**DOES RELIGIOUS AFFFILIATION INFLUENCE TRUST?**

***Michael A. Kortt****,**Southern Cross University, Queensland, Australia.*

***Joseph Drew****,**University of Technology, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia and Tokyo Metropolitan University, Tokyo, Japan.*

*Correspondence:*

Michael Kortt

Associate Professor

School of Business and Tourism

Southern Cross University

Gold Coast Campus

Locked Bag 4

Coolangatta QLD 4255

AUSTRALIA

p: 61-7-5589-3212

e: [michael.kortt@scu.edu.au](mailto:michael.kortt@scu.edu.au)

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to estimate and explore how religious affiliation may influence general and local trust in contemporary society.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper employs data from the 2010 and 2014 waves of Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. The association between religious affiliation and trust was estimated using an ordered logistic regression and conventional OLS model.

**Findings** – The paper presents evidence of a statistically significant association between religious affiliation and trust that are consistent with theory.

**Social implications** – This finding is important for a heterogeneous population like Australia as it seeks to build social cohesion in the face of threats to internal and external security.

**Originality/value** – The study contributes to the literature by providing – to the best of our knowledge – the first results on the association between religious affiliation and trust for Australia.

**Keywords**: general trust, local trust, religious affiliation.

**INTRODUCTION**

Trust is important for a whole host of everyday associations and represents the foundation of many of the human interactions upon which society is based (Finnis, 2013; Putnam, 2000). For instance, trust is critical to social cohesion (identity as a citizen of a nation is predicated on trust in other citizens), democratic participation (Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2018), resilience in the face of a crisis whether a natural disaster, institutional failure or act of terrorism (e.g., Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Trust has also been linked to lower levels of crime and hence enhanced safety because of citizens being more disposed to report crimes because they trust that effective action will be taken (Wuthnow, 2002). Indeed, it has been suggested that there is an association between trust in the community and the need for regulations and legislation (Mendolia et al., 2016). Furthermore, economic performance is also enhanced by trust because it reduces transaction costs, promotes organisational citizenship, encourages entrepreneurship, and enhances confidence in financial markets (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002; Addai et al., 2013). Moreover, there are strong grounds for suspecting that trust is subject to a feedback loop, which means that it is critical for us to understand the level of trust in our communities along with its determinants and barriers (Mayer et al., 1995; Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002; Rousseau et al., 1998; Addai et al., 2013).

Trust is a willingness to accept vulnerability and it occurs in proximity to an action in which the Trustor has an expectation of a certain behaviour from a Trustee. This is especially salient in conditions where it may not be possible to monitor the said act or seek remedy in the event of disappointment (e.g., Rousseau et al., 1998; Mayer et al., 1995). Trust is predicated on two factors: (i) interdependence, and (ii) risk. Trust is salient because we need to rely on others to achieve our ends (interdependence) and significant because social interaction involves the risk that others might not behave in the way we wish them to (Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2018). However, it is important that we carefully delineate trust from co-operation given that the two concepts are often confused. The fact that we might co-operate with another on a task does not necessarily imply that we trust them. For instance, there may be strong deterrents in place to stop someone from betraying our trust (e.g., contract provisions) or it may be the case that the prospective collaborators have a strong motivation to carry out the action (e.g., an airline pilot will take care for their own sake as much as for ours).

One important determinant of trust (as testified to in the corpus of scholarly literature) is religion (e.g., Welch et al., 2004; Addai et al., 2013; Johansson-Stenman et al., 2009; Daniels and von der Ruhr, 2010). This might come as something of a surprise to some, but as we build our model of trust below, the reasons for positing statistically significant associations will become clear. First, membership of a religious faith can often be taken as reliable evidence of a personality trait consistent with the propensity to trust. We all know people who seem to be very trusting of others and it is not surprising that those who can trust religious leaders on matters of spiritual importance may also be more trusting with respect to non-spiritual matters (Azzi and Ehrenberg, 1975; McCleary and Barro, 2006).

Second, interactions can act to increase (through positive outcomes arising from interdependence) or reduce (through disappointment or betrayal) trust in others. As religious practise often represents a considerable investment of time and money it can have clear implications for the frequency of both in-group and out-group interactions (Sarkissian, 2012; Iannaccone, 1994). That is, sometimes religions require significant investments of time, money and other sacrifices (such as abstinence from alcohol) which will increase in-group bonding at the expense of out-group bridging. Similarly, patriarchal structures can influence the type (e.g., orthodox Jewry place limitations on the practice of females in the Synagogue) and number of interactions (e.g., some Muslim women are not permitted to participate in the labour market).

Third, some religious faiths have a history of being persecuted for their beliefs (notably Judaism, but also some of the more fundamentalist Christian sects such as the Jehovah’s Witness), and this has been posited to reduce the levels of trust in others by members of the persecuted faith. Finally, the religious texts of some faiths are sometimes associated with intolerance. For example, some religious faiths draw on their canonical texts to oppose homosexual marriage, consumption of alcohol, and the like and this may well constrain interactions in liberal societies (Welch, 2004).

The purpose of this paper is to examine whether there is an association between religious affiliation and trust. The balance of this journal article is organised into three main parts. First, we review the literature on trust and religion with a view to constructing a model of trust, which casts light on the determinants of trust with respect to religious affiliation. Next, we outline the empirical strategy employed to test the association between religious affiliation and trust. The findings point to statistically significant associations between certain religions and trust, which have important implications for heterogeneous societies that might face challenges on social cohesion, economic growth, internal security and the like. The article concludes by outlining areas for future research.

**THEORY OF TRUST**

A dyadic model of trust is helpful for one to fully understand the concept of trust and hence appreciate the saliency of its key determinants (Figure 1). The attribute of the Trustor, which is most important to the conception of trust, is a personality type, which has a propensity to trust (Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Some persons are more trusting than others are and this may be due to experience, the religious faith of the Trustor, the number and quality of interactions that the Trustor has with others, and the ability of the Trustor to communicate with others (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002; Sarkissian, 2012; Leigh, 2006; Iannaccone, 1994).

The other party to trust is the Trustee. Here the salient attributes are ability, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer et al., 1995). If the Trustee does not have the ability to carry out a task proficiently then making oneself vulnerable to such a person would not seem be a rational choice. Ability may be gauged by experience, or by seeking a reference to attest to the Trustee’s proficiency, or through certification of ability (e.g., academic qualifications). However, even if the Trustee has the requisite ability to carry out the desired action there can be no assurance that they will. In this regard, benevolence becomes an important quality – if the Trustee is known to have the Trustor’s interests at heart then there is a far greater likelihood that the willingness to make oneself vulnerable will end favourably (Addai et al., 2013). Yet one might have the ability and the interest of the Trustor at heart but still fail to act in the desired manner – hence the importance of integrity. Integrity refers to the Trustee’s disposition to act consistently in a manner, which is morally acceptable to the Trustor. A Trustee might have the ability to carry out an act and be well disposed towards the Trustor but if the Trustee were likely to carry out the act in a manner that the Trustor finds morally reprehensible, it would not be rational to make oneself vulnerable to such a character.

However, the attributes of Trustee and Trustor in themselves do not create trust. There needs to be a reason to trust – that is, there must be both a need for interdependence and a risk that the desired act may not be carried out in a manner that the Trustor would like (Rousseau et al., 1998). Once these conditions have been met then trust may be invested: a willingness to accept vulnerability in proximity to an action in which the Trustor has an expectation of certain behaviour from a Trustee. Because trust is proximate to an act, an outcome is likely to eventuate. Outcomes represent a feedback loop. If the Trustee carries out the act in the desired fashion then this may reinforce the Trustor’s perception of ability, integrity or benevolence in this person (e.g., Mayer et al., 1995).

Moreover, a positive outcome will do nothing to dent the Trustor’s propensity to trust others. Negative outcomes may cause the Trustor to re-evaluate their perception of the Trustee’s attributes, but this does not necessarily destroy trust and, in the case of ability, would seem to be a matter of degree. In addition, a single negative outcome is unlikely to materially alter one’s propensity to trust, although it may be summed with other poor outcomes to influence propensity over time. Outright betrayal, however, would seem to be an entirely different matter and is likely to attract a premium, which reflects people’s reticence to feel as if they have been played for a fool (Arai, 2009). In this case, it is entirely likely that a single bad outcome will destroy trust in the Trustee forever, and may even cause the Trustor to re-evaluate their trust in all persons.

***What Makes Others Trust?***

We seek to identify the determinants of two types of trust: general trust in others and local trust. General trust implies attitudes to people with whom the respondent may not have had personal interactions and experimental evidence suggests that it may actually be a better measure of ‘whether or not a person is *trustworthy* [than it is] whether or not he trusts others’[[1]](#footnote-1) (emphasis added, Glaeser et al., 2000, p. 833). Local trust, on the other hand, suggests the neighbourhood that the respondent lives in (which might well be more homogenous) and is more likely to call to mind actual interactions.

Our model of trust provides us with an insight into the variables required for the empirical analysis of trust. The existence of a feedback loop means that variables need to be included which reflect opportunities for interactions with others. Thus, the number of years that a respondent has resided at their current address will be important for local trust, as will variables that identify whether the respondent was born overseas or is a refugee, which may be indicative of lower levels of interaction. A variable which indicates whether the respondent lives in an urban or rural environment is also routinely employed because communities in rural areas tend to be more homogenous and also often rely more on neighbours as a result of distances from services (e.g., Mendolia et al., 2016; Addai et al., 2013). Another variable that is often included in trust studies is time spent commuting. It contended that longer commuting times reduce the time available for social interactions and thus leads to a reduction in local trust (e.g., Mattisson et al., 2015).

The level of education attained by the respondent is also an important variable for empirical work on trust. This is because education is an external attestation to ability that is essential for the accurate assessment of ability in others and may be reflective of success in life. On this latter point, Daniels and von der Ruhr (2010) note that success in life is a good predictor of trust. Similar proxies for success in life – which in one sense is a reflection of positive payoffs from trusting others – are indicated by income, marital and employment status. Moreover, in the case of income and employment status there is a clear association with opportunity costs – those who have more to lose risk more – while marital status measures a very significant investment in trust in others (and divorce or separation represent a possible betrayal in trust, hence their inclusion).

Gender is often included as a variable in trust models and reflects the inequality in opportunity for females in terms of interactions with others (particularly in patriarchal societies), the vulnerability of females in many societies (e.g., in domestic violence situations) and the special position of trust that women with children find themselves in (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002). Age is also a potentially important predictor of trust for at least two reasons. First, there is a large body of work, which suggests that civic participation has decreased in recent years to be replaced by indirect forms of interaction like social media, which may not be as conducive to trust building (e.g., Fergusson, 2013). Second, religious attitudes are not time invariant. For instance, the Vatican II reforms ending in 1965 changed the practise of Catholicism in many ways including the displacement of Latin as the vernacular, the heralding of inter-faith dialogue and ecumenism, a loosening of the vertical links of obligation and an intellectual liberalisation (Rodden, 2013). Similar transformations have occurred in other religions (e.g., Reform Judaism) and these time specific changes are likely to have had disproportional influence on particular age cohorts with respect to the trust that adherents state they are willing to place in others.

We noted in the introduction that religion is likely to be a determinant of trust given that it may: (i) indicate a propensity to trust, (ii) significantly influence the frequency, type and quality of interactions of adherents, (iii) lead to intolerance, and (iv) sometimes be accompanied by persecution. Clearly not all religions are created equal when it comes to a consideration of how religious practise influences trust with respect to our model. It is therefore helpful to think of religion in terms of Iannaccone’s (1994) seminal work on strict churches (or religions in our case). Strict religions are identifiable according to a single attribute: ‘the degree to which a group limits and thereby increases the costs of non-group activities’ (Iannaccone, 1994, p. 1182). This constraint is imposed through high bonding demands of membership such as distinctive dress, prohibitions on certain foods, a distinctive morality, prohibition on certain drugs, and significant time demands. Moreover, strict churches tend to ‘proclaim an exclusive truth – a closed, comprehensive and eternal doctrine’ (Iannaccone, 1994, p. 1182).

It has been posited that the strictness of a religious faith represents a rational design that discourages deleterious free riding (i.e., use of religious ‘resources’ without paying the full ‘price’) and thus results in a more committed adherent base and better and more efficient religious experience (Stark and Finke, 2000). It is also likely to predict trust given that the sacrifice demanded by strict religions is liable to indicate an initial higher propensity to trust (religious leaders) owing to the proportionally higher risk involved.[[2]](#footnote-2) However, religious persecution and prejudice can reduce trust over time, especially in those who do not share the particular strict religious conviction (i.e., the out-group). Moreover, the strict bonding activities and freedom from free riders are likely to result in elevated in-group levels of trust (but less time and resources for bridging activities due to the higher cost of same).

We investigate a number of strict religions in our empirical work, which follows, by employing the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. For example, Islam and non-Council of Churches (CoC) Christianity[[3]](#footnote-3) represent the extreme end of the strictness spectrum and account for 1.04% and 8.79% of our survey respondents, respectively (and is reflective of Australia’s heterogeneous religious landscape). We would thus expect adherents of these groups to have high levels of in-group trust, but perhaps low levels of out-group trust. Catholicism (representing 22.54% of our respondents) is a mixed case[[4]](#footnote-4) – pre-Vatican II it was regarded as a strict religion, however, younger generations are likely to have experienced a far less strict religious practise (which is another reason why it is important to control for age cohorts in our analysis). By way of contrast, the Anglican community (referred to as Episcopalian in America and 17.50% of our respondents) is relatively liberal in Australia as are the remnant of the Council of Churches. Catholic and Anglican churches are members of the CoC, but we treat them separately in our analysis owing to the high proportion of adherents and divergent levels of strictness with respect to the broader group. The outreach activities of these latter groups, combined with relatively low demands for group membership might suggest relatively high out-group trust in these cohorts.

Notably, the religious and cultural tapestry of Australia is distinctly heterogeneous when compared to other countries and this paper therefore addresses an important gap in the literature given that there is no existing work on religion and trust in Australia. With our model of trust and brief account of how religion interacts with the model in hand, we now detail the data source and empirical strategy employed to the sequent analysis.

**DATA AND EMPIRICAL STRATEGY**

The data used in this study were sourced from the HILDA Survey, which is Australia’s first nationally representative household panel (Wooden and Watson, 2007). HILDA commenced in 2001 (Wave 1) and was based on a large national probability sample of Australian households with a major emphasis on families, income, employment, and subjective well-being. Wave 1 consisted of 7,696 households and 13,696 individuals. Households were selected using a multi-stage sampling strategy and a 66 per cent response rate was obtained. Within each household, information was collected from each household member aged 15 and over, using face-to-face and self-assessed questionnaires. In Wave 1, 92 per cent of adults provided an interview and, in each subsequent wave, the previous wave on wave response rates were between 87 and 95 per cent.

In this study, we focus on participants 16 and over from the 2010 and 2014 waves of the HILDA Survey, which has information on trust and religious affiliation. The major advantage of using the HILDA Survey is that it is one of the largest surveys in Australia to collect data on religious affiliation and trust as well as detailed socio-demographic and economic information on its participants. Our subsequent regression analysis is based on a final analytical sample 24,984 of respondents.

The dependent variables in our regression analysis were classified as measuring either: (i) general trust (‘Generally speaking, most people can be trusted?’) or (ii) localised trust (‘People in this neighbourhood can be trusted?’). Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with these statements using a seven point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). We also controlled for the respondent’s reported life satisfaction, generational cohort, gender, whether the respondent was married, divorced or unemployed, how many minutes per week the respondent spent traveling to and from work, the highest level of education obtained by the respondent, whether the respondent entered Australia as a refugee or was born overseas, the number of years the respondent has resided at their current address, the respondent’s index of relative socio-economic advantage/disadvantage, the respondent’s level of household disposable income, plus an indicator for year.

Religious affiliation was classified into the following seven categories: (i) no religion, (ii) Catholic, (iii) Anglican, (iv) Judaism, (v) Council of Churches (comprising of Greek Orthodox, Orthodox, Churches of Christ, Lutheran, Uniting Church, and Salvation Army), (vi) non-Council of Churches (comprising of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Brethren, Seventh-day Adventist, Pentecostal, Mormons, Other Christian, Presbyterian/Reformed, Oriental Christian, Other Protestant, and Baptist), and (vi) non-Christian (comprising of Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism). In the subsequent regression analysis, ‘no religion’ was selected as the excluded reference group. The names, definitions, means, and standard deviations of the variables used in our study are reported in Table 1.

Separate regression analyses examined the association between religious affiliation and trust using the following model:

*T = α0 + β1R + β2X + µ* (1)

In Equation 1, T is the respondent’s reported level of trust (either general or local), R is the respondent’s religious affiliation, X is a vector of control variables (i.e., life satisfaction, cohort, gender, and so on), and µ is an independently identically distributed error term. All results are estimated with ordered logistic regression (OLOGIT). Since we observe the same individuals over two waves, our standard errors are clustered at the individual-level to account for within-person serial correlation. By way of robustness check, we also conducted ordinary least squares regressions (OLS) and found that this made little difference to our results. We also tested for and found no evidence of multi-collinearity among our explanatory variables. Our variance inflations factors (VIFs) for each explanatory variable was well below 10 and the mean VIFs for our regression models was 2.6.

**RESULTS**

One way of investigating trust is simply to graph the mean trust response for the various religious classifications for the two waves of surveys (2010 and 2014, respectively). Figure 2 does just this (for general trust) and we can immediately see a *prima facie* difference in responses across both religious affiliation and time. For instance, Muslims appear to have lower levels of general trust than their religious peers do while CoC adherents have relatively higher levels of general trust. Moreover, the graph suggests that general trust responses in 2014 may have deteriorated for non-Christians and to a lesser extent for Catholics, No Religion and Muslims. If this trend were to continue then it might pose problems for social cohesion, community resilience, and economic performance. This is especially concerning given the challenges facing Australia at the present, which include internal and external security threats, a sluggish economy, and the rise of right wing political activism (Ward, 2015).

When it comes to local trust (Figure 3) the apparent trend is largely reversed (a notable exception are Jews, which had a reduction in local trust).[[5]](#footnote-5) Given that Australia is noted for having concentrations of particular ethnic and religious groups in certain suburbs, it is probably not surprising to find that local trust might increase, particularly in response to heightened levels of immigration. For example, for the six years to 30 June 2014, nett migration was 1.596 million in a nation of 23.5 million residents and the Australian Bureau of Statistics attributes most of the increase to the proportion of non-Christian affiliates to immigration. This is because new immigrants often increase the homogeneity of already concentrated suburbs (Osdowski, 2016). Thus, an immigrant entering a suburb with an increased concentration of the immigrant’s religious brethren may tend to trust locals largely because others principally constitute locals with the same faith and often language.[[6]](#footnote-6) Local trust may be further enhanced if an increased concentration of people from a particular faith or culture also perceive that they have been somehow unfairly treated or otherwise singled out. In Australia there has been much political activism in response to Islamic inspired terrorism along with calls to ban the burqa because they will tend to increase in-group activities (where they feel accepted) at the expense of bridging out-group pursuits.

With respect to both Figure 2 and Figure 3, we are struck by *prima facie* pronounced differences between the mean responses of the various religious cohorts for local trust. However, these *prima facie* differences should not be considered in isolation given that our trust model also predicts the saliency of factors such as education, age, income, marital status and immigration. We therefore conducted a multiple regression analysis to control for these factors.

Looking at our general trust regression in Table 2, we find that most of the variables predicted by our model have the expected sign. For instance, there is a statistically significant positive association between general trust and life satisfaction, generational cohort, and socio-economic status. Females, on average, report having higher levels of general trust compared to men. Interestingly, there was no statistically significant association between general levels of trust and persons born overseas, although the estimated coefficient was negative. Similarly, there was no statistically significant association between refugee status and general trust, although, once again, the coefficient was negative.

With respect to refugees, this may indicate that the benevolence shown to them may not have overcome the other factors in our trust model. More specifically, the propensity to trust may well be the relevant explanation for this result given the harmful experiences that refugees are likely to have encountered prior to gaining asylum. We also note that time spent commuting is not statistically significant as it was in earlier Australian studies (Leigh, 2006; Mendolia et al, 2016), although it should be noted that these studies do not control for the possible influence that religious affiliation may have on general trust.

Turning to our local trust regression in Table 2, we observed similar associations for most of our non-religion variables. However, there are few notable discordances. Specifically, we observe that gender is no longer statistically significant – the coefficient is close to zero – and there is a statistically significant negative association between time spent commuting and local trust, although the magnitude of the estimated coefficient is relatively small.

However, our main interest, relates to the association between religious affiliation and trust. For general trust, there is a statistically significant positive association for CoC Christians and a statistically significant negative association for non-CoC Christians as well as Muslims compared to the no-religion reference group. For the remaining religious groups – Jews, Catholic, Anglicans, and non-Christians – we find no evidence of statistically significant associations. Turning to our local trust regression in Table 2, we now observe a statistically significant positive association between Muslims and local trust. Notably, the reversal on the sign of the coefficient for local trust – compared to general trust – does not occur for non-CoC Christians, and the estimated coefficient is no longer statistically significant. In contrast, there is a statistically significant positive association between local trust and CoC Christian and Anglicans, which may reflect the frequent local interactions facilitated through social groups.

As a robustness check, we also estimated conventional OLS regressions (Table 3). The results from these models parallel our OLOGIT results. The close concordance between our OLOGIT and OLS estimates provides a high level of assurance for our results, which have been shown to be consistent with the underlying theory.

**DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION**

In this paper, we examined whether religious affiliation influences general and local trust using data drawn from the HILDA Survey. Our statistical analysis indicates that religious affiliation may influence levels of trust in contemporary Australia (and thus addresses a gap in the scholarly literature). Moreover, our empirical analysis also suggests that general trust may be reducing among many religious affiliations. This finding is important for a heterogeneous population like Australia as it seeks to traverse some serious challenges such as internal security, social cohesion, and economic transition.

For general trust, we observe a positive association for CoC Christians. This positive association is consistent with the observation that CoC Christian churches tend to have relative low demands for group membership and are strongly orientated toward a range of community outreach activities. For example, both the Uniting Church and Salvation Army are well known for their social support services for disadvantaged persons. This finding is broadly consistent with studies from the US (e.g., Daniels and von der Ruhr, 2010). Conversely, we observe a negative association between general trust and non-CoC Christians and Muslims. These negative associations are consistent with the observation that non-CoC Christianity and Islam impose high membership costs in form of diet, alcohol consumption, time commitment, and dress. For example, Muslims are required to eat halal, shun alcohol, pray five times a day, and, in some cases, women are required to wear a burqa.

Thus, membership to a strict religious affiliation like non-CoC Christianity and Islam may reduce the time available for out-group bonding and the building of general trust. Moreover, the distinctive behaviour of these religious affiliations may single out members for persecution, which, in turn, may reduce the level of general trust. In addition, where religious affiliation is closely associated with immigration – as is the case of Islam in Australia – then reduced levels of general trust may also be a function of poor language proficiency or the settlement pattern of migrants, which tend to be concentrated in specific geographical locations, which does little to promote out-group interactions. Notably the size of the negative coefficient for Muslims is much larger than that of their strict non-CoC counterparts. This suggests that language proficiency, perceived persecution, and concentrated geographical distribution may be the underlying explanations for the low levels of general trust reported among this group.

Turning to local trust, we observe a statistically significant positive association between Muslims and local trust. It is possible that the comparatively high membership costs of Islam coupled with potential language barriers, perceptions of persecution, and geographical concentration may lead to a higher frequency of in-group interactions at the expense of out-group interactions (and hence greater in-group trust at the expense of out-group trust). On this point, data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) suggests that Muslim adherents tend to dominate the demographic profile of particular suburbs, which, in turn, makes the frequency of in-group interactions more likely.

Finally, for local trust, we also observed statistically significant positive coefficients for CoC Christians and Anglicans. These findings may be explained by the frequency of local interactions facilitated through social groups and institutions. For example, the Anglican Church is a prominent provider of primary and secondary school education in Australia and CoC churches run a range of social outreach programs that may have a positive spill-over effect on local trust. Moreover, the fact the CoC Christians have statistically significant positive associations for both general and local trust suggest that this group may have a particularly high propensity to trust, although additional research would be required to unravel the factors underscoring this empirical observation.

In conclusion, trust is important for a wide range of social and economic functions. As such, further research is required to unravel what general trust means and where trust deficiencies may lie. With regard to the former, there would appear to be a need for faith-based trust experiments to test whether general trust reflects either (i) a person’s trustworthiness; or (ii) low trust in the out-group (e.g., Johansson-Stenman et al., 2009). With respect to the latter, more survey data is needed to disentangle what religious adherents do or do not trust. It is government, fellow citizens, specific community services like law enforcement, or certain businesses such as banks? Given the inherent importance of trust for any nation, and the apparent declining levels of trust in Australia that have religion as a possible determinant, these research questions appear to be important and we commend same to our peers.

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**TABLE 1: Variable definitions and means (n=** **24,984)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable** | **Definition** | **Mean (SD)** |
| **Dependent variables** |  |  |
| General trust | To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Generally speaking, most people can be trusted (the scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). | 4.90 (1.28) |
| Local trust | To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your neighbourhood? People in this neighbourhood can be trusted (the scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). | 4.72 (1.38) |
| **Independent variables** |  |  |
| ***Religion*** |  |  |
| No religion (ref.) | No religion. | 0.38 |
| Jews | Jews. | 0.004 |
| Catholics | Catholics. | 0.23 |
| Anglican | Anglican. | 0.18 |
| Council of Churches | Greek Orthodox, Orthodox, Churches of Christ, Lutheran, Uniting Church, Salvation Army. | 0.09 |
| Non-Council of Churches | Jehovah’s Witnesses; Brethren; Seventh-day Adventist; Pentecostal; Latter Day Saints (Mormons); Other Christian; Presbyterian/Reformed; Oriental Christian; Other Protestant; Baptist. | 0.09 |
| Non-Christians | Buddhists; Hindus. | 0.03 |
| Muslim | Islam. | 0.01 |
| Life satisfaction | All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life? Again, pick a number between 0 and 10 to indicate how satisfied you are. | 7.92 (1.41) |
| Metropolitan | 1 = residing in a metropolitan area; 0 = otherwise. | 0.67 |
| ***Cohort*** |  |  |
| Gen Z (ref.) | Respondent was born in 1996 and after. | 0.03 |
| Gen Y | Respondent was born between 1977 and 1995. | 0.32 |
| Gen X | Respondent was born between 1965 and 1976. | 0.20 |
| Baby Boomers | Respondent was born between 1946 and 1964. | 0.30 |
| Silent Generation | Respondent was born in 1945 and before. | 0.15 |
| Female | 1 = female; 0 = male. | 0.52 |
| Married | 1 = married; 0 = otherwise. | 0.49 |
| Divorced | 1 = divorced; 0 = otherwise. | 0.06 |
| Unemployed | 1 = unemployed; 0 = otherwise. | 0.04 |
| Commute | Travelling to and from a place of paid employment (minutes per week). | 5.85 (13.20) |
| ***Highest education*** |  |  |
| Postgraduate | Masters or doctorate. | 0.05 |
| Graduate diploma | Graduate diploma or graduate certificate. | 0.06 |
| Bachelor | Bachelor or honours degree. | 0.14 |
| Diploma | Diploma or advanced diploma. | 0.09 |
| Certificate | Certificate III or IV. | 0.22 |
| Year 12 | High school graduate. | 0.16 |
| Year 11 and below (ref.) | Year 11 and below | 0.29 |
| Osborn | 1 = born overseas; 0 = otherwise. | 0.20 |
| ***Refugee*** |  |  |
| No (ref.) | Not a refugee. | 0.13 |
| Yes | Is a refugee. | 0.02 |
| Not asked | Respondent not asked. | 0.86 |
| Years at address | Number of years at current address. | 10.17 (11.35) |
| SES index | Decile of index of relative socio-economic advantage/disadvantage. | 5.66 (2.85) |
| Household income | Household disposable income. | $97729.24 ($79599.93) |
| Wave | 1 = 2014; 0 = 2010. | 0.56 |

Source: HILDA. Note: The SES index used in this study is the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). It is comprised of four indices that have been created from the economic and social information contain in the Census. In essence, each index ranks geographic areas across Australia based on their relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage.

**TABLE 2: The effects of religious affiliation on trust, OLOGIT (n = 24,984)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **General Trust** | | | **Local Trust** | | |
| ***Religious affiliation*** | **β** |  | **SE** | **β** |  | **SE** |
| Jews | -0.168 |  | 0.188 | -0.099 |  | 0.195 |
| Catholics | -0.005 |  | 0.034 | 0.045 |  | 0.034 |
| Anglican | -0.005 |  | 0.038 | 0.094 | \*\* | 0.038 |
| Council of Churches | 0.096 | \*\* | 0.046 | 0.247 | \*\*\* | 0.046 |
| Non-Council of Churches | -0.138 | \*\*\* | 0.049 | -0.079 |  | 0.047 |
| Non-Christians | -0.139 |  | 0.083 | 0.104 |  | 0.079 |
| Muslim | -0.367 | \*\*\* | 0.150 | 0.393 | \*\*\* | 0.142 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Life satisfaction | 0.338 | \*\*\* | 0.010 | 0.253 | \*\*\* | 0.010 |
| Metropolitan | -0.145 | \*\*\* | 0.030 | -0.651 | \*\*\* | 0.030 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ***Cohort*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Gen Y | 0.008 |  | 0.079 | 0.029 |  | 0.077 |
| Gen X | 0.279 | \*\*\* | 0.083 | 0.298 | \*\*\* | 0.081 |
| Baby Boomers | 0.639 | \*\*\* | 0.082 | 0.527 | \*\*\* | 0.081 |
| Silent Generation | 1.244 | \*\*\* | 0.089 | 0.968 | \*\*\* | 0.087 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | 0.106 | \*\*\* | 0.026 | 0.004 |  | 0.026 |
| Married | 0.067 | \*\* | 0.030 | 0.192 | \*\*\* | 0.030 |
| Divorced | -0.125 |  | 0.065 | 0.012 |  | 0.059 |
| Unemployed | -0.313 | \*\*\* | 0.066 | -0.006 |  | 0.070 |
| Commute | 0.000 |  | 0.001 | -0.002 | \*\* | 0.001 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ***Highest education*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Graduate diploma | -0.048 |  | 0.076 | 0.125 |  | 0.070 |
| Bachelor | -0.034 |  | 0.063 | 0.039 |  | 0.060 |
| Diploma | -0.402 | \*\*\* | 0.068 | -0.002 |  | 0.066 |
| Certificate | -0.508 | \*\*\* | 0.063 | -0.150 | \*\* | 0.060 |
| Year 12 | -0.354 | \*\*\* | 0.064 | -0.082 |  | 0.062 |
| Year 11 and below | -0.567 | \*\*\* | 0.064 | -0.092 |  | 0.061 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Osborn | -0.107 |  | 0.056 | -0.067 |  | 0.053 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ***Refugee*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Yes | -0.067 |  | 0.109 | 0.154 |  | 0.120 |
| Not asked | 0.120 |  | 0.066 | 0.103 |  | 0.062 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Years at address | 0.005 | \*\*\* | 0.001 | 0.011 | \*\*\* | 0.001 |
| SES index | 0.064 | \*\*\* | 0.005 | 0.155 | \*\*\* | 0.005 |
| Household income | 0.001 |  | 0.002 | 0.000 |  | 0.002 |
| Wave | -0.038 |  | 0.020 | 0.026 |  | 0.020 |

\*\*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\* *p* < 0.05

Source: HILDA

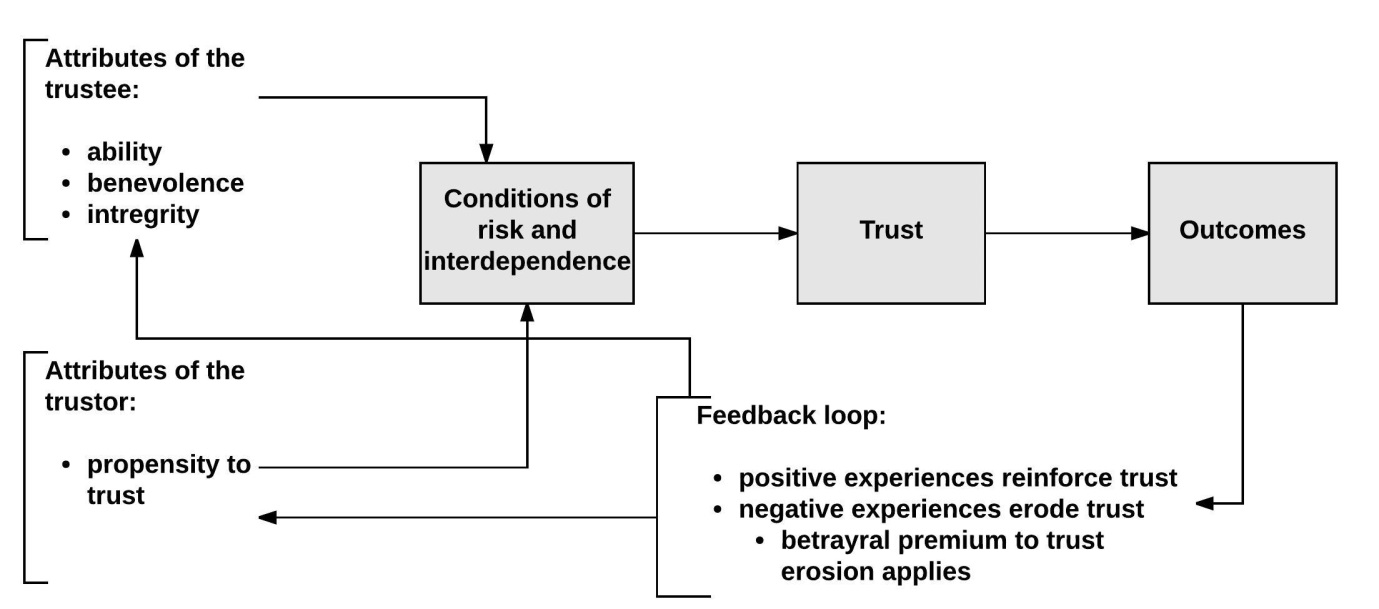
**TABLE 3: The effects of religious affiliation on trust, OLS (n = 24,984)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **General Trust** | | | **Local Trust** | | |
| ***Religious affiliation*** | **β** |  | **SE** | **β** |  | **SE** |
| Jews | -0.110 |  | 0.134 | -0.089 |  | 0.150 |
| Catholics | -0.015 |  | 0.023 | 0.036 |  | 0.024 |
| Anglican | 0.005 |  | 0.024 | 0.076 | \*\*\* | 0.026 |
| Council of Churches | 0.061 | \*\* | 0.030 | 0.173 | \*\*\* | 0.032 |
| Non-Council of Churches | -0.097 | \*\*\* | 0.032 | -0.044 |  | 0.033 |
| Non-Christians | -0.099 |  | 0.055 | 0.080 |  | 0.056 |
| Muslim | -0.249 | \*\*\* | 0.097 | 0.260 | \*\* | 0.104 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Life satisfaction | 0.207 | \*\*\* | 0.007 | 0.170 | \*\*\* | 0.007 |
| Metropolitan | -0.087 | \*\*\* | 0.020 | -0.437 | \*\*\* | 0.021 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ***Cohort*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Gen Y | -0.008 |  | 0.053 | 0.012 |  | 0.055 |
| Gen X | 0.166 | \*\*\* | 0.055 | 0.214 | \*\*\* | 0.058 |
| Baby Boomers | 0.374 | \*\*\* | 0.055 | 0.368 | \*\*\* | 0.058 |
| Silent Generation | 0.732 | \*\*\* | 0.057 | 0.646 | \*\*\* | 0.061 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | 0.058 | \*\*\* | 0.017 | 0.008 |  | 0.018 |
| Married | 0.069 | \*\*\* | 0.020 | 0.147 | \*\*\* | 0.021 |
| Divorced | -0.066 |  | 0.041 | 0.014 |  | 0.042 |
| Unemployed | -0.227 | \*\*\* | 0.046 | -0.011 |  | 0.051 |
| Commute | 0.000 |  | 0.001 | -0.001 |  | 0.001 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ***Highest education*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Graduate diploma | -0.038 |  | 0.047 | 0.085 |  | 0.049 |
| Bachelor | -0.018 |  | 0.039 | 0.010 |  | 0.042 |
| Diploma | -0.257 | \*\*\* | 0.043 | -0.011 |  | 0.046 |
| Certificate | -0.340 | \*\*\* | 0.040 | -0.123 | \*\*\* | 0.042 |
| Year 12 | -0.217 | \*\*\* | 0.041 | -0.067 |  | 0.043 |
| Year 11 and below | -0.382 | \*\*\* | 0.040 | -0.090 | \*\* | 0.042 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Osborn | -0.076 | \*\* | 0.037 | -0.042 |  | 0.038 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ***Refugee*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Yes | -0.052 |  | 0.073 | 0.061 |  | 0.082 |
| Not asked | 0.063 |  | 0.043 | 0.067 |  | 0.044 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Years at address | 0.003 | \*\*\* | 0.001 | 0.007 | \*\*\* | 0.001 |
| SES index | 0.042 | \*\*\* | 0.003 | 0.112 | \*\*\* | 0.004 |
| Household income | 0.002 | \*\* | 0.001 | 0.000 |  | 0.001 |
| Wave | -0.039 | \*\*\* | 0.013 | 0.012 |  | 0.014 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Constant | 2.964 | \*\*\* | 0.099 | 2.600 | \*\*\* | 0.103 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| R-squared | 0.138 |  |  | 0.154 |  |  |

\*\*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\* *p* < 0.05

Source: HIDLA

**FIGURE 1. A Dyadic Model of Trust**

****Source: Adapted from Mayer et al. (1995)

**FIGURE 2. General Trust by Religion, 2010 and 2014**



Source: HILDA

**FIGURE 3. Local Trust by Religion, 2010 and 2014**



Source: HILDA

1. The most likely explanation for this effect is that persons must refer to some ‘known’ when answering an attitudinal evaluation question of a vague nature. The most probable ‘known’ that one might fall back on is oneself (Glaeser et al., 2000). Moreover, when referring to the ‘self’ one *can* know whether acts relate directly to desirable attributes of Trustees or whether said acts were merely coincidental. For example, did the Trustee act according to high ability or just get lucky on this occasion? Was the action motivated by benevolence or understanding of shared goals? Was the action carried out with integrity or undetected deceit? [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The risk is that the more significant sacrifices of these strict religions may not be rewarded with greater outcomes in the world to come (where notably much of the pay-off from the trust must occur and where it is impossible to monitor the said act or seek remedy in event of disappointment (Azzi and Ehrenberg, 1975). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Australian National Council of Churches is a volunteer peak body for Christian churches that subscribe to core beliefs. Churches that do not subscribe to CoC do so because of incompatible beliefs and parochialism. In our sample, non-CoC include Jehovah Witness, Brethren, Seventh-day Adventist, Mormons, Other Christian, Presbyterian/Reformed, Oriental Christian, Other Protestant, and Baptist. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. As is Judaism – largely owing to the fact that our data cannot discern between strict Orthodox Judaism on the one hand, and liberal Reform Judaism on the other. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is likely due to a combination of small sample size and historical child abuse controversies as raised in the Royal Commission on Child Sexual Abuse (Percy and MacMillan, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Evidence of this sort of trend, for increasing concentration, can be found in the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data. For instance, in 2011 48.8% of residents in Lakemba identified as Muslim and by 2016 this figure had risen to 59.2% (in 2011 15.1% of people only spoke English at home and by 2016 this had fallen to 14.7%; ABS, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)