

# Trust in Informal Groups as a Resource for Achieving the Generalized Trust of the Population in the Altai Territory

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**Keywords:** confidence, informal confidence, trust, resources, generalized confidence, social capital

**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to consider the features of the manifestation of population confidence in informal groups in the Altai Territory. Our research data was collected using a sociological study conducted in the Altai Territory in 2019 among the population aged 15 to 75 years (n = 400). We examined the confidence level with respect to four informal groups, membership in which implied acquaintance and personal experience of communication, namely: work colleagues, friends, close acquaintances, neighbors, and close relatives. As the study clearly demonstrates, the level of confidence in informal groups is largely determined by the status and ideological positions. The general social situation will determine the number of available resources of the generalized confidence in the regional society.

## 1. Introduction

The ability of people to unite based on common goals and interests differentiates different social groups and entire societies in space and time [9]. And the ability of people to unite is determined by the presence within the community of norms and values shared by all its members [4], as well as due to the willingness to subordinate their interests to group interests [11].

For informal groups with whom the individual has close relations based on kinship, friendship, affection, mutual assistance, trust are considered both integral and necessary attributes. This fact is due to the ease and personal significance of the interactions being made, the duration of contacts, the possible delicacy of the subject of the relationship [7]. Informal relations and spontaneous communication implemented in them serve as the basis for effective cooperation and the creation of voluntary associations, acting, along with trust, as an essential component of social capital. But it is in informal social networks that the relationship of trust is horizontal, parity, and mutual (reciprocal) [8]. In contrast to generalized trust, which is an indefinite feeling, not directed at anyone, which determines the perception of the world around us as hostile, alarming, or open and benevolent [12], trust in informal groups obeys mechanisms that have a socio-psychological nature and regulate the processes of group education [6].

According to experimental and theoretical studies [1, 2, 6], people tend to have greater confidence in the members of those groups with which they identify and share a collective identity. And people have greater confidence in the members of those groups that can provide a positive contribution to their self-concept and maintaining a positive self-image. Identification is based on categorization and comparison according to certain criteria [10], such as the degree of kinship, ethnicity and citizenship, commonality of behavior, lifestyle and style, ideas and preferences, place of residence, geographical and administrative position, frequency of communications, common destiny, etc. These criteria structure the boundaries of interpersonal trust [5], expanding them and taking them beyond personal acquaintance and a rational assessment of costs characteristic of interindividual dyadic connections interpreted in categories of social exchange [3]. Thus, moving from the personal level to the social-group level of identification, individuals begin to show impersonal trust, the basis for which is only the category of membership and those ideas, expectations, and stereotypes that are associated with this group. At the horizontal level, such an informal in-group trust serves as an intermediate between a generalized trust in people about whom we know nothing, and interpersonal trust based on the experience of interaction. On a vertical level, such trust serves as an intermediate between personal trust among individuals and completely impersonal trust in social institutions [7]. Such a dual, intermediate position

of informal trust determines the indefinite and dual nature of social capital formed in informal networks, its quality, and its relationship with broader processes of social and civil integration.

On the one hand, practically no one doubts that horizontal voluntary, informal organizations contribute to the consolidation of society and the effectiveness of the social system. On the other hand, excessive trust in one group to the detriment of another may lead to the manifestation of group favoritism, the emergence of isolated castes with a predominantly internal, bonded type of social capital. Mobilization of small groups of people, especially based on ethnic, racial, religious, or extreme ideological convictions, is often accompanied by particularistic demands and casts doubt on democratic institutions. And on an individual level, the mobilization of small groups threatens with the loss of individuality, the identification of the desires and needs of others with their personal goals, which is fraught with a loss of criticality and various social risks [5, 10].

The purpose of this article is to consider the features of the manifestation of trust of the population living in the Altai Territory to informal groups.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The basis for the preparation of the report was the results of a sociological study conducted in the Altai Territory among the population aged 15 to 75 years ( $n = 400$ ) in 2019. The principles of planning the sample took into account two aspects: (a) representativeness for the regions as a whole; (b) a reasonably compact distribution over the territory. "Given these circumstances, the scheme of zoned (stratified) proportional sampling in combination with serial sampling (multi-stage sampling using quota sampling) was used. Since such a sample refers to a "territorial" one, the structure of which is determined in accordance with the structure of employment, our sample planning reflected the correlation of living conditions with respondents' social characteristics [13]. The sample used is representative by gender, age, and type of settlement. From the point of view of socio-economic development, the Altai Territory is characterized by a number of features of quality and living standards. The Territory is not among the regions of leaders, donors; indicators related to the quality of life tend to worsen in most cases. Despite the fact that the situation in the region is not unique, there are objective conditions in the region that form a low quality of social trust.

The article considers trust in four informal groups, membership in which implied acquaintance and personal experience of communication. These are groups such as work colleagues, friends, close acquaintances, neighbors, and close relatives. The criteria for identifying the respondent with these groups included the following: relationship, professional ties, the proximity of the place of residence, and close and horizontal relations based on shared interests, value orientations, and preferences. It was this set of identification features that reflected the substantial grounds for the formation of social capital conducive to the development of civil society. Respondents assessed the degree of trust in each of these groups on a five-point scale (from "I completely don't trust" to "I completely trust"). At the preliminary stage of processing the survey data, one-dimensional distributions were analyzed, and private confidence indices were calculated based on information about the balance of estimates made by the respondents (in percent) on the corresponding question of the questionnaire. The balance of assessments was the ratio of the sum of shares (in percent) of definitely positive and rather positive answers to the sum of shares (in percent) of definitely negative and rather negative answers. When calculating the index, neutral responses were not taken into account. The subsequent stages of the analysis corresponded to the stages of the algorithm that we used in the study of generalized trust. Even though the level of measurement was ordinal at best, the form of distribution helped to understand the general trends and biases characteristic of respondents' estimates, to carry out a visual comparative analysis of the differences in the severity of trust in these groups.

## **3. Results**

The distribution characterizing the estimates of trust in colleagues at work was symmetrical. In its form, the distribution was as close as possible to the normal distribution. The average value was 2.97 points, and the median was 3 points, the confidence index was almost equal to one (0.99), which testified to nearly equal shares.

To the greatest extent, respondents trusted their relatives and relatives (57.0% gave the answer "I completely trust"); the average rank was 4.37 points, the median was 5 points. The confidence index for this category was maximum and very high (17, 42). Confidence in close acquaintances and friends showed a

slightly lesser degree (average score was 3.79, the median was 4.0 points), the confidence index was 7.37. With regard to neighbors, it can be argued that this category, as the category of colleagues, was practically not considered by respondents as a significant object for expressing trust. The average value in the sample was 2.96 points, and the median was 3.0 points. More than 10% of the respondents did not trust their neighbors at all, and every fifth respondent answered “I don’t really trust.” As a result, the confidence index for this category was 1.02 points (Table 1).

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES ON INDICATORS OF CONFIDENCE IN INFORMAL GROUPS, % AND INDEX

Community	I don't trust at all	I don't really trust	Yes and no	I rather trust	I totally trust	Confidence index
Work colleagues	7.8	21.8	41.2	24.3	4.9	0.99
Friends, close acquaintances	2.5	6.9	21.2	47.3	22.0	7.37
Neighbors	10.6	20.6	36.9	26.1	5.7	1.02
Close relatives	2.3	2.7	7.9	30.1	57.0	17.42

A comparative analysis of differences in the average level of trust in groups, differentiated by various socio-demographic and sociocultural parameters, revealed that these factors had an uneven effect on the trust shown in informal groups. Only two factors, such as nationality and social status, had a high level of statistical significance of differences in estimates of trust in all four categories. Respondents demonstrating a Russian identity showed a higher level of trust both in groups of relatives and friends and in networks of professional and local ties tied to their place of residence. The nature of the influence of social status was more complex since the number of comparison categories was quite large.

The main differences in attitude towards colleagues were observed between non-working respondents (2.7) and employees (3.07). These findings are understandable because it is employees who are forced to build horizontal ties with their colleagues due to their subordinate status. These horizontal connections represent a kind of internal social capital of the organization, contributing to the stability of their position, obtaining moral and professional support. Due to the lack of need for such actions, unemployed citizens do not feel trust in colleagues whom they never had, or at least at the time of the study. The level of trust in relatives, close friends, and acquaintances was also minimal among the non-working population (average value 3.6), which significantly distinguished them from other status categories in which the level of friendly trust was much higher (3.75-3.94). As regards neighbors, the greatest differences were observed between students. Their neighbors were not significant others to be trusted (the average value on a scale of 2.71, this was below the theoretical average), and respondents of retirement age who were confident in their neighbors more than all others categories (3.14).

The factors of the place of residence and age determined differences in the level of trust in colleagues and neighbors, which was significantly higher among respondents living in rural areas (average values of 3.08 and 3.19) than among those living in the city (2.92 and 2.85). In the youngest group up to 24 years old, trust in colleagues was as low as possible, which distinguished it from other age categories. In relation to neighbors, three groups were distinguished, the ratings in which significantly differed from each other: a group of 18-24 years old (the lowest ratings), over 60 years old (the highest), and all other groups. We already discussed this effect of age above when we considered differences in status groups.

In contrast to the place of residence and age, the gender factor, the factor of education and material status, on the contrary, manifested themselves in the assessment of groups belonging to the closest "circle of trust" (according to F. Fukuyama). Namely, we consider the circle of relatives and friends, to which the following groups experienced greater confidence: (a) women (average values of 3.83 and 4.41, compared with 3.76 and 4.32 in men), (b) respondents with higher education (average values of 3.87 and 4.45, in the group with lower educational level are 3.76 and 4.33), and (c) respondents who localize themselves on the scale of financial standing at the level not lower than average (average values of 3.81-3.83, compared with 3.54-3.66 in the group of respondents considering themselves poor). The level of religiosity caused differences on only one of the four scales of informal trust, namely trust in neighbors, which was significantly higher among believers (average value is 3.22) than among non-believers (average value is 2.91).

Given the statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) and reasonably strong correlations ( $\rho \approx 0.4$ , except for a pair of scales “work colleagues” - “close relatives”, where  $\rho = 0.2$ ), it was decided to conduct a psychometric test of the possibility building a single index of trust in informal groups. The reliability (internal consistency) of the resulting scale was quite high (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.7$ ), none of the scales, when removed, contributed to improving the quality of the index. In this connection, the decision was made to leave all four variables in spite of the weakness of some partial correlations. The discriminatory indicators were quite acceptable (Table 2). The indicator variable of trust in neighbors had the least discriminative values (1.04), and it was also the most difficult. So, to give a probability of 0.5 at least 3 points on the question of trust in neighbors, it was necessary to have a degree of informal trust almost one standard deviation above the average level. Whereas for the same result on a scale to relatives and relatives (the least difficult scale), a much lower level of trust was required (-2.47).

TABLE 2. EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE IN INFORMAL GROUPS IN VARIOUS SOCIAL GROUPS OF RESPONDENTS, AVERAGE VALUES

	<b>Alpha on exception</b>	<b><math>\beta_1</math></b>	<b><math>\beta_2</math></b>	<b><math>\beta_3</math></b>	<b><math>\beta_4</math></b>	<b>D</b>
All categories	<b>0.70</b>					
Work colleagues	0.63	-3.22	-1.21	1.16	3.79	1.44
Friends, close acquaintances	<b>0.57</b>	<b>-7.17</b>	<b>-4.74</b>	<b>-1.79</b>	<b>2.73</b>	<b>3.16</b>
Neighbors	0.67	-2.51	-0.96	0.90	3.25	1.04
Close relatives	<b>0.68</b>	<b>-4.71</b>	<b>-3.76</b>	<b>-2.47</b>	<b>-0.35</b>	<b>1.49</b>

#### 4. Discussion

As the results of the study demonstrate, the level of trust in informal groups is largely determined by the status and ideological positions of the population. The general social situation will determine the number of available resources of generalized trust in the regional society. This situation makes trust in informal groups dependent on the general nature of the socio-economic situation in the region, the parameters of the property and status of the population, and the stigmatization of low-status groups of the population. When trying to determine the resource of social trust, in addition to status differences, generational and worldview differences manifested themselves to a high degree. They are caused by a change in moral and ethical guidelines and living conditions that have determined the daily lives of people for many decades. More than that, their conversion into a situation of infinite variability and relativity has led to the loss of the need for trust in those who tomorrow may simply not be near.

#### 5. Conclusion

The highest level of trust is maintained in groups of relatives and friends playing the most significant role in the life of each respondent. At the same time, the traditions of maintaining trusting, and even just some kind of relations with neighbors and colleagues, characteristic of the Soviet era and reflected in numerous examples of mass art culture (for instance, in the films “Our Neighbors” (1957), “Five Evenings” (1978), “East-West” (1999), “Office Romance” (1977), and others), have practically lost their significance and have been largely transformed due to both increased labor and territorial mobility.

#### 6. Acknowledgments

This article was prepared with the financial support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research grant No. 19-011-00417 “Factors and Mechanisms of Building Confidence in the System of Maintaining Social Security in the Border Regions of Russia.”

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