

SOCIAL CAPITAL DATA BRIEF: SOCIAL TRUST

BACKGROUND

Social capital is having the networks, norms, and structures that promote upward economic mobility by increasing social stability and widening access to key resources.¹ In 2019, the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute partnered with Leading on Opportunity, Opportunity Insights, Foundation for the Carolinas, Communities In Schools, the YMCA of Greater Charlotte, and SHARE Charlotte, with additional funding support from the Gambrell Foundation, to conduct a new baseline measurement of social capital in Mecklenburg County. **Social trust** (or trust in neighbors, institutions, and general society) is linked to relationship building and is one indicator of social capital.² This data brief looks at how social trust varies by race, ethnicity, age, income, and education in Mecklenburg County.

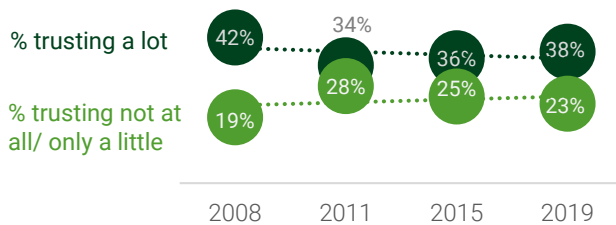


Social capital can create opportunities for upward economic mobility²

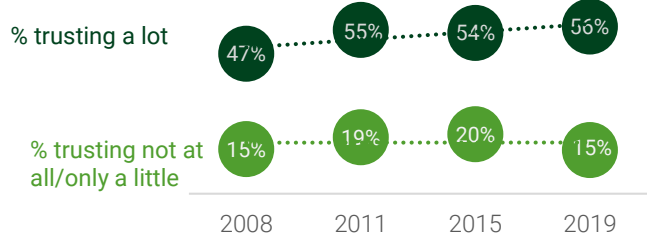
HISTORIC TRENDS

Two types of social trust have been measured in Mecklenburg County intermittently since 2008. Trends suggest that trust in “police in your neighborhood” is typically higher than trust of “people in your neighborhood,” and that fewer than half of residents have “a lot” of trust in neighbors. In 2019, 38% of respondents had high trust in neighbors, while 56% had high trust in neighborhood police.

Trust in neighbors



Trust in neighborhood police



2019 DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

The 2019 Social Capital Survey consisted of a 400-person sample that was demographically representative of Mecklenburg County. Results for three social trust questions (neighbors, police, and a new question on community) were analyzed to determine how responses varied by demographic characteristics. Statistically meaningful trends are reported.³

Generally speaking, would you say that you can trust...

people in your neighborhood?



African Americans and Latinx respondents were more likely to report lower trust than Whites.



Younger adults (ages 18-34) were more likely to have lower trust in neighbors than those ages 55 and over.



College graduates were more likely to have higher trust in neighbors than those without a college degree.

police in your neighborhood?



African American respondents were more likely to report lower trust than Whites.



Adults under age 55 were more likely to have lower trust than adults 55 years and over.



College graduates were more likely to have higher trust in police than those without a college degree.

those you consider a part of your community?



African American respondents were more likely to have lower trust than Whites.



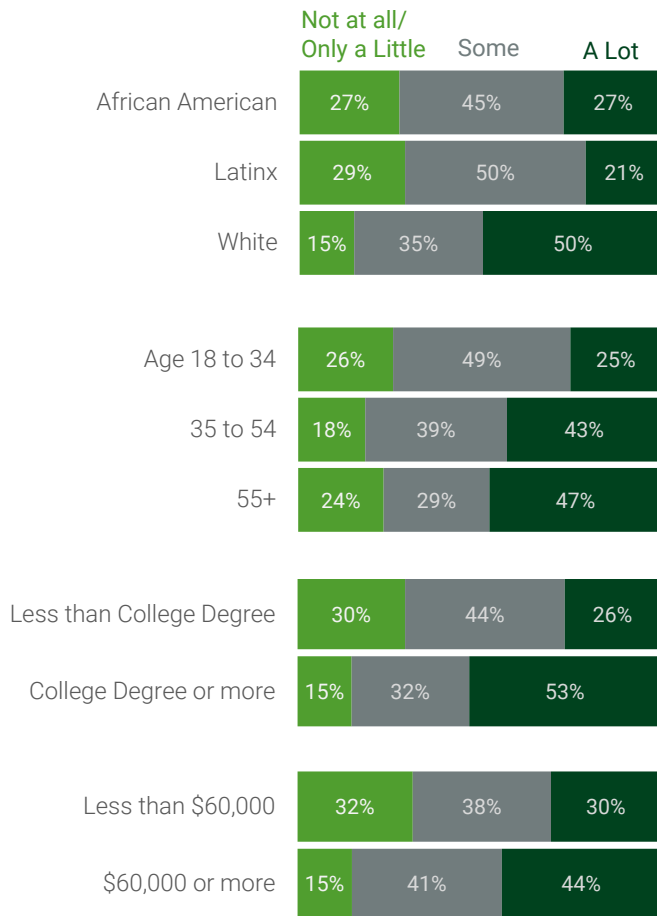
Respondents who had volunteered in the last 12 months were more likely to have higher trust in the community than those who had not volunteered.

1. This is the working definition of social capital developed by the Charlotte Social Capital Research Committee.; 2. Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez. (2014); 3. Regression analysis was conducted to determine if trends had statistical significance, controlling for variance caused by age, race, ethnicity, and education. Significant variables are reported. Income, length of residency in Mecklenburg County, and gender were also analyzed found not significant.

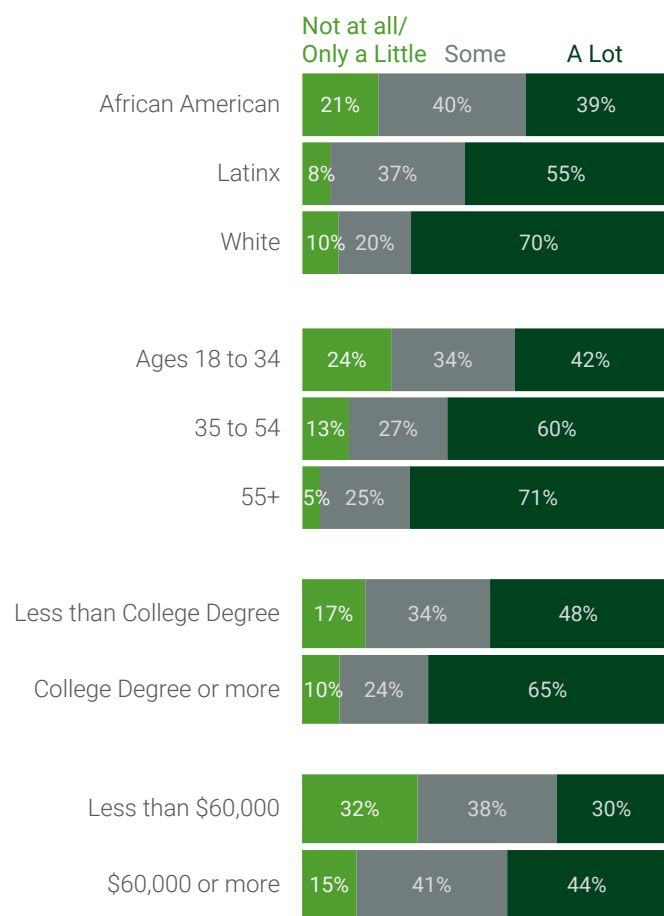
2019 DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS, CONTINUED

The following charts show the percent breakdown of neighbor and neighborhood police trust by demographic. Trends demonstrate how **trust is highest among white, older, college educated, and higher income respondents.**

Generally speaking, would you say that you can trust **people in their neighborhood?**



Generally speaking, would you say that you can trust **police in your neighborhood?**



EXPLAINING DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES WITHIN SOCIAL TRUST

Latinx and African American respondents reported lower levels of social trust, both locally and nationally.⁴ Institutional racism (historic and current), interpersonal discrimination, and neighborhood factors (such as concentrated poverty and crime) help to explain this trend.⁵ Neighborhood factors have roots in discriminatory housing policies such as redlining, which restricted African American homeownership to specific neighborhoods within Charlotte.⁵ National research indicates that youth have lower trust- both in society and institutions-than older generations.⁶ Some scholars suggest that low youth trust is specific to the current generation, while other research asserts that trust increases with age as individuals become more involved in their communities.⁷⁻⁸ Education and income are closely related and are consistent predictors of social trust.⁴ Research suggests that the college experience exposes students to groups different from their own, encourages open mindedness, and promotes shared values, all of which promote social trust.⁹

4. Pew Research Center. (2007) Americans and Social Trust: Who, Where, Why.; 5. Smith, S. S. (2010); 6. Gramlich J. (2019).; 7. Putnam R. (2001); 8. Iyengar V. et al. (2019).; 9. Huang, J. et al. (2011).

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