

Faith no more?

The divergence of political trust between urban and rural Europe

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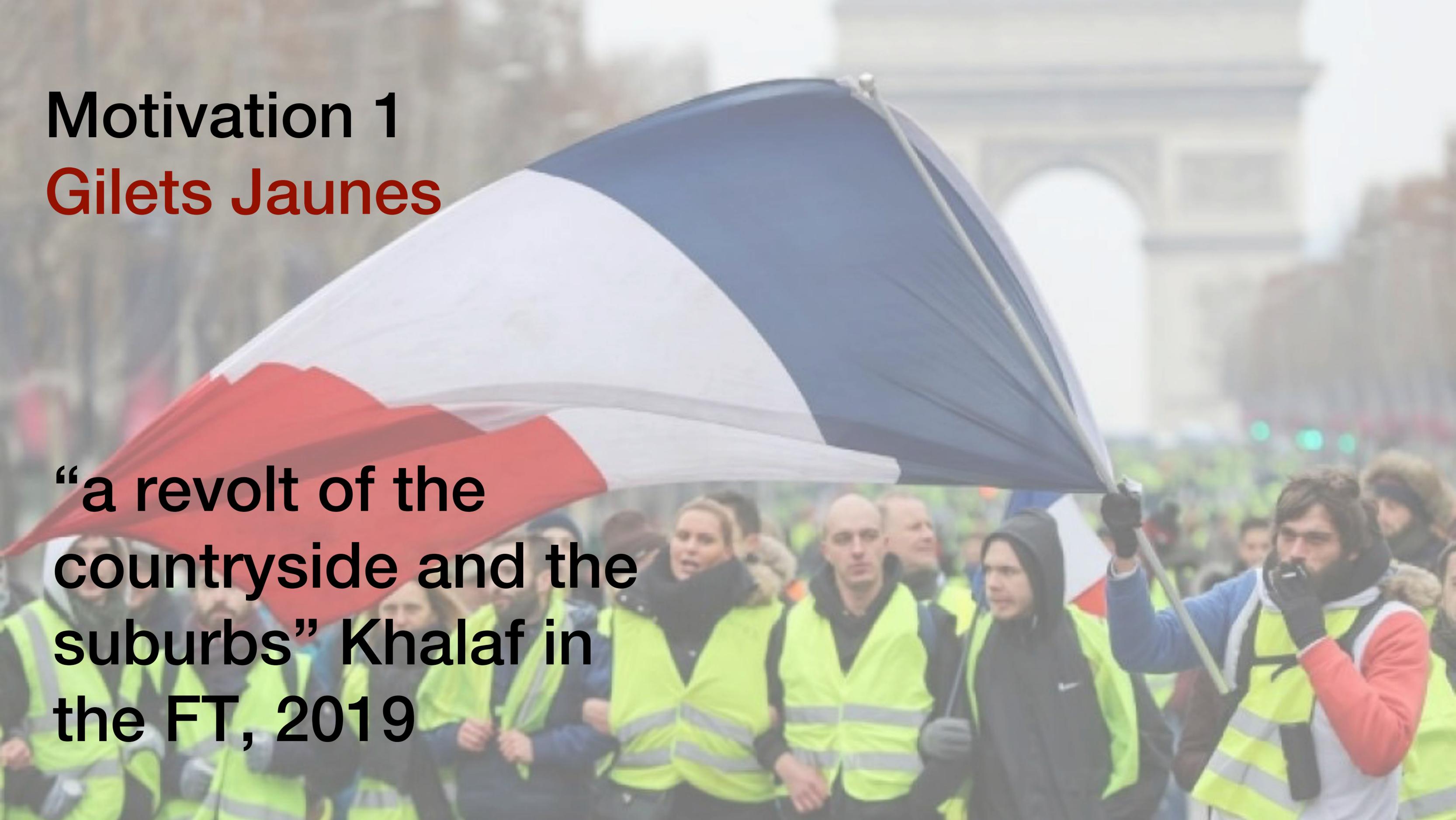


Department of
Geography and
Environment

Motivation 1

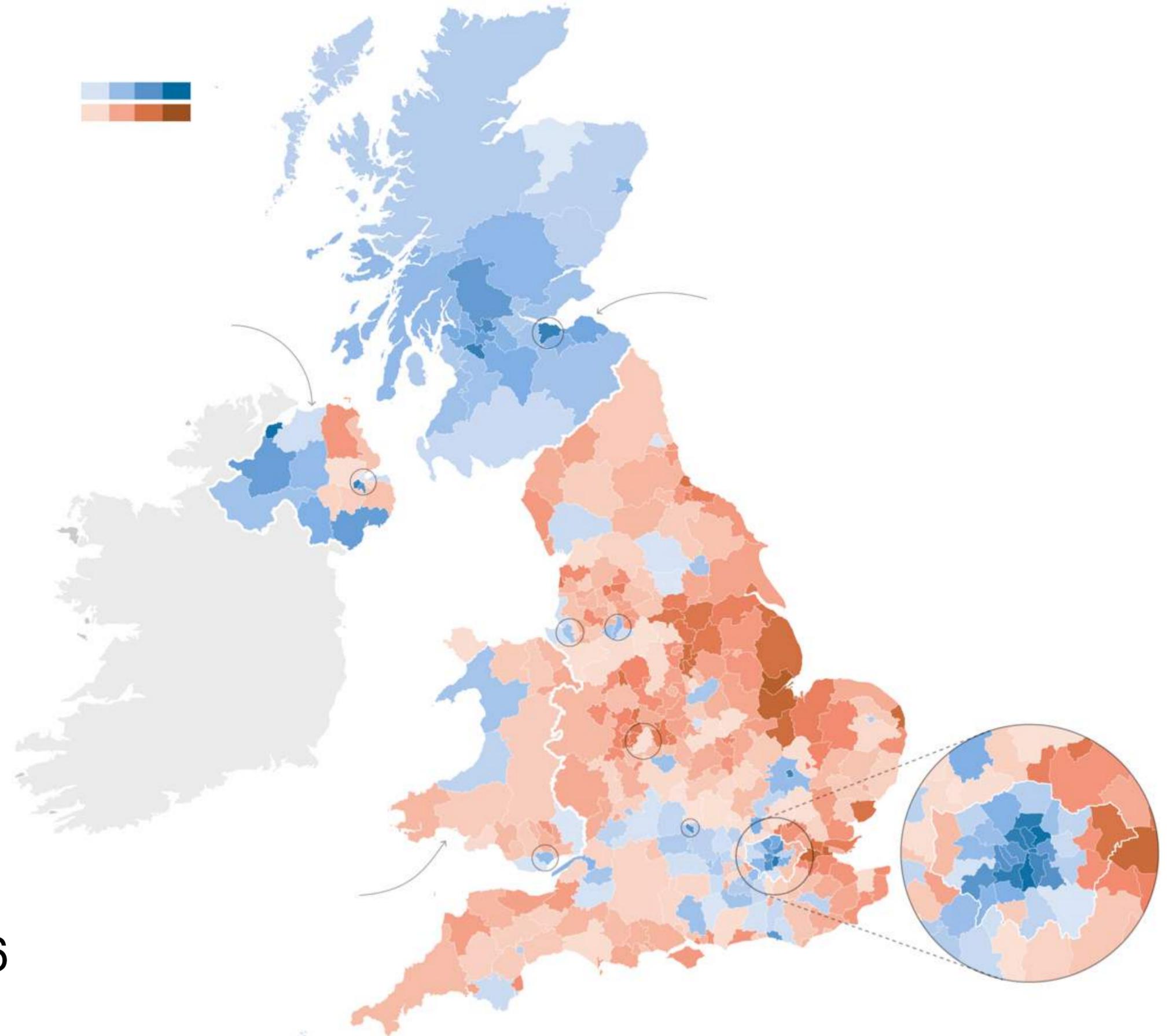
Gilets Jaunes

“a revolt of the countryside and the suburbs” Khalaf in the FT, 2019

A large crowd of people, many wearing bright yellow high-visibility vests, are gathered in a city square. In the foreground, a large French flag (blue, white, and red) is being held up by a man in a blue jacket and yellow vest. The background shows a large stone archway, likely the Arc de Triomphe, under an overcast sky. The overall atmosphere is one of a significant public demonstration.

Motivation 2

Brexit



Red = leave

Blue = remain

Source: New York Times, 2016

Data

Defining political trust and rurality

ESS has 7 Trust variables measured on likert scale (1 - 10, where 10 = high)

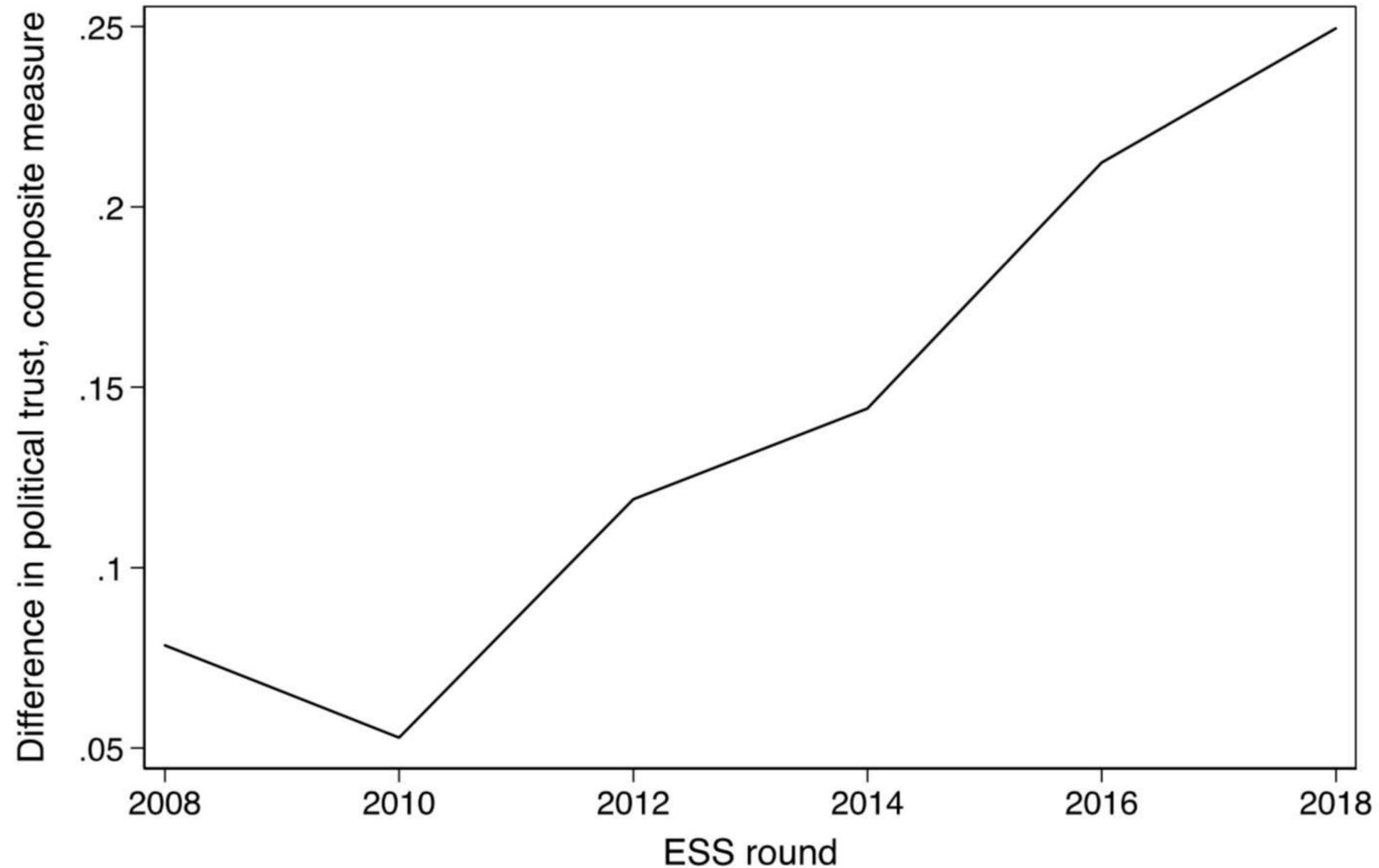
1. Trust in the legal system
2. Trust in the police
3. Trust in the United Nations
4. Trust in the country's parliament
5. Trust in politicians
6. Trust in political parties
7. Trust in the European Parliament

“rural” - those living in country villages or farm or home in the countryside.

The 18 countries we include are Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom

Rural trust in government is diverging

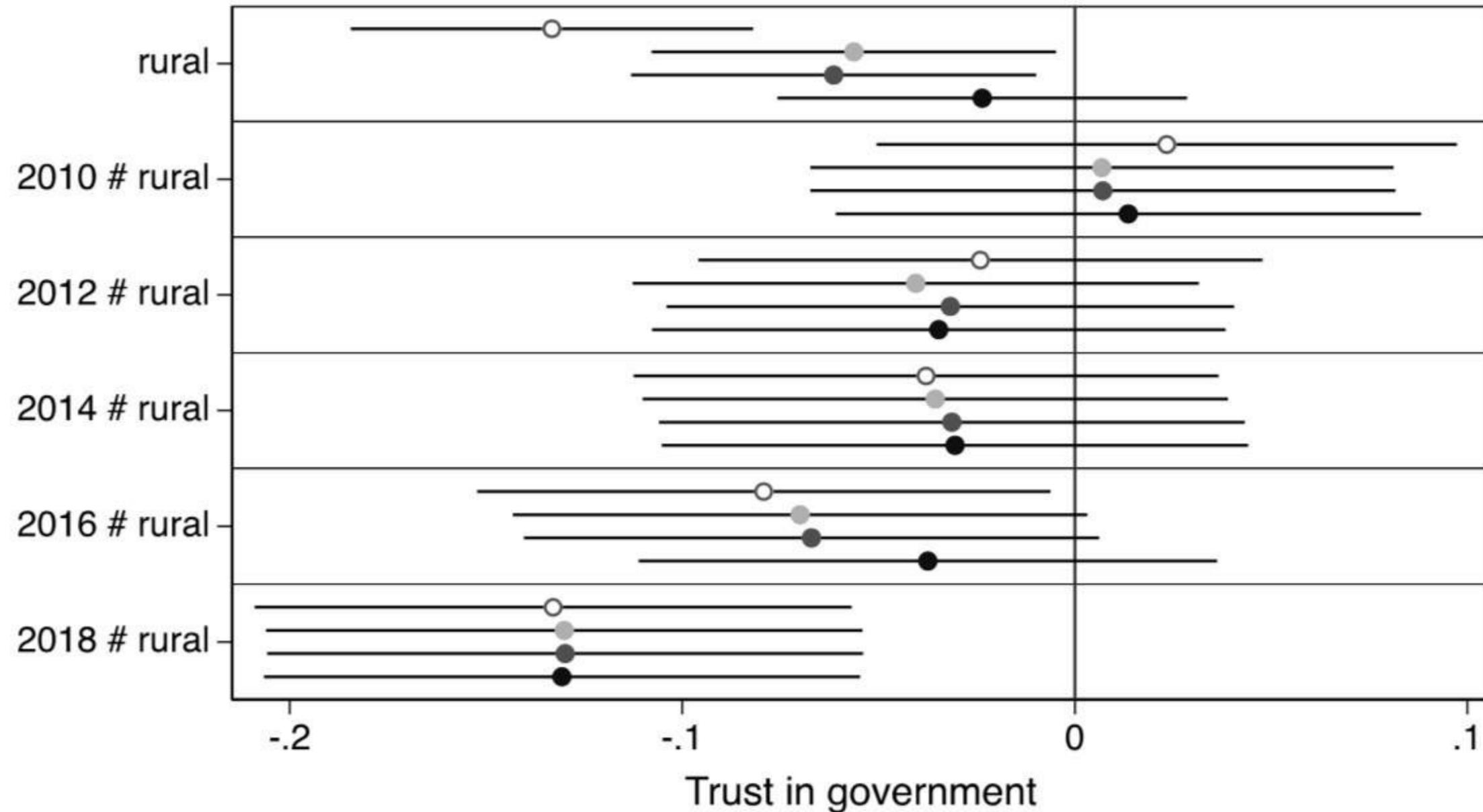
Difference between urban-rural areas in composite trust indicator, 2008-18



Note: Difference in political trust = trust in urban areas minus trust in rural areas.

Rural trust diverges, even controlling for other characteristics

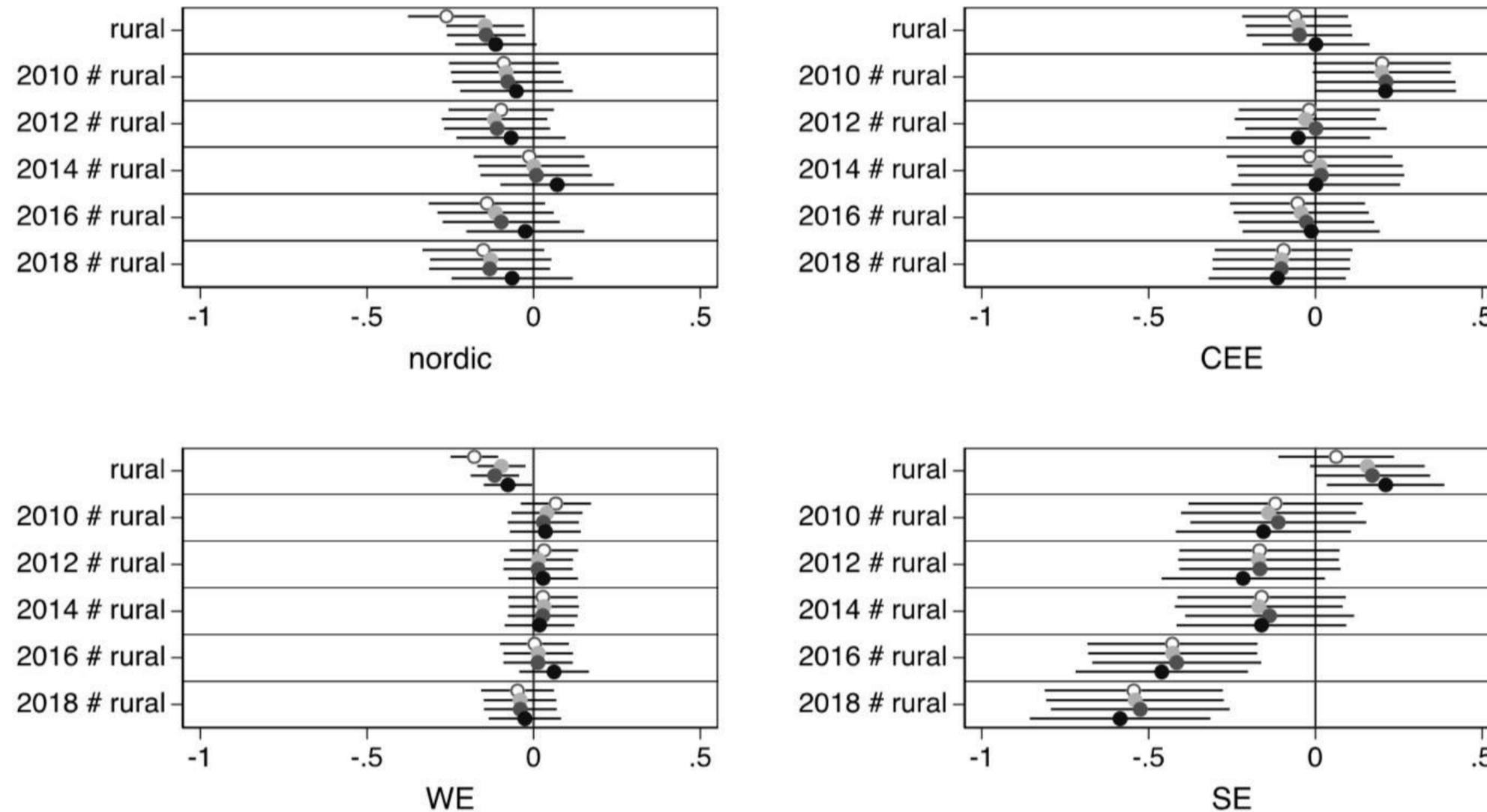
Interaction plots from ordinal logit including various controls



- Country only
- Country + Demog.
- Country + Demog + Values
- Country + Demog + Values + Satisfaction

Rural distrust is uneven, divergence driven by Southern Europe

Interaction plots from ordinal logit including various controls



- Country only
- Country + Demographics
- Country + Demographics + Values
- Country + Demographics + Values + Satisfaction

Results and implications

An increasing urban-rural divide?

- **Political trust matters** for the functioning of democracy and quality of government. Our research finds:
 - **Geographical unevenness** - Trust is lower in rural than urban Europe (see McKay + Jennings's work for global story)
 - **Geographical divergence** - as trust recovers in urban areas, it isn't recovering in rural areas, driven by Southern Europe
- We find some evidence that this is driven by public service delivery and particularly the after-effects of the Eurozone crisis – **as we build back better after COVID, we need to avoid the mistakes of the last crisis**

Paper

Full paper available here:

Mitsch, F., Lee, N., & Morrow, E. R. (2021). Faith no more? The divergence of political trust between urban and rural Europe. *Political Geography*, 89, 102426. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102426>

Ungated version here:

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/110447/1/Mitsch_faith_no_more_published.pdf

Extra slides

This paper

Does political trust differ between urban and rural Europe?

- Recent populist movements have highlighted divisions between urban and rural Europe: Brexit, Gilet Jaunes...
- The dominant, **big-city growth model** – as highlighted by Rodríguez-Pose – has stranded some rural dwellers, and they are not happy
- In this paper we investigate this using the last five waves of the European Social Survey for 18 European countries, giving us a sample of over 120,000 individuals.
- Our results suggest a divergence in trust between urban and rural Europe, with trust rebounding in the cities but not the countryside

Theory

Why does political trust matter?

Political trust = “confidence in institutions such as the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, and the police.”

Uslaner, 2018 : 5

- Political trust has long been seen as important in political science, because it:
 - Underpins the functioning of democracy (e.g. Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki 1975)
 - Ensures voters feel government acts in public / individual interest (Boyer, 1992; Levi and Stoker, 2000)
 - Bridges ideological gap between parties (Hetherington and Rudolph, 2018)

Zmerli and Newton (2017) suggest two main political institutions: **neutral public institutions** such as courts or the police and **political institutions** such as parliament or political parties.

Evidence

Does political trust vary geographically?

Political trust will vary:

- **Individually** - according to individual characteristics such as education, age, psychology, and beliefs
- **Geographically** - e.g. quality of local government (Agerberg, 2017), strength of local community (Putnam), local economy, local public services.

These effects will be mitigated by **sorting**, as individuals move into areas with those who are like minded, and as views adapt with those of neighbourhoods (Rentfrow 2011)

Data

The European Social Survey

- A large cross-sectional, representative survey
- Cumulative data file for the ESS years 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018,
- We include 18 countries for which we have data in all periods, to prevent sample variation affection our results
- Together these account for a total population of 433 million in 2018
- We exclude those aged < 16 , and remove individuals with missing observations
- The results is a final sample size of +120,000 individuals in 18 countries

Empirics

The model

We estimate an individual level OLS model (concerns re: multilevel models):

$$\text{Trust}_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Rural}_i + \beta_2 \text{Demographic}_i + \beta_3 \text{Income}_i + \beta_4 \text{Values}_i + \theta + \delta + \varepsilon$$

For individual 'i'. Where: Trust is one of the measures of political trust,

- **Rural** is a measure of rurality
- **Demographics** is age, gender, qualifications and ethnicity
- **Income** is the individual's position in the country's income distribution
- **Values** is a set of indicators of individual values around gay rights, lifestyle etc
- θ is a set of country dummies; δ is a set of ESS round dummies

Political trust is lower in rural areas

OLS Regressions: Urban-rural residence and trust in government

	(1)	(2)	(5)	(6)
Dependent variable:	Political trust	Political trust	Political institutions	Neutral institutions
Suburbs / outskirts of big city	-0.0832*** (0.0202)	-0.0433** (0.0195)	-0.0327 (0.0215)	-0.0504** (0.0203)
Town or small city	-0.186*** (0.0162)	-0.0639*** (0.0158)	-0.0770*** (0.0172)	-0.0416** (0.0166)
Country village	-0.232*** (0.0165)	-0.0769*** (0.0163)	-0.103*** (0.0178)	-0.0440*** (0.0171)
Farm or home in countryside	-0.280*** (0.0240)	-0.0653*** (0.0234)	-0.0919*** (0.0260)	-0.0219 (0.0242)
Country dummies	X	X	X	X
ESS Dummies	X	X	X	X
Demographic controls		X	X	X
Income		X	X	X
Values		X	X	X
Observations	112,553	112,553	116,024	116,345
R-squared	0.156	0.154	0.258	0.256

Source: European Social Survey rounds 4 – 8. Country dummies are for X countries; ESS dummies for X waves; demographic controls for X countries.