



# Ethno-religious groups, identification, trust and social distance in the ethno-religiously stratified Philippines



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## ABSTRACT

Unlike in the West, people's identification with religion remains significant in the political and social arena in the ethno-religiously stratified Philippine society. At the height of the peace talks to end the protracted conflict between Christians and Muslims in the Southern Philippines, this study examines the relationship between ethno-religious categorization, identification and social distance by testing the mediation of out-group trust. It has been found that salience of religious identification influences willingness to maintain social distance with out-groups. The relationship between ethno-religious categories and social distance is explained by out-group trust. This main finding highlights the role of out-group trust in the ethno-religiously stratified society with collectivist culture.

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## 1. Introduction

Two recent events have captured the trend in the intergroup relations in the highly stratified and unequal Philippine society. First, when the first Muslim newscaster appeared on a Manila-based and Tagalog-language national television on the 7th of August 2012, it was a historic first for Muslims who through social media rejoiced the achievement as a group. What made the appearance more noteworthy was that the newscaster was a woman from Mindanao wearing a *hijab* and traditional ethnic dress to project her ethno-religious identity. Second was the

signing of the Framework Agreement between the Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on the 15th of October 2012 to end a long-running armed conflict. Both Christian and Muslim groups cheered this momentous stage of the peace talks. Central in these two historic events are group identification and trust. In this process of peace talks and reconciliation, promoting intergroup trust to prevent renewed violence must be the agenda towards a post-conflict scenario (Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2009).

Many studies on intergroup trust have been with experimental, gift-exchange, social dilemma, investment or trust, and distrust games using minimal groups (Bohnet & Meier, 2005). While they do control some extraneous variables, they may also miss other factors that play in intergroup behaviour and relations of real groups (Tam et al., 2009, p. 46), especially those involved in real conflict.

Trust, as a component of social capital, has been a popular concept in the social sciences. It has been correlated with desirable outcomes, such as civic engagement

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(Putnam, 1993), economic prosperity (Fukuyama, 1995), growth rate (Knack & Keefer, 1997), democracy (Warren, 1999) and equality (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). It has also been associated with politics (Tilly, 2004), political institutions (Bratton, Chu, Lagos, & Rose, 2005), social distance (Buchan & Croson, 2004), religion (Proctor, 2006), and history of democracy (Gesthuizen, van der Meer, & Scheepers, 2009). Moreover, several studies have delved on the relationship between the lack of trust and negative outcomes, such as social exclusion (Narayan, 1999), corruption (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005), erosion of social solidarity or “hunkering down” (Putnam, 2007), restrictive immigration policy (Crepaz, 2008), and economic inequality (Gesthuizen et al., 2009). Quite a lot of the studies on trust, including the World Values Survey (WVS)/General Social Survey (GSS),<sup>3</sup> dealt with generalized trust which resulted to mixed results in correlations with trusting behaviour, and brought questions to the validity of the measurement (Delhey, Newton, & Welzel, 2011; Glaeser, Laibson, Scheinkman, & Soutter, 2000; Miller & Mitamura, 2003; Naef & Schupp, 2009; Sapienza, Toldra, & Zingales, 2010). To minimize this concern, this study employs trust of well-defined out-groups in specific circumstances, rather than generalized trust.<sup>4</sup> It is when people are trusting more those with whom they share common and salient characteristics than those without shared characteristics (Foddy, Platow, & Yamagishi, 2009, p. 419). In this sense, group membership such as kinship (Fukuyama, 1995), nationality (Buchan and Croson, 2004; Yuki, Maddux, Brewer, & Takemura, 2005), and having studied at a certain university (Foddy et al., 2009) serves as a boundary of trust. People naturally see their in-group members possessing positive qualities including trustworthiness (Brewer, 1999), and demonstrate in-group bias, a preference to have social contacts with their in-group than out-groups (Hagendoorn, 1995).

Surveys on the ranking of countries on trust show contradictory results. For examples, Americans are expected to show higher generalized trust than Chinese as Fukuyama (1995) proposed, but Buchan and Croson (2004) found the opposite. Regarding the ranking of the Philippines, Bratton et al. (2005) found East Asia including the Philippines where trust is the highest in the world, whereas Rothstein and Uslaner (2005, p. 42) cited the Philippines as among the low trusting countries. Even a survey in the country by Social Weather Stations/International Social Survey Programme (SWS/ISSP) on social relations brought confounding results on the three measures of generalized trust (Abad, 2008, pp. 43–44). Delhey et al. (2011) clarified that the general or unspecified trust used in most surveys varies from country to country depending on the radius of trust bordering in-group and out-group, especially in Confucian countries (South Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, and China). It

may be beyond the scope of this contribution to clarify the contradictory and confounding results, but it aims to provide solid evidence on the positive role of out-group trust in the intergroup relations.

The seminal works by Bogardus (1926, 1933) on social distance have been elaborated by many researchers looking at people's unwillingness to be in contact with certain distinct groups such as students, immigrants, minorities, in different situations in the US, South Africa, and Europe (Coenders, Lubbers, & Scheepers, 2007; Nix, 1993; Owen, Eisner, & McFaul, 1980; Pettigrew, 1960; Poppe & Hagendoorn, 2004; Verkuyten & Kinket, 2000). In the Philippines, earlier studies have looked at the social distance between Filipinos and other nationalities (Catapusan, 1954; Kanwar, 1956). Other studies have looked at the social distance between groups, particularly Muslims and Christians (Human Development Network, 2005; Kim, 1973; Lacar & Hunt, 1972; Tolibas-Nuñez, 1997). Although religion and race (ethnicity) are found to be determinants of social distance (Triandis & Triandis, 1960) and more than 80 percent of Filipinos identify themselves as religious to some extent (Abad, 2001, p. 341), no study so far has been done to examine directly the degree of group identification of these groups in relation to social distance in the Philippines. A leading question would be: if Filipinos strongly identify with their own ethnic and religious groups, do they tend to generally avoid or accept religious out-groups?

Although there are discussions contrasting Western and East Asian cultures regarding group identification,<sup>5</sup> groups based on common identity, such as ethnic and religious groups, remain meaningful and useful analytical unit in the social sciences.<sup>6</sup> Previous studies on group identification in the Philippines have either been categorized by religion and ethnicity. This study sharpens the group identification by combining religion and ethnicity into one social phenomenon or variable, thus ethno-religious categorization.

This study argues that ethno-religious self-categorization and group identification with certain religions induce social distance among differentiated groups in the Philippines. Social distance will stratify these groups by having group members unwilling to have social contacts and relations with out-groups (Poppe & Hagendoorn, 2004) and avoid out-groups to gain power which is essential for social mobility. However, if there is out-group trust, then social distance may be reduced. The study focuses on Christian and Muslim groups in Metro Manila and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

<sup>3</sup> The question used to measure trust is, “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?”.

<sup>4</sup> Trust has multilevels (Rousseau et al., 1998). Examples are interpersonal, group, firm, institutional, national, continental, etc. Other distinctions of trust are primordial and universal (Crepaz, 2008) and in-group and out-group trust (Delhey et al., 2011).

<sup>5</sup> In contrast with Western cultures which tend to focus on categorical in-group and out-group distinctions, East Asians tend to think more about group identification based on relationships embedded in networks rather than in strict and bounded groups (Yuki et al., 2005, pp. 48–49). In East Asia, there is less emphasis on categorization, group comparison, and depersonalization, rather there is more emphasis on building and maintaining the harmony of complex relational structure within the group (Yuki et al., 2005). The discussion is quite similar with the distinction between common identity group and common bond group (Prentice et al., 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Brubaker (2004, p. 11) problematizes the tendency to take groups for granted as a unit/category for social analysis or as “discrete, concrete, tangible, bounded, and enduring ‘groups’ . . . but rather in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms.”

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