

Social Trust and its Impact on Survey Response Rates

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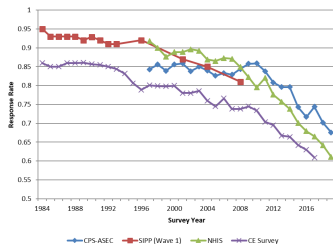
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Background and Research Question

- Response rates in household surveys declining consistently Meyer et al. (2015); Brick and Williams (2013)
- What are the reasons?
 - Holbrook et al. (2007); Reyes (2020) refer to a number of reasons - survey climate, time of contact etc.
 - But they are external to what could really drive non-response (NR)!
- Brick and Williams (2013); Tourangeau and Plewes (2013) suggest decline in social capital (Putnam (2000)) as a potential driver of NR.



Source: Meyer, Mokand Sullivan (2015), adapted and updated

Figure: Response Rates in Some Household Surveys

- We try to find out - "Is there a relationship between social trust (one of the seven dimensions of social capital) and the response rates over time?"

- **Why GSS?**

- ① A large nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized US adults
- ② Measuring confidence in institutions for nearly 30 years - suitable for trend analysis

- **Variables Used**

- ① *Outcome Variable:* GSS Response rates reported for the time period 1975-2016
- ② *Predictors:* Weighted average percentages of interpersonal and institutional confidence measures for each year
 - Confidence measures for 13 American institutions and an interpersonal trust - "How well people can be trusted?"
 - For each item, only the response option "A Great Deal" was considered
 - Used final adjusted survey weight 'wtssall' provided in GSS public use data file

- **Methodology**

- We empirically examine co-movement between response rates (RRs) and trust over time using univariate time series modeling
- Can test for co-movement and co-integration between RRs and trust over time

- **Key Considerations**

- Non-Stationarity → Perform Augmented Dickey-Fuller tests
- Co-Integration → Engle-Granger tests
- Autocorrelated residuals → Newey and West (1987) standard errors

Relationship Between Social Trust and Response Rates

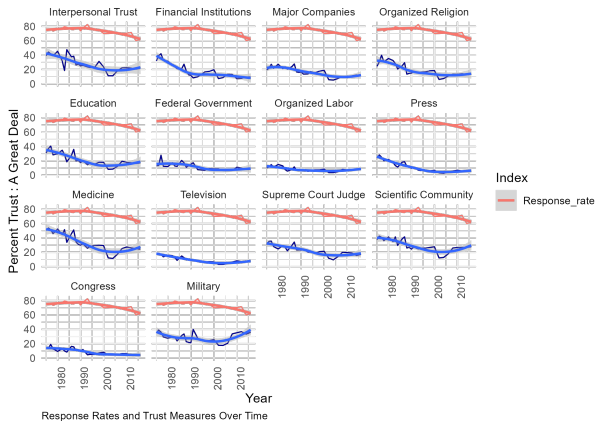


Figure: Dimensions of Social Trust and Response Rates: GSS 1975-2016

Empirical Results

We find no empirical evidence for co-movement between RRs and interpersonal or institutional trust as measured in the GSS

- Models estimated in first differences show no significant relationships
 - ADF tests indicate all series are non-stationary in levels
- Fail to observe co-integration (common trends) between RRs and trust across any measure
 - Engle-Granger tests on residuals fail to reject null of no co-integrating relationship between RRs and each measure of trust

Using aggregated data from the GSS alone, it is not clear whether changes in trust are a likely explanation for declining RRs

- Additional information likely needed beyond long-run time series

• General Findings

- Differences in trust, either interpersonal or institutional, alone does not explain differences in declining RRs in the GSS
- We find no time series evidence for a co-movement or co-integration between RRs and trust over 1975-2016

• Limitations and Future Work

- 1 Univariate time series only tell part of the story
 - Can only examine broad macro trends between RRs and trust over time
 - Abstracts from information about individual respondent behavior
- 2 Only observe measures of trust for *respondents*,
 - May be biased towards a null finding if response to the GSS endogenous to trusting behavior
- 3 GSS provides a single example from a social survey, does not explain declining RRs in *federal surveys* (e.g. CPS, ACS, etc.)
 - Institutional trust may explain broader declines in federally-administered surveys, avenue for further work

References

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Thank You!