

Mind the trust gap: It's wider than you think

February 12 2020



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

New Yorkers are more trusting of others compared to Alabamans or Texans. While this regional divide between southerners and the rest of Americans is well documented, the gap is wider than perceived, a study from York University reveals.

"If you take into consideration the internal [migration](#) of southerners to the northern region and vice versa, and exclude migrants in the

calculation, the gap in [trust](#) levels between the two groups would be significantly bigger. This is because the trust levels don't change much if someone moved out of their native place after age 16," said Professor Cary Wu in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies, who conducted the study.

"The south is more collectivist than the other parts of the country, and that tends to generate lower trust compared to the individualist social relations seen in the rest of America."

Wu's study "Does Migration Affect Trust? Internal Migration and the Stability of Trust among Americans," published in *The Sociological Quarterly*, examined whether people are trusting because that's how they were raised from an early age or whether they constantly adjusted their trust throughout their life according to social experiences gained along the way.

"My research concludes that people tend to retain the trust they formed since childhood through lived experiences and cultural heritage," said Wu.

The sociologist analyzed migration history using cross-sectional data from the General Social Survey between 1972 and 2018. His study also sheds light on the possible reasons for [regional differences](#) in social institutions and individual wellbeing. For example, the higher rates of poverty and lower levels of political engagement in the south than other regions of the country could be direct results of the southerners' low trust levels, Wu said.

The regional gap in trust is not a result of the higher percentage of Black Americans—who tend to have lower trust—living in the south, he said. Instead, the distrust is deeply rooted in the unique social and political culture shaped by the defeat in the Civil War, history of slavery, poverty,

and prominence of religion in the southern United States.

"Ultimately, trust—or the belief in the benevolence of the world—is an individual's core value and identity, acquired at an early age and remains relatively stable in later life," Wu concluded.

More information: Cary Wu, Does Migration Affect Trust? Internal Migration and the Stability of Trust among Americans, *The Sociological Quarterly* (2020). [DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2019.1711259](https://doi.org/10.1080/00380253.2019.1711259)

Provided by York University

Citation: Mind the trust gap: It's wider than you think (2020, February 12) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-02-mind-gap-wider.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.