Insufficient Rights Protection and Insecurity Predict Low Levels of Trust in Haiti: An Analysis of Trust in Neighbors and Trust in Compatriots

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September 21, 2021

Key Findings:

- Trust in neighbors is low in Haiti, and trust in compatriots is even lower
- Trust levels are lower among those who feel insecure in their neighborhood
- Both types of interpersonal trust are lower among women
- Those who report that their basic rights are unprotected are less trusting in compatriots
- The wealthy are less trusting in their neighbors
- Trust in compatriots is higher among those who are very worried about COVID-19 illness
Interpersonal trust is critical to economic, social, and political development: high levels of trust are associated with stronger economic performance, elevated interest in public affairs, and better government performance, among other positive outcomes. Levels of interpersonal trust vary across communities, countries, and time. While many studies have examined the causes and consequences of interpersonal trust levels in advanced industrialized Western countries, less attention has been placed on what predicts interpersonal trust outside these contexts.

This Insights report focuses on Haiti. I examine the predictors of trust in neighbors versus trust in compatriots (fellow citizens) using data from a national phone survey of Haiti conducted by LAPOP in 2020. The survey included a split-sample experiment to test whether levels of trust differ if respondents are asked about trust toward Haitians in the country instead of trust toward people in their neighborhood. The survey measured levels of interpersonal trust (neighborhood vs. country) by asking one of the two following questions, depending on the questionnaire version to which respondents were randomly assigned:

**IT1N1**: And speaking of the people from your neighborhood, would you say that people in your community are very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy or untrustworthy...?

**IT1N2**: And speaking of Haitians, would you say that people in this country are very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, not very trustworthy or untrustworthy...?

On average, levels of trust are low. Responses to both variables are coded on a scale of 1-4, with 1 corresponding to “very untrustworthy” and 4 corresponding to “very trustworthy”. The mean level of trust in neighbors is 2.31 and the mean level of trust toward compatriots is 1.88. This difference in means is statistically significant at the 5% level.

Figure 1 summarizes the distribution in levels of trust toward people in the neighborhood vs. Haitians in the country. The results reveal that, on average, citizens in Haiti are more trusting toward their neighbors than they are toward their compatriots. While 17% of respondents view their neighbors as very
trustworthy, only 7% view their compatriots as very trustworthy. On the other end of the spectrum, 27% view their neighbors as very untrustworthy while 45% view their compatriots as very untrustworthy.

<table>
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<th>Trust in Neighbors</th>
<th>27%</th>
<th>32%</th>
<th>25%</th>
<th>17%</th>
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<td>Not very trustworthy</td>
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<td>Very trustworthy</td>
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<tr>
<th>Trust in Compatriots</th>
<th>45%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>18%</th>
<th>7%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Untrustworthy</td>
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<td>Very trustworthy</td>
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Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2020; Haiti v12.0.9.0

Figure 1: Trust in Haiti, 2020

This difference between mean levels of trust in neighbors and trust in compatriots is known among scholars as the “radius of trust”, which theorizes that the degree of trust can be classified based on social distance. Trust is “thickest” in the center of the circle, which represents family members and close friends, and it weakens moving outward toward compatriots and strangers located at the periphery of the circle. Scholars debate where trust in neighbors fits along this “radius of trust.” Sometimes it has been grouped as “particularized trust,” alongside trust toward family and friends, and contrasted with “generalized trust” toward compatriots. Using this classification, Newton and Zmerli (2011) found that high levels of particularized trust are not always associated with high levels of generalized social trust. Other studies, however, have used trust toward neighbors as a measure of “generalized trust” in people. More recently, scholars have argued that neighborhood-level trust should be treated as a third and distinct form of interpersonal
trust that is strongly influenced by personal experiences situated in the local context. The results for Haiti shown in Figure 1 support the notion that trust toward neighbors is distinct from trust toward compatriots, but they leave open the question of whether the former is itself distinct from trust in family and friends.

**Women Express Lower Levels of Trust, and the Wealthy Trust Less in Neighbors**

Do individuals’ characteristics predict trust toward neighbors and trust toward compatriots in the same way? To assess this question with respect to the Haitian population in 2020, I conduct a linear regression analysis to identify how a set of demographic and socio-economic indicators predict trust in neighbors versus trust in compatriots, and whether the predictors for the two types of trust differ. The initial set of independent variables comprises age, education, gender, urban/rural setting, and wealth. All independent variables are recoded on a scale of 0-1 to show the maximum effect of moving from one end to the other on the trust scale.
Figure 2: Socioeconomic and Demographic Predictors of Levels of Trust Toward Neighbors (%)
Figures 2 and 3 show that, on average, women in Haiti have lower levels of trust toward both neighbors and compatriots than men. Women are predicted to be 0.36 levels less trusting toward neighbors and 0.41 levels less trusting toward compatriots compared to men. Many past studies have found that groups that have been historically discriminated against are less trusting toward others after controlling for demographic factors. Alesina and La Ferrara (2002) suggest that women may be less trusting because they have less social interaction and participate less in social activities in comparison to men. One would have to examine social life in Haiti to know whether that explanation fits this case. Future research might also consider whether another explanation for the difference in levels of trust between men and women is related to the high levels of gender-based violence in Haiti.

However, while this gender effect is intriguing, the relationship between gender and trust in Haiti has not been consistent over time.

Higher levels of wealth are associated with lower levels of trust toward neighbors. A move from the lowest amount of wealth to the highest amount...
of wealth lowers the level of trust toward neighbors by 0.47 on the 4-point scale. This runs counter to the notion of Alesina and La Ferrara (2002) that individuals who are economically unsuccessful are often less trusting. Interestingly, they find that those who live in neighborhoods with high degrees of income disparity tend to hold lower levels of trust toward neighbors. One possibility, then, is that income inequality in Haiti contributes to lower levels of trust in neighbors among the wealthy, but more work is needed in this area. The wealth variable is not statistically significant for predicting levels of trust toward compatriots.

Education, urban (vs. rural) residence, and age are not statistically significant predictors of trust toward neighbors or toward compatriots at the 5% level. However, education level is positively correlated with level of trust toward neighbors at the 10% level. At that level of significance, receiving post-secondary education (versus no education) is predicted to increase an individual’s level of trust toward neighbors by 0.46. Existing literature consistently identifies higher education level as a predictor of higher levels of trust.13

Believing Rights Are Not Protected and Insecurity Hurt Interpersonal Trust

What other variables might be responsible for low levels of interpersonal trust in Haiti, and the difference in trust toward neighbors and trust toward compatriots? The United Nations report on Haiti issued February 11, 2021, reviewed Haiti’s developments in areas such as good governance, violence reduction, and human rights protection since the previous report issued on September 25, 2020. According to the report, Haiti is challenged by increasing levels of gang violence, kidnappings, and killings. The government’s lack of capacity to protect citizens’ basic rights and hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes leaves communities in a state of insecurity. Haiti also lacks sufficient COVID-testing ability and healthcare infrastructure and suffers from a lack of access to water and sanitation. The impact of the pandemic, though causing far fewer infections and deaths than some anticipated, further aggravated
socioeconomic and humanitarian conditions in Haiti. These attributes of Haiti could be important in explaining the low levels of interpersonal trust found in the survey.

To assess the relevance of these challenges for levels of interpersonal trust, I assess how perceptions of the protection of basic rights, neighborhood insecurity, and worriedness about coronavirus in the household predict levels of trust toward neighbors and compatriots. Scholarship provides reason to expect that these factors help determine levels of trust. First, when citizens perceive their basic rights to be protected, they are more likely to act in a trustworthy manner without fear that they will be taken advantage of. In a cross-national analysis of social trust, Delhey and Newton (2005) find that good government (democracy) is a predictor of generalized social trust at the national level.

Second, social trust may be influenced and eroded by feelings of personal threat and insecurity in the community. Brehm and Rahn (1997) find that experiences of victimization such as burglary and the fear of walking at night in one's neighborhood undermine one's trust in others. Third, and finally, crises and disasters can produce a significant short-term effect on interpersonal trust. Carlin, Love, and Zechmeister (2014) found that where states lack capacity, natural disaster weakens interpersonal trust. On the contrary, a recent study in Sweden found that the active Coronavirus crisis led to higher levels of institutional trust and interpersonal trust. Yet, that country has far greater state capacity compared to Haiti.
Figure 4: An Expanded Model Predicting Levels of Trust Toward Neighbors

Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP
Figures 4 and 5 present the results of linear regression analysis that includes these three additional variables, while controlling for the same variables in Figures 2 and 3.\(^{19}\) The results in Figure 5 show a strong and significant negative correlation between views that basic rights are unprotected and trust toward compatriots.\(^{20}\) A movement from 0 to 1 in this variable is associated with a 0.34-point decrease in the level of trust. This finding is consistent with results from existing literature\(^ {21}\) that examines the connection between measures of formal institutions – rule of law, democratic equality, effectiveness of government – and generalized interpersonal trust.\(^ {22}\) It is also supported by the Hobbesian theory that in a state where there exists no central authority to exercise the rule of law, everyone lives in constant fear of one another, and the state is characterized by a conflict “of every man against every man.” This is not to say that Haiti is in a Hobbesian state of nature but, rather, to suggest that instability and violence in the country move society in that direction, with consequences for trust in compatriots.

Figure 4 shows that opinion on protection of basic rights is not a significant
predictor of interpersonal trust at the neighborhood level. This finding is consistent with research stating that community level trust is influenced by personal experiences with members of the community, and by social perceptions of that shared space as context. In other words, the null finding is consistent with the notion that levels of trust toward neighbors are predicted more so by concrete experiences situated in the neighborhood, rather than by generalized conceptions.

Figures 4 and 5 show that feelings of neighborhood insecurity hold a strong and significant negative correlation with both trust toward compatriots and trust toward compatriots. The magnitude of change is greater for interpersonal trust at the neighborhood level (-0.64) than for interpersonal trust at the national level (-0.43). Feelings of neighborhood insecurity may be propelled by personal experiences of victimization, stories told by others in the community, and media reports of the neighborhood. The finding here is consistent with other studies, which have found that personal experiences with burglary and crime and feelings of personal threat lead to lower levels of trust toward others. To the extent that perceptions of neighborhood insecurity can extend and translate into general feelings of personal threat and insecurity, it is not surprising that neighborhood insecurity also predicts trust toward compatriots.

Interestingly, being worried about COVID-19 illness in the household is associated with higher levels of interpersonal trust at the national level. Figure 5 indicates that on average, those who are “very worried” about illness are 0.20 points more trusting toward compatriots than those who are “not worried at all.” While these results are surprising given previous literature documenting the negative impact of natural disaster on interpersonal trust in Haiti, Esaiasson et al. (2020) found that citizens in Sweden tended to react to the pandemic by increasing in solidarity. Their argument is based on principles of the “rally effect.” They argue that citizens perceive the crisis as an external threat toward their community, much like when waging war against an external state. Even though Haiti’s national context and state capacity is extremely different from that of Sweden, it is possible that a similar rally dynamic is responsible for the positive relationship between worry about COVID-19 illness and national trust. In fact, Lupu and Zechmeister (2021)
find that priming the pandemic in Haiti resulted in other opinion changes (e.g., increase in presidential approval) consistent with a rally effect.

Figure 4 shows that concern about COVID-19 illness is not a significant predictor of interpersonal trust at the community level. This result is consistent with studies that suggest community level trust is shaped by personal experiences in the neighborhood context; given that Haiti has a relatively low number of COVID-19 deaths in comparison to other Latin American countries, especially at the time of the survey in the second quarter of 2020, concern about the pandemic is likely not a function of high levels of illnesses and deaths in one's own neighborhood.

Conclusion

This Insights report reveals that levels of interpersonal trust in Haiti are low, both with respect to trust in neighbors and trust in compatriots. The analysis also shows that levels of trust vary in expected ways: Haitians are more trusting in their neighbors than in their fellow citizens.

The findings suggest that some variables are predictors of both types of trust in Haiti in 2020. Women (vs. men) have lower levels of trust at the neighborhood and national level. These results are not surprising given that women belong to a historically marginalized group. The two types of trust are also strongly predicted by perceptions of neighborhood insecurity. However, trust in neighbors and trust in compatriots are also predicted by different variables. Higher wealth is associated with lower levels of trust toward neighbors. Meanwhile, perceptions of basic rights being unprotected predicts lower trust in compatriots and worry about coronavirus illness in the household is associated with higher levels of trust in compatriots. More research should be done to investigate the relationship between different COVID-19 indicators and interpersonal trust in Haiti.

This report concludes by highlighting that trust toward compatriots is significantly lower than trust toward neighbors in Haiti. Given that those who report that their basic rights are unprotected are on average less trusting
toward fellow Haitians, I recommend that policymakers who are interested in increasing levels of generalized trust toward other Haitians should work toward strengthening their protection of citizens’ basic rights. Overall, low levels of interpersonal trust are strongly predicted by feelings of neighborhood insecurity. As indicated in the United Nations report on Haiti, reducing violence is a critical benchmark for Haiti to meet as it addresses mounting levels of insecurity.

Notes


3. The experiment was also included in the national phone surveys of Peru and Mexico in 2020. However, there is no statistically significant difference between the mean levels of trust toward neighbors and compatriots.

4. When mean levels of trust toward neighbors is assessed across regions (North, South, Center, West), we find that the mean level of trust in Center is higher than trust in other regions, and the difference is statistically significant for Center vs. South and Center vs. West. The mean level of trust toward compatriots is highest in North but the differences are not statistically significant.


8. These independent variables were re-coded from 0 to 1. Age is a continuous measure of the respondent’s age in years. The alternative measure of age, age in quantiles, produces similar results. I checked that there do not exist nonlinear patterns for age. Movement in age from 0 to 1 represents a move from youngest to oldest of all respondents. Education is a categorical variable that records the highest level of education obtained by the individual, the lowest
category being no education and the highest being post-secondary education. Movement from 0 to 1 in education is from no education to post-secondary education. The question on gender allows individuals to specify whether they identify as a man, woman, or other. Those identifying as women and others are represented by a 1, while those identifying as men are represented by 0. Urban is coded as 1 if the respondent indicates living in an urban area, and 0 if in a rural area. The wealth variable was calculated based on an additive index of 12 binary variables on household possessions. R16 was omitted from the additive index because it was only asked to the fraction of respondents who answered yes to R1. Responses recorded as “Don’t know” or “No response” were imputed to 0, where I assume that the respondent does not have the possession. The alpha score for this wealth variable is 0.73. Movement from 0 to 1 is from individuals who own none of the 12 possessions to individuals who own all 12 possessions. No respondent scored a 1.

9. In Figures 2 and 3, the dots represent the predicted change in level of trust associated with each variable. Dots to the right of the vertical red line indicate positive relationships while dots to the left of the line indicate negative associations. The bars extending from each dot represent the 95% confidence interval around each estimate. A variable is statistically significant (p<0.05) if its bars do not intersect the red line. The coefficients represent the maximal effect for each variable, moving from 0 to 1.

10. UN Secretary-General (2021).

11. Replication of the analysis using previous rounds of AmericasBarometer datasets in Haiti reveals that while the relationship between women and trust toward neighbors has been negative since 2016-17, it has been an insignificant predictor in various other years and a positive relationship between women and trust was detected in the 2010-2011 round. The relationship between other socioeconomic demographic indicators and trust have been inconsistent over the previous rounds as well, suggesting that these indicators may be context specific.

12. After regional dummies variables are controlled for, wealth becomes only significant at the 10% level for predicting trust toward neighbors.


14. UN Secretary-General (2021).

15. Protection of basic rights was measured by asking “To what extent do you think that citizens’ basic rights are well protected by the political system of Haiti?” from 1 being “Not at all” to 7 being “A lot”. This was reversed and re-coded from 0 to 1, so movement from 0 to 1 means
moving from believing that the political system of Haiti protects basic rights of citizens a lot to believing that the political system does not protect basic rights. The recoded variable is thus labeled “Reports Unprotection of Basic Rights”.

16. Neighborhood insecurity was measured by asking “Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being assaulted or robbed, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe or very unsafe?” from 1 being “very safe” to 4 being “very unsafe”. This is recoded from 0-1 in terms of a minimum (very safe) to the maximum (very unsafe).

17. Worry about COVID-19 in the household was measured by asking “How worried are you about the possibility that you or someone in your household will become sick with the coronavirus?” from 1 being “very worried” to 4 being “not at all worried”. This is recoded from 0-1 in terms of a minimum (not at all worried) to the maximum (very worried).

18. Esaiasson et al. (2020).

19. Because the variables for protection of basic rights, neighborhood insecurity, and worry about COVID-19 illness in the household all contain high proportions of missing data, I recoded them by imputing the missing values to the mean. This change increased the significance level of the coronavirus variable at the national level. In another model I also controlled for regional dummies variables. That model obtained very similar results, with nearly identical coefficients compared to Figures 4 and 5.

20. The mean reported level of basic rights being unprotected is 0.77 on the recoded scale from 0 to 1.


22. I also tested the impact of a related indicator, national pride (B3), on levels of trust toward compatriots and neighbors. National pride was a significant positive predictor of trust toward compatriots, after controlling for the standard socioeconomic variables in Figure 1; yet it was no longer significant after neighborhood insecurity and worry about COVID-19 illness were added into the regression.


24. A study conducted by Pérez (2011) using data from the 2008 AmericasBarometer series also found a significant negative relationship between levels of neighborhood insecurity and trust
toward neighbors.


27. Zéphyr et al. (2011). This LAPOP report conducted in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake in 2010 found that the average level of interpersonal trust dropped from 40.8 in 2008 to 32.7 in 2010 on a scale of 0-100.


References


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This report was edited by Dr. Elizabeth J. Zechmeister and Dr. Mariana Rodríguez. This report was translated by Dr. Juan Camilo Plata, Dr. J. Daniel Montalvo, Rubí Arana, Dr. Mamadou Lamine Sarr, and Abrianna Rhodes. This report was audited by Alec Tripp and Dr. Carole J. Wilson. Formatting, production, copy editing, graphics, and report distribution were handled by Rubí Arana and Laura Sellers. Our data and reports are available for free download on the project website. Please follow us on Twitter or Facebook to stay in touch.

As a charter member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Transparency Initiative, LAPOP is committed to routine disclosure of our data collection and reporting processes. More information about the AmericasBarometer sample designs can be found at vanderbilt.edu/lapop/core-surveys.

This Insights report is made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Vanderbilt University. The contents of this Insights report are the sole responsibility of its author and LAPOP and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, the United States Government or any other supporting organization. LAPOP’s AmericasBarometer surveys are supported predominantly by USAID and Vanderbilt University.