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## Trust in Diversity: Embracing Differences for a Harmonious Society

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### Abstract

Because environmental problems are characterized by uncertainty and free-riding fears, trust that others will reciprocate one's own efforts to alleviate them is likely an important predictor of willingness to support environmental protections. Drawing on cross-disciplinary theory and research, I argue that whether individual's social trust translates into willingness to sacrifice for environmental protections depends both on their own social trust and a culture of trust. I test this proposition using cross-national data from the International Social Survey Programme's Environment III survey. In societies characterized by a culture of high trust, those individuals reporting high social trust are considerably more willing to support environmental protections in these ways. However, in those characterized by a culture of low social trust environments, the relationship between high trust and willingness is dampened. The findings highlight that while there is a positive relationship between social trust and willingness, this relationship likely depends on cultural trust.

### Keywords

Environment; Social trust; Cooperation Comparative

### Introduction

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In today's world, the global community faces numerous environmental challenges, from climate change to biodiversity loss. Addressing these issues requires collective action, cooperation, and a willingness to make sacrifices for the greater good. Social trust and cultural trust play crucial roles in fostering such willingness among individuals and communities. This article explores the concepts of social trust, cultural trust, and their connection to the will to sacrifice for environmental protections.

### **Social trust, cultural trust, and environmental problems**

Trust is a belief that another person or group will reliably act in a pro-social way when we are uncertain of how they will act, and they cannot be monitored to ensure that they act in this way. Social trust is important because if we believe people in general are trustworthy, fair, and helpful, we are more likely to expect them to reciprocate our own sacrifices, and therefore more willing to co-operate ourselves, and cooperation under uncertainty is essential for the formation and maintenance of public goods.

Work by environmental sociologists highlights the importance of trust in others for predicting willingness to pay for environmental protections. They find that even when people believe environmental problems are important, their lack of trust in other people makes them less supportive of protections, fearing other people will not do their fair share, or that sources of information about these problems have selfish motives. I propose that this relationship between an individual's social trust and their willingness to sacrifice for public goods provision and maintenance likely depends on widespread beliefs about the trustfulness of most people: cultural trust.

Cultural beliefs are beliefs that are widely shared and transmitted through social learning. Cultural beliefs likely shape individual decision-making in situations where success depends on the decisions of others and we cannot be certain what their decisions will be. Correll et al. argue that under situations of interdependence and uncertainty, a person's decision-making likely depends as much on what they perceive the beliefs of most other people are, what they call cultural, or third order beliefs, as it does on their own belief their first order beliefs. Recently Doyle extended Correll et al. theory of Third Order Inference to the relationship between social trust and cooperation. In a series of experimental public goods games, his findings suggest that, under similar conditions of interdependence and uncertainty, individuals' decisions to cooperate or not may be based on their perception of what most people believe about the trustfulness of others, not just their own beliefs.

### **Understanding Social Trust**

Social trust refers to the belief and confidence that individuals have in others within their society. It involves a willingness to cooperate and rely on others, with the expectation that they will reciprocate



trustworthiness. When social trust is high, individuals are more likely to engage in cooperative behavior and work towards common goals, including environmental protection.

Social trust creates a foundation for cooperation by reducing transaction costs and fostering a sense of shared responsibility. People who trust each other are more likely to collaborate, pool resources, and work towards sustainable solutions. In contrast, low levels of social trust can hinder collective action and undermine environmental efforts, as individuals may be less willing to sacrifice personal interests for the common good.

### **Cultural Trust and Environmental Values**

Cultural trust refers to the shared values, beliefs, and norms that exist within a particular culture or community. It encompasses the collective confidence in the reliability of cultural institutions, traditions, and practices. Cultural trust influences how societies perceive and prioritize environmental concerns and can shape the willingness to make sacrifices for environmental protections.

Cultural trust is closely intertwined with environmental values. When a culture values and respects the natural world, individuals within that culture are more likely to prioritize environmental protection and be willing to make personal sacrifices to achieve sustainability. For instance, societies with a strong cultural trust in sustainability may embrace renewable energy, conservation practices, and sustainable lifestyles.

### **The Will to Sacrifice for Environmental Protections**

Environmental protections often require individuals to make personal sacrifices, such as changing consumption patterns, adopting sustainable practices, or accepting short-term economic costs for long-term environmental benefits. The will to sacrifice for the environment is influenced by social trust and cultural trust.

When social trust is high, individuals are more likely to trust that their sacrifices will be reciprocated by others, creating a sense of collective responsibility and fairness. Furthermore, cultural trust in environmental values and practices can motivate individuals to prioritize the well-being of the planet over immediate personal gains.

### **Promoting Social and Cultural Trust for Environmental Protections**

To foster social and cultural trust for environmental protections, several strategies can be employed:



**Education and Awareness:** Promote environmental education and awareness programs that highlight the importance of sustainability and the collective benefits of environmental protection. This can help shape cultural trust and foster a shared understanding of the need for sacrifice.

**Community Engagement:** Encourage community involvement and participation in decision-making processes related to environmental policies and projects. Engaging individuals in collaborative efforts builds social trust and empowers communities to take ownership of environmental issues.

**Transparency and Accountability:** Promote transparency and accountability in environmental governance and policy-making. This helps build social trust by ensuring that sacrifices made by individuals are matched with concrete actions and results from institutions and authorities.

**Role of Media:** Media plays a crucial role in shaping cultural trust and public opinion. Encourage responsible reporting and media coverage that highlights the positive impacts of environmental protections and showcases inspiring examples of individuals and communities making sacrifices for the environment.

## Conclusion

Social trust and cultural trust are essential elements in creating a collective will to sacrifice for environmental protections. By fostering trust within societies and cultivating a culture that values environmental sustainability, we can encourage individuals to make sacrifices for the greater good of the planet. Promoting social and cultural trust through education, community engagement, transparency, and responsible media coverage will pave the way for a more sustainable future where environmental protections are prioritized and cherished.

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