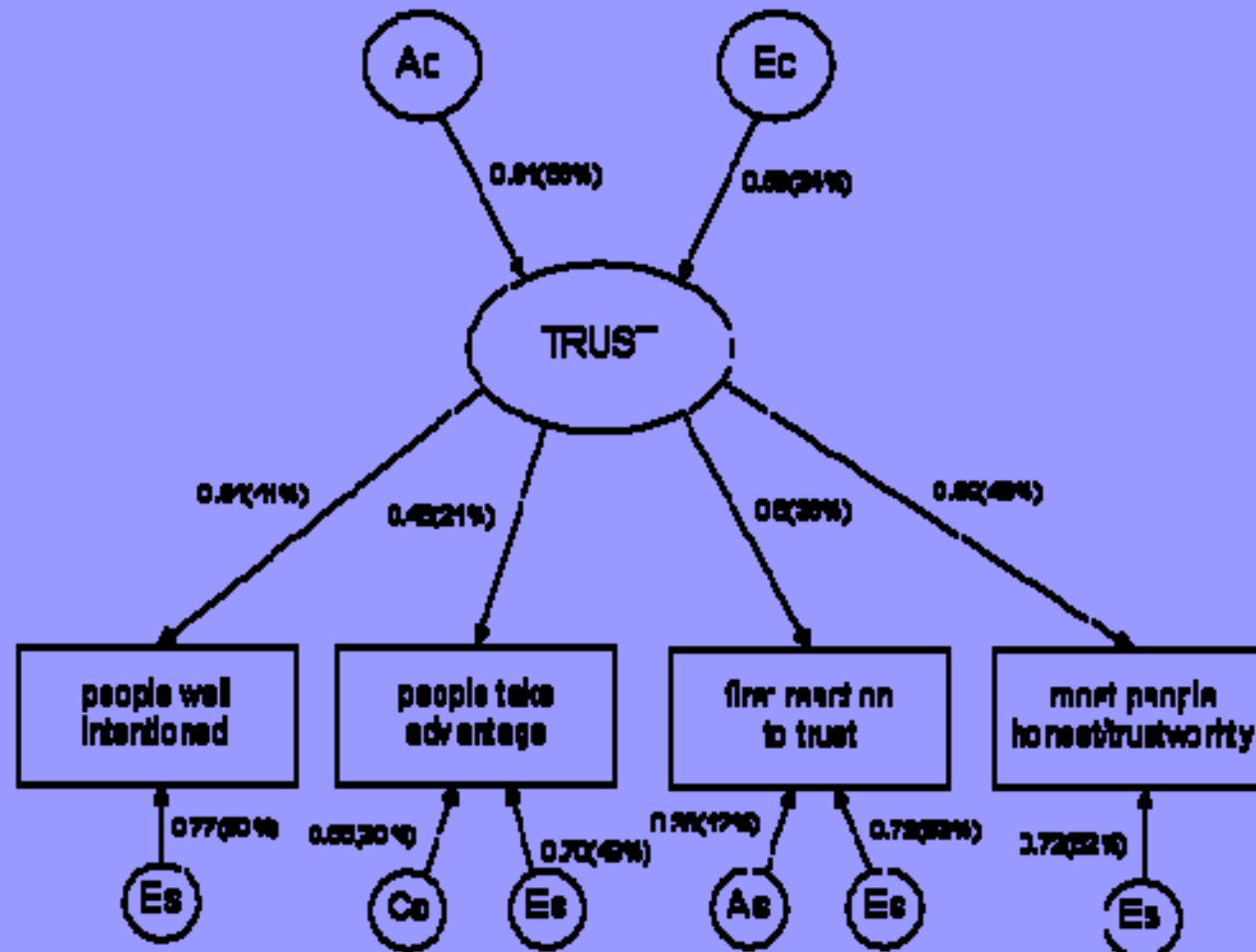
- No effect of ethnic diversity on the generalized trust question in the UK
- This is the question that formed the basis of Putnam's Bowling alone analysis
- Small, positive coefficient for diversity on trust in neighbours
- Strongly moderated by neighbourhood deprivation and social interaction



A Genetic Basis for Trust?

- Trust is 'sticky' (Nannestad 2008)
- Evidence from psychology and behaviour genetics - 'everything is heritable' (Turkheimer 2001)
- Trust as a facet of the 'agreeableness' dimension of the 'Big Five'
- Many political attitudes & behaviours genetically heritable (cf. Alford et al 2005)
- Neurobiological correlates of trust

Final Model





All papers available from project
website:

<http://www.sapt.surrey.ac.uk/>