Generalized Trust in Surveys
From Scales to Dragons

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Lundmark Sebastian and Mikael Gilljam. “Panel Conditioning on Political and Social Attitudes: Evidence from a Seven-Wave Randomized Experiment.”

Lundmark, Sebastian and Andrej Kokkonen. “Subjective Assessment and Objective Number of Immigrants: Impact on Generalized Trust and Attitudes toward Immigrants.”


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Abstract

Generalized trust has been one of the frequently researched attitudes in political and social sciences. Although this type of trust saw its real breakthrough in the theories about social capital, offered by Robert D. Putnam in 1993, the survey measurement was created in the 1940s. Despite this, only a handful of studies evaluate generalized trust from a survey measurement perspective.

This thesis presents four articles aiming to rectify this shortcoming by employing a measurement error perspective to the generalized trust survey question. The first article offers analyses of whether the survey question can be improved through the application of theories dominant in survey methodology. The second article investigates measurement error in generalized trust and other attitudes stemming from panel survey participation. The third article analyzes whether measurement error in responses to factual questions bias results between generalized trust and ethnic diversity. The fourth article utilizes the knowledge obtained in the thesis by studying social experiences in an online game and its impact on generalized trust.

The thesis proposes that measurement error in the generalized trust survey measurement can be substantially decreased by employing survey methodology theories. In addition, generalized trust seems to be measured in panels without increasing measurement error. Furthermore, the effect of ethnic diversity does not seem to be driven by measurement error in factual survey questions about immigrants. Using the proposed adaption of how to measure the generalized trust survey question in the first articles, the last article finds that social experiences in voluntary associational-like environments in an online game seem to affect generalized trust. All in all, when measured as suggested in this thesis, generalized trust fares pretty well as a survey measurement. Hence, the thesis promotes a continued usage of the generalized trust survey question.

Keywords: Generalized Trust, Survey Methodology, Survey Experiments, Panel Studies