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Trust in Society (Russell Sage Foundation Series on Trust)

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Trust plays a pervasive role in social affairs, even sustaining acts of cooperation among strangers who have no control over each other's actions. But the full importance of trust is rarely acknowledged until it begins to break down, threatening the stability of social relationships once taken for granted. *Trust in Society* uses the tools of experimental psychology, sociology, political science, and economics to shed light on the many functions trust performs in social and political life. The authors discuss different ways of conceptualizing trust and investigate the empirical effects of trust in a variety of social settings, from the local and personal to the national and institutional.

Drawing on experimental findings, this book examines how people decide whom to trust, and how a person proves his own trustworthiness to others. Placing trust in a person can be seen as a strategic act, a moral response, or even an expression of social solidarity. People often assume that strangers are trustworthy on the basis of crude social affinities, such as a shared race, religion, or hometown. Likewise, new immigrants are often able to draw heavily upon the trust of prior arrivals—frequently kin—to obtain work and start-up capital.

Trust in Society explains how trust is fostered among members of voluntary associations—such as soccer clubs, choirs, and church groups—and asks whether this trust spills over into other civic activities of wider benefit to society. The book also scrutinizes the relationship between trust and formal regulatory institutions, such as the law, that either substitute for trust when it is absent, or protect people from the worst consequences of trust when it is misplaced. Moreover, psychological research reveals how compliance with the law depends more on public trust in the motives of the police and courts than on fear of punishment.

The contributors to this volume demonstrate the growing analytical sophistication of trust research and its wide-ranging explanatory power. In the interests of analytical rigor, the social sciences all too often assume that people act as atomistic individuals without regard to the interests of others. *Trust in Society* demonstrates how we can think rigorously and analytically about the many aspects of social life that cannot be explained in those terms.

A Volume in the Russell Sage Foundation Series on Trust

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