

## Summary Eric Uslaner book *National Identity and Partisan Polarization*

Eric Uslaner's "*National Identity and Partisan Polarization*" examines the relationship between national identity, political polarization, and social trust. It argues that a strong sense of national identity, particularly one that emphasizes shared values and civic duty, can mitigate the negative effects of partisan polarization on social trust. Conversely, a more exclusionary or ethnically based nationalism can exacerbate polarization and erode social trust. The book uses extensive cross-national data to support these claims.

Here's a breakdown of the key themes, findings, and relevant parts:

### Core Argument:

Uslaner's central argument hinges on the mediating role of national identity in the relationship between partisan polarization and social trust. He posits that:

- **High levels of partisan polarization do not automatically lead to low social trust.** The impact of polarization on trust depends on the *type* of national identity prevalent in a society.
- **Inclusive national identities** that emphasize shared civic values and a sense of community are associated with higher levels of social trust, even in highly polarized societies. These identities foster a sense of "we" that transcends political divisions.
- **Exclusive national identities** that emphasize ethnic homogeneity or prioritize in-group loyalty over civic duty are associated with lower levels of social trust and a stronger negative impact of polarization. These identities foster a sense of "us vs. them" that deepens political divisions.

### Key Findings and Data:

The book relies heavily on quantitative analysis of data from various sources, including the World Values Survey and other large-scale cross-national surveys. The analysis involves sophisticated statistical modeling to control for various confounding factors. While specific numbers and statistical details aren't directly replicable from this summary, the core findings include:

- **The impact of partisan polarization on social trust varies significantly across countries.** Uslaner demonstrates this variability, showing that polarization's negative effect isn't uniform.
- **Countries with inclusive national identities generally show higher levels of social trust.** Regardless of the level of partisan polarization, those nations with a strong sense of civic nationalism tend to maintain higher levels of social trust.
- **National pride, when tied to civic values,** is positively associated with social trust and can help buffer against the negative effects of polarization. This suggests that a shared sense of national pride based on common values can promote unity despite political divisions.
- **National pride, when tied to ethnic or racial identity,** is negatively associated with social trust and intensifies the negative effects of polarization. This indicates that national pride rooted in exclusionary criteria reinforces "us vs. them" mentalities, damaging social trust.

### **Other Relevant Parts:**

Beyond the core argument and statistical findings, Uslaner's book includes:

- **Discussion of different types of national identity:** He differentiates between civic nationalism (emphasizing shared values and citizenship) and ethnic nationalism (emphasizing shared ancestry and culture). This distinction is crucial to understanding the differential effects of national identity on social trust.
- **Analysis of the role of social trust:** He explains why social trust matters for the functioning of democratic societies. Social trust facilitates cooperation, reduces transaction costs, and promotes effective governance.
- **Exploration of the mechanisms linking national identity to trust:** The book explores how inclusive national identities promote generalized trust (trust in strangers) by fostering a sense of shared fate and common interests.
- **Comparative analysis of different countries:** The book utilizes data from a wide range of countries, allowing for comparisons and contrasting the impact of polarization and national identity across various political and cultural contexts.

### **Overall Implications:**

Uslaner's work suggests that fostering inclusive national identities that emphasize shared civic values is crucial for maintaining social trust in increasingly polarized societies. Promoting a sense of national unity based on principles of civic duty and mutual respect can help to counter the divisive effects of partisan politics. Conversely, relying on exclusionary forms of nationalism can deepen social divisions and undermine the very fabric of social trust. His findings have implications for political leaders, policymakers, and citizens interested in fostering social cohesion and the health of democratic institutions.