



Social Trust and Attitudes Toward Science and Technology: An Analysis of Contemporary Social Values

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ABSTRACT

Social Trust is a key dimension in the process of interpretation of social change, scientific development and new technology. This paper explores the relationship between social trust and attitude towards scientific and technological development through the secondary data of World Values Survey Waves 6 and 7. This analysis covered 169,126 observations, and focused on indicators of generalized trust, interpersonal trust, scientific optimism and reservations about science and technology. Patterns and associations were explored by descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation, chi-square analysis and simple regression. Highest levels of trust were towards family members and persons personally known, and trust was significantly lower towards strangers, persons of another religion and persons of another nationality. The general attitude of the respondents towards science and technology was positive in terms of betterment of lifestyle, future opportunities and progress of the society. There was a small positive relationship between social trust and scientific optimism and less negative attitudes towards moral and social aspects of science. But the magnitude of the relationships observed were weak, meaning that the variance in people's technological attitudes explained by social trust was low. The results indicate that general mixtures of social values and cultural norms, institutional trust and people's experiences affect attitudes toward science and technology. These findings underscore the need for trust, communication and responsible governance to foster positive public participation in science and technology transitions.

Keywords

Social Trust; Science and Technology; Scientific Optimism; Public Attitudes; Social Values

1. INTRODUCTION

Today science and technology are important drivers of society, impacting communication, health care, education, employment, governance and our daily choices. The understanding of technological development as a technical process has now become inadequate, as the process of introduction and the resulting social impact are significantly shaped by cultural expectations, collective values and public perceptions. The impact of emerging technologies on social interaction, institutional conduct and visions of what future societies should look like are major reasons for this topic to be studied (Bibri, 2022).

The rise of automation and AI has further sparked debates on the social, ethical, and long-term impacts of technological transformation (Khogali & Mekid, 2023). The public attitude to science and technology thus offers valuable clues to individual perceptions of innovation, opportunity, risk and social change.

Citizen attitudes towards science and technology have evolved over time in conjunction with various political, cultural and informational contexts. While science can be linked to higher levels of living and better opportunities, public responses are not always positive and can vary

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depending on social orientations and situations (Miller et al., 2024). Attitudes towards emerging technologies can also be emotional, ethical, and interpersonal, especially when technologies like artificial intelligence become part of everyday life (Ho et al., 2023). Social robotics studies have also shown the need to systematically assess people's positive and negative attitudes towards new technologies (Koverola et al., 2022). Awareness and trust have become two critical factors in shaping individuals' positive or cautious perception of technological innovation in the realm of artificial intelligence (Scantamburlo et al., 2024).

Social trust is another significant aspect of present-day social values. It represents the degree of trust that people have in other people that they are reliable, cooperative and honest in various social contexts. Trust may apply to intimate relationships like family and friendships, but also to larger relationships like neighbours, strangers, religious groups, and different nationalities. Social trust is very much linked to social capital, which can foster cooperation, collective action, and adjustment to new social circumstances (Xu et al., 2023). Through interpersonal relations, social capital can also help build stronger communities by providing social resources that buffer people against broader social and cultural changes (Wahono et al., 2023). These types of trust are especially important in the assessment of scientific knowledge and technological development in modern societies.

The faith in science is becoming increasingly recognized as a social phenomenon and not just a judgement about scientific competence. The relationships, institutions, communication settings and broader social experience influence public confidence in science (Contessa, 2023). Social attitudes and individual motivations can shape trust in scientists and public responses to scientific matters, including climate change, vaccination, and emerging technologies (Dixson et al., 2022). Trust in science-society relations is also a growing topic of concern with issues of misinformation, contested expertise, and loss of institutional trust (Gundersen et al., 2022). Past studies have shown that general attitude to science, scientists' credibility and previous experiences with scientific information may have an impact on public trust in science (Wintterlin et

al., 2022).

As new technologies become more prominent in daily life, the association between general social trust and attitudes toward technology is especially pertinent. Attitudes towards AI have been linked to general trust and distrust, indicating that overall interpersonal attitudes can influence attitudes toward technological systems (Schepman & Rodway, 2023). In a contemporary media landscape, this dynamic can be further driven by the way media contribute to exposure to information, political interpretations, and the perception of technological risks and benefits (Yang et al., 2025). While there has been growing interest in trust and technological acceptance, there has been comparatively little work that has investigated multiple dimensions of social trust and general attitudes to science and technology in large-scale social survey data. An analysis of these connections could be useful in understanding the connection between current social values and public reactions to scientific and technological change.

Objectives

- To assess patterns of social trust across different interpersonal and social groups.
- To examine respondents' attitudes toward science and technology in contemporary society.
- To determine the association between social trust and attitudes toward science and technology.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Design

The design of this study is secondary data and quantitative, which is a cross-sectional study to analyse the relationship between social trust and attitude toward science and technology. The analysis relied on the responses that were available from the World Values Survey in Waves 6 and 7. This design appeared to be suitable as the study was intended to find the patterns and the relationship between the social-value indicators among a large population, and not to find causal relationship. It paid special attention to indicators of interpersonal and generalized trust and respondents' attitudes towards science and technological development.

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2.2 Data Source

The data for this study are from the combined World Values Survey Waves 6 and 7 data set (features_w6_w7_21_06.csv). The available file consisted of 169,126 observations and 73 variables that represent different dimensions of values, attitudes, beliefs, trust, social perceptions and views about science and technology (Yudin, 2025). The World Values Survey offers standardized survey measures which enable values and social attitudes to be measured across large and diverse populations. The variables that were chosen for analysis were those directly related to the purpose of the present study.

2.3 Study Population and Sample

Analysis the population comprised of respondents who were included in Waves 6 and 7 of the world values survey and represented in the combined data file. The sample that was available contained 169,126 records prior to missing or invalid responses. People who had valid responses on the selected social trust and science and technology attitude variables were kept for the respective analysis. The participants were not recruited or contacted because this study was secondary analysis of a previously collected survey.

2.4 Study Variables

Social trust was the key explanatory variable in the study. This was measured with world values survey questions 57 and 63. Q57 was a general trust question and Q58-Q63 were trust in people of various social categories (family, neighbourhood, personally known, first met, another religion, and another nationality). Both close interpersonal trust and social trust (more general) were described by these variables. The attitudes towards science and technology were the main outcome construct and was measured with items Q158 through Q163. These questions addressed respondents' views on the role and impact of science and technology, such as whether technological development is good for life, offers prospects, affects daily life, and raises broader social issues or concerns. The items were analysed separately, to maintain the meaning of each attitude indicator. When appropriate, consistently directed items were grouped together to form an overall tendency towards positive or negative

attitudes to science and technology.

2.5 Data Preparation

Data were first screened for incomplete and/or invalid and/or non-substantive responses prior to statistical analysis. The special survey codes for missing data, refusal, and out-of-range responses were excluded from the substantive numeric data. The additional index column that was uploaded was not used in substantive analysis. Variable coding was checked to make sure that the meanings of the higher and lower responses were consistent. Reverse direction items were coded accordingly (as needed) to create or compare composite measures. Available valid responses to each variable or combination of variables were used for analyses.

2.6 Statistical Analysis

Respondents' patterns of social trust and attitudes towards science and technology were first summarised using descriptive statistics. Percentages and frequencies were obtained for the categorical and ordinal response categories. For composite or approximately continuous scores, central tendency and variability were summarised using either the mean and standard deviation or the median and interquartile range depending on the distribution of the scores. Since the key variables on the survey were measured on an ordinal response scale, Spearman's rank correlation was employed to determine direction and magnitude of association between the social trust variables and attitudes towards science and technology. Where both the trust and attitude variables were analysed as categories, chi-square tests were also used. Simple regression analysis was used to estimate the relationship between social trust and attitudes towards science and technology for analyses involving an overall attitude score. The magnitude and direction of the association observed was interpreted as regression coefficient. Data were judged for statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

This study was a secondary analysis of an existing survey file without direct human interaction. The analysis was restricted to the variables available in

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the data set and no attempt was made to identify individual respondents. The data would be used only for research purposes and intended to be reported as a summary. The study thus respected and has ensured confidentiality of the respondents and principles for the responsible use of secondary social survey data.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Patterns of Social Trust

The analysis included up to 169,126 observations, with the number of valid responses varying slightly across individual variables. There was a relatively low level of generalized trust. Of the 165,763 who provided valid responses to Q57,

125,456 (75.68%) said that most people should be treated with great caution, while 40,307 (24.32%) said that most people could be trusted. There were large discrepancies in trust depending on the social group. The family members were the most trusted with 79.85% complete trust and 16.26% some trust as given in Table 1. There was also a high level of trust for others in the neighbourhood and personally known. By contrast, only 2.68% completely trusted strangers they met for the first time, while 74.60% said they trusted strangers, but not much. Similarly, trust was lower towards people of different religion and nationality. A visual representation of these differences is found in Figure 1, which shows a clear decrease in trust with increasing social distance.

Table 1. Distribution of Social Trust Indicators

Social trust indicator	Valid n	Trust completely n (%)	Trust somewhat n (%)	Do not trust very much n (%)	Do not trust at all n (%)
Family	168,279	134,368 (79.85)	27,370 (16.26)	5,031 (2.99)	1,510 (0.90)
Neighborhood	167,400	31,909 (19.06)	87,326 (52.17)	36,261 (21.66)	11,904 (7.11)
People known personally	167,604	39,167 (23.37)	87,741 (52.35)	31,184 (18.61)	9,512 (5.68)
People met for first time	166,062	4,449 (2.68)	37,734 (22.72)	71,446 (43.02)	52,433 (31.57)
People of another religion	160,362	9,815 (6.12)	60,544 (37.75)	56,186 (35.04)	33,817 (21.09)
People of another nationality	160,222	8,139 (5.08)	54,761 (34.18)	57,064 (35.62)	40,258 (25.13)

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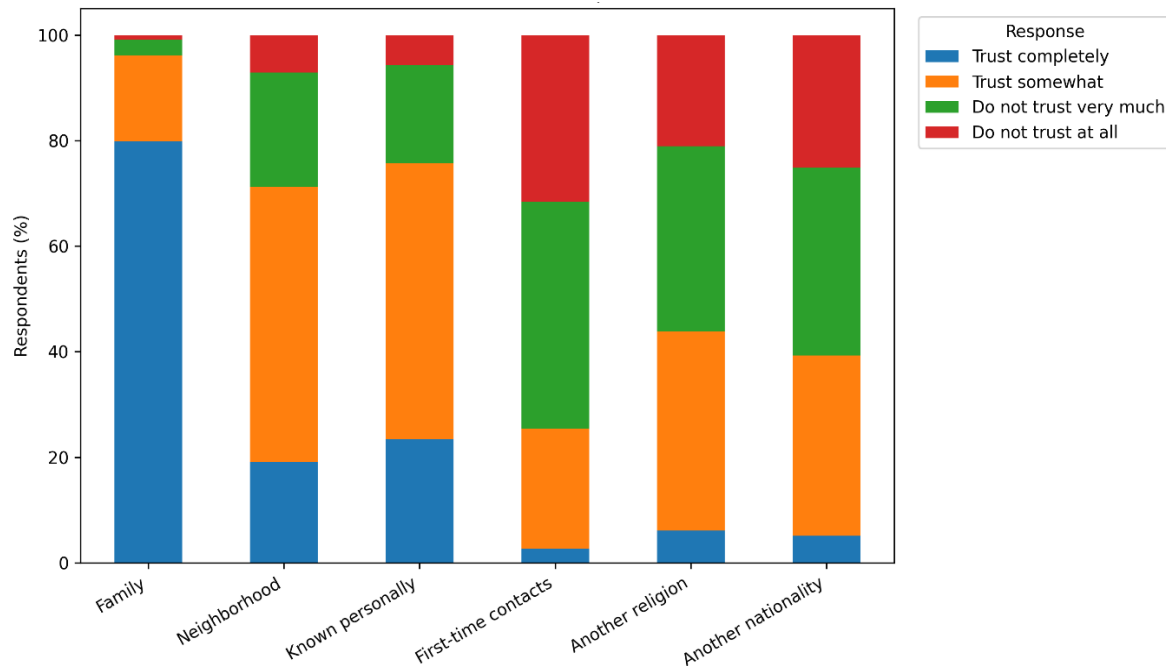


Figure 1. Distribution of Social Trust Across Different Social Groups

3.2 Attitudes Toward Science and Technology

The respondents overall had positive attitudes towards the value of science and technology. Table 2 indicates that science/technology will give more opportunities for the next generation (mean = 7.63; SD = 2.30) and science/technology make life healthier, easier, more comfortable (mean = 7.50; SD = 2.36) were the highest mean scores. The belief that things are better in the world thanks to science and technology was also rated high (mean

= 7.15, sd = 2.43). A more mixed set of responses was seen with regards to concerns around science. The mean score for excessive reliance on science, not faith was 5.57 and the statement that science made ideas of right and wrong weaker had a mean score of 5.44. The least mean was obtained for the item "scientific knowledge is not important in everyday life" (mean = 4.70, SD = 2.91). The positive attitudes towards science and technology were thus significantly stronger than the negative or distancing attitudes as shown in Figure 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Attitudes Toward Science and Technology

Attitude indicator	Valid n	Mean	SD	Median	Score 8–10 (%)	Score 1–3 (%)
Science and technology make life healthier/easier	165,623	7.50	2.36	8	57.92	7.05
More opportunities for next generation	165,229	7.63	2.30	8	60.15	6.16
World better off because of science/technology	165,587	7.15	2.43	8	51.33	8.83
Depend too much on science rather than faith	163,053	5.57	2.88	6	29.17	26.59

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Science weakens ideas of right and wrong	160,568	5.44	2.80	5	25.96	26.82
Science is not important in daily life	164,323	4.70	2.91	5	20.79	40.32

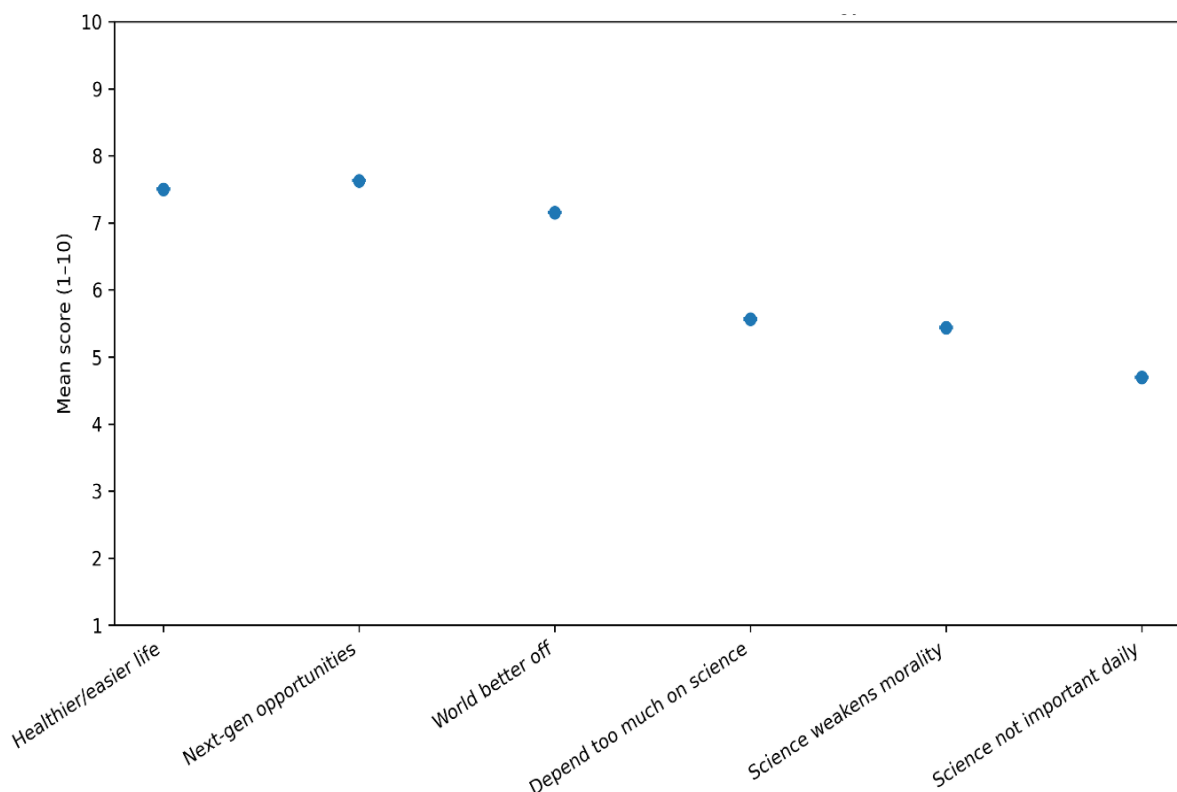


Figure 2. Mean Attitudes Toward Science and Technology Across Survey Indicators

3.3 Association Between Social Trust and Science and Technology Attitudes

The correlation analysis using the Spearman method showed that the relationship between social trust and attitudes toward science and technology was generally weak, although many were statistically significant, due to the number of observations. There was a positive correlation between higher trust in family and belief that science and technology make life healthier and easier ($\rho = 0.098$, $p < 0.001$) and satisfaction with the opportunities for the next generation ($\rho = 0.099$, $p < 0.001$). The strongest association with

trust in one's neighbourhood was with the belief that the world would be better off with science and technology ($\rho = 0.089$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, trust tended to be higher with decreasing reservations about science. For instance, trust in people of another nationality was negatively correlated with the notion that science undermined ideas of right and wrong ($\rho = -0.098$, $p < 0.001$). There was a similar negative relationship with trust in people of another religion ($\rho = -0.077$, $p < 0.001$). The entire correlation pattern is displayed in Table 3 and plotted in Figure 3.

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Table 3. Spearman Correlations Between Social Trust and Science/Technology Attitudes

Social trust	Healthier/easier life	Next-generation opportunities	World better off	Depend too much on science	Science weakens morality	Science not important daily
Family	0.098***	0.099***	0.083***	-0.001	-0.014***	-0.033***
Neighborhood	0.073***	0.052***	0.089***	-0.038***	-0.037***	-0.014***
Known personally	0.060***	0.050***	0.080***	-0.063***	-0.071***	-0.055***
First-time contacts	-0.016***	-0.051***	0.023***	-0.056***	-0.075***	-0.013***
Another religion	-0.026***	-0.042***	0.013***	-0.044***	-0.077***	-0.031***
Another nationality	-0.015***	-0.029***	0.035***	-0.057***	-0.098***	-0.044***

*Note: Higher trust scores indicate greater trust. **p < 0.001.

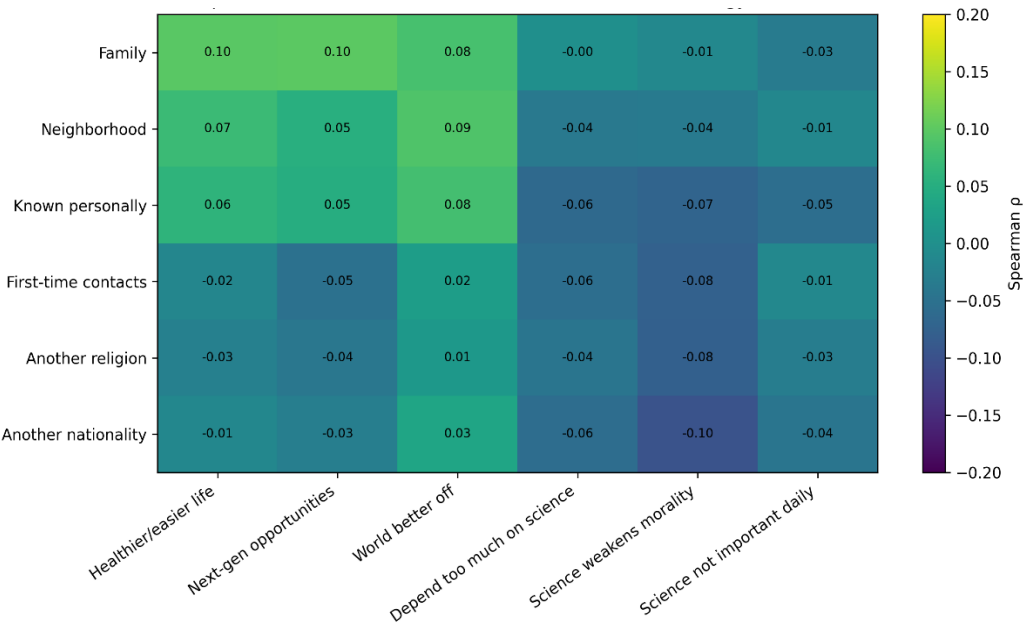


Figure 3. Correlation Matrix Between Social Trust and Attitudes Toward Science and Technology

3.4 Composite Social Trust and Scientific Attitudes

A composite interpersonal social trust measure was created by reverse-coding Q58–Q63 so that higher scores represented greater trust. The results of internal consistency showed that the Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.754, which was acceptable. The three positive science indicators (i.e., Q158, Q159 and Q163) were also found to be of acceptable consistency ($\alpha = 0.720$) and were combined into a scientific optimism score. Findings with the reservations score should be interpreted with more caution as there was less

consistency ($\alpha = 0.546$) among the three reservation items. There were small positive relationships between composite social trust and scientific optimism ($\rho = 0.062$, $p < 0.001$) and small negative relationships with scientific reservations ($\rho = -0.101$, $p < 0.001$). This trend is also confirmed in Figure 4: the mean optimism score rose from 6.96 in the lowest trust category to 7.56 in the highest; the mean reservation score fell from 5.79 to around 5.16.

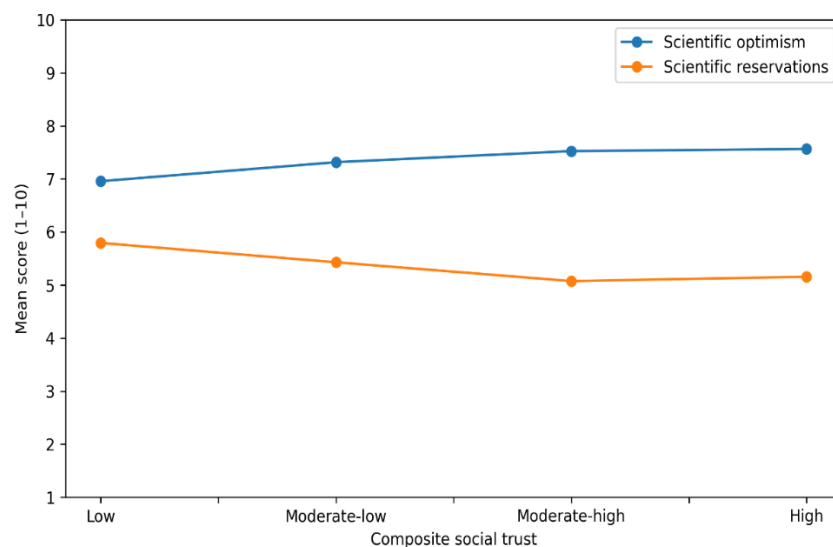


Figure 4. Scientific Optimism and Scientific Reservations Across Levels of Social Trust

3.5 Regression Analysis

To further examine the relationship between composite social trust and the two dimensions of attitudes towards science and technology, simple linear regression was employed. Table 4 shows that high social trust scores were positively related to high scores on scientific optimism ($B = 0.264$, 95% CI: 0.246–0.281, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, one-unit in the trust score related to around 0.26 points in the scientific optimism score. There was

a negative association between social trust and scientific reservations ($B = -0.389$, 95% CI: -0.408 to -0.370 , $p < 0.001$), so that those who had more social trust were less concerned or skeptical about science. But the predictive value of both models was not high. Social trust was responsible for 0.54% of the variance in scientific optimism and 0.98% of the variance in scientific reservations. The results shown here reflect statistically significant but substantively weak relations.

Table 4. Simple Regression of Social Trust on Science and Technology Attitudes

Outcome	n	B	SE	95% CI	t	p-value	R ²
Scientific optimism	164,230	0.264	0.009	0.246 to 0.281	29.88	<0.001	0.005
Scientific reservations	162,099	-0.389	0.010	-0.408 to -0.370	-40.03	<0.001	0.010

Overall, Tables 1–4 and Figures 1–4 consistently

indicate that social trust was strongest within

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close social relationships, respondents generally held favourable views toward science and technology, and greater social trust was associated with slightly greater scientific optimism and fewer reservations about science. The associations were nevertheless weak, suggesting that social trust represents only one of several factors related to contemporary attitudes toward science and technological development.

4. DISCUSSION

This study investigated social trust and attitude towards science and technology with a large sample from the World Values Survey Waves 6 and 7. The findings indicated that trust was highest in intimate relationships, such as with family members and acquaintances, and much lower with strangers and out-groups. As well, generally positive attitudes toward science and technology were expressed, notably for better living, future opportunities, and the overall influence of science and technology on society. The relationships between social trust and technological attitudes observed in the present study, however, were of weak magnitude and statistically significant, suggesting that while trust is one of the many factors that affect public perceptions of science and technological change, it is an important one.

This positive relation between social trust and scientific optimism is in line with earlier findings, indicating that trust can impact the acceptance of new technology. Social influence and trust have been found to influence the intention to adopt AI-assisted diagnosis and treatment in the healthcare context (Cheng et al., 2022). In the context of AI acceptance, comparable trends are observed in the literature, as trust is a key determinant of acceptance and willingness to use AI applications (Kauttonen et al., 2025). Responsible innovation and trust-building processes have also been connected to public acceptance of other innovations, e.g., green hydrogen (Häußermann et al., 2023). These results lend support to the idea that the trusting individual in social situations might be a little more open to scientific and technological advances.

The current findings also suggested that higher levels of trust were related to less concern about science undermining morality or being too much of an influence. This may be due to the general influence of credibility and social influence on

attitude. Attitude formation and behavioral intentions can be influenced by perceived expertise and credibility, especially when the sources are trusted or providing social cues (Iqbal et al., 2023). The impact of social influences on intentions and behavioral responses has also been demonstrated in consumer contexts (Liang et al., 2024). Social trust and perceived similarity can shape attitudes and interaction with information electronically transmitted in a digital environment (Pang et al., 2024). Overall, these results indicate that technological attitudes can form not only due to technological knowledge, but also as a result of social processes.

The responses relative to trust also may differ based on the technology under consideration. In the younger demographic, AI has been seen to impact brand trust and purchase decisions, highlighting the influence of technological systems on perception and action (Guerra-Tamez et al., 2024). Trust has also been associated with the uptake of conversational AI in higher education, as system design, institutional policy and anthropomorphic features can influence uptake (Polyportis & Pahos, 2025). Likewise, regarding an online context, digital communication and electronic word of mouth can have an impact on trust and loyalty (Sahir, 2024). These findings support the notion of trust being a phenomenon that exists in various social and technological settings and is not necessarily one uniform response.

Results should also be interpreted in the greater ethical, cultural and institutional context. In the context of AI governance, trustworthiness is a significant topic, especially with regard to accountability and transparency and the responsible use of automated systems (Lahusen et al., 2024). The ethics of digital research practices, such as web scraping, also underscore the importance of social acceptability and legitimacy in the acceptance of the technology (Essien et al., 2023). Broad social and cultural influences may also impact personal attitudes and decisions, even in areas where technology is not directly involved (Safdari-Dehcheshmeh et al., 2023). Similarly, religion, trust in government, and the rule of law have been linked to value-based individual decisions (Shah & Asghar, 2024).

Lastly, the overall positive attitudes towards science and technology that emerged from this

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study align with findings in educational settings, where technological interventions and STEM are linked to positive learning outcomes and engagement (Sapounidis et al., 2024). However, the small effect sizes observed here suggest that we should not be so optimistic about science based on social trust alone. Attitude towards technology is likely to be determined by a general set of cultural values, institutional experiences, information exposure, perceived risks and personal experiences with innovation. These additional factors should be included in future research, with further study indicating whether the link between social trust and technological attitudes varies from country to country, cultural context, and technological area.

5. CONCLUSION

The study investigated the association of social trust and attitude toward science and technology based on the data from World Values Survey Waves 6 and 7. The results indicated significant differences in the extent of social trust among interpersonal groups. Trust was greatest for family members and persons known personally and least for strangers, persons of another religion and persons of another nationality. Overall, people rated their attitudes toward science and technology positively, especially in the areas of a healthier/easier life, future opportunities and progress of society. The analysis also showed that higher levels of social trust were related to marginally more positive attitudes towards science and technology and less negative attitudes towards the moral and social implications of scientific progress. They were of low magnitude, though, meaning that social trust is not strongly correlated with technological attitudes. Public perceptions of science and technology are probably shaped by a larger mix of cultural values, institutional trust, information availability, experiences, interest and risk and benefit perceptions. Overall, the results indicate a need to pay attention to social values in the analysis of public reactions to scientific and technological change. Building social trust, clear communication and responsible governance of technologies can help enable more informed and constructive discussions about innovation. Future studies should explore these relationships within countries and cultural groups and incorporate

other social, institutional and demographic variables.

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