Exploring Political Trust Among Immigrants in Scandinavia

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a study on differences in political trust between immigrants of different origins, residing in either Denmark, Norway or Sweden. The main question is how differences in the general propensity to hold confidence in various political institutions may be explained by previous political systems experiences. Utilising recent survey data we seek to explain variations in political trust by incorporating country-level data based on the Corruption Perceptions Index. Empirical analyses suggest that the strongest confidence in political institutions is found among immigrants who share a background in high-corruption countries. However, we also find that length of residence in the host country negatively influences political trust; hence, over time, immigrants belonging to this category will be positioned more on par with the rest of the population. Analysing possible reasons for this conditional effect, we find experiences of discrimination to be an insufficient explanation. Instead we argue that immigrants from less trust-worthy political regimes initially tend to have a very bright view on the system performance of stable democracies, such as the Scandinavian countries, but that experience and knowledge acquired over time engender a more critical, though arguably realistic, outlook.

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In any democratic political system, there are obvious reasons to care about citizens’ trust in the ruling elites, and in the institutions granted with legislative, executive and judicial power. Where citizens do not share at least a basic amount of such confidence, one may expect a troublesome lack of legitimacy and, as a result, a democratic system that is deemed both unreliable and inefficient (cf. Rahn And Rudolph 2005, 530–531). But on what kind of information do ordinary citizens base their support—or lack of support? It is reasonable to assume that the level of political trust—the general propensity to hold confidence in various political institutions—in a given society is a consequence of subjective evaluations of “system performance” (Easton 1965; cf. Anderson and Tverdova 2003). In other words, rational citizens may base their opinions on whether elected politicians and government institutions “deserve” to be trusted on their experiences of government activities (Kumlin and Rothstein 2005). However, aside from individual experiences, it seems safe to assume that citizens frequently also make more implicit judgements of their political institutions, thereby being guided by a wide array of impressions from other people’s experiences and from reports provided by mass media.

If this is the case, one of several complex issues raised concerns which kind of system performance that should be measured, in order to explain cross-country variations in institutional trust. As noted by Anderson and Tverdova (2003, 92), the most common choice in this respect has fallen on various macro-economic indicators, whereas consequences of actual “political performance” are far less investigated. However, regardless of the choice between indicators of how well a given set of institutions function in practice, we argue that different members of society may use different yardsticks when evaluating political institutions. If this is true, it may very well be that some citizens share a first class political trust, while others find that the political institutions leave much to be desired.

Previous research suggests that political trust generally have declined over time in Western democracies (Dalton 2006; Holmberg 1999; Dalton 1999, 66–9; Klingemann 1999, 49–52; Levi and Stoker 2000, 482). Reasonably, however, the total figures do not tell the complete story here. Specifically, one may observe significant intra-country differences in political trust that are rarely highlighted in this field of research. In this paper, we present a study on differences in political trust between immigrants of different origins, residing in Denmark, Norway or Sweden. Exploring potential variations in this regard, we seek to contribute both theoretically and analytically to the research on political trust. Further, although primarily for methodological reasons, we argue that our focus on evaluations of system performance among immigrants simultaneously generates results of relevance for the public debate on integration policies in the Scandinavian countries. Our analysis suggests that a gradual increase in system critical viewpoints among immigrants is not necessarily a bad outcome. On the contrary, one may argue
that a “trust overload” would be counterproductive for a multicultural democracy that, among other things, needs critical citizens.

**Conceptions of trust**

The growing literature on various dimensions of trust has provided important clarifications regarding the concept as such (“what do we mean by trust in the first place?”) as well as a valuable scrutiny of comparisons across time and space (“are we observing a decline in trust or not?”). Recognising that trust is a “multi-level concept” that should generate research on both individuals and features of bureaucracies and nations (Levi and Stoker 2000), a first fundamental distinction separates social (or “horizontal”) trust from political (or “vertical”, and sometimes “institutional”) trust. Where the former concept typically denotes the extent to which ordinary members of a society place trust in one another, the latter aims to capture the confidence individuals have in the political institutions of their society.

The Putnamian inspired scholarly literature on social capital, continually developing since the 1990’s, includes a substantial amount of efforts to specify possible mechanisms of social trust (see e.g. Wollebaek and Selle 2002; Marschall and Stolle 2004; Kumlin and Rothstein 2005). Seemingly, however, the corresponding analyses regarding possible important predictors of political trust are harder to obtain.

The arguably more multifaceted nature of political trust has probably complicated matters in this particular respect. Early, Easton (1965) developed a classic trichotomy by distinguishing support for the community, for the regime, and for the authorities in rule. This distinction, although widely accepted as being relevant, has been refined somewhat in more recent research. For example, Norris (1999) argues that the regime category should be itself divided into the three categories of regime principles, regime performance, and regime institutions. Utilising these further distinctions has proven fruitful. Several empirical studies have suggested that citizens in general support regime principles, but often are much less trusting in how the regime, including its institutions and actors, behave in practice (for an overview, see Norris 1999).

Previous research include the finding that those who express stronger identification with the ruling party (or parties) tend to show higher levels of political trust, and vice versa (Newton 1999). Reasonably, this is related to individuals’ political preferences, as reflected in a certain level of support for incumbent politicians. Other explanatory factors, for which some empirical evidence suggest a positive effect, are individual levels of satisfaction with democracy and the attachment to the local community (Zmerli, Newton and Montero 2007). Socio-economic factors, on the other hand, seem to have only minor explanatory power. Hence, contrasting
typical findings in political behaviour studies, the consequences of educational and income related variation for confidence in political institutions seem to be modest indeed (cf. Newton 1999; Holmberg 1999). Thus, previous scholarly efforts notwithstanding, there seems to be sizeable space for propositions on factors that are potentially related to political trust.

In this study, we contend that the explanatory analysis preferably should not relate merely to individual level differences (whether in other sets of attitudes or in resources of various kinds). Assuming that the (actual as well as perceived) performance of political institutions varies across countries, one would also want to control for contextual properties in this respect. Intuitively, it is reasonable to assume that a given person’s level of political trust to some extent depends on the actual set of political institutions that she or he has to cope with. Anderson and Tverdova (2003) present interesting evidence for such an hypothesis. Studying attitudes towards government, in a cross-country comparative analysis, they find country corruption level to be associated with more negative individual level evaluations of governmental practices. Expanding upon their result in this paper—thereby also utilising cross country variation in levels of corruption—we move further in an attempt to include not only current impressions of governmental performance but also past experiences.

**Immigration to Scandinavia – a test bed for theoretical expectations**

Before detailing our specific idea, a somewhat more philosophical remark concerns the problem of defining ideal levels of political trust. Considering social trust, there seems to be a general consensus that more is always better than less. If inter-citizen mutual trust reduces various kinds of risk in transactions, and makes human interaction easier, any society should opt for the highest possible levels. As for political trust, however, demarcating the optimum is a more ambiguous task. From a democratic point of view, a certain amount of political distrust seems clearly warranted. The politically engaged citizenry is probably not the most contented one; but, at the same time, it is difficult to identify an appropriate level of, what perhaps may be called, sound suspiciousness. Although we are not able to settle this normative issue, we argue that it should be a fruitful endeavour to compare groups that have different experiences of political system performance.

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1 Although not further addressed in this paper, scholarly findings indicate that there are important links between political and social trust. Zmerli, Newton and Montero (2007) find social trust to be a strong predictor of political trust in a comparative study. Noteworthy, their conclusion opposes the results in several earlier studies (e.g. Kaase 1999, 13).
A pure empirical question, namely, concerns how people in general actually form an opinion on the quality of their political system. Put differently, what would be the appropriate standard—or “benchmark”—when someone is asked to judge the trustworthiness of a given set of institutions? As it turns out, the answer may quite reasonably vary depending on who you ask. For citizens having spent their whole lives in a well-established democratic system, such as in one of the Scandinavian countries, it is sensible that the standard would be something like the “ideal democracy”. For most people (including political scientists) the picture of a theoretical ideal is probably quite abstract. Still, if the only available basis for evaluation is the “best of worlds”, one may very well expect a rather critical view of the actual institutions, which, after all, hardly may be regarded as perfect in an absolute sense. Nevertheless, we assume that citizens of developed, and stable, democracies in general do not believe actual political institutions elsewhere to be much more trustworthy.

Following this line of thought, we also assume that individual level political trust would not significantly change for someone who migrates from a well-established democratic state to another, as for example from the Netherlands to Sweden. Such a migrant, used to comparatively high standards in the quality of democratic government, would roughly expect the institutions of her or his new country to work equally well.

However, we hypothesise that the situation may be significantly different for migrants from countries run by corrupt political regimes, with poor, if any, democratic traditions. In previous absence of experience from “good government”, one may expect that they picture reasonably well-functioning democratic countries as being much closer to the ideal in comparison with the country of origin. Hence, when asked to evaluate political institutions in the new country, their comparative outlook probably result in more positive judgements than those observed either within the non-migrant population, or among immigrants from other stable democracies.

Thus one may expect high levels of political trust within large shares of the immigrant populations in Scandinavia, since—in a comparative light—many non-Western immigrants reasonably would perceive the political institutions of those countries as more reliable and trustworthy. In fact, along with a few other democracies, the Scandinavian countries may be regarded as “most likely” cases for a positive outcome of comparative evaluations in this
respect. Denmark, Sweden, and, although to a somewhat lesser extent, Norway are habitually found among the most “clean” countries in comprehensive assessments of corruption.\textsuperscript{2}

Importantly, however, time may make a significant difference in this respect. Even if certain categories of immigrants initially deem the Scandinavian institutions as very reliable and trustworthy, their integration process may involve the development of higher demands, perhaps more in line with prevailing attitudes within the majority population. Specifically, one may hypothesise that initially high levels of political trust among immigrants tend to be attenuated with increased length of residence, hence gradually approaching the “normal level” in the host country. On the basis of experience, their impression of the institutions in their new country will be more realistic. Put simply, they become more critical citizens.

From the reasoning above we derive the following two hypotheses, for which we contend that international migration to Scandinavia provides an interesting test bed:

H1: Among immigrants in Scandinavia, we expect a positive relationship between the level of corruption in the country of origin and individual level political trust

H2: Among immigrants from countries of high corruption, we expect individual level political trust to decrease with length of residence in Scandinavia.

Figure 1 attempts to illustrate the analytical premises outlined. The pictured key variables of the study are Corruption Experience (measured on a contextual level), Time in Host Country and Political Trust (the latter both measured on an individual level). Estimating the partial effects of the former, independent, variables on the latter, dependent, variable should provide a basis for empirically evaluating our expectations. As illustrated in the graph (by the arrow drawn from Time in Host Country, pointing on the other arrow between Corruption Experience and Political Trust) it should be worthwhile to take the possible interaction between the independent variables into account as well. Indeed, an interaction effect of this kind is precisely what we

\textsuperscript{2} The Corruption Perception Index (CPI), developed by Transparency International is widely regarded as the most ambitious and reliable source in this respect. In the 2008 evaluation, both Denmark and Sweden received the highest observed score of 9.3 on a scale ranging from 0 (‘highly corrupt’) to 10 (‘absolutely clean from corruption’). Although Norway received a comparatively lower score of 7.9, all three countries end up in top 15 of the list comprising no less than 180 countries in the world. As we utilise the CPI measure in the following analyses, one should note that, to facilitate interpretation, we have reversed the scale (thus letting more corrupt countries score higher on the corruption scale).
should find if corruption experiences are consequential only among immigrants that may be considered as newcomers.

Figure 1. Key variables of the study, and the links to explore

Data and measures
For the empirical analysis, we rely on two complementary (although entirely independent) data sources. For initial tests of the hypotheses, we use round 4 (the most recent one, administered in 2008) of the biennial European Social Survey (ESS). The ESS employs face-to-face interviews with representative samples of the resident (age 15 and over) populations of a large number of countries. Given our purpose, we disaggregated the respective national samples from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden in order to form a Scandinavian ESS subset. The data set we thus utilise includes information from in total 4989 respondents (approximately equally distributed over the three countries), of which 443 are considered to be immigrants as they declared themselves foreign-born.

For follow-up analyses of causal relationships we also make use of the large-scale Swedish Citizen Survey 2003 (“Medborgarundersökningen 2003”). This survey also employed face-to-face interviews, but with a stratified random sample of inhabitants in Sweden (age 18 and over). Although limited to merely one of the Scandinavian countries, this survey has other important merits, most important of which is its large over-sample of immigrants (originally selected on the basis of official register data records data). The total sample includes 2138 respondents of which 998 have immigrated to Sweden. The Swedish Citizen Survey 2003 is particularly

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3 For full documentation, as well as data access, see http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org.
4 The respondent totals are 1610 (Denmark), 1549 (Norway), and 1830 (Sweden).
5 The Swedish Citizen Survey 2003 employed a complex sampling scheme, increasing the selection probability for refugees and for immigrants from developing countries, while under-representing immigrants from Nordic and Western European countries. At the same time, the design allows for
useful for the purpose of our study, while it aside from questions on confidence in different political institutions in Sweden also contained numerous questions on immigration specific experiences and life circumstances.

At the same time, the surveys are quite compatible, since we are able to measure political trust, our dependent variable, with a virtually identical set of items in both surveys, the difference although being that the Swedish-only data includes evaluations of three more institutions.

We try to capture overall political trust through each respondent’s stated confidence in the following institutions: the parliament, the legal system, the police, politicians (explicitly expressed in this, very general, sense), and political parties (again, generally expressed). In addition, the respondents in the Swedish survey were also asked about their confidence in the municipal board (“kommunstyrelsen”), the civil service, and the national government (“regeringen”).

All assessments were made using a scale 0–10, where higher values represent more trust. For each survey, we summarised respondent answers in an additive index variable of overall political trust, which finally was rescaled so that the minimum value on the dependent variable is 0 (for a respondent expressing minimum trust across all institutions) and the theoretical maximum is 1 (for a respondent expressing complete trust, no matter which institutional sphere).

To evaluate the potential importance of experiences from other political systems, we utilise the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), developed by Transparency International (2008). Published annually, this index is widely regarded as the most ambitious and reliable source of information necessary adjustments to produce representative samples of the total population, the native population and the population of immigrants, respectively.

6 Within “translation margins”, the political trust items were identically introduced in the both surveys, as follows: “Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust.” However, the positive maximum was in the Swedish Citizen Survey 2003 expressed as “very strong trust”. Also, in this case, the formulation “the courts” was used instead of “the legal system”.

7 The construction of the respective political trust index is supported by dimensional analyses. Using either survey, a principal component analysis reveals that only one factor survives the Kaiser criterion (i.e. has an Eigenvalue greater than 1.0). For the Swedish Citizen Survey 2003, the single retained factor explains 61 percent of the variance in the (original 8) variables, with an Eigenvalue of 4.9. In our subset of the European Social Survey 2008, the corresponding figures (in this case, then, based on 5 original variables) is 66 percent and 3.3.
on worldwide differences in corruption (Anderson and Tverdova 2005, 95–96; see also Rothstein and Uslaner 2005). We take advantage of this measure by matching CPI-data for all countries of origin mentioned by the respondents in the two surveys respectively. Thus, for each person in our data with a background in another country, the information is completed with a contextual measure on the corruption level of the country in question. The CPI is originally expressed on a continuous 0–10 scale, where higher values indicate a less corrupt country. However, to facilitate interpretation in this study, we reversed the measure thus instead letting the CPI range from “good” (lowest perceived corruption level) to “bad” (highest perceived corruption level).

Corruption experiences and political trust – empirical findings

Numerous studies have shown that residents of foreign origin tend to be less active in political life than the native population in the developed democracies of Western Europe (Bäck and Soininen 1998; Adman and Strömbäck 2000; Fennema and Tillie 2001; Togeby 2004). Although recent findings suggest that the partition of diverse forms of political activism is decisive for the conclusions that may be drawn (Myrberg 2007), immigrants also tend to express a more negative view when asked to evaluate possibilities of political influence.

However, when it comes to political trust among immigrants, previous research is surprisingly scarce. In Western European countries, there seems to be a general lack of knowledge on levels of trust among ethnic minorities. There are, however, some studies based on data from the United States in which inter-ethnic differences in political trust are explored (for an overview, see Herreros and Criado 2008, 59). The typical finding seems to be that African-Americans in general report lower confidence in political institutions than do Anglo-Whites. Yet, interestingly in the light of our own hypotheses, research on Mexican-Americans in the United States suggests that members of this immigrant group that have gained American citizenship show less trust in government than non-citizens, and Mexican-Americans generally tend to develop more

8 Recent (2008) CPI scores were used, although, ideally, the scores would be “time-matched” as well. That is, we should in the best case scenario be able to include the CPI score for Country A at the time when the respondent actually migrated from A. However, due to data shortage (CPI is a rather novel index) this is not possible. To the benefit of the study, it should though be mentioned that the serial autocorrelation is high. Thus, the measure we use may still be regarded as a reasonable proxy, tapping present and past relative variations in country corruption levels.

9 Additionally, we recode the reversed 0-10 index to a (still continuous) 0–1 variable, analogous to our political trust variable.

10 Specifically, immigrants tend to score lower on measures of internal, but not external, political efficacy (cf. Myrberg 2007). Since the latter variable is theoretically and empirically related to political trust, we will return to this distinction later on.
cynical viewpoints as they become more “acculturated”, as measured by language proficiency (Michelson 2003).

We start our own examination by a simple comparison of levels of political trust across several population categories within the three Scandinavian countries. The bars in figure 2 refer to mean levels of the composite political trust index previously described.

Figure 2. Political trust across different population categories (mean levels on the 0–1 scale).
Note: $N_{DK} = 1510$ (autochthonous); 100 (immigrants), $N_{NO} = 1418$ (autochthonous); 130 (immigrants), $N_{SE} = 1616$ (autochthonous); 213 (immigrants).
Source: European Social Survey 2008

The graph is based on two different population categorisations within each country. Firstly, trust levels may be compared between the autochthonous population and immigrants. Secondly, the immigrant population is itself divided into three categories. As we hypothesised, one may expect rather different levels of trust among immigrants depending on the country of origin, as migration takes place from countries with all sorts of political systems (from stable democracies to authoritarian states). As the number of observations for single countries is limited, however, this descriptive analysis necessarily has to be rather crude.

The first category (“From West”) includes immigrants from the Nordic countries and from other parts of Western Europe, as well as from North America, Australia and New Zealand. Immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia were classified as belonging to the second category
Finally, the third category (“From South”) encloses respondents who have migrated from countries in Africa, Asia (including the Middle East) and Latin America.\footnote{The West-East-South categorization (though somewhat modified in this study) was originally developed by Myrberg (2007, 41–43). Although it may seem crude and unsophisticated, it has been proven to be remarkably useful for analyses of differences in levels of political participation.}

Overall, the graph does not reveal any striking differences in levels of political trust. That is, at least not when in comes to within country comparisons. In all three countries, immigrants in general tend to have confidence in the host country institutions to a level more or less on par with the autochthonous population, although levels seems to be most equal in Sweden.

Interestingly, still, there seems to be a slight tendency to express higher trust among immigrants from non-Western countries, which may indicate support for our first hypothesis. In line with reasonable expectations we find, namely, that CPI-levels tend to be much higher for countries sorted in either the East or the South category (that is, countries in these categories are generally perceived as considerably more corrupt in comparison with countries sorted in the West category).\footnote{Studying all countries of origin mentioned by the ESS respondents, the CPI mean levels are as follows: 0.16 (West); 0.61 (East); and 0.68 (South).}

Whereas none of the within country differences are statistically significant, one should note the more obvious variation between the Scandinavian countries. In particular, Denmark stands out as political trust levels in all population groups there seems to be substantially higher than in either Norway or Sweden. While it is beyond the scope of this study to attempt to explain why (native and immigrated) Danes tend to have more confidence in their political institutions, there are obviously good reason to keep the three countries’ populations distinguishable also in more complex analyses.

To this end, we translate our theoretical scaffolding (from Figure 1) into the following analytical model:

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 Political\ trust = f(CPI, Time, CPI \times Time, Country, Controls)\]

\footnote{The West-East-South categorization (though somewhat modified in this study) was originally developed by Myrberg (2007, 41–43). Although it may seem crude and unsophisticated, it has been proven to be remarkably useful for analyses of differences in levels of political participation.}
Figure 3A. Regression based predicted levels of political trust (0–1) for different country of origin CPI-values (0–1). Calculations are based on a hypothetical male immigrant, with 0–5 years in the host country (all control variables, aside from gender, are set to their means).

Figure 3B. Regression based predicted levels of political trust (0–1) for different country of origin CPI-values (0–1). Calculations are based on a hypothetical male immigrant with at least 20 years in the host country (all control variable, aside from gender, are set to their means).
Using regression techniques, first selecting all immigrated respondents in the data set, we can estimate the effect of previous corruption experiences (as captured by the CPI for each respondent’s country of origin) on political trust, while simultaneously accounting for the importance of length of residence in the respective host country (“Time”), the possible interaction effect of these variables (“CPI × Time”), and the intrinsic differences in trust levels between Denmark, Norway and Sweden (“Country”).\(^\text{13}\) In addition, we perform basic controls by accounting for possible differences in political trust due to gender, age, and education level (condensed in the analytical model above as “Controls”).

Undertaking this assignment provides some interesting results. Estimating a regression equation we end up with substantially, as well as statistically, significant positive effect of previous corruption experiences. Moreover, wholly supporting our hypotheses, there is also evidence for a negative interaction effect, such that time in host country reduces trust among immigrants from countries of high corruption.

The results are summarised in Figures 3A and 3B, in which the graphs display predicted levels of political trust for different levels of country of origin corruption level. The differences between the upper and lower graph all lies in the time factor. In the former case, we calculated predicted values for recently arrived immigrants (0–5 years in the host country), while the latter case depicts the situation for long-term members of the population (20 or more years in the host country).\(^\text{14}\) Although no other parameter is allowed to vary, the differences are obvious.

The results displayed in figure 3A support our first hypothesis. Reading the graph from left to right, the corruption level in the country of origin seems to be positively associated with confidence in Scandinavian political institutions. The slope of the lines must be regarded as substantial, in particular since the predicted values are adjusted for differences in gender, age

\(^{13}\) In regression jargon, the variable “Country” (in practice specified as a set of country dummies) will, in effect, result in country specific intercepts.

\(^{14}\) Somewhat disappointing, the ESS survey only contains a crude categorical measure of length of residence. Still, we were able to analyse the time effects by constructing dummy variables corresponding to the given intervals. It should be mentioned that we excluded the pure additive time effects from the final estimation since these were all found to be insignificant. Further in the paper when using the data from the Swedish Citizen Survey 2003, which also includes a better, i.e. continuous, measure of length of residence, we will show that the results remain substantially identical.
and levels of education. Although, as observed beforehand, trust levels are generally higher among immigrants in Denmark (but seemingly lower in Sweden than in Norway, once differences in social characteristics are accounted for) we note that immigrants sharing a background in more corrupt parts of the world tend to be more trustful in all three countries, in comparison, that is, with immigrants from states receiving more Scandinavian like CPI-scores. The difference in expected political trust, all else equal, is close to 10 percent (i.e. approximately corresponding to the distance between adjacent dotted vertical lines in the graphs) between immigrants from, say, Canada, scoring a respectable 0.13 on the recoded 0–1 CPI scale, and immigrants from Iraq, a country for which the corresponding score is a poor 0.87. Hence, previous experiences of corruption seems to be substantially important when citizens evaluate the current state of affairs.

Importantly, however, the positive effects are only observed among immigrants with a relatively short length of residence (the category for which the calculations in figure 3A are based). Studying the lower figure 3B, we note that the lines are flatter, and also that they rather indicate a negative relationship between the key variables. Again, the time factor carries the explanation. Due to the interaction between previous corruption experiences and time in the host country, the effect of the former variable changes, depending the value of the latter. Hence, among immigrants who since many years live in either Denmark, Norway or Sweden, we should according to this analysis expect to find comparatively low political trust among those who originally emigrated from more corrupt countries.

Studying the graphs a bit more carefully, however, what stands out as most interesting is the “net result” for different categories of immigrants. To let the more complete picture emerge, we may imagine that the lower graph (in 3B) is placed on top of the upper one (in 3A). Then we would conclude that the predicted political trust value for immigrants from highly “clean” countries (with, say, a CPI-value of 0.2 or less) is approximately the same regardless of length of residence. But we would also conclude that the net result is totally different should we instead focus on immigrants from highly corrupt countries (with, say, a CPI-value of at least 0.7). Within this category, expected political trust levels are considerably higher among the

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15 In actual fact, however, the effects of the control variables proved to be modest. Although we found an expected positive effect of education level, neither gender nor age (which we also squared, to allow for curve-linear age effects) were found to be significant predictors of political trust in this data subset.
fairly recently arrived, than among those who have a long history in the host country. Thus, the results in figure 3A and 3B, jointly considered, support our second hypothesis. Immigrants in Scandinavia from corrupt regimes may to begin with regard the political institutions in their new country as admirably trustworthy. Over time, though, they seem to reconsider their initially bright view, to end up with considerably more moderate, conceivably more host-country typical, levels of political trust.

Next, we demonstrate that our findings so far may be replicated with the Swedish data set, which, although limited to one of the Scandinavian countries, provides enhanced possibilities to further scrutinize the observed relationships. We then move on to examine possible explanations for the time-related decrease in political trust.

In a series of regression analyses, we carry out systematic tests of the (additive as well as interactive) effects of previous experiences of corruption among immigrants in Sweden. As a first benefit of utilising the Swedish Citizen Survey 2003, we may specify a more carefully selected subset of respondents. Recall that our hypotheses are based on the assumption that immigrants (more or less consciously) compare the performance of political systems. This should imply that persons who migrated during childhood ought to be excluded from the analysis, since they hardly could have had any well thought-out opinions on the political institutions in the country of origin. Given the limited information on immigration, a selection of this kind was not possible with the ESS data. The Swedish data set, however, contain all necessary information. Hence, in the analyses following, we include only respondents who had reached the age of 15 when they migrated to Sweden, assuming that persons of this age have had chances to form at least some experience-based views of the political system in their country of origin.

Table 1 summarises results from estimations of several regression models, the first three of which make up the replication of our previous findings—the main difference being that we now

16 Specifically, calculations reveal that the time-related decrease in political trust for a hypothetical immigrant from a country with a CPI-value of 0.1 is 2 percent, whereas it in the case of a country of origin with a CPI-value of 0.9 is as much as 16 percent.

17 Our choice of the age of 15 is of course somewhat arbitrary. However, we have also experimented with other restrictions (thus setting the “qualification” age of immigration above as well as below 15 years), but results tend so be very similar to those reported here.
are able to use a continuous, and thus improved, measure of length of residence: the number of years an immigrated person have resided in Sweden.\textsuperscript{18}

The first model consider the pure additive effects of previous corruption experiences, taking into account only the set of control variables. Again in support of our first hypothesis, the statistically significant and positive regression coefficient of the CPI variable suggests that immigrants from more corruption plagued countries tend to score higher on the political trust index. That is, in general they tend to have more confidence in Swedish political institutions. In substantial terms, the analysis suggests that the effect translates into a maximum difference of about 10 percent higher political trust. Thus, all else being equal, an immigrant from a highly corrupt country is expected to trust the political institutions significantly more than an immigrant with a background in country on par with Sweden in terms of corruption level. Although age seems to make a slight difference, the control factors overall proved to be virtually unimportant (in fact excluding them all, the CPI coefficient would still be approximately the same).

Model 2 is expanded with the measure on length of residence in Sweden. Unlike in the ESS data analysis (see note \textsuperscript{14}), the number of years since immigration at first seems to be associated with decreasing trust. Moreover, this reduces the corruption experience effect to about half of its size and makes it statistically insignificant, suggesting that immigrants from high-corruption countries tend to have lived in Sweden for a shorter period.\textsuperscript{19}

Although the mean length of residence clearly may differ among immigrants from different parts of the world, the estimation of model 3 elicits a more complete picture. In line with the results depicted in figures 3A and 3B, this analysis considers the interaction effect between corruption experience and length of residence. As before, we find a significant negative interaction effect, which means that the positive effect of corruption experience on political trust is strongest among the recently arrived immigrants.\textsuperscript{20} And again supporting our second hypothesis, the result analogously suggests that the positive effect of corruption experiences

\textsuperscript{18} As previously mentioned, another improvement compared to the analysis based on ESS data is that the dependent variable in table 1 encompasses a larger set of institutional evaluations.
\textsuperscript{19} This is also confirmed by an analysis with years in Sweden as the dependent variable. There is a statistically significant (on the 0.01 level) negative effect of CPI on years in Sweden, controlling for gender, age, and education.
\textsuperscript{20} At the same time, one should note that the pure additive time effect becomes insignificant, once the interaction is accounted for. Hence, length of residence in itself, disregarding background, does not seem to make much difference for political trust.
decreases with the number of years spent in Sweden. The obvious question now is why we find this to be the case.

Table 1. Predicting Political Trust by Corruption Experience (CPI) and Years in Sweden, controlling for other explanatory factors (ordinary least-squares estimates).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>CPI (0–1)</th>
<th>Years in Sweden</th>
<th>CPI × Years in Sweden</th>
<th>Discrimination (0–1)</th>
<th>Internal efficacy (0–1)</th>
<th>Satisfaction with democracy (0–1)</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age squared</th>
<th>Constant</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
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Statistical significance: *** $p < 0.01$ ** $p < 0.05$ * $p < 0.10$

Note: The sample is weighted to be representative of people who live in Sweden and are born in another country. The analyses only include those who were 15 years or older when immigrating to Sweden. Entries are un-standardised regression coefficients (OLS regression) with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable Political Trust is a continuous scale running from 0 (very low trust) to 1 (very high trust). Corruption Experience (CPI) is measured by the eleven-point Corruptions Perceptions Index, rescaled to run from 0 (highly clean country) to 1 (highly corrupt country). For a description, including information on coding, of the other independent variables, see appendix.
The quite optimistic explanation, mentioned earlier in this paper, is that a lower level of political trust among immigrants from countries of high corruption is a reasonable consequence of an integration process that involves a more realistic (some would call it a less naïve) evaluation of Swedish political institutions. If this is true, immigrants may, in a positive sense, be expected to become more critical citizens over time.

However, we should also consider a counterhypothesis, according to which immigrants’ judgements of the Swedish institutions are negatively affected by post-migration experiences. It may very well be the case that a declining trust among immigrants from countries of high corruption is a consequence of discrimination, in particular if discrimination is experienced during encounters with representative of institutions in the new country (cf. Shierenbeck 2004).

Being more or less explicitly discriminated against could certainly have negative consequences for an individual’s trust in politicians and governmental authorities. Furthermore, one must not necessarily go through such experiences oneself. It may suffice to observe (or hear about) that immigrants from one’s country or, even more generally, immigrants from the same part of the world, are being worse treated than people in general. In order to provide a generous test of this explanation we will also consider the more implicit form of discrimination resulting from a feeling (whether warranted or not) of political marginalisation. Hence we take into account not merely individual experiences of discrimination, but also the extent to which one believes that people like oneself have a say in politics, in comparison with other citizens—a set of attitudes related to political self-confidence, usually referred to as internal political efficacy.

The estimation of model 4 provides a test of this more pessimistic explanation, by adding composite measures of experiences of discrimination as well as of internal political efficacy. As intuitively could be expected, both variables have a significant effect (negative and positive, respectively) on political trust. Unsurprisingly, immigrants that report being victims of a discriminatory behaviour of some kind and/or regarding their prospects of making an impact in political processes as gloomy tend to have less confidence in Swedish political institutions. Importantly, however, the inclusion of the discrimination and efficacy variables does not reduce the interaction effect of corruption experiences and length of residence at all.\(^{21}\) This means that we do not find any evidence for the pessimistic explanation. True, experiencing discrimination

\(^{21}\) Instead, we observe an increase in the pure additive positive effect of the CPI-variable. The interpretation of this is that in absence of higher levels of perceived discrimination, and lower levels of internal political efficacy, recently arrived immigrants from more corrupt political regimes would have had even more confidence in Swedish political institutions.
and low levels of internal efficacy is associated with lower levels of political trust, but inter-
category variation in this respect does not seem to explain the “equalisation” of political trust
among immigrants that are no longer newcomers in Sweden.

This conclusion put us in an at least somewhat more safe position, should we instead argue for
the optimistic explanation according to which initially high-trusting immigrants in due course
become more critical citizens. But providing empirical evidence would obviously be better still.

However, though a “natural” development of more critical attitudes may be reasonable,
systematically testing the explanation turns out to be hard, at least with the cross-section data at
hand. We believe, however, that the mechanism, if valid, to some extent could be captured by
studying differences in more general attitudes toward the political system. If immigrants who
initially have a very bright view of Swedish political institutions become more similar to the
majority population in this regard, they may observe that citizens in general tend to have limited
influence over political institutions, and that politicians intermittently fail to be responsive, at
least in the degree that would conform to an ideal state of affairs.

Wholly aware that the test we are able to make is not waterproof, the final model 5 in table 1 is
augmented with a measure of satisfaction with democracy. In addition, it also includes an index
based on survey questions that tap the view of the responsiveness of the political system—a
parallel efficacy dimension regarding the prospect for people in general to have a say in politics,
usually referred to as external political efficacy. Admittedly, we may introduce problems related
to reciprocal effects here, while the theoretical distance between political trust, external political
efficacy and satisfaction with democracy reasonably is quite small. Nevertheless we find the
examination worthwhile; if nothing else it ought to be confirmed that the latter suggested
explanatory factors perform differently in the analysis, in comparison with experiences of
discrimination and internal political efficacy.

The estimation of model 5 indeed reveals a different picture. Simultaneously incorporating
satisfaction with democracy and external political efficacy, the interaction effect is drastically
reduced and no longer statistically significant. While expected positive effects are found for
both, newly introduced, variables, it would no longer be possible to conclude that the length of
residence in Sweden reduces the effect of previous corruption experience. Given the reasonable casual order of the variables, however, what this means in practice is that initially high trusting immigrants over time tend to be less satisfied (yet not necessarily displeased in an absolute sense) with the Swedish democracy and the responsiveness of the political system. Developing such more critical standpoints may quite reasonably go hand in hand with less political trust.

**Concluding remarks**

For a democratic system to be legitimate, it is vital that the citizens have at least a basic amount of confidence in their political institutions. Yet, significant differences in political trust may exist also within a single country. The study reported in this paper has highlighted inter-country variations in this respect, taking methodological advantage of international migration to Scandinavia.

Immigrants residing in Denmark, Norway or Sweden may have a background in any part of the world. Due to this, their expectations on the political system of the host country may differ. Our study provides empirical evidence for the idea that such a variation is consequential, since immigrants from countries more plagued by corruption tend to have higher expectations of the Scandinavian political institutions. This, we believe, is because they have a different system to compare with, unlike either the majority population or immigrants from countries with low—and hence more Scandinavian like—levels of corruption.

However, we have also demonstrated that an initially bright view of the Scandinavian institutional qualities tend to be attenuated over time, as immigrants from countries of high corruption develop more critical viewpoints of the host country state of affairs. This may at first seem negative from an integration perspective, and we argue that it indeed would be negative.

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22 Further analyses (not shown) reveal that satisfaction with democracy and external political efficacy contribute to roughly the same extent (i.e. the interaction effect would be less reduced and still statistically significant, should only one of the factors be included).

23 To further scrutinise the findings, we have examined the impact of a substantial set of potentially confounding factors: various indicators of socioeconomic status at the time of the interview, political interest, political discussion, political knowledge, party identification, political preferences (left vs. right), civic virtues, social trust, involvement in voluntary associations, tolerance, political recruitment, civic skills, Swedish language skills, media consumption, citizenship (Swedish vs. non-Swedish), and reasons for immigration (refugee vs. other reasons). Furthermore, we have analysed the effects of various indicators on relations to the welfare state, subjective feelings of integration in the Swedish society, and community attachment (on several levels). Yet, none of these factors contribute in explaining the effects we have observed.
should the relative decrease in political trust be explained by experiences of discrimination and political marginalisation. Though such processes certainly take place, with likely detrimental consequences, we find no evidence for a theory suspecting that immigrants have an optimistic outlook only as long as they are not victims of discrimination. Rather, we find that the development of a more critical outlook is connected to a more realistic view of the, although considerably less corrupt than most countries in the world, still far from perfect Scandinavian democracies. This does not necessarily mean that Utopia becomes Dystopia. Instead, in a best case scenario immigrants, no matter their background, a position as critical citizens that neither fear, nor blindly believe in, the ruling elites and governmental authorities.

However, with differing routes in the integration policies in Scandinavia (cf. Rooth and Strömblad 2008) it is not evident that future immigrants will regard the countries as equal as this study suggests. True, we have found that political trust generally seems to be higher in Denmark also among immigrants from different parts of the world. At the same time though, the most equal levels of trust seem to be observed in Sweden; that is, in the country that, unlike Denmark and Norway, almost demonstratively has stuck with its very generous rules for acquisition of citizenship, along with other highly migrant-friendly policies (British Council and Migration Policy Group 2007). Perhaps this might be a recipe for equal, yet lower average levels of political trust.

Appendix: coding of variables not described in the main text

Female is coded 1 for women and 0 for men.
Age is the respondent’s age at the year of the interview.
Education measures the number of years spent in combined full-time schooling and occupational training (in analyses based on the Swedish Citizen Survey 2003, the measure refers to education accomplished outside of Sweden).
Discrimination is coded 1 for respondents who reported that they (“during the last 12 months”) had been badly treated (“because of your foreign background”) within any of the contexts or situations listed below, and 0 for those who did not report any such experiences of discrimination. The following contexts/situations were mentioned: when looking for a dwelling; in other housing-related contacts; when looking for work; in other work-related contacts; in contacts regarding studies; in contacts regarding medical services; in contacts as a parent of a child in school; in contacts with other public authorities (e.g. the tax office, the social security office, or the police); when visiting a restaurant, dancehall or a sports event;
when buying or hiring something as a private customer; during encounters in the street or in public transport; in contacts within another context than those mentioned.

**Internal efficacy** measures the respondent’s assessment of his or her capacity and competence to influence political and administrative decisions. The measurement is an additive index based on three interview questions concerning the possibilities (1) to make one’s opinions known to politicians, (2) to make politicians take account of one’s opinions, and (3) to gain redress if one is treated wrongly by an authority. For all three questions, respondents were asked to indicate their opinions using a scale from 0 (“much smaller opportunity than others”) to 10 (“much greater opportunity than others”). Due to relatively large internal non-response, missing values were imputed by assigning a value even if a respondent only answered two of the three questions. The final index variable is rescaled to run from 0–1 (higher values indicating a higher sense of internal political efficacy).

**External political efficacy** measures the respondent’s assessment of the capacity and competence of people in general to influence political and administrative decisions. The measurement is an additive index based on three interview questions concerning (1) ordinary people’s possibilities to present their opinions to politicians, (2) the weight politicians attach to opinions presented to them by ordinary people, and (3) the possibilities to obtain redress for someone who has been wrongly treated by an authority. For all three questions, respondents were asked to indicate their opinions using a scale from 0 (“none at all”) to 10 (“very large”). Due to relatively large internal non-response, missing values were imputed by assigning a value even if a respondent only answered two of the three questions. The final index variable is rescaled to run from 0–1 (higher values indicating a higher sense of external political efficacy).

**Satisfaction with democracy** is based on the question “Are you generally very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Sweden? The original variable was recoded into a four-point scale from 0 (“not at all satisfied”) to 1 (“very satisfied”).
REFERENCES


