

Why do we trust others? Evidence from Germany, Italy, the UK and the USA

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Abstract

Trust is key for economic and social development. But why do we trust others? And why are we trustworthy? We study motives behind trust and trustworthiness in strangers, using data from an investment game with 4,709 respondents, representative of people living in Germany, Italy, the UK and the USA. Counter to what is generally assumed in classical economics, we find that calculative expectations of returns and reciprocity are not the main drivers of trusting and trustworthy behaviour. Instead, players take a broad range of values and attitudes into account when they make trusting decisions, and unconditional kindness is the single most important predictor of both behaviours.