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Trust and National Identity

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Abstract and Keywords

This article examines evidence from social psychology and comparative social science on the trust-related effects of having a national identity. The starting hypothesis is that identities provide a foundation for extending trust by permitting those who share them to make assumptions about the motivations and intentions of others. The discussion in the article establishes that this hypothesis is empirically supported, and examines the trust-related effects of national identities in particular. We are attentive to the strength and quality of these identities, which correlate with how inclusive or exclusive they are. We then propose that public policy steers national identities in a culturally civic direction, emphasizing elements that are accessible to newcomers and minorities and downplaying those that are not.

Keywords: National identity, newcomers, ethnic nationalism, civic nationalism, trust

The relationship between trust and national identity is an issue that has been much discussed by both political theorists and social scientists. Underlying this interest is the thought that national identities might provide the necessary “glue” that can hold large, culturally diverse societies together and enable them to function successfully. Trust features here as the intervening variable that links national identity to positive outcomes such as democracy and social justice. The claim, in other words, is that people who share an identity are more likely to trust one another as individuals, and also to trust the institutions that govern them. This in turn motivates them to support a well-functioning democracy and to accept and comply with the policies needed for social justice. It is this assumed causal chain that has encouraged political leaders in liberal democracies to engage in nation-building programs, such as introducing “education for citizenship” into the school curriculum, and requiring new immigrants to prepare for and take citizenship tests that familiarize them with the national culture of the society they are joining. But

does the causal relationship actually hold? Is sharing a national identity really an important precondition for a trusting society?

There are certainly reasons to be cautious about this assumption. There are multiple sources of both social and political trust, as the other contributors in this volume make abundantly clear. Perhaps trust among individuals depends simply on their interactions, or even on dispositions to trust or not to trust formed in the early years. Perhaps our trust in political institutions primarily reflects how well these institutions perform in delivering the services we expect from them; our national identities, then, may be largely irrelevant to trust. A second reason has to do with the character of national identity itself, which necessarily discriminates between those who belong to the nation and those who don't—or more insidiously, between those who belong to the national "core" and those who remain on the periphery (immigrants in particular). The effect, then, of having such an identity may be positive for trusting 'insiders" while it is also negative for trusting "outsiders," who might nonetheless be our fellow citizens.

So in examining the evidence from social psychology and comparative social science on the trust-related effects of having a national identity, we need to be attentive not only to the *strength* of such identities (how important does it seem to people that they belong to nation X?) but also to their *quality* (what does it mean to be a member of nation X?), which in turn determines how inclusive or exclusive the identity is and how easy or difficult it is to recognize members of different social groups as belonging to X. This analysis maps well onto the broader discussion of the distinction between generalized and particularized trust (Uslaner 2008; Kramer, this volume). Generalized trust refers to trust that extends beyond one's immediate circle of friends and family and underpins cooperation among individuals who are not personally known to each other. Particularized trust refers to trust that extends to one's friends and family; it is often also the term used to refer to the trust that extends between members of ethnic groups.[1] In the analysis that follows, therefore, we are attentive to whether the trust that appears to stem from national identities of various types is best described as generalized or particularized.

First, we look at general evidence on the relevance of identity to trust. The hypothesis here is that identities provide a foundation for extending trust by permitting those who share them to make assumptions about the motivations and intentions of others. Since extending trust requires making oneself vulnerable to the actions of others, or at least requires us to believe that others will not harm us intentionally, shared identities serve to provide cues for whether one's trust is likely to be rewarded and reciprocated, thus reducing the felt experience of vulnerability associated with extending trust to others. Having established that this hypothesis is empirically supported, we then turn to examine the trust-related effects of national identity in particular, and finally we propose a

direction for policy makers concerned to generate and support inclusive, trust-building, national identities. But before beginning that review, we need first to examine the idea of national identity itself, and how we can test for its strength and quality. What does it actually mean to think of oneself as belonging to a particular nation, and how should we categorize the different forms of national identity that we find in contemporary societies?

National Identity Defined

Most people in the modern world think of themselves as belonging primarily to one or another nation: rootless cosmopolitans are few and far between. But what it means to have a national identity is by no means straightforward. Complexity abounds at both the individual level and the societal level. What Pierre understands himself to be saying when he identifies as French may be quite different from what Jacques understands by the same proposition. And setting aside these individual differences, the ingredients that make up French national identity may not the same as those that single out the Japanese. As we have already noted, such qualitative contrasts may be important when it comes to determining the sources of social trust. So we need to do some disentangling before looking at the evidence on that question. The present section explores different dimensions of national identity, with a particular focus on the contrast between *civic* and *ethnic* conceptions of nationhood.

We begin with the common elements that must be present if a national identity is to exist at all. There are five of these elements (Miller 1995, chap. 2). First, there must be a sufficiently large group of people who share the identity: if Pierre is the only human being who thinks of himself as French, there is no French nation. The boundaries of this group need not be precisely drawn: not all of the people Pierre thinks of as French need think of *themselves* as French, nor is there a need that Pierre's view about who counts as French and who doesn't coincides exactly with Jacques' view.[2] But there must be a substantial degree of overlap in both respects.

Second, people who belong to the group must think that what connects them is not just some random feature, like having names beginning with the same letter, but something *significant*. What they have in common are features that make them different from other nations. As we shall see later, which features count will vary from case to case: it might be a language, a religion, a cultural heritage, or a set of political values. Using the term "culture" in a broad sense, then, we can say that having a national identity means seeing yourself as culturally different, in one or more respects, from members of other nations.

Third, the identity binds you to your compatriots emotionally and morally in certain ways. You may not like many of them as individuals, but if things go badly for some of them—they are caught in a destructive flood, for example—you will empathize with them and be disposed to offer help. And you will want the group to continue to exist *as* a group over time; if there is some danger of the group being fully assimilated into some larger group, you will regret that this is happening, and try to resist it.

Fourth, the nation encompasses not just a group of people but also a place where the people live now, or have lived in the past, which they regard as their national homeland. So nation and territory are indissolubly linked, and in the case of nations that have been dispossessed, recovering that territory becomes a primary objective.

Fifth, national identity includes the idea that the nation should be in charge of its own destiny. The group should enjoy some kind of self-determination, ideally perhaps in the shape of a state of its own, but if that is not possible, then in the form of political autonomy within the state. The fourth and fifth features, taken together, explain the connection between *national identity* and *nationalism*. The more virulent forms of nationalism arise when groups of people who identify as nations are deprived of their "rightful" territory or are denied political autonomy and subjected to "alien" rule.

These are the features that, taken together, distinguish national identities from other kinds of group or personal identities. But now we must examine important variations, focusing on dimensions two and three above. How is the commonality that holds the nation together understood? And what kind of emotional or normative attitude do individual members of the nation hold toward the group as it now exists or has existed over time? How strongly does their membership matter to them, for example? And are they more proud or more ashamed of the nation they belong to?

On the second dimension, a distinction has long been drawn between civic and ethnic conceptions of national identity. Although we will shortly raise some questions about this distinction, it is first necessary to understand it. There is no canonical formulation, but an influential version was put forward by Michael Ignatieff. According to Ignatieff, the civic conception of nationality "envisages the nation as a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values," whereas according to the ethnic conception "what gave unity to the nation…was not the cold contrivance of shared rights, but the people's pre-existing ethnic characteristics: their language, religion, customs and traditions" (Ignatieff 1993, 3–4).[3] Thus, on the civic view, a nation is held together by political bonds: its members share a commitment to the political principles and institutions that define their state, especially to a constitution if that is central to their political identity, but they need not share any "thicker" set of cultural features, nor need they regard themselves as sharing a common ancestry. On the

ethnic view, by contrast, culture and descent are crucial, and the state should ideally enclose all those, and only those, who share these features. This means, among other things, that on the ethnic conception immigrants who are unable to trace their ancestry back to the homeland cannot be full members of the nation, whereas on the civic conception their inclusion simply requires that they should embrace its constitutive practices and political values.

Although this civic/ethnic distinction has enjoyed wide currency, most of those who employ it immediately go on to add that few if any nations exemplify either of the pure types.[4] As Anthony Smith puts it, "[E]very nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms. Sometimes civic and territorial elements predominate; at other times it is the ethnic and vernacular components that are emphasized" (Smith 1991, 13). For example, allegedly civic nations usually insist that all citizens should learn the national language—a cultural feature—and also create "stories of peoplehood" that give the nation a historical trajectory, and by implication separate those who can trace their origins back to the founding generation from those who have joined more recently.[5] Allegedly ethnic nations, on the other hand, allow for naturalization on the basis that newcomers will in due course acquire enough of the national culture to qualify for membership. So what we find in reality is a spectrum, with most nations in the real world displaying both civic and ethnic characteristics to varying degrees.[6] But where a nation is located on the spectrum may still matter, if we want to investigate the relationship between national identity and trust. Intuitively, at least, the bonds that hold predominantly civic nations together will be *wider* but *weaker*, whereas the bonds that hold predominantly ethnic nations together will be *narrower* but *stronger*. Civic conceptions of national identity can more easily make room for immigrants and ethnic minorities, but because they appeal to values such as democracy and human rights that are shared by many countries, they may be less able to explain what makes this nation special and distinctive, and so to foster internal solidarity. Whether this intuition is correct is something we shall explore shortly.

Alongside the qualitative distinction between mainly ethnic and mainly civic conceptions of nationhood, therefore, we have a contrast between stronger and weaker forms of national identification. How strong are people's national attachments, and do they regard their *national* identities as more or less important than other identities they might have? As with the civic-ethnic question, we can ask this about both nations as a whole and their individual members. We can distinguish between countries where people generally feel that their national identity matters to them a great deal, and others where this identity is less important; equally, we can distinguish between individuals on the same basis,. And then an interesting issue arises: If national identity and trust are connected, does the connection obtain at the individual level or the collective level? Is what matters whether

you yourself have a strong or weak, civic or ethnic, national identity or whether you belong to a nation where people generally score high or low on these dimensions?

To answer these questions, we need to find ways of measuring the nature and strength of national identities. Researchers wanting to explore the civic-ethnic dimension do so by looking at the answers given to questions such as "How important do you think characteristic X is to being truly a member of nation Y?" This is then followed by a list of features, some of which, such as being born in Y, being able to trace their ancestry back in Y, identifying with the "way of life" of Y people, or adhering to the historic religion in Y, are counted as "ethnic," while others, such as believing in democracy or freedom of speech, supporting Y's constitution, or feeling a loyalty to Y, are counted as civic.[7] In their responses people typically combine features from both lists, but the relative weight they attach to "ethnic" versus "civic" characteristics is used to place both individuals and the societies they belong to at appropriate points on the civic-ethnic spectrum.[8]

To measure the strength of national identities, various techniques have been used. The most straightforward involves asking people how much the identity means to them: "How important is being a Y to you?" "The fact that I am a Y is an important part of my identity: do you agree?' A slight variant asks how *close* the respondent feels to country Y. Another variant asks respondents to rate the importance of their different identities, allowing national identity to be ranked against ethnic, occupational, and other such identities (Theiss-Morse 2009 45–47). Somewhat more problematic are measures that ask respondents about national *pride*, for example, "How proud are you to be a Y?" or "The world would be a better place if people in other countries were more like people in Y: do you agree?"[9] Although the answers to "national attachment" questions and answers to "national pride" questions are correlated to some extent, the correlation is not perfect, and the pride questions introduce an element that is lacking in the attachment questions, namely an *evaluation* of how the nation has performed over some unspecified period of time.[10] Care is therefore needed when looking at research that tries to measure the effects of stronger or weaker national identities to see more precisely how "national identity" has been measured in the study in question.

Identity and Trust

Having now explored the meaning of national identity, and the tools that are available to measure it along different dimensions, in this section we investigate the relationship between identity *in general* and trust, before moving on to examine the impact of national identity in particular. It is a commonplace in the literature on trust that our willingness to

trust others depends on the extent to which we identify with them. As Messick and Kramer express this point, “We trust and help people with whom we are familiar, with whom we have frequent contact, whom we believe to be similar to ourselves, and for whom we have positive regard’ (Messick and Kramer 2001, 100). Experimental research over a number of years has demonstrated that in a range of so-called trust games, trust is extended and rewarded in cases where the players believe that they share an identity with one another (e.g., Kramer and Brewer 1984). We report here on experiments in which identities are manipulated to reveal their consequences. What these experiments show, in line with the hypothesis above, is that when people believe that they share an identity with their partners in interaction, they are more willing to extend trust to them. So perceptions of shared identity both influence whether people extend trust to others and whether they expect that their extended trust will be reciprocated.

In one recent experiment, for example, participants (recipients) were told that they were to receive money from another participant (allocator), who had been given a sum of money and then asked to share it with a recipient. This experiment used a version of the “dictator game,” in which allocators are free to choose what proportion of a sum provided to them they will share with the other party. The game discredits claims that individuals are purely rationally self-interested, since nearly all players in the game choose to distribute at least some money to recipients, and in many cases allocate half of what they are given, even though they suffer no penalty by keeping the entire sum.[11] In this particular experiment, recipients were asked whether they wished to receive an allotment from someone with whom they shared an identity or from someone with whom they did not. Experimenters found that recipients who knew that identity was shared, and who believed that their allocator also possessed this information, were significantly more likely to choose to receive money from an in-group member. The explanation offered is that recipients believed that allocators would be moved by the shared identity to act fairly in allocating their resources. In other words, reciprocal knowledge of their shared identity created a situation in which recipients were willing to trust allocators to behave fairly. Where recipients knew that identity was shared, but believed that allocators lacked that information, recipients showed no statistically significant preference in choosing allocators (Foddy, Platow, and Yamagishi 2009).

A follow-up study noted, however, that the structure of the game required that players accept unconstrained allocations from *someone*, and thus only suggested the existence of relative trust; that is, at issue was only who was likely to be more trustworthy, if extending trust could not be avoided. In examining whether the shared knowledge of common identity might operate to increase trust levels absolutely, in circumstances where there was no need to rely on trust, a modified experiment adapted the dictator-game structure (Platow et al. 2012). In this experiment, recipients were given three

choices: they could choose one of two envelopes, or six dollars. Inside those envelopes was an amount of money, chosen by allocators. Recipients were told that allocators had been given sixteen dollars, and asked to share the money as they preferred. Recipients therefore faced a choice between a certain six dollars or one of two envelopes that could contain anywhere between zero and sixteen dollars. Under various experimental conditions they were told different things about their allocators: first, whether or not they shared an identity with the recipient; and, second, more crucially, whether the allocator also knew about this commonality. In a majority of the cases where recipients were told that their allocators shared with them a significant identity *and* that the allocators also knew this, recipients chose the appropriate envelope. Where they believed that the allocator did not know that identities were shared, they chose to take the six dollars. Given that the most the recipients could reasonably expect to receive by choosing the envelope was eight dollars, one half of the total, this finding is quite significant. It clearly reveals the impact of group identity on trust in strangers, in this case trust that the unknown other will behave honorably in allocating resources.

The identities that were manipulated in these experiments were local ones (in the latter case, for example, a factor was whether the allocator belonged to the same academic department). We cannot assume without further evidence that national identities can play the same role in fostering trust, either among fellow nationals (social trust) or toward political institutions (political trust). Also, as noted earlier, national identities are complex phenomena, and their effects may depend on which aspects are highlighted. So we should now begin to review the research that has been carried out on social and political trust in general, before turning our attention to these more specific questions. Social trust, sometimes termed “interpersonal trust” and at other times “horizontal trust,” is typically thought to be captured by responses to the generalized trust question: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with others?” Political trust is sometimes captured by asking questions that ask respondents for their views of their political leaders, but more often it is captured by questions that focus on whether respondents believe that their political leaders can be expected to do what is right or whether one had confidence in their government and associated political institutions.

Comparative research unsurprisingly demonstrates that there are significant differences in reported levels of trust, both social and political, across nation-states. In 2000, citizens in Denmark (67%), Sweden (66%), and Iran (65%) responded positively to the generalized trust question; nearly 10 of 83 surveyed countries reported trust levels at less than 10%; and, in Brazil, only 3% of citizens responded positively to this trust question (Newton 2007, 345). A similar spread of responses appears when surveys assess citizens’ confidence, or trust, in the political institutions that govern their lives (for a review, see

Levi and Stoker 2000). Much evidence, furthermore, suggests that there are often correlations between social and political trust within nation-states; although there are anomalies, in general where levels of social trust are high, levels of political trust also tend to be high (Newton 1999, 2001).[12] High levels of variance are also found in studies that track strengths of national identities; there are significant differences in how citizens understand the key components of their national identities, and how strongly they feel attached to these key components (Miller and Ali 2014).

Even taken together, however, this evidence does not tell us how and when the presence of national identity in a state correlates with levels of trust. It simply confirms what we would expect, that is, that both trust levels and the strength of national identity vary among states. Even without considering the impact of national identity or its specific content, we would predict that levels of trust in different countries would be affected by a wide range of factors, including for instance the extent of wealth inequality or of corruption (Catterberg and Moreno 2005). Similarly, contextual factors, historical or contemporary, may have impact on both the content and the strength of national identity and its corresponding ability to produce trust. For example, in nation-states where extreme forms of nationalism have produced violence in the past, or that have been governed by communist regimes, contemporary citizens often respond by expressing relatively lower levels of trust (Bjornskov 2007; Lovell 2001; Mishler and Rose 2001). Given all of these complicating factors, is there any way to assess whether national identity plays a role in generating trust in these cases, and furthermore how generalized that trust is?

There are three rather different ways in which we might try to show that it does. First, we could remain at the collective level and look for correlations between countries where, on average, people identified more strongly with their nation, and countries where trust levels were also on average higher. Or we could ask the same question at the individual level, comparing strong and weak identifiers within each country. For example, an American study investigating levels of national commitment by asking people how strongly they identified themselves *as* Americans found a significant correlation between strong national identification and scoring highly on the standard measure of interpersonal trust; the study also found that strong identifiers were much more likely than weak identifiers to show “trust and confidence…in the wisdom of the American people when it comes to making choices on Election Day” (Theiss-Morse 2009, chap. 2). One drawback with these approaches is that the direction of causation remains unclear: Does identifying with your conationals make it more likely that you will trust them, or does trusting your compatriots make it more likely that you will feel able to identify with them—or indeed might there be some third factor that explains both of these phenomena?

This suggests a third approach, where the salience of national identity is manipulated, and the results observed. This technique has been applied in a number of cases where people belong to rival ethnic groups, and the question is whether introducing a superordinate national identity by means of selective cueing can induce respondents to behave more generously toward the outgroup (Kramer, this volume). Thus an American study highlighted ethnic/racial identity for one group of respondents and national identity for the comparison group, and found that those in the second group were more likely to favor raising taxes to improve education even when the policy was couched in terms of improving education for minorities (Transue 2007). An Indian study examined whether Hindus were willing to donate a small sum of money they had been given to the victims of a fire accident, which was alleged to have occurred in either a Hindu or a Muslim neighborhood, and the manipulation involved displaying a picture of India adorned with the colors of the national flag before they had to decide. The quite striking result was that the display of the picture eliminated the bias that otherwise existed in favor of coethnic Hindus (Charnysh, Lucas, and Singh 2015). Neither of these experiments looked explicitly at intergroup trust (though it might be argued that willingness to offer support to people outside of your own ethnic group implicitly assumes that they would be willing to reciprocate should the occasion arise).

However, a third experiment, conducted on the border between Malawi and Zambia, examined willingness to trust more directly by playing a version of the dictator game described above, with individuals divided four ways by ethnicity (Chewa vs. Tumbuka) and nationality (Malawian vs. Zambian) (Robinson 2016). This enabled the researchers to measure comparatively the effects of shared ethnicity and shared nationality on trust, as shown by the quantity of resources each respondent was willing to transfer during the game to an anonymous partner drawn from one of the four categories. Introducing a further dimension, half of the respondents were primed by asking them for their views about the Malawian flag (at that time two possible versions of the new national flag were under debate) before playing the game. The results showed the effects of national identity for Malawians: “the more strongly one identifies as Malawian, especially in terms of cognitive identification, the more strongly one trusts Malawians from other ethnic groups, ultimately eliminating ethnic trust discrepancies among the strongest nationalists” (Robinson 2016, 21). Moreover, showing the flag also had an effect on those whose Malawian identity was relatively weak: “the national identity prime did indeed reduce (and even eliminate) the coethnic trust premium among weak national identifiers, who, in the absence of the national identity prime demonstrate the largest coethnic trust bias” (Robinson 2016, 22).

It appears, therefore, that the general effect of shared identity on trust that many studies have revealed applies more specifically to national identity, at least so long as those whom one is being asked to trust are included under that umbrella. But this is where

doubts may begin to form. As we noted at the beginning, national identities by their very nature require discriminating between insiders and outsiders, and we cannot be confident about where, for any given person, the dividing line will be drawn. Indeed, the study we have just cited is ambiguous in one respect, since the main component of national identity that was shown to have a positive effect on interethnic trust was "cognitive identification," measured through agreement with the statements "I see myself as quite similar to most Malawians" and "Even though there is a lot of cultural variety among Malawians, we are more the same than we are different." These measures depict the nation as a homogenous group, whereas the more open "affective identification" expressed by simple pride in being a Malawian was less effective as a source of trust. So the lesson that might be drawn here is that national identity "works" as a ground of *generalized* trust only for people who assume that their conationals are like them, culturally and in other ways. On the other hand, the observed motivational power of national symbols—the Indian and Malawian flags in the cases cited—might appear to point in a more optimistic direction, since such symbols can be inclusive of all citizens regardless of cultural background. So we need to take a closer look at how different strands of national identity might affect people's willingness to trust their fellow-citizens and their political institutions.

To do so, we begin by interpreting the results of a cross-national study that uses the civic-ethnic distinction to explore the relationship between national identity and political trust (Berg and Hjerm 2012). In this study, countries were classified as having identities that were either more civic or more ethnic according to what individual respondents in those countries judged to be important in order to qualify as a true member of nation X. "Ethnic" features included being born in the country or having ancestors who lived there and espousing its religion; "civic" features included having citizenship, speaking the nation's language, and respecting its political institutions. Overall levels of political trust varied significantly across the eighteen countries in the study, as we should expect given the large range of factors that influence them.

In general, the study suggests that in countries where the ethnic components of national identity loom larger, political trust is lower, whereas in countries where people describe their national identity in civic terms, they report higher levels of trust in their political institutions. Using attitudes toward immigration as a proxy for civic versus ethnic identities at the individual level, it also appears that in states where the predominant understanding of national identity is mainly civic, those who describe their identities in civic terms display the highest levels of trust (McLaren 2015). Conversely, in states where national identities are described in largely ethnic terms, those with the strongest ethnic identities display the *lowest* levels of political trust (Berg and Hjerm 2012, 401). However we should exercise caution in interpreting these results. In the European states

from which the study is drawn, failure to control immigration is one of the main factors influencing citizens to register low levels of trust in their political institutions, so where a negative attitude toward immigrants (or xenophobia) is used as an indicator of ethnic national identity, it should come as no surprise that this should correlate with diminished political trust.

That this is so is suggested by a more recent study that also examines the interaction between collective and individual national identities, though in this case using the same criteria in both cases to determine whether identities are predominantly civic or ethnic (McLaren 2015). Comparing individuals with ethnic and civic identities, living in states in which the predominant identity is ethnic or civic, shows that those who display the highest levels of political trust are those who possess a civic identity living in a predominantly civically defined state, while those who display the *lowest* levels of political trust are those who possess an ethnic identity living in a predominantly civically defined state. In particular, these are individuals who, because they live in a civically defined state, are confronted with generally welcoming and tolerant attitudes and policies toward immigrants, whom they believe will struggle to adopt the features of national identity that they believe are important (McLaren 2015, 100). Individuals whose identity is ethnic, and who live in ethnically defined states, display levels of trust that are lower than those whose identity is civic living in civically defined states, but not significantly lower (99). So although having a civic identity is generally good for political trust, what also matters is whether an individual person's understanding of her national identity "fits" the society to which she belongs. As McLaren (2015, 99) puts it, "trust is higher when government policy fits well with the individual's own perception of what it means to be (or become) a country-national."

Does the contrast between more civic and more ethnic conceptions of nationhood have a similar effect on *social* trust, as measured by responses to the generalized trust question? It appears so. At both collective and individual levels, civic nationalism has a (weak) positive effect on social trust, whereas ethnic nationalism has a (stronger) negative effect (Reeskens and Wright 2013). Furthermore, if one looks at the widely researched, and mainly negative, effects of ethnic and cultural diversity on levels of trust, having a civic national identity appears not to moderate these effects, whereas having an ethnic national identity exacerbates them (Reeskens and Wright 2013, 169). The reason, we may assume, is that people who understand their identity in civic terms are able to include everyone in the society, whatever their ethnic background, as part of the collective "we"—they are generalized trusters—whereas those who employ ethnic understandings are bound to differentiate between those who truly belong and those who don't and therefore to extend their particularized trust only to people in the former group. But why are the effects of ethnic national identity on trust stronger than the effects of civic

identity? One reason might be that those who identify strongly with their nation are also more likely to interpret their identity in ethnic or cultural terms and to set harder boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Theiss-Morse 2009, 85–89). The motivational effects of having an ethnic identity may therefore be stronger—but only favorable toward the group who are seen as sharing that identity.

National Identity and Extending Trust to Newcomers

Let us therefore turn explicitly to what we can learn about the content of national identity and its impact not simply on trust relations in general (whether political or social), but in particular on the ease or difficulty with which trust is extended to newcomers. Do we have reason to believe that specific elements of national identity correlate with tolerance for others, especially those who are new to the political community, as well as wide relations of trust? Put differently, do we have reason to believe that specific elements of national identity may be better poised to underpin generalized rather than particularized trust? The intuition that underpins this question is roughly this. Civic identities, characterized as they are by a commitment to political institutions, underpinned by broadly democratic values, are thereby *also* committed to the view that these institutions can in principle be opened to any individual who shares those values. Correspondingly—recalling that shared identity is a source of trust—individuals whose identities are defined in mainly civic terms should be willing to extend generalized trust to newcomers who display a commitment to these principles, and who are thereby understood to share the relevant national identity markers. People who understand their identity in civic terms are able to include everyone in the society, whatever their ethnic background, as part of the collective “we.” On the other hand, ethnic identities, defined as they are by characteristics that cannot be adopted by newcomers, or at least that cannot be adopted as easily as can a commitment to shared political principles—including shared ancestries and thick cultural norms—are less likely to extend trust to newcomers, who in virtue of their being *new*, cannot be understood to share the relevant national identity markers. Those who employ ethnic understandings are thereby bound to differentiate between those who truly belong and those who don’t and therefore to extend their particularized trust only to people in the former group.

This is precisely the intuition that Matthew Wright attempts to capture (Wright 2011), using data collected in the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) over a period of nearly ten years. Across sixteen democratic countries, he finds strong correlation between individuals who define their national identity in “ascriptive,” that is, ethnic

terms, and those who support restricting immigration as well as restricting the rights of migrants who are admitted (Wright 2001, 845).[13] Wright hypothesizes, but does not demonstrate, a connection to trust: “it seems reasonable to expect that relatively ascriptive definitions of the national ingroup might impede bridging social networks and trust from forming between mainstream populations and immigrants” (Wright 2001, 855). The explanation, as above, can be supposed (but is not demonstrated) to run through the notion of *particularized* trust, which binds individuals who define their identities in ethnic terms, but not those who define their identities in civic terms.

More narrowly construed research confirms this finding. For example, among a sample of English adolescents, researchers found that what engenders distrustful attitudes toward immigrants is not the strength of a person’s national identification as such, but the extent to which national identity is conceived in an essentialist manner that unavoidably excludes newcomers (Pehrson, Brown, and Zagefka 2009). In this study subjects were asked to react to statements such as “It is our English blood that basically makes us who we are throughout our lives” to measure national essentialism, and a high rating on this measure was shown to have a positive effect on both their willingness to express attitudes of anger, fear, distrust, and annoyance toward asylum seekers and their willingness to support anti–asylum seeker political groups, together with a negative effect toward pro–asylum seeker groups. This research focused on attitudes and behavior at the individual level.

An associated cross-national study also looked at the effects of national identity at the collective level on attitudes toward immigrants (Pehrson, Vignoles, and Brown 2009). Using ISSP data from 2003, the study explored the effects of national identification (“How close do you feel to your country? How proud are you of being an X?”) and of three indicators for the content of national identity on positive or negative views of immigrants in general. The content indicators were civic (having citizenship in the country), cultural (speaking the national language), and ethnic (having ancestry there). Individually, those more strongly attached to their nation were also likely to express more negative views about immigrants, though the strength of the correlation varied considerably between countries (Pehrson, Vignoles, and Brown 2009, 30). Moving to the national level, however, the relationship was reversed: “people in countries with higher mean levels of identification reported *lower* levels of prejudice [toward immigrants].” When the *content* of national identity was factored in, significant contrasts emerged, with predominantly civic conceptions leading to more favorable attitudes toward immigrants, and predominantly cultural and ethnic conceptions indicating more negative attitudes.

A Canadian experiment offers a way to understand whether shared identities can overcome the worries that citizens may have about newcomers. In this study, experimenters triggered a sense of national identity before asking respondents for their

views about immigrants—what characteristics they typically possessed, whether they had positive or negative feelings toward them, and so on (Esses, Dovidio, Semenya, and Jackson 2005). Subjects were given one of four different fake editorials, one describing Canadian immigration in neutral fashion, the second highlighting the shared immigrant origins of the great majority of Canadians, the third emphasizing the common identity shared by longer-established and recently arrived citizens, and the fourth blending material from the second and third editorials; “the latter three editorials all promoted a civic/cultural conception of national identity, based on non-immigrants and immigrants being part of the national fabric and having a common allegiance to Canada” (Esses, Dovidio, Semenya, and Jackson 2005, 329). In every case, exposure to one of the “common identity” editorials had a positive effect on attitudes to immigrants, compared to the neutral benchmark, with the effect being stronger in the case of those whose social attitudes generally were likely to make them more hostile to immigrants. Interestingly, however, manipulating identity in this way had no significant effect on attitudes toward *immigration*, as opposed to immigrants as people. What the experiment suggests, along with what others we have reported, is that national identities (of the right kind) can serve as a bridge between groups whose relationships might otherwise be marred by suspicion or active hostility—ethnic or religious groups in the studies we described earlier, immigrants and nonimmigrants in the one referred to here.

Going Forward: A Cultural Account of National Identity’s Content

What practical conclusions might we draw from the evidence we have surveyed on trust and national identity? We take for granted, as we have throughout, that it is valuable for societies to experience high levels of social and political trust, and that they function best when this trust is generalized rather than particularized. The more generalized the trust, the better able it is to support commitment to and participation in shared political institutions. We have found support for the general proposition that sharing a national identity is one of the factors helping to create trust of both these kinds, but we have also found that that the particular form and content of the identity that is shared matters too. Where people identify more strongly with their nation, they tend to be more trusting of others, but strong identifiers are also more likely to hold an ethnic conception of the nation. This means that their trust is particularized, that is, that they are less willing to trust those who do not “belong,” whether new immigrants or settled minorities. They may also trust their political institutions less if they dislike the immigration and minorities policy that their governments are pursuing.

Yet immigration, and the cultural diversity that it brings with it, are inescapable features of modern liberal democracies, and there is some evidence that diversity of this kind can have negative effects on trust.[14] To counteract these effects, it is important to find sources of unity that are open to the new perspectives that newcomers inevitably bring, in ways that preserve the capacity for national identity to serve as a source of trust among *all* citizens (Lenard 2012). This suggests that it is a legitimate aim of public policy to "steer" national identities in a civic direction, emphasizing those elements that are accessible to newcomers, and downplaying the significance of features such as ancestry and religion that cannot help but be exclusive. The historical trajectory of liberal societies has in any case been to move away from more ethnic and toward more civic conceptions of national identity, though in recent years there has been evidence of some movement in the opposite direction (Citrin and Wright 2008; Wright 2011). But the question remains whether purely civic conceptions will be powerful enough to perform the trust-enhancing role we are asking them to play. Is it enough to think of fellow citizens as sharing values like the rule of law and democracy, or do we need a stronger sense of what distinguishes us from other nations? If so, how can this be created or maintained without falling back on ethnic markers of identity, which as we saw are likely to alienate immigrants and minorities and narrow the circle of trust?

Although most research on national identity and trust continues to be framed in terms of the civic/ethnic distinction, reflecting the contrast between civic and ethnic forms of nationalism that we described earlier in this article, some contributions introduce a third alternative—a "cultural" understanding of nationality (Pehrson, Vignoles, and Brown 2009; Shulman 2002). One reason for doing so is the ambiguity of features such as language when looked at through the spectacles of the civic/ethnic distinction. On the one hand, language might be regarded as an ethnic trait, since newcomers are very unlikely to become quickly fluent in the national language. On the other hand, a new language *can* be learnt without having to abandon previously held cultural attributes, and it is also a key component of civic identity, at least in the sense that attaining proficiency in a state's language is generally a key step toward participating in its political institutions. This suggests that it may well be worth exploring the value of "cultural" identity markers further, as a way to support and, indeed, bolster the capacity of civic identities to underpin trust relations that are not simply wide but also deep. As we conceive them, these are markers that can easily be adopted, or learned, by newcomers—unlike key features of ethnic identities, which are effectively closed to newcomers. Such markers include shared literary and artistic traditions, key political moments, food and leisure preferences, national jokes, and so on. They form a kind of shared knowledge that explains why certain principles, values, and norms characterize "our" political community rather than another one, even as these principles, values, and norms are a subject of ongoing conversation and contestation.

This sort of proposal is likely to find critics among those who resist any form of pressure on newcomers to adapt to their new state, and will be rejected by those who worry that national identities are always objectionably homogenizing. We can imagine these critics objecting that “not all Canadians love hockey” or “not all of the English enjoy gardening.” What we are proposing, however, is not that any newcomer must adopt the loves associated with the state they are joining. Rather, we suggest it is reasonable that newcomers learn about the cultural touchstones that underpin the national, political conversations they are joining, conversations that are already in progress when they arrive. These conversations must be open to newcomers, certainly, but it is a mistake to ignore that they are steeped in traditions filled with cultural references that can be learned (and subsequently rejected in open and inclusive public discourse) by newcomers. There will be work, going forward, to identify these markers, and to think through the mechanisms by which they are both imparted to newcomers and adapted by them over time. But these markers are those that define a *particular* political culture, and distinguish it in meaningful ways from others. Ensuring its continuity—alongside its openness to newcomers with the changes they inevitably bring—may serve to sustain and support widespread and deep trust relations among citizens in increasingly diverse states.

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Notes:

([1]) Robert Putnam offers an analogous distinction between bridging and bonding social capital, where the former binds members of heterogeneous groups and the latter binds only members of homogeneous groups. See Putnam (2007).

([2]) For example, Pierre might regard all Corsicans as French, while some Corsicans repudiate that identity.

([3]) Ignatieff was drawing in turn on a long-established contrast between “Western” and “Eastern” forms of nationalism, exemplified in works such as Kohn (1944) and Plamenatz (1976).

([4]) Some authors go further, and argue that the distinction itself is misleading and should be abandoned: see, e.g., Brubaker (2004). Others suggest that we need instead a tripartite distinction between civic, cultural, and ethnic conceptions of nationhood: see, e.g., Nielsen (1999); Shulman (2002).

([5]) The phrase comes from Smith (2003).

([6]) This position is persuasively defended in Yack (2012). For a cross-national study of popular conceptions of national identity that confirms the interpretive claim, see Jones and Smith (2001). The factors that explain the formation of national identities are widely debated between scholars: for a recent review, see Kunovich (2009).

([7]) Studies of American national identity using this methodology include Citrin, Reingold, and Green (1990); Theiss-Morse (2009), chap. 3; Citrin and Sears (2009). For an in-depth study of British national identity that distinguishes “cultural” and “civic” components, see Rothi, Lyons, and Chryssochoou (2005). For a comparative study of eighteen European countries using the civic-ethnic distinction, see Berg and Hjerm (2012).

([8]) A problem that needs to be addressed is that the civic components of national identity tend to be very widely endorsed, whereas the ethnic components allow much more discrimination between respondents. For a discussion of this problem, and a proposal that what should be taken into account is the *ranking* of the different components—i.e., the extent to which a respondent regards ethnic features as more important than civic features, or vice versa—see Wright, Citrin, and Wand (2012).

([9]) A variation of this approach invites respondents to take pride in specific national achievements such as economic performance or sporting success. For discussion of the merits of different national pride measures, see Smith and Kim (2006).

([10]) For a fuller discussion of the relationship between these and other ways of measuring the strength of national identity, see Miller and Ali (2014).

([11]) The “dictator game” is not strictly a game, since the recipient has no strategic choices to make in response to the allocator’s decision. In the experiments we describe, the choice the recipient has to make is which allocator to be paired with, or, in the second variant, whether to join the “game” at all.

([12]) Note that Newton does not claim that one form of trust causes the other, or even that their foundations are the same; rather his claim is that there are certain conditions (e.g., economic prosperity) that tend to support both political trust and social trust.

([13]) It is worth noting that Wright also finds that, across these countries, most people nevertheless adhere more to civic than ethnic national identities.

([14]) Whether and under what conditions ethnic and cultural diversity stresses trust relations is a subject of ongoing research. See Hooghe et al. (2009); Dincer (2011); Dinesen and Sonderskov (2015); Uslaner (2011); Stolle, Soroka, and Johnston (2008).

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