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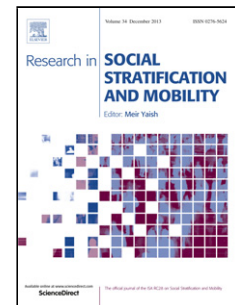
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On the Relationship between Subjective Inequality and Generalized Trust

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Abstract

Despite the well-received detrimental effect of socio-economic inequality on generalized trust, the role of subjective inequality, as defined to be the joint outcome of one's perception of factual unequal social resource distribution and normative belief about the ideal state of inequality, is elusive, which constitutes a research gap, especially in light of the increasing evidence for the independent role of subjective inequality in people's social life. Drawing on the sixth wave of the World Values Survey, this study shows that, other things being equal, one's subjective judgment of inequality has an inverted-U shape relation with generalized trust, from those who perceive the society to run short of inequality to motivate social members, to those who regard the current situation of inequality to be too serious. Such a curvilinear pattern is robust by applying to the trust in people one meets for the first time, and holds across countries with different economic, institutional, and cultural characteristics. Theoretical and policy implications are discussed.

Key words: Generalized Trust; Subjective Inequality; Curvilinear Relation; Social Capital

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