



Ipsos MORI 

## Can We Trust the General Trust Question?

Nick Allum  
Roger Patulny  
Patrick Sturgis  
Patten Smith

*University of Surrey & Ipsos-MORI*

 1

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Ipsos MORI 

## The importance of trust

- Generalised or social trust has become a hot topic for political scientists and sociologists
- Especially since Putnam's work on social capital – of which interpersonal trust is a part (along with political trust and civic engagement).
- We are all familiar with the apparent falling off of social trust in America since early 1960s
- In the UK, we see a similar trend



---

---

---


---

---

---


---

---

Ipsos MORI 

## Does it matter?

- Probably yes...
- Trust has been linked statistically (if not causally) to many positive outcomes:
  1. *Economic* – growth (Knack and Keefer)
  2. *Democratic* – social capital, (Putnam), institutional performance (Norris), corruption (Rothstein and Uslaner)
  3. *Health* – heart disease (Kawachi)
  4. *Emotional wellbeing* – Happiness, Satisfaction (Veenhoeven, Helliwell)
  5. *Crime* – neighbourhoods, delinquency (Sampson, Halpern)
  6. *Education* – individually (Putnam), neighbourhoods (La Porta)



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Ipsos MORI UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

## Measuring trust

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

(responses: most people trusted, can't be too careful)

- This is the item that has most often been used, in GSS and elsewhere in US and UK (GTQ)
- Our motivation to examine this comes from a project studying trust in historical perspective
- How reliable is the GTQ for measuring these historical trends?

ESRC

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Ipsos MORI UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

## What is happening to trust in UK?

- Hall (1999) : trust is **declining** in the UK from a high point in 1959 (Civic Culture Survey) to 1999 - World Values Survey (WVS) – echoing the US situation
- Grenier and Wright (2003) say trust has levelled off in the UK - British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA)
- What is going on?
- Slightly different **response alternatives** over time, and of course **different surveys**

ESRC

---

---

---

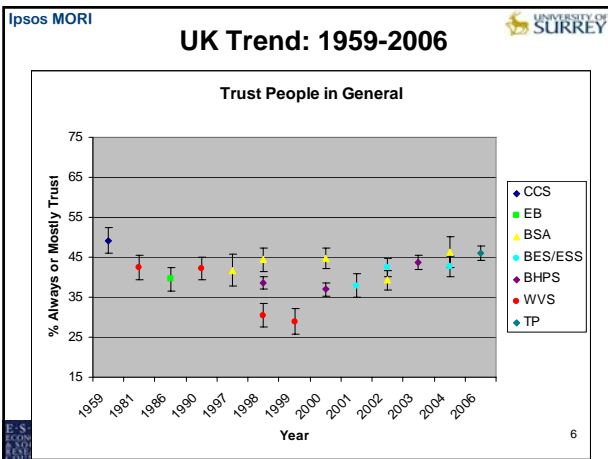
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Ipsos MORI UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

## The outliers

- 1958 – unusually high point
- 1958 – response alternatives were:
  - Most people can be trusted
  - Can't be too careful
  - It depends
- Hall excludes 'it depends' from baseline
- **If potential distrusters disproportionately choose this option, the level of trust overall would have been overstated viz the trend.**

E.S.R.C. ECONOMIC RESEARCH SURVEILLANCE

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Ipsos MORI UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

## The outliers II

- 1998 and 1999 – unusually low points
- Turns out that the GTQ preceded in questionnaire by battery of items about people you might not want as neighbours.
- **Priming some respondents to be thinking about people they might not like may have biased responses to GTQ downwards** in these surveys
- (generalised questions can be interpreted heterogeneously)

E.S.R.C. ECONOMIC RESEARCH SURVEILLANCE

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Ipsos MORI UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

## EVS/WVS prior questions

<table border="0"> <tr><td>_____</td><td>%</td></tr> <tr><td>Drug addicts</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>Heavy drinkers</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>Religious extremists</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>People with a criminal record</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>Political extremists</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>Emotionally unstable people</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>Immigrants/foreign workers</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>People with large families</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>Don't mind any</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>Gay or lesbian people</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>People who have AIDS</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>Don't know</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>People of a different race</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>Don't like any</td><td>_____</td></tr> <tr><td>Refused</td><td>_____</td></tr> </table>	_____	%	Drug addicts	_____	Heavy drinkers	_____	Religious extremists	_____	People with a criminal record	_____	Political extremists	_____	Emotionally unstable people	_____	Immigrants/foreign workers	_____	People with large families	_____	Don't mind any	_____	Gay or lesbian people	_____	People who have AIDS	_____	Don't know	_____	People of a different race	_____	Don't like any	_____	Refused	_____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Could you tell me if any of the people on this card are ones you would not, generally speaking, like to have as neighbours?"</li> </ul>
_____	%																																
Drug addicts	_____																																
Heavy drinkers	_____																																
Religious extremists	_____																																
People with a criminal record	_____																																
Political extremists	_____																																
Emotionally unstable people	_____																																
Immigrants/foreign workers	_____																																
People with large families	_____																																
Don't mind any	_____																																
Gay or lesbian people	_____																																
People who have AIDS	_____																																
Don't know	_____																																
People of a different race	_____																																
Don't like any	_____																																
Refused	_____																																

E.S.R.C. ECONOMIC RESEARCH SURVEILLANCE

---

---

---


---

---

---


---

---

Ipsos MORI 

### Experimental study

- Test effect of including an 'it depends' to GTQ compared to the binary version
- Test effect of asking the 'neighbours' question before GTQ
- 2x2 randomised survey experiment
- Ipsos MORI face to face omnibus (CAPI)
- Quotas on age, sex and region
- N=1035



---

---

---


---

---

---


---

---

Ipsos MORI 

### 1. What happens to the 'it depends' respondents?

- Hypothesis was that offering an 'it depends' option will attract more non-trusters, due to it being the cautious option, thereby increasing relative proportion of trusters vs distrusters (Miller & Mitamura 2003)...
- Turns out this isn't so.



---

---

---


---

---

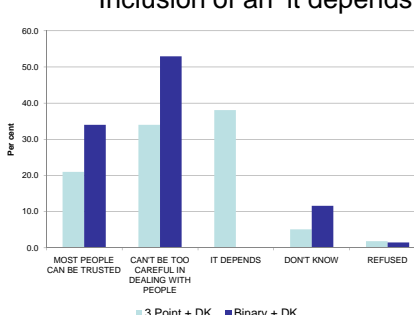
---

---

---


Ipsos MORI 

### Inclusion of an 'it depends' option



Category	3 Point + DK (%)	Binary + DK (%)
MOST PEOPLE CAN BE TRUSTED	20	33
CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL IN DEALING WITH PEOPLE	33	52
IT DEPENDS	38	38
DONT KNOW	5	11
REFUSED	2	2

- Odds ratio of distrusters to trusters almost identical in both formats
  - Binary format: 1.56
  - 'It depends' format: 1.62
- Reduces dks



---

---

---


---

---

---


---

---

Ipsos MORI 

## 2. What happens if primed with the 'neighbours' question?

- Hypothesis was that bringing to mind potentially unwelcome neighbours will depress levels of trust expressed immediately afterwards...
- Turns out this isn't so either!



---

---

---

---

---


---

---

---


---

---

Ipsos MORI 

The following questions are about people's attitudes to various groups of people. We appreciate that some people might find this a sensitive area. Could you tell me if any of the people on this card are ones you would not, generally speaking, like to have as neighbours? Please just tell me which letter, if any, applies - I would like to reassure you that I cannot see the wording against each letter, on my screen

	%
Drug addicts	49
Heavy drinkers	34
Religious extremists	30
People with a criminal record	29
Political extremists	24
Emotionally unstable people	22
Immigrants/foreign workers	11
People with large families	10
Don't mind any	10
Gay or lesbian people	8
People who have AIDS	8
Don't know	7
People of a different race	5
Don't like any	5
Refused	3



---

---

---

---

---


---

---

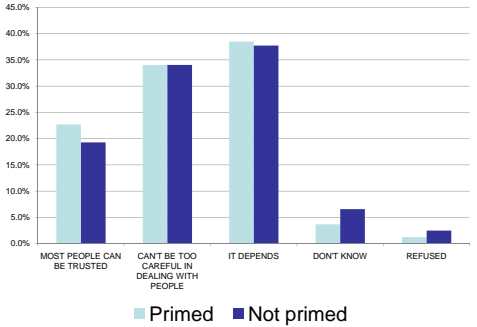
---

---


---

Ipsos MORI 

## Primed vs not primed (4-point)



Response	Primed (%)	Not primed (%)
MOST PEOPLE CAN BE TRUSTED	23	19
CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL IN DEALING WITH PEOPLE	34	34
IT DEPENDS	39	38
DONT KNOW	4	7
REFUSED	1	3



---

---

---

---

---

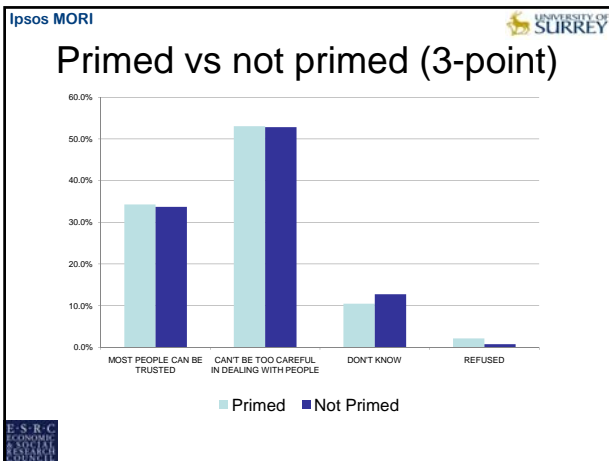
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---


---

---

---


---

---

Ipsos MORI 

### Subgroup analysis

- We also looked to see if there were interactions with subgroups – gender, age, education – there weren't
- Checked to see if only people who expressed a lot of intolerance had reduced trust – this was not so.



---

---

---


---

---

---


---

---

Ipsos MORI 

### Conclusions

- For comparison, it may not matter if you have an 'it depends' or not in GTQ. Potential trusters and distrusters fall out equally into it.
- GTQ doesn't appear to be sensitive to the context in this case.
- We still can't explain the blips in the GTW in UK, especially the EVS/WVS
- Thank you for listening!



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---