

An exploration of trust, betrayal, & social identity

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Thesis summary

The chapters in this thesis are bound not by methodology, but by stemming from the same curiosity: that about how to improve cooperation and social cohesion in the light of diversity. Chapter 1 uses observational data from schools in the United States in the '90s to study how variations in exposure to racial diversity in school might affect turnout and political preferences of young adults. Higher racial diversity in school has a positive effect on turnout in presidential elections seven years later, and a higher share of blacks predicts a higher probability to identify as a Democrat. The effects do not differ significantly by race. The remaining three chapters use an experimental approach. Chapter 2 investigates whether preferences for strategic risk (relative to random risk) in one-shot, two player games depend on whether the players' interests are aligned or not. We find that this matters only if interests are not aligned. In this situation, the opponent faces a trade-off between private and social interest. As a result, one can evaluate their intentions from their action. Chapter 3 studies how betrayal aversion contributes to the difference in trust towards ingroup members versus towards outgroup members. Results indicate that it does not play an important role. This is true not only in the short run, but also over time, even as some participants trust ingroup members more than outgroup members seven months after the groups had been created. Chapter 4 empirically tests an assumption made in the identification of betrayal aversion. Results show that this assumption—that the underlying distribution of risks does not influence risk aversion—does not hold. Overall, the chapters in this thesis contribute to experimental methodology, to the experimental research of trust, and to political behavioral economics.