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# TRUST IN CRISIS: The Emergence of the Quiet Citizen

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# 01

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## Preface

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'Without trust we cannot stand' – Confucius.

Confucius told his disciple Tszé-kung that three things are needed for government: weapons, food and trust. If a ruler can't hold on to all three, he should give up the weapons first and the food next. Trust should be guarded to the end, as without trust we cannot stand.

European politicians, policymakers and economists have, in recent years, commented on the decline of trust. But although trust is widely used in economics and politics, it is not primarily an economic or political term – it is first and foremost about relations, human relations. Trust is relational; it cannot be commanded but needs to be given, freely. To understand trust, we have to understand human nature.

Francis Fukayama, in his book *Trust: The Social Virtues and The Creation of Prosperity*, defines trust as 'the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms on the part of other members of that community'.<sup>1</sup>

Trust is even more significant in a crisis situation and today, Europeans are regularly informed by the media and political leaders that they are facing a number of crises such as the 'migration crisis' because of an influx of refugees and the consequences of austerity – a 'social crisis' – in the wake of the 'financial' and 'euro crisis'.

It is for this reason that the Woolf Institute undertook the **Trust in Crisis Project** so as to better understand how the experience of crises affected relations among communities – particularly those of faith and other minority groups – and the formation of trust. A team of researchers examined the impact of perceptions of crisis on community-based initiatives, cooperative action and local solidarity in Berlin, London, Paris and Rome from 2014–17.

I would like to thank the Templeton World Charitable Foundation as well as an anonymous donor for their support. I would also like to express my appreciation to the authors of this report, Dr Jan-Jonathan Bock and Dr Sami Everett and the three editors, Dr Julian Hargreaves, Asher Kessler and Austin Tiffany. The Co-Principal Investigator for much of the project was Dr Shana Cohen and the research team included Dr Christina Fuhr. I am grateful to them all.

I have been encouraged by the extent of interest the research has generated, particularly the finding that trust in the ability of local initiatives to respond to needs remains strong, indeed stronger, than in the state. Although each city differs in its levels of historical welcome and integration of ethnic and religious diversity, a trend emerged: *local* initiatives responded to crisis in ways the centralised state could not, and often doing so across religious and ethnic lines. This research has shown that trust *can* develop – and grow – at the grassroots, even during times of crisis.

Indeed, as the sub-title of this report suggests, our research indicates that the significant challenges faced by communities across Europe are resulting in new forms of citizenship mobilised through publicly-minded activism and capable of uniting seemingly disparate social groups across religious and ethnic divides. The authors identified and wish to celebrate the role of the 'quiet citizen' – an individual who contributes positively to her or his neighbourhood and community, often without recognition or attention, through the completion of 'quiet work' – local acts of kindness and generosity borne out of a shared sense of social responsibility. This was recently demonstrated in the UK after the London and Manchester attacks and the Grenfell Tower fire when individuals from local communities opened their homes to one another, provided help in a time of need and trust prevailed.

This 'quiet work' strengthens bonds of interdependency and friendship between citizens and social groups and, on a more practical level, is capable of addressing local needs more immediately and more effectively than national institutions. Indeed, without the contribution of the 'quiet citizen', many of us might find it hard to trust one another and to live peaceably together.

I believe this is an important report and ask that its findings be widely considered across the political spectrum by policy makers, government officials, religious leaders and the wider public. I commend this report to you.



**Dr Edward Kessler MBE**

Founder Director, Woolf Institute

# 02

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## Executive Summary

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'Crisis' is a word used frequently to describe the social and economic challenges faced by communities across Europe. Diverse scenarios ranging from financial uncertainty, the influx of refugees, and the integration of minority communities have been increasingly discussed and debated by politicians, commentators and members of the public using terms borrowed from the lexicon of crises and crisis-management. This report examines how the notion and perception of crisis, and the underlying conditions categorised by the term, affect relations among communities in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy.

The so-called financial crisis of 2008 preceded a range of economic strategies and interventions across Europe, the use of which generated widespread debate around the legitimacy, credibility, and viability of the continent's financial institutions. Against this backdrop of financial challenges, the intervening decade witnessed a sharp rise in the numbers of refugees arriving at Europe's eastern and southern borders (among others, Italy); many of whom continued their journeys westwards and northwards towards France, Germany and the United Kingdom. The so-called refugee crisis stoked long-standing debates around minority communities, levels of integration and wider social cohesion (referred to in the British context as a crisis of both migration and immigration). Particular grievances around economics and immigration conflated as public administrations and services strained to meet increasing public demands with decreasing public resources. Often related to migration and minority communities, security concerns around terrorist violence offered opportunities to apply the 'crisis' label within other contexts: whether in relation to individual acts of terrorism or the state responses to them, or to the underlying social conditions and political factors underpinning both.

In the UK, political and media debates around Brexit reflected, and perhaps crystallised, public anxieties across several distinct registers: dissatisfaction with centralised government and the institutions of the European Union; fears around the actual and perceived consequences of current patterns of migration to Europe; and concerns around the disparities between those at

the top and bottom of society. Use of the term 'crisis' within this context transcended political boundaries. For some, 'crisis' described the perceived failings of the mainstream political system (both British and European-wide): a failure to represent the electorate, to control immigration, and to protect provisions for work and welfare. For others, the term described uneasiness at the prospects of leaving the EU, the apparent rise of populist and nationalist politics, and the predicted economic consequences. As the UK now prepares to leave the European Union, some suggest that trust itself is in crisis: with public fears and anger channelled nationally at governments and financial institutions, and more locally at those with perceived differences.<sup>2</sup>

However, this report suggests that trust within communities can be strengthened in times of apparent crisis. Despite the diversity and prolonged state of the crises detailed above, each crisis has energised trust within local communities. These local forms of trust can be found in faith communities working side-by-side, supplying food banks and confronting the needs associated with refugee resettlement and cohesion. In other settings, civic authorities cooperate with religious organisations to provide necessary support. Overall, trust in local initiatives to confront crisis has grown. It is in the context of this critical moment that the Trust in Crisis Project came to fruition.

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The aim of the Trust in Crisis Project was to understand how the experience of crises affected relations among communities – particularly those of faith and other minority groups – and the formation of trust. The team of researchers examined community-based initiatives engaged in interreligious and intercultural encounter, and explored how cooperative action and local solidarity were hindered or supported by the perceptions of crisis.

As nations continue to address these intertwined challenges, the notion of trust – and its absence – is central to both economic and social stability. This report summarises ethnographic research conducted in Berlin, London, Paris, and Rome. It shows how the mobilisation of grassroots initiatives to address the needs created by crisis has, at times, led to reinvigorated practices of citizenship. This is a result of the state's incapacity to effectively manage and respond to these unstable times, notably through the provision of goods and services. In response to crisis scenarios, the role of the citizen has evolved to become more actively involved in local projects that aim to produce solidarity. This type of citizenship places more trust in the ability of local initiatives to respond to needs than in the state-driven promise of equality and provision. Each city differs in its levels of historical welcome and integration of ethnic and religious diversity, political challenges and levels of economic growth. Despite this, a trend emerged whereby local initiatives responded to crisis in ways the centralised

state could not, and often doing so across religious and ethnic lines. This research has shown that trust can develop – and grow – at the grassroots, even during times of crisis.

The cities selected for this study, while not exhaustive and representative of all of western Europe, carry regional, national, and even global significance. More importantly, each unique context has been challenged differently by the severe crises emerging over the past ten years and, in turn, has responded in different ways. This makes the findings that demonstrate similarities and particularities across the four cities both striking and significant.

## **LONDON**

In London, justification for the continued application of so-called austerity measures (in essence, a suite of measures designed to reduce the structural deficit) focused, in part, on the financial crisis that began in 2008 (critics argue that the measures also reflected an ideological preference for a smaller state). This produced immediate consequences for public spending. The effects were felt by services supporting the vulnerable and economically disadvantaged, and by an overstretched police force addressing perceived insecurity and real danger in the light of the 2017 terrorist attacks in Westminster and London Bridge. Longer-term consequences included generating, directly or indirectly, some of the discontent that characterised those voting for Brexit in the EU Referendum of June 2016.

## **PARIS**

A crisis of security continues in Paris, precipitated by the attacks of 2015: first in January at the offices of Charlie Hebdo and a kosher supermarket, then in November at the Stade de France and Bataclan theatre. The attacks and subsequent police and security investigations in France and Belgium renewed a focus on community segregation, and the lack of opportunity among minority populations, particularly amongst North African Muslim communities. Scholars and commentators have connected the security crisis in Paris with wider issues of *laïcité*, the separation of church and state, and the political and legal grounding this affords the ongoing restrictions to religiously symbolic dress.

## **BERLIN**

In Berlin, the refugee crisis and its effects have dominated the news and public debate since 2015, producing a wide range of civil society initiatives and engagement to support struggling state authorities. However, following a major terrorist attack carried out by Anis Amri on Berlin's large Christmas Markets in 2016, if not before, discussions about self-styled Islamists and the state's struggle to provide security revealed processes of social polarisation. This has redesigned the relationship between citizens, local volunteer groups, faith-based civil society actors, and state institutions at local, regional, and federal levels.

## ROME

A deep economic crisis in Rome has been exacerbated by a political one in the wake of the success of the anti-establishment Five Star Movement during 2016 local elections in Rome and Turin and the instability of the current coalition government. The unprecedented arrival of large numbers of African migrants in Italy added further pressure, compounded by the unwillingness of other EU countries to support relocation schemes and demonstrate European-wide solidarity.

There is no doubting the impact of crisis in each of the cities described above, yet ongoing challenges relating to the crisis – and urban life more broadly – will remain. The Trust in Crisis Project is concerned with responses to these ongoing challenges, revealing possible solutions to the questions of state responsibility, as well as the persistent issue of religious and ethnic coexistence. The findings here do not provide exhaustive solutions for handling crises, the challenges of urban life, or the continual development of trust. Rather, out of this research comes a set of proposals to be utilised and implemented by communities and policy-makers alike, especially in a crisis situation. It emphasises the relevance of religion in public life, as well as highlights approaches to integration and inter-cultural and religious solidarity. Nonetheless, the present context of crisis makes this all the more urgent and timely. Whether that crisis is financial, concerns the arrival of refugees (many, but not all, of whom are Muslim), or involves the integration of minority communities, it will certainly shape Europe for decades to come.

## KEY FINDINGS

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Whilst this executive summary cannot hope to capture the depth and nuance of extensive ethnographic work undertaken by the authors, a number of key findings emerged from the fieldwork and are presented below. For the purpose of this report, they are summarised under three headings: **Citizenship**, **Locality** and **Language**. We recommend reading the Full Report for those interested in more detail.

### CITIZENSHIP

#### *Key finding 1: The emergence of the ‘quiet citizen’*

Our research revealed that the social and economic challenges faced by communities across Europe are breeding new forms of citizenship, based on shared social purposes and more active involvement in public affairs.

New forms of citizenship mobilised through publicly-minded activism are capable of uniting seemingly disparate social groups across political, religious, and ethnic divides. The research revealed shifting patterns of social, civic and political engagement, and positive tangible change for

communities predicated on the collective acceptance of the challenge to provide social support for the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Through insights offered by the fieldwork, the authors identified the role of the 'quiet citizen' – an individual who contributes positively to her or his neighbourhood and community, often without recognition or reward, through the completion of 'quiet work' – local acts of kindness and generosity borne out of a shared sense of social responsibility. Through these acts, the 'quiet citizen' refashions productive citizenship to a greater extent, and more concretely, than more vocal forms of political protest (whether conducted in a march or in a voting booth). This dedicated, and often uncelebrated, 'quiet work' strengthens bonds of interdependency and friendship between citizens and social groups and, on a more practical level, is capable of addressing local needs more immediately and more effectively than national institutions.

***Key finding 2: Increased social and political engagement by local faith communities***

**Our research has revealed that the challenges faced across Europe have galvanised groups within faith communities, with the effect that many are now increasingly engaged within social and political spheres.**

In the wake of these crises, faith-based groups are becoming more energetic and engaged in public life, whether as providers of emergency services (such as foodbanks, drop-in centres and credit lending), or as voices speaking out against policies deemed unfair and unjust. Faith-based-groups have strengthened their support for migrants and the socially and economically disadvantaged; outspoken and active, for example, with regard to refugee integration in the UK, France, Italy and Germany.

***Key finding 3: New communities shaped by shared social values***

**Our findings suggest that social bonds of trust and solidarity among the local groups we met are shaping new forms of community based on shared social values that transcend identity, ideology and belief.**

Individuals across Europe have responded to the political, security, and migration crises by engaging in grassroots initiatives to tackle challenges at local levels. This has created new forms of community and inclusion during times of crisis, where trustworthiness is based on shared *social* values, rather than simply on ethnic or religious identities, and is sustained through narratives of transparency, solidarity, and inclusion. These new narratives counter shrill nationalistic rhetoric and its promise of patriotic rebirth, especially at the grassroots where trust matters throughout the year, not only during political campaigns. Trust in such communities and narratives can generate new kinds of solidarity in the face of need. This will encourage new forms of citizenship at the local level, where feelings of belonging and cooperation are cultivated. Respect for individual dignity and the moral necessity of social support and positive social relations have become principles for social solidarity at a local level across the sites and contexts we studied.

## LOCALITY

### ***Key finding 4: The greater impact of local structures***

Our findings revealed that investment in local structures has a greater impact on the management of crisis. Local governments and volunteer organisations administer provision, confronting direct and immediate needs in times of crisis, particularly where state institutions are unable to provide.

Local groups are often more in tune with realities on the ground and deliver services that have been reduced or eliminated during times of austerity. These organisations cannot continue to cope without proper investment, and many providers and users are frustrated by the ongoing lack of state resources. When public administrations manage and address new challenges, such as multi-faith landscapes or the integration of migrants, evidence shows these are more likely to be achieved at local and regional levels. Coordination and communication between faith communities, civil society actors and civic authorities benefits the larger community while providing a tangible form of support to minority groups. The Berlin city government, for example, created a full-time position responsible for the Dialogue of Religions, coordinating activities among local faith groups and providing them with platforms for dialogue and exchange. London has a history of consulting and providing space to faith communities, such as the Inter-Faith Network and Faiths Forum for London. These initiatives are perceived as tangible forms of support for faith groups, and they have allowed better communication among faith groups and civic authorities, which could, for example, be harnessed to better tackle issues related to violence and discrimination.

Trends in local activism and social action are consistent across the four fieldwork sites. Further, they have intensified and become vital mechanisms in the response to crisis. Despite the differences in each context, manifestations of local activism are present in each of the locations, signifying its broader relevance. Increasingly, groups engaged in social activism are connected with one another, using social media to discover alternative resources and share methods of best practice.

## LANGUAGE

### ***Key finding 5: The negative effects produced by overuse of the term 'crisis'***

**Although widely-used, and whilst it provides a framework and the departure point for this study, the term's overuse creates an overall narrative that can be problematic.**

As shown throughout this report, the term 'crisis' has been used by politicians, journalists, and ordinary people to describe a number of scenarios. However, the term implies an image of chaos, emergency, and danger. This alarmist rhetoric creates unattainable political expectations that can give way to nationalistic and strong-arm politics, and it can undermine trust in democracy's virtues – compromise, negotiation, and the balancing of interests. This 'crisis' narrative is at odds with the

reality on the ground, where de-centralised local and regional structures respond to economic uncertainties, migratory issues, or the integration of religious minorities in a more measured manner.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Trust in Crisis Report makes the following policy recommendations in line with the themes of Citizenship, Locality and Language. As for the key findings, this section offers a summary of the recommendations. For a more detailed discussion, please refer to the full report.

### ***Recommendation 1: Celebrate the 'quiet citizen'***

We recommend an award for 'everyday' individuals who excel in their support for others facing social and economic hardship. The award could be given following nominations by relevant local groups or community organisations. The award will applaud those who give selflessly to others, especially where doing so involves stretching out across social, religious and cultural divides.

### ***Recommendation 2: Support dialogue***

We recommend the creation of full-time positions to coordinate or support dialogue among religions and other minorities in major urban centres of plurality and diversity following the model set by the Berlin city government. This is needed particularly in Paris and Rome. The role could provide a neutral space for local faith and cultural groups, establishing platforms for positive dialogue and exchange. This is not simply a practical solution to allow exchange, but the role could create an important institutional point of contact and illustrates recognition for the presence and role of religious or cultural identities in urban life.

### ***Recommendation 3: Strengthen local resources***

We recommend an increased investment in local government and the strengthening of civil society organisations, especially in times of crisis. Both can fill the void of resources and care that centralised structures are not always able or willing to fill. Recognising the strengths of the German federal model, we welcome greater devolution of state powers as represented by the introduction of directly elected mayors across the United Kingdom, and argue that greater devolution is favourable in France.

### ***Recommendation 4: Acknowledge new forms of religious citizenship***

We recommend the acknowledgement of new forms of religious citizenship built in times of crisis. Religions and religious identities remain important to many in society. Further, our research shows that religiosity and dedication to civic life do not exclude each other; therefore, such emergent forms of religious citizenship should be acknowledged and supported. Further, it is recommended

that the changing nature of local faith groups is more often recognised as a source of trust and social cohesion during times of social and economic challenges. Cooperation between state authorities and faith groups, as well as with other representatives of minority communities, should be strengthened to show official support for changing practices of civic life.

***Recommendation 5: Encourage public bodies to foster greater social cohesion***

We recommend that European governments continue to develop the establishment, and empowerment, of ministries responsible for social cohesion. This move would not simply address the factual need for greater state involvement in the management of pluralism in diverse societies, but would also communicate to the public that governments take seriously concerns from both majority populations regarding the direction and velocity of social change and those from minority groups challenging social norms. Such bodies must necessarily involve minority community representatives at the highest levels.

***Recommendation 6: Limit the negative effects of social media***

We recommend developing more responses to tackle and reduce online abuse of minority groups. Social media play an increasingly important role in public perception, including the experience of crises. Social media platforms are also used frequently to promote hatred and division by spreading false information (such as so-called fake news) and conspiracy theories that seek only to complicate and frustrate coexistence and understanding. A failure within European administrations to monitor and control virtual spaces has exacerbated the insecurities felt especially by minority groups. Authorities should cooperate with grassroots actors and others to guarantee debate in safe virtual spaces. Further, rules governing social exchange in the offline world should be applied with equal vigour in the online world without any undue restrictions of freedoms.

***Recommendation 7: Promote contact across social divides***

We recommend that European governments promote initiatives that increase interaction across religious and cultural divides. Contact is inevitable for the development of bonds of intercultural trust. Targeted social policy, for example, complemented by strong local institutions, can reduce problematic ghettos, large-scale marginalisation, and distrust among communities.

***Recommendation 8: Use the term 'crisis' more carefully***

We recommend caution around use of the term 'crisis'. Whilst it provided a useful lens through which to undertake the research reported here, sensationalist and inflationary use of the term is dangerous and leads to the depreciation of democratic compromise and negotiation. Wherever possible, we recommend the use of alternative terms to describe social and economic challenges. We recommend that governments follow the lead offered by the work of the 'quiet citizen': in most cases, scenarios and challenges described using the terms 'crisis' and 'crises' are manageable rather than hopeless.