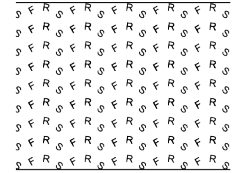


Trust – A Prerequisite for Social Resilience

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- Current crises challenge social resilience and highlight their relevance
- Social contracts and compacts are essential for assuring collective cooperation in disruptive times
- Social trust appears as necessary condition for well-functioning social contracts and hence for social resilience
- Social trust could be boosted based on knowledge about citizens' trust profiles or archetypes
- Singapore has launched several initiatives to foster social trust; dedicated research could make these initiatives more effective and efficient

Challenges for Social Resilience

Currently, many societies are struggling to grapple with economic headwinds, the climate crisis (incl. extreme weather events), increased urbanisation, increased migration and rapid technological change. Generational, income and education gaps seem to be widening and political and ideological polarisation seem to be on the rise. The overwhelming contextual pressures and societal fragmentation pose great threats to societies and demand for social resilience. Being a complex and multifaceted concept, social resilience is primarily measured in terms of multiple indicators: those commonly identified in the literature include the sense of belonging, community involvement or citizen participation, shared values or norms, social networks, social cohesion and effective communication.

In the past years, incidents of societal unrest, polarisation and fragmentation have challenged the elements of connection, solidarity, mutual commitment and cooperation among many parts of the society. Yet, the imperative of social resilience remains salient: only with strong social fabrics future adversities seem manageable.

Enhancing Social Resilience: The Promise of Social Contracts and Compacts

Social contracts and compacts appear promising for

enhancing social resilience. They will have positive implications for major indicators of social resilience such as collective participation and social cohesion.

What are Social Contracts and Compacts?

A social contract is typically understood as a tacit agreement between the modern state and the people, defining the underlying terms and conditions characterizing the relationship between institutions and population. A social contract outlines the moral and political rights, benefits and obligations of individuals within a society, as well as the state's obligations to the people and the basis of the legitimacy of its authority. It typically involves a mutually beneficial exchange – citizens agree to follow state authority and direction, adopting prescriptive behaviors in exchange for a set of favorable social conditions.

The substance of social agreements – the specific obligations and payoffs involved in this exchange - can vary depending on national context. While the dominant obligation expected from citizens is usually the recognition of state legitimacy, it can also include other behaviors such as military service, paying of taxes, civil democratic engagement, consensus-seeking, deference, industriousness, and enterprise (Loewe et al., 2021). In turn, states are obligated to deliver various payoffs to citizens. These may include protection-based items (e.g.

physical security against internal threats, rule of law, and collective security against external threats), provision-based items (e.g. prosperity, adequate standards of living, infrastructure, social services, economic opportunities), or participation-based items (e.g. freedoms of participation & association, access to political decision making).

The term “social compact” often refers to the same concept as social contracts. Yet, social compacts typically connote a more horizontal type of social agreement. While a “social contract” focuses more on a vertical agreement between citizens and the government, the “social compact” also involves the notion of a horizontal agreement about the terms of citizens’ interactions with and obligations to one another, in the interest of collective organising and coordinating towards a high quality of life (Zack, 2018). It defines the social arrangements, norms and expectations that structure citizens’ political, moral and economic relationships with each other.

How Social Contracts and Compacts Matter for Social Resilience

By serving as blueprints for the expected behaviours and payoffs that govern intersociety relations, well-functioning and well-accepted social contracts and compacts provide a basic sense of certainty, security and fairness with regards to how one can expect to live within society.

Hence, functioning social contracts and compacts can be argued as crucial for social resilience. A society’s ability to cope with vulnerability in an unpredictable, hazardous and morally-neutral reality would be greatly bolstered if its people, regardless of negative externalities, are able to retain some baseline sense of security and justice. This could be derived from having a guaranteed claim to a baseline of beneficial social conditions via social contracts and social compacts.

As social contracts and compacts underline people’s obligations toward one another, the strength of these agreements also directly affect the degree to which individual interests prioritised over the collective good during times of crisis (Shafik, 2021). Whether people feel responsible for performing other-regarding behaviours in response to crises - such as choosing to vaccinate, wear masks, self-isolate or social-distance measures during pandemic – is in part dependent on having a strong sense of obligation towards other citizens. By structuring citizens’ feelings of social obligation, social compacts and contracts can increase the likelihood that other-regarding responses overcome the natural impulse towards self-interest, which is often heightened in the haze of panic in crisis scenarios and emergencies.

During a crisis, well-functioning social contracts and compacts will serve as lubricants for an effective collective cooperation and reciprocal contributing behaviour in society (Vlerick, 2019). Through proving to citizens’ the personal as well as the mutual benefits and payoffs of collective cooperation, they help increasing citizens’ psychological willingness to cooperate and commit to a coordinated societal response for overcoming a crisis. Universally adequate and fairly distributed rewards and

payoffs serve as effective stimuli and incentives for contributing behaviours under adverse circumstances. Social sanctions ensure that “freeriding” behaviour or the risk of being made a “sucker” is kept to a minimum. The maintenance of social contracts and compacts enables communities to build up the habit of collective action, accumulating a pool of other-regarding, participatory capacities to be drawn on in times of crises.

Another key resilience-related outcome of functioning of social contracts and compacts could be the creation of foundations for social cohesion. As social contracts and compacts define the prescribed social behaviours through which citizens relate to the authorities and to each other, the collective interests and values which undergird these obligations are implicitly legitimized when the contract or compact is operating smoothly. The collective fulfilment of the prescribed civic duties suggests there is a working public consensus regarding the values and terms of the society. Hence, functioning social contracts and compacts are platforms for establishing a common ground for social cohesion. When the public is fragmented in the conceptions of the social contract or compact and the values around which society should be arranged, the common grounds for social cohesion fall away and weaken social resilience.

The Connection between Social Trust and Social Resilience

Trust has often been cited as a crucial element for the functioning of social contracts or compacts and hence for social resilience. The salience of trust in the functioning of social contracts or compacts seems to be founded on trust’s role as a prerequisite for compliance and cooperation when payoffs are not guaranteed in a social exchange.

Trust is typically defined as the belief that another will not harm you, involving the element of uncertainty and some deliberation of risks and benefits informed by each trustees’ specific characteristics. Social trust alludes to a broader concept, involving larger-scale trust on the level of community and society. It covers a range of trust relations in society, spanning from familiar ingroups and communities to abstract strangers and collectives within wider society, as well as to institutional authorities and actors within them. Social trust can be summed up as a “mutually shared expectation (...) that people will manifest sensible and, when needed, reciprocally beneficial behaviour in their interactions with others” (Welch et al., 2005, p. 457). Hence, social trust seems to be an essential component for social resilience, which requires cooperative behaviors of citizens, especially in times of disruptions.

Social trust also appears necessary for well-functioning social contracts and compacts. Firstly, horizontal social trust, i.e., trust between people in a society, encourages individuals to perceive a high level of collective action in society and that compliant behaviours and efforts will not be in vain (Rudolph, 2017). This perception is a cornerstone for social resilience. Secondly,

vertical trust in government authorities to uphold their side of a social contract or compact may be a primary driver of cooperation. Vertical trust bolsters the belief that the government works in the interests of the citizens, instead of engaging in corrupt and self-serving behavior (Citrin & Stoker, 2018). This can be seen as a basis for social resilience.

Social Trust: Indispensable for Social Resilience

Social trust can be seen as an essential factor for contributions and cooperation in phases of crisis and uncertainty. On the one side, social trust is a recurring sub-indicator of social resilience, usually outlined as a component quality of single indicators, such as social cohesion or collective efficacy. Yet, on the other side, social trust seems to play a diffuse and far-reaching role in the overall task of social resilience. Social trust appears as a prerequisite for citizens' general inputs, involvement and investments in social agreements and in society in general. Citizens' continued activity and participation within their communities can hence be assured by social trust. Such civic engagement is a necessary condition for societies' ability to continue functioning well in the face of shocks and disruption. Hence, social trust appears as the basis of societies' resilience capacities. Social trust will therefore be key to overcoming the collective action problems that affects major aspects of social resilience.

Bolstering Social Resilience via Social Trust

The existing literature on social trust has largely tested possible factors that either prevent or enhance social trust, elaborating on individual or structural factors. Individual-level factors that enhance social trust include social qualities, characteristics, group memberships, relationship ties, and behaviours of single individuals, as well as their idiosyncratic personal experiences and perceptions of wider societal structures and qualities; these have particularized effects on personal trust levels. Boosting bonds between neighbours, as colleagues and schoolmates or extending integration policies to specific institutional settings, such as sports, arts, extracurricular groups or religious gatherings could encourage interaction across diverse societal groups and strengthen their social trust (Chua et al., 2020). Good macro-economic performance, high governmental quality and delivery of outcomes, the presence of institutional structures conducive to social protection, or high levels of ethics and effectiveness in government appear as obvious structural imperatives for promoting vertical trust (Schubert & Chin, 2023).

Towards the goal of increasing social trust levels, studying the use of citizen archetypes may be an interesting new approach. The creation of citizen archetypes involves the identification of common behavioural patterns or "configurations of values" of citizens to outline the endogenous heterogeneity within cultures and national contexts (Venaik & Midgley, 2015). Citizen archetypes appear useful for identifying the various citizen trust profiles that commonly exist as part of diverse populations. As existing research has also shown how idiosyncratic factors such as

an advantaged or disadvantaged social position and positive or negative life experiences can significantly impact individuals' personal levels of social trust, it may be useful to translate these into various "trust archetypes" that map out the varied citizen trust levels and reasons for trust or distrust seen in society. Knowledge in this field could help to more precisely prevent broken social contracts and attendant loss of trust across society.

Fostering Social Trust in the Singapore context

Singapore has been making steps towards boosting the trust levels of the population and strengthening its social compact. The government has firstly attempted to increase vertical trust within the country by encouraging authentic, inclusive and frank dialogue between the government and Singaporeans, via the Our Singapore Conversations survey and the Singapore Together movement which were launched respectively in 2012 and 2019. These measures involve the set-up of dialogue opportunities between citizens, the private and the public sector representatives, for the discussing challenges and solutions for significant complex issues. They seek to leverage on "open-ended" conversations to bridge affective disconnects between citizens and the government, as well as allow for more impactful public participation.

Further consideration may be needed for understanding how to enhance the effectiveness of dialogue sessions in building up social trust. Firstly, it may be salient to maximise the scope of the audience reach of dialogue sessions: segments of the population that already proactively communicate and participate in such initiatives may be disproportionately represented in citizen-government discussions. Hence, discussions may not always reach individuals with lower levels of engagement and/or trust. Future research should look into understanding why some individuals are less proactive or less comfortable with participating in dialogue and engagement sessions, to develop best practices for attracting them and earning a baseline level of their trust for engagement. In addition, research could also study how to optimise the design and facilitation of dialogue sessions to create conducive conditions for candid, meaningful discussion of diverse viewpoints.

More recently, the renewal of Singapore's social compact and horizontal social cohesion has been cemented as a long-term, whole-of-government top priority. In 2022, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong launched the Forward Singapore exercise to "refresh and update" Singapore's social compact towards "a shared understanding of how all of us in society relate to one another...that is deemed fair by all segments of society" (Wong, 2022). The Forward Singapore project appears to focus on improving structural conditions for social trust and a cohesive social compact, addressing six segments of the social structure that are areas of pressure and insecurity for citizens: economy and jobs, education and lifelong learning, health and social support, home and living environment, environmental and fiscal sustainability, and

the Singapore identity.

Within the sixth segment of “the Singapore identity”, the campaign will likely involve responding to the common individual-level narratives and feelings of unfairness, distrust and suspicion among the public which hamper social cohesion. One possible strategy in this context would involve understanding and acknowledging the diversity of the various worldviews and identities of disillusioned and distrusting citizens within the population. A thorough understanding of discrete citizen archetypes and trust profiles may enable the country to make its citizens feel represented and perceive that their grievances are understood. Exploring ways to identify citizen archetypes that outline the perspectives, concerns and policy needs of different subgroups of citizens appears relevant in this context. In addition, it should be studied how archetypes can be translated into the formulation of discrete and context-aware policies to address different citizen narratives of trust and distrust.

Conclusion

In times of polarisation and continued challenges, it is imperative for societies around the world to improve their capacities to remain resilient in the face of adversities. We posit that social resilience can be bolstered through enhancing social trust through the well-functioning of social contracts and compacts. Identifying citizen’s trust profiles would help to reveal rifts in social contracts which could and should be patched in order to uphold social resilience.

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