The Breakdown of Trust in Society

#TCDtrustinsociety

Hosted by:
The School of Social Sciences and Philosophy

February 21, 2019
Knowledge, Implicit Bias and Bad Motivations
Understanding the Breakdown of Trust in Society

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SCEPTICISM

- For a long time people have got caught up in doubt about what the world is really like.

- We question other people, the external world, even our own bodies.
But one of the things we’ve tended to be the most certain about is our own minds.

“I think, therefore I am!” (Descartes)

Maybe we shouldn’t even be certain of that!

And not just for abstract reasons of scepticism.
CONFABULATION

- We’re really bad at knowing things about ourselves.

(Study by Nisbett and Wilson 1977)
We also have a lot of implicit biases

“Implicit bias” is a term of art referring to relatively unconscious and relatively automatic features of prejudiced judgment and social behavior.

(Brownstein, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on ‘Implicit Bias’)

There’s a lot of evidence for implicit bias. One example (of many) is a test called the IAT – Implicit Associations Test
“The stronger one’s associations of good with white faces and bad with black faces on the black-white IAT, the more likely one is to perpetrate hiring discrimination (Bertrand et al. 2005); to “shoot” unarmed black men in a computer simulation than unarmed white men (Correll et al. 2002; Glaser & Knowles 2008;) and to diagnose white patients described in case vignettes with coronary artery disease and prescribe thrombolysis for them compared to black patients described as having equivalent symptoms and electrocardiogram results (Green et al. 2007).” (Brownstein – SEP)

Implicit biases still affect members of the targeted groups.
What does this have to do with trusting others?

So far this is a pretty pessimistic talk!
• In short, it seems like understanding our own flaws is going to be an important step in understanding other people.

• And that, itself, seems like an important step towards re-establishing trust.
TRUST

• More specifically, it seems like it can help us to understand why, in other people, there can seem to be a conflict between their intentions and their actions.

• This is something we’re all vulnerable to – having good intentions, but acting in bad ways, and for the wrong reasons.

• Hopefully, understanding phenomena like confabulation and implicit bias can help us to see that, on many occasions, people who do what we think of as wrong can still have genuinely good intentions. Our opponents can be well-meaning.
• But is this still a bit bleak? Is there anything we can actually do about these problems?

• Well, yes. At least, we can take steps to fix our own biases.

• Knowing about them doesn’t make them go away, but it does help.

• We can’t change other people, but we can do our best for ourselves.
THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

21/02/2019 – Dr Lizzy Ventham
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Trust, Institutions & Health

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People can do amazing things When they Cooperate....
Generalised Trust

The sense that others in your society have a stake in society and will not seek to exploit you

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

World Values Survey Trust Question
% Population Agreeing that “Most People Can be Trusted” WVS 2009
Trust Trends in Four Selected Countries

- Sweden
- Denmark
- United Kingdom
- United States

Pre 1979, 81-84, 90-93, 94-99, 99-04, 2005-8
Income Inequality?

Income inequality creates ‘status anxiety’ which leads to less trust and worse health and life expectancy.

Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin
#TCDtrustinsociety
Income Inequality?

The graph depicts the Gini coefficient for income inequality over the years from 1967 to 2006, comparing the United States, United Kingdom, Sweden, and Denmark. The Gini coefficient is a measure of statistical dispersion intended to represent income inequality within a nation or a social group. A higher Gini coefficient indicates greater income inequality. The graph shows a general increase in income inequality over time for all countries, with notable fluctuations and differences in trends among them.
Five Drivers

• Deindustrialisation
• Unemployment
• Increased migration & heterogeneity
• Increased competition for low skilled jobs
• Increasing divorce and separation
• Deregulation and marketisation
Policy Choices: Union Density

The diagram illustrates the trend of union density in various countries from 1960 to 2004. The countries compared include Denmark, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The data shows a generally upward trend for Denmark and Sweden, while the United Kingdom and the United States exhibit a decline.
Policy Choices: Poverty Rates

- United States
- United Kingdom
- Sweden
- Denmark
**Images of Society**

Q14. These five diagrams show different types of society. Please read the descriptions and look at the diagrams and decide which you think best describes <country> ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type A</th>
<th>Type B</th>
<th>Type C</th>
<th>Type D</th>
<th>Type E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A small elite at the top, very few people in the middle and the great mass of people at the bottom.</td>
<td>A society like a pyramid with a small elite at the top, more people in the middle, and most at the bottom.</td>
<td>A pyramid except that just a few people are at the bottom.</td>
<td>A society with most people in the middle.</td>
<td>Many people near the top, and only a few near the bottom.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Perceptions of the Ideal Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Middle Class Society”</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>SE</th>
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</table>
### Perceptions of Current Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
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<th>DK</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class</td>
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<td>10%</td>
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<td>Society</td>
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"Middle Class Society"
Perception of Living in a Middle Class Society and Trust (2006-2009)
Deaths of Despair?

Deaths of Despair?

Thank You
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February 21, 2019
Media Bias and Political Consensus

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Media Bias and Political Consensus

Does exposure to slanted information affect voting behaviour?

✓ “Fox News effect” in the US
✓ Independent TV channel in Russia

Are slants in information effective in the long run?

Why do individuals not account for systematic slants over time?
Media Bias and Political Consensus

- Long-lived slant towards former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in political information on Italian TV.

- For ten years within the period 1994 to 2011, Berlusconi controlled six out of seven national channels, due to his dual role as a media tycoon and prime minister.

- Contrary to the US and Russia, Italian voters knew that Berlusconi owned the major commercial TV network since the early eighties.
A natural experiment

- Switch from analog to digital TV, mandated by the EU, between 2008 and 2012.

- At the deadlines, old analog signals were switched off and only digital signals kept on airing.
Media Bias and Political Consensus

✓ Digital TV improved transmission efficiency and increased the number of free national channels tenfold.

✓ Most digital channels were aired by new media companies, which had no ties to Berlusconi.

✓ We exploit variation in viewers' exposure to Berlusconi bias using deadlines to switch to digital TV from 2008 to 2012.
Switch to digital TV and viewing habits

✓ After switching to digital TV, many Italian households changed their viewing habits.

✓ From June 2008 to June 2011, the share of viewers of old channels dropped from 86% to 66%.

✓ Over the same period, viewers of new channels increased from 3% to 24%.
Media Bias and Political Consensus

- Did the switch affect voting behavior?

- March 2010 regional elections were the first which took place during the switch-off process.

- We look at Piedmont, a region where western towns switched to digital TV in autumn 2009, while eastern towns switched in autumn 2010.
Media Bias and Political Consensus

✓ **Compare** the electoral outcome of Berlusconi’s party between municipalities that were exposed to the new digital channels and those where the digital switch-off had not taken place yet.

✓ In order to make the comparison more credible, we compare **municipalities close to the switch-off geographical boundary**.

✓ These municipalities are **only a few kilometres apart**, and they differ only in terms of access to the new television technology.
Natural Experiment
Media Bias and Political Consensus

- Did the switch affect voting behavior?

- The switch caused a drop in Berlusconi coalition vote share by 5.5 to 7.5 percentage points.

- We estimate that at least 20% of digital users changed their voting behaviour after the switch-off to digital TV.

- The effect was stronger in towns with older and less educated voters.

- Moving to digital TV affected voting via turnout.
Media Bias and Political Consensus

✓ Were voters more informed?

✓ After the switch, viewers sorted out of news programs on slanted channels and into new, all-entertainment digital channels.
Media Bias and Political Consensus

✓ Our results imply that policies should be implemented to help individuals, and the most vulnerable demographics in particular, filter out biases in information over time.

✓ In our setting, persuasion survived over time even if all Italians were aware that Berlusconi controlled most TV channels.

✓ Mandating disclosure of conflicts of interest is therefore not a sufficient provision.
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Trust in Institutions in Eastern Europe

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Why Trust in Institutions?

Trust in political institutions is important for quality of democracy especially in young democracies

- Democratic regimes cannot rely on coercion (Bianco 1994)
- Trust allows governments to postpone short-term constituency concerns for national long term interests
- Trust $\Rightarrow$ Quality of democracy $\Rightarrow$ Trust (Gamson 1968)

Excessive trust can be harmful

- In new democracies that is usually not the case
Why Eastern Europe?

Politics

Hungary Becomes First ‘Partly Free’ EU Nation in Democracy Gauge

By Zoltan Simon
February 5, 2019, 2:48 PM GMT

Viktor Orban Photograph: Runi Rekowicz/Bloomberg
Why Eastern Europe?

The former communist states started with low levels of institutional trust compared to Western Europe (Mishler & Rose 1997)

BUT...
- Years of democracy should enhance trust
- EU membership should strengthen institutions

Has the difference in trust between East and West diminished?

Over-time changes are difficult to test
The Eurobarometer Trend

Asked since 2004 regular questions about trust in various institutions

I averaged the absolute levels of trust for all Eastern and Western EU members

- %tend to trust-%tend not to trust

Has the gap from the 1990s narrowed?

The Police

![Graph showing the trend of police numbers in West and East over time.](image-url)
The Press

-15 -10 -5 0 5 10 15

West

East

1/14/04 10/10/06 7/6/09 4/1/12 12/27/14 9/22/17
Political Parties

[Graph showing the trend of political parties over time with markers for West and East.]
Justice System

![Line graph showing trends in the Justice System with data points for West and East regions over time from 1/14/04 to 9/22/17.](image-url)
The Army

- West
- East

Timeline: 1/14/04 to 9/22/17

Graph showing trends over time.
The Parliament

The chart shows a comparison of two different trends labeled as 'West' and 'East'. The x-axis represents dates from 1/1/04 to 9/22/17, while the y-axis represents values ranging from -70 to 30. The 'West' trend starts with a peak around 10/10/06 and then shows a decline, while the 'East' trend remains relatively stable with slight fluctuations.
Religious Institutions

![Graph showing the trend of religious institutions over time, with two lines representing West and East regions.](image)
Conclusions

Differences in trust seem to be here to stay

Some problematic differences: Justice, Government, Parliament

- Separation of power
Thank You

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