

New research sheds light on factors influencing trust and bias in societies

July 20 2023



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

People with more positive perceptions of their nation's institutions are

more likely to show favoritism toward fellow citizens, according to new research in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. This research suggests that support for national institutions could pose a challenge for establishing trust across borders.

Researchers also found that people who identify strongly with their own nation are likely to favor their fellow citizens, which aligns with previous studies. The possible role of [trust](#) in national institutions, however, was an unexpected development for researchers.

"We observed greater favoritism in trust toward fellow citizens (as opposed to foreigners) from participants who yielded more positive perceptions of institutions as trustworthy, benevolent, and able to provide security," says author Dr. Giuliana Spadaro, of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Researchers asked more than 3,200 participants in 17 societies to play a game that measured the level of trustworthiness they expect from a fellow [citizen](#), someone not from their country, and an unidentified stranger.

[Previous research](#) has shown that institutions offering more support and security can guarantee safe interactions with others outside of a person's in-group. Based on these findings, Dr. Spadaro's team hypothesized that people with a more positive opinion of their country's institutions would be less likely to show favoritism toward other citizens. Researchers were surprised to find that people with more faith in institutions were more likely to favor their fellow citizens.

"Trust among strangers is an essential feature of functioning societies," says Dr. Spadaro. "Our findings can inform citizens about the potential factors that might be associated to discrimination, such as national identification or being embedded in well-functioning institutions."

Dr. Spadaro emphasized that these findings do not show the cause of in-group favoritism, but rather that it is associated with positive opinions of national institutions. As a result, these findings should be considered preliminary and an encouragement for further investigation.

Looking ahead, Dr. Spadaro also believes that researchers should examine how people's attitudes toward institutions within their own local communities play a role in [favoritism](#).

"More attention should be paid to perceptions of local (compared to national) institutions, as citizens have a higher chance to interact first hand with local institutional representatives (e.g., police, municipalities, bureaucrats), and might actively rely on these perceptions," says Dr. Spadaro.

More information: Giuliana Spadaro et al, Identity and Institutions as Foundations of Ingroup Favoritism: An Investigation Across 17 Countries, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/19485506231172330](#)

Provided by Society for Personality and Social Psychology

Citation: New research sheds light on factors influencing trust and bias in societies (2023, July 20) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-07-factors-bias-societies.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.