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Political Trust as Modest Expectations

*Exploring Immigrants' Falling Confidence in Swedish
Political Institutions*



ABSTRACT

Recent studies report high levels of political trust among immigrants in Western Europe. Notably, such confidence tend to be particularly pronounced among immigrants from countries without democratic institutions and poor records in terms of corruption level. Yet over time, members of these population categories tend to express decreasing levels of political trust. Following previous research, such a pattern may be explained by high initial—although with time retreating—expectations concerning the quality of institutions in Western Europe. Analyzing Swedish survey data—particularly appropriate in the light of competing hypotheses concerning acculturation and barriers to integration, including discrimination—this paper presents additional support for the importance of expectations when it comes to political trust. Our analyses suggest that the gradual development of more modest expectations regarding institutional performance in the new country is a trustworthy explanation of the falling levels of immigrants' political trust.

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Is trust in the political institutions of a democracy a matter of to what extent expectations are fulfilled? Recent studies report comparatively high levels of political trust—the overall confidence in political institutions and politicians—among immigrants in Western Europe (Maxwell 2010; Strömblad and Adman 2010; Röder and Mühlau 2012a). Notably, such confidence tend to be particularly pronounced among those who have migrated from countries without democratic institutions and/or having poor records in terms of corruption level. Such findings may to some extent decrease pessimism from an egalitarian point of view, considering that a number of studies have suggested that immigrants in Western Europe tend to be less active in politics and to believe that they have less political influence than native citizens (Adman and Strömblad 2000; Fennema and Tillie 2001; Togeby 2004; González-Ferrer 2011).¹ Yet immigrants with a limited length of residence may very well find it difficult to become highly active political participants in an established democracy, the reason does not seem to be a general lack of political trust.

High expectations of political institutions in the new country, due to a comparison with those in the country of origin (cf. Anderson and Tverdova 2003), may have been initially fulfilled for large groups of immigrants. Importantly, however, the observed high confidence levels do not persist over time. Political trust seems to decline with length of residence in the host country and, quite analogously, to drop significantly between first generation immigrants and their descendants (Maxwell 2010; Strömblad and Adman 2010; Röder and Mühlau 2011; Röder and Mühlau 2012a). Taking explicit account of the important dynamic aspects of political trust, this paper contributes to the growing body of knowledge of immigrants' evaluations of institutional performance. Although providing a rather consistent picture, we argue that previous studies do not present a thorough answer to the crucial question of why a decline in political trust among immigrants is observed. The aim of this paper is to utilize particularly appropriate survey data in order to assess earlier suggested explanations, and eventually put forward the most credible one.

Previous research provides three plausible explanations of why political trust among immigrants may decline over time (Maxwell 2010; Strömblad and Adman 2010; Röder

¹ However, it should be mentioned that scholars have observed also more complex and inconsistent patterns when studying how various categories of immigrants differ from the native populations of different countries in terms of political involvement (e.g. Myrberg and Rogstad 2011).

and Mühlau 2011; Röder and Mühlau 2012a). According to the first one, the reason may be ‘acculturation’; that is, with increasing number of years in the new country, immigrants gradually develop attitudes and behavioural patterns more similar to the ones of the native majority. Another suggested explanation concerns ‘barriers to integration’, thus being focused on factors that may prevent social as well political inclusion, such as experiences of discrimination and weak labour market attachment. Finally, it has also been suggested that ‘altering expectations’ may explain a decline in political trust. The idea is then that hopes initially are high (or even ‘naïve’), when it comes to the performance of political institutions in the new country. However, with increasing experiences of how these institutions actually work, immigrants tend to become more critical and therefore less politically trusting.

Further efforts to gauge the empirical value of the proposed explanations are clearly motivated. Not least because they suggest quite different implications for the evaluation of actual conditions for political integration. While both acculturation and an (essentially ‘healthy’) altering of expectations provide room for optimism in this respect, the opposite is true in case barriers to integration such as discrimination instead explain why immigrants are becoming less politically trustful over time. Interestingly, empirical tests in previous studies have foremost supported the expectations explanation (Maxwell 2010; Röder and Mühlau 2012a). We argue, however, that the accumulation of evidence is far from sufficient.

Firstly, tests have solely been conducted on a general European level. It is fully possible that contextual differences between countries, particularly when it comes to integration policies and ambition in terms of political inclusion, are important and thus may affect the relative value of explanations in different parts of Europe. The present study is focused on Sweden, which may be regarded as a particularly interesting case in the light of the barriers to integration explanation; given this country’s quite unique combination of, on the one hand, ambitious multicultural policies and favourable *opportunities* for immigrants to participate in society (Migration Policy Group 2011; Borevi 2008) and, on the other hand, comparatively poor *outcomes* for immigrants in terms of unemployment and segregation (OECD 2012; Koopmans 2010).

Secondly, the measures both of acculturation and of barriers to integration utilized in previous studies may have been too restricted to cover all important aspects. Hence, the significance of these explanations may have been underestimated, to the benefit of the explanation focusing on altering expectations. This potential problem is aggravated given that the empirical examination of expectations—at least in quantitative research—seems to be almost unavoidably indirect. Aiming to improve accuracy, the analyses reported in this paper rely on data from the large-scale *Swedish Citizen Survey 2003*. This survey, based on a large over-sample of immigrants in Sweden, was designed to capture numerous aspects of social and political involvement. Aside from providing comprehensive relevant information on immigrants' life circumstances, the survey data also include measures on acculturation and discrimination that are better suited, compared to data used in previous research, for a simultaneous evaluation of the different explanations of decreasing political trust.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In the subsequent section, we further discuss the hypotheses and findings in previous research. Next, we present the data in more detail along with the measures utilized in our own analyses, followed by a section describing our empirical findings. In the final section, we conclude the study and discuss some implications for further research.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Reviewing recent studies on immigrants' political trust, one notices the consistent findings. Maxwell (2010) shows that the levels of trust in parliament and satisfaction with national government are generally higher among immigrants than among native-origin individuals in Europe. Furthermore, immigrants from less democratic countries tend to express higher levels of political trust in their new countries of residence.

According to Röder and Mühlau (2011), natives and immigrants in Europe seem to have about the same level of confidence in public institutions, in spite of some evidence of that discrimination of members of the latter group has a negative impact on their trust. Moreover, both these studies conclude that political trust among 'second generation migrants' (i.e. native born descendants of immigrants) is lower than among those who themselves have immigrated. In a subsequent study, Röder and Mühlau replicate several of these findings (Röder and Mühlau 2012a). They find that differences in 'quality of governance' (measured by indicators published by the World Bank) between the host

country and the country of origin explain the generally higher trust levels among first generation migrants, and they also observe the general decrease in trust over time. Thus an important conclusion is that subjective comparisons of institutional performance affect initial trust in the new home country's institutions (Strömblad and Adman 2010; cf. Röder and Mühlau 2012a).

Focusing on the Scandinavian part of Europe, Strömblad and Adman (2010) find that the levels of political trust are generally higher among immigrants than among native born citizens in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In harmony with the above mentioned evidence concerning institutional performance, they also discover that immigrants from countries more plagued by corruption tend to express higher levels of political trust than other immigrants. Also in this case, however, trust among the former decreases gradually with the number of years the new country (whereas they tend to end up at about the same level as native born citizens).

Furthermore, it should be noted that the generality of these findings seems to extend outside of Europe. Similar results are reported in studies concerning Latin American immigrants in the USA. In this particular category, those who had migrated themselves tend to report higher political trust than members of the white majority population (Michelson 2003; Weaver 2003; Wenzel 2006).

Hence, empirical evidence clearly suggest that immigrants in established democracies initially tend to place high trust in host country political institutions, especially if they have migrated from countries with corrupted and democratically deficit institutions; over time, however, these high levels of trust tend to attenuate. But research is much more scarce when it comes to the question why the decline occurs. The obvious next important task within this research field is to explain why an initially high confidence in political institutions decrease, in particular among immigrants from non-democratic countries and poor records in terms of corruption.

Expanding upon prior scholarly work (Maxwell 2010; Strömblad and Adman 2010; Röder and Mühlau 2011; Röder and Mühlau 2012a), we seek to re-examine three previously mentioned plausible hypotheses that may explain the decline in political trust. The first one is the *acculturation* hypothesis. This refers to a learning process

which is assumed to take place as an individual, after having migrated, experiences a new culture; a process that may change her or his attitudes and patterns of behaviour, which in turn also may include the overall confidence in political institutions. Clearly, the outcome of the learning process may differ in terms of how much, and at which pace, an immigrant gradually ‘embraces’ the majority culture of the new country. This notwithstanding, the most commonly used indicator of acculturation in this respect is language use and proficiency (e.g. Michelson 2003).

The second hypothesis concerns *discrimination and other barriers to integration*. According to this line of thought, a declining political trust is mainly due to factors that may prevent immigrants’ actual possibilities, as well as their desire, to integrate in society; particularly the presence of ethnic discrimination, along with poor conditions for social mobility and scarce economic opportunities. Results from a number of studies suggest that discrimination indeed occurs in various interactions between immigrants and political and societal institutions; furthermore, high education does not preclude unfair treatment on the labour market (cf. Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller 2005; Gans 2007; FRA 2009; Karlsson and Tahvilzadeh 2010). Experiences of such kind may be generalized as negative spill-over effects when it comes to confidence in political institutions (cf. Kumlin and Rothstein 2005).

Their reasonableness notwithstanding, we contend that the two hypotheses have not yet been satisfactorily tested. First, one may suspect that too restricted measures of discrimination have been used. Maxwell (2010) as well as Röder and Mühlau (2011; 2012a) base their respective analyses on the European Social Survey (ESS), which include a question on whether the respondent considers her or himself as a member of a group that is discriminated against in the country.² Clearly, this measure may fail to capture personal experiences of discrimination, which obviously should be important for individuals’ system evaluations.

A somewhat analogous problem may be detected also in previous test of the acculturation hypothesis. In this case, language skills have been measured with an item concerning whether one primarily speaks the new country’s language at home, or a

² More precisely, respondents are being asked whether they belong to a group that experienced discrimination on grounds of color or race, nationality, religion, language, ethnic group membership, age, gender, sexuality, disability or other grounds (Röder and Mühlau 2011:543).

different language.³ This measure is potentially flawed as well; obviously, an immigrant may be very skilful in the majority language of the new country, and yet prefer to speak another language at home. As described in more detail in the following section, the present study makes use of survey data that, we argue, provides more satisfactory measures of both language skills and individual experiences of discrimination.

The third hypothesis takes its point of departure in changing *expectations*, the essential idea being that institutions in the new country are more critically evaluated over time; particularly by immigrants who initially had high expectations, due to experiences from poorly performing institutions in their countries of origin (cf. Reese 2001; Menjívar and Bejarano 2004). The underlying mechanism in this regard is assumed to be a ‘dual frame of reference’ (Röder and Mühlau 2011; 2012a). As long as institutional experiences in the new country appear favourable, in comparison with corresponding experiences in the country of origin, an immigrant will end up with more positive evaluations than individuals having only a single (one-country) frame of reference. The larger the contrast in perceived institutional performance, the more pronounced differences in political trust may be expected. All else being equal, immigrants in established democracies are assumed to express higher political trust the more corrupt and undemocratic institutions they have experienced before migrating.

Still, with increasing length of residence in the new home country, the original frame of reference becomes less salient, and evaluations of institutional performance will gradually become more critical. Consequently, political trust is thus expected to decrease over time, particularly among immigrants who initially had the highest expectations. Importantly, however, the more critical outlook is in this case not due to personal experiences of discrimination; rather, the quality of political institutions are judged by the perceived situation for people in general thus also being influenced by reports in mass media and the like. At the same time, altering expectations in this respect should also be conceptually distinguished from acculturation. For instance, it may be assumed that a ‘less acculturated’ immigrant still can pick up information on the performance and quality of Swedish institutions, from own experiences as well as more indirectly from relatives and acquaintances.

³ Specifically, the item concerns whether the migrant mainly speaks a language at home which is not an official language of the new country of residence.

Still, our analyses will inevitably generate an indirect assessment, rather than a genuine test, of the expectations hypothesis. The rich database we utilize notwithstanding, there exist no adequate measures of how multiple frames of reference (e.g. thus distinguishing personal experiences from perceptions of other people's experiences) potentially affects the evaluation of political institutions. Nevertheless, we argue that a more comprehensive examination of the other hypotheses than hitherto has been possible, will permit also a more informed judgement of the usefulness of the expectations hypothesis.

Moreover, we contend that the focus on a single country—as Sweden in the present study—is fully compatible with this ambition. Sweden has undoubtedly a reputation of being an immigration friendly welfare state and also a well functioning democracy.⁴ With a tradition of ambitious multicultural policies, Sweden also ranked first of among 31 developed countries in a comparison of integration policies and migrants' opportunities to participate in society using the 'Migrant Integration Policy Index' (Migration Policy Group 2011; cf. Borevi 2008). Hence, immigrants to Sweden may quite reasonably develop high expectations of the political institutions in the new country of residence.

At the same time, however, the distance between favourable opportunities in theory and actual possibilities in practice may be large. In spite of allegedly auspicious conditions, immigrants in several ways seem to be disadvantaged in the Swedish society, for instance in terms of their position in the labour and housing markets (OECD 2012; SCB 2008; cf. Koopmans 2010). In the light of this arguably unique combination of favourable opportunities and poor outcomes for immigrants, we argue that Sweden constitutes an interesting critical case for further examination of the declining levels of political trust. In particular, the empirical setting permits us to examine if a gradual development of more modest expectations of political institutions in fact is explained by unanticipated obstacles among immigrants in society. As Sweden seem to be a country for which immigrants may get their hopes up very high, the harsh reality in this society

⁴ Cf. Eger (2010, pp. 204), maintaining that: 'Sweden stands out as arguably *the* most egalitarian, humanitarian, and democratic country in the world' (emphasis in original).

may lead to a particularly strong dissonance between expectation and experiences, thus resulting in falling levels of political trust.

DATA AND MEASURES

For our empirical analyses, we rely on the large-scale *Swedish Citizen Survey 2003* ('Medborgarundersökningen 2003'). This survey employed face-to-face interviews with a stratified random sample of inhabitants in Sweden (age 18 and over). It consists of a large over-sample of immigrants (originally selected on the basis of official registry data).⁵ As already indicated, the Swedish Citizen Survey 2003 is particularly useful for the purpose of our study, while it aside from including questions on confidence in different political institutions in Sweden also contains numerous questions on immigration-specific experiences and life circumstances.

Our dependent variable, political trust, is quite comprehensively measured through each respondent's stated confidence in no less than eight institutions: the *parliament*, the *courts*, the *police*, *politicians* (explicitly expressed in this, very general, sense), *political parties* (again, generally expressed), the *municipal board* ('kommunstyrelsen'), the *civil service*, and the *national government* ('regeringen').⁶ All subjective assessments were made using a scale from 0–10, where higher values represent more trust. We summarized 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).⁷

⁵ The total sample includes 2,138 respondents of which 858 originally have immigrated to Sweden. 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 necessary adjustments to produce representative samples of the total population, the native population and the population of immigrants, respectively. The empirical analysis is based only on 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 their (former) political system. The chosen cut point 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 to be very similar to those reported here.

⁶ The political trust items were identically introduced, as follows: 'I will now read out the names of various institutions such as the police, the government, the civil service, etc. Please tell me how much confidence you have in each of these institutions'.

⁷ The construction of the political trust index is supported by a principal component analysis, which reveals that only one factor survives the Kaiser criterion (i.e., has an Eigenvalue greater than 1.0). The

To detect differences in expectations, due to experiences of institutional performance, we utilize the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), developed by Transparency International (2008). Published annually since 1995, the CPI is widely regarded as the most ambitious and reliable source of information on worldwide differences in corruption (Anderson and Tverdova 2005; cf. Rothstein and Uslaner 2005).⁸

We take advantage of this measure by matching CPI data for all countries of origin reported by immigrated participants in the Swedish Citizen Survey 2003. Thus, for each of these respondents, the registered information is completed with a measure on the corruption level of the country in question.⁹ To facilitate interpretation in our analyses, we reversed the original 0–10 CPI scale, thus letting the index range from lowest perceived corruption level (‘absolutely clean from corruption’) to highest perceived corruption level (‘highly corrupt’; i.e. from “good to ‘bad’). Additionally, we recode the reversed 0–10 index to a (still continuous) 0–1 variable, analogous to the scale of our political trust variable.

Turning to the operationalization of hypotheses that may explain falling levels of political trust, our measure of acculturation is, in line with previous research, focused on majority language use and proficiency. Here, however, the survey data allow us to construct an additive index variable, based on the following four questions answered by the *interviewer* after having conducted the interview with a respondent (thus aiming to document skills more objectively, compared to an optional ‘self-evaluation’ by each

single retained factor explains 61 per cent of the variance in the eight variables, with an Eigenvalue of 4.9. Furthermore, we have replicated all analyses treating each of the eight measures of political trust as separate dependent variables. The results (not shown) generally tend to be very similar to those shown in table 1, although coefficients are not statistically significant in each single case.

⁸ In the 2008 evaluation, Sweden received, along with Denmark, the highest observed CPI score of 9.3, on a scale ranging from 0 to 10 (where 10 indicates a state of affairs totally free from corruption). Various measures have been used in previous research regarding the institutions in the country of origin: the level of democracy, the quality of government, and the level of corruption. The results seem to be very similar for all these measures, which is not surprising considering the, quite sensible, strong mutual correlations (see e.g. Lipset and Lenz 2000; Pellegrini and Gerlagh 2006).

⁹ We used the 2008 CPI scores, although ideally the scores should be “time matched” as well. That is, in the best case scenario, we should 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 be mentioned that the world wide pattern of corruption levels tend to be very similar across evaluations over time. For instance, we found the rank correlation to be a respectable 0.95 between the CPI evaluations from 1996 and 2008 (using all 54 countries included in both surveys). Thus, the measure we use may still be regarded as a reasonable proxy, at least tapping present and past *relative* variations in country corruption levels.

respondent): ‘How would you assess the respondent’s Swedish pronunciation?’; ‘Apart from the question of accent, how would you assess the respondent’s ability to express him/herself orally in Swedish?’; ‘How would you assess the respondent’s ability to understand spoken Swedish?’; and finally, ‘How would you assess the respondent’s ability to understand written Swedish?’. All assessments were made using a scale ranging from 0 to 10, where higher values represent better Swedish language skills.¹⁰

Moving to our measure of discrimination, we include a variable coded 1 for respondents who reported that they (‘during the past 12 months’) themselves had been badly treated because of their foreign background, and 0 for those who did not report any such experiences of discrimination.¹¹ The question was further specified, by explicit reference to large number of contexts and situations, namely: when looking for a dwelling (or in other housing-related contacts); when looking for work (or in other work-related contacts); in contacts regarding studies; in contacts regarding medical services; in contacts as a parent of a school child; 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.

Apart from discrimination, we seek to capture other ‘barriers to integration’ by including information on each respondent’s disposable household income (registry data). The assumption is then that facing more such barriers, all else being equal, systematically will be reflected in lower income levels.

As already indicated, the expectations hypothesis inevitably has to be more indirectly operationalized. The following analyses take into account the potential interaction between experiences of country of origin institutional performance (i.e., as reflected in the CPI measure) and length of residence in Sweden. A statistically significant *negative*

¹⁰ The construction of a one-dimensional index is supported by a principal component analysis (details are available from the authors upon request). It should be mentioned that the survey interview involved showing each respondent many cards with written information (with the purpose to efficiently convey response options); hence, by the end of the interview it is therefore likely that the interviewer had a good grip of the respondent’s ability to understand also written Swedish.

¹¹ We chose to code the discrimination variable as a dummy because it is heavily skewed; few individuals report several experiences of discrimination. Still, analyses with a corresponding continuous variable reveal very similar results.

interaction effect would in this case suggest that initially high levels of political trust (that is, among fairly recently arrived immigrants from countries more plagued by corruption) attenuate over time. If such an effect remains after accounting (as rigorously as possible) for acculturation and various barriers to integration, this result may be interpreted as an indirect support of the expectations hypothesis. Holding constant the development of competences such as majority language proficiency as well as possible experiences of discrimination, a gradual decline in political trust may reasonably be due to that dual frames of references influences expectations, and thus also evaluations of political institutions in Sweden (for a similar approach, see Röder and Mühlau 2012a).

We also add a set of basic control variables to the statistical models: *Female* is coded 1 for women and 0 for men; *Age* is the respondent's age at the year of the interview; and *Education* measures the number of years spent in combined full-time schooling and occupational training (the measure refers to education accomplished outside of Sweden, since we wanted to obtain controls for pre-immigration experiences).¹²

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In a series of regression analyses, we carry out systematic tests of the proposed hypotheses. Studying the results displayed in Table 1, we first consider the pure additive effects of different experiences of institutional performance, as indicated by the country of origin corruption level, taking into account only the set of control variables (i.e., Model 1 in the table). Perfectly in line with previous findings, 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 in Sweden. That is, they generally tend to have more confidence in Swedish political institutions compared to immigrants from countries with less corruption, taking into account demographic and educational differences. In substantial terms, the analysis suggests that the effect translates into a maximum difference of about 12 percentage points higher political trust. Thus, all else being equal, an immigrant from a country of high corruption is expected to trust the political institutions significantly more than an immigrant with a background in a country on a par with Sweden in terms of corruption levels. Although age seems to make a slight difference, the control factors overall

¹² We have replicated all analyses using an alternative measure on education capturing the total number of years in schooling, regardless of fulfilled in Sweden or in another country. The results (not shown) are very similar to those reported in the tables.

proved to be virtually unimportant (in fact excluding them all, the CPI coefficient increases only marginally).

{TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE}

Next, we introduce the important time factor, which in the analyses is referred to by the variable *Years in Sweden* (i.e., measuring a respondent's length of residence in the country since she or he immigrated for the first time).¹³ For the sake of transparency, the effect of this variable is scrutinized in two separate steps, corresponding to the remaining columns in Table 1. In Model 2, the regression equation is expanded with the measure on length of residence in Sweden, but without considering possible interaction effects. At first, the number of years since immigration seems to be associated with decreasing political trust, as we find a statistically significant negative effect. Moreover, including the time factor apparently reduces the impact of previous corruption experiences, as the CPI coefficient drops considerably in magnitude (no longer being statistically significant). In actual fact, this result reveals that immigrants from countries of high corruption tend to have spent a shorter period of time in Sweden.¹⁴

Yet, although the average length of residence in Sweden certainly varies among immigrants from different parts of the world, the estimation of Model 3 elicits a more complete picture. In this case, we also consider the interaction between different experiences of institutional performance and the length of residence since immigration (by including the multiplicative term 'CPI x Years in Sweden'). As the table clearly displays, such an expansion of the model turns out to be consequential. We find a statistically significant negative interaction effect, suggesting that experiences from countries of high corruption primarily translate into high political trust among recently arrived immigrants.¹⁵ Hence, in line with previous research this result also tells us that such a positive effect tends to decrease with the number of years an immigrant has spent in Sweden.

¹³ Specifically, the length of residence is actually measured in detail by the number of years and months the respondent has been living in Sweden, also taking into account temporary periods abroad.

¹⁴ This is also confirmed by an analysis in which Years in Sweden is entered as the dependent variable. Controlling for gender, age, and education, there is a statistically significant negative effect of CPI on the length of residence in Sweden.

¹⁵ 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 does not seem to be consequential for political trust among immigrants from countries with very low levels of corruption.

Moving further, the results presented in Table 2 provide tests of the two hypotheses in previous research stating that political trust decreases over time either as a consequence of acculturation, or because of the presence of barriers to integration. Expanding upon previous estimations, Model 1 in this table now includes the variable *Swedish language skills*—representing our measure of acculturation. Interestingly, however, this variable does not seem to have any impact at all on immigrants’ political trust. All else being equal, developing a fluency in the language of the majority population is apparently not associated with a decrease in confidence in political institutions in Sweden. Most important here, however, we note that the interaction effect is not influenced by the inclusion of the variable measuring Swedish language skills (the size and sign of the effect is the same as in Model 3 of Table 1). Hence, the acculturation hypothesis does not receive any support in this analysis.

{TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE}

As it turns out, a similar story may be told after considering the results from estimating Model 2 in the table, thus including also the two variables measuring barriers to integration, i.e. *Discrimination* and *Income*. True, in contrast to the measure of acculturation, both these variables seem to have reasonably expected effects on the level of political trust. Immigrants who report experiences of discriminatory behaviour of some kind tend to be less politically trusting. Furthermore, the positive and significant effect of the income variable, suggesting that a vulnerable socioeconomic position is associated with lower levels of political trust. The economically more successful immigrants in Sweden tend to express higher confidence in Swedish political institutions

However, and most important for this study, the inclusion of the latter two variables still leaves the interaction effect intact. Thus, neither experiences of discrimination, nor a weak labour market attachment resulting in low income, may explain why some groups

of immigrants express significantly lower trust levels once they have been residing in Sweden for a number of years.¹⁶

True, measuring experiences of discrimination has its difficulties. It is not hard to imagine that a specific type of situation may be interpreted as an experience of ‘being badly treated because of one’s foreign background’ by some individuals, but not by others. Still, we contend that the measure utilized here is fairly comprehensive, given the rich set of specified contexts in which discrimination may occur. Respondents should in this case be able to picture more clearly a potentially discriminatory situation (at least in comparison with a unspecified question on experiences of discrimination) supporting the trustworthiness of the results in this study.

Hence, we believe that the lack of support for the discrimination hypothesis is not due to a methodological flaw. It does not seem possible to explain the decrease in political trust among immigrants from high corruption countries as a consequence of acculturation or by a spill-over effect of facing barriers to integration.

In further support of this conclusion , we examined the impact of a large number of other potential indicators on acculturation as well as barriers to integration: various indicators of socioeconomic status at the time of the interview, social trust, involvement in voluntary associations, political recruitment, civic skills, media consumption, citizenship (Swedish vs. non-Swedish), and reasons for immigration (refugee vs. other reasons). We moreover analyzed the effects of various indicators on subjective feelings of integration in the Swedish society, and community attachment (on several levels).¹⁷ Noteworthy, however, none of these factors contribute to explain the interaction effect.¹⁸

¹⁶ In statistical terms, the interaction effect in these analyses of corruption experiences and length of residence turns out to be neither correlated with experiences of discrimination, nor with household income. We have also undertaken analyses with a discrimination index variable, based on items only referring to perceived discrimination in relation to *government* institutions (i.e. disregarding other public or economic spheres). Still, the results tend to be very similar to those reported.

¹⁷ We have also investigated many political attitudes, without finding any indications of them working as intervening variables: political interest, political discussion, political knowledge, party identification, political preferences (left vs. right), civic virtues, tolerance, and different attitudes concerning the arrangement of the welfare state.

¹⁸ Further analyses (not shown) reveal that the overall conclusions are not changed if controls are made for which part of the world one has migrated from. In this case, we categorized immigrants into the three group of ‘West’ (Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand), ‘East’ (Eastern Europe and Russia), and ‘South’ (Africa, Asia, including the Middle East, and Latin America). This trichotomy is

As an additional analytic control (results not shown), we also examined the results reported in Table 1 and Table 2 by means of multi-level modelling techniques. Fitting a random intercept model, in which country of origin was specified as the level-2 variable (rendering 89 unique contexts, with an average representation of 6 respondents), essentially provides the same answers as the OLS analysis with cluster corrected standard errors. All in all, the extensive set of further tests unambiguously suggest that the findings reported in this paper are robust.

CONCLUSION

Among immigrants in Sweden, trust in political institutions are highest among migrants from countries with highly corrupted and poorly democratically functioning institutions. However, these high trust levels tend to decrease with length of residence in Sweden.

The aim of this paper has been to explain this decline. Previous research provided us with three plausible hypotheses, for which we proposed the Sweden constitutes a highly interesting context. Moreover, uniquely well-suited survey data at our disposal permitted more fine-tuned tests than what has been the case in earlier studies. Our results show no support for two of the hypotheses: the decline in trust is not explained neither by acculturation nor by barriers to integration such as discrimination or weak labour market attachment. Instead, the third hypothesis regarding altering expectations may be assumed to portray the mechanisms in the most fruitful way. When arriving in the new country immigrants compare institutional encounters with their experiences of institutional performance in their country of origin, generating a more positive evaluation in so far as institutions appear to have a significantly higher quality in the new setting. Over time though, the past experiences becomes less salient, and thus evaluations of institutional performance in the new home country will be more critical.

Admittedly, even though we believe we tested the hypotheses in a more accurate way than earlier studies, the support for the expectations hypotheses is necessarily indirect. The underlying mechanism, with earlier experiences as the frame of reference, is difficult to capture with survey methods, and alternative data collection as for instance

admittedly crude, but following Myrberg (2007) it is nonetheless theoretically and empirically motivated, at least in the Swedish context.

through in-depth interviews should be considered in future research. Yet, there is more evidence, from other societal areas, indicating that migrants compare experiences and situations in the new country with the old one, and that this comparison affects the evaluation of the present situation. For instance immigrants judge moral behaviour and treatment by authorities, as well as the trustworthiness of criminal justice institutions relative to standards of their old country (Reese 2001; Menjívar and Bejarano 2004; Röder and Mühlau 2012b). These findings of course make the expectations hypothesis as for political institutions appear even more likely.

Yet, knowing more about these processes is obviously important from a political integration point of view. If convincing evidence is found in the end, supporting the expectations hypothesis, a more positive view may be called for. The overall picture may not appear to be as dark as has been suggested.

APPENDIX

{TABLE A1 ABOUT HERE}

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Table 1. Predicting political trust by corruption experience and length of residence in Sweden, controlling for other explanatory factors

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
CPI	0.118** (0.051)	0.074 (0.054)	0.209** (0.082)
Years in Sweden		-0.003* (0.002)	-0.0008 (0.0019)
CPI × Years in Sweden			-0.006*** (0.002)
Female	-0.007 (0.015)	-0.010 (0.014)	-0.012 (0.014)
Age	0.007* (0.004)	0.008** (0.004)	0.011*** (0.004)
Age squared	-0.00008** (0.00004)	-0.00007* (0.00004)	-0.00010*** (0.00004)
Education	0.00003 (0.00254)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.003)
Constant	0.380*** (0.110)	0.408*** (0.101)	0.277** (0.117)
R^2	0.06	0.07	0.08
N	538	538	538

Statistical significance: *** $p < 0.01$ ** $p < 0.05$ * $p < 0.10$

Note: Entries are ordinary least-squares estimates with robust standard errors in parentheses (adjusted for cluster correlation within 89 countries of origin), and based on a sample weighted to be representative of foreign born people living in Sweden. The analyses include only respondents who were 15 years or older upon immigrating to Sweden. The dependent variable *political trust* is a continuous scale running from 0 (very low trust) to 1 (very high trust). *CPI* is the Corruptions Perceptions Index, indicating corruption experiences in the country of origin among (adult) immigrants in Sweden; the measure is rescaled to run from 0 (very low levels of corruption) to 1 (very high levels of corruption). See Table A1 in appendix for descriptive statistics.

Table 2. Investigating if the interaction effect of corruption experience and length of residence in Sweden on political trust is explained by variations in Swedish language skills, discrimination and income.

	Model 1	Model 2
CPI	0.203** (0.080)	0.223*** (0.066)
Years in Sweden	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)
CPI × Years in Sweden	-0.006** (0.002)	-0.006*** (0.002)
Swedish language skills	-0.003 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.006)
Discrimination		-0.088*** (0.022)
Income (log)		0.016* (0.009)
Female	-0.011 (0.014)	-0.007 (0.016)
Age	0.011*** (0.004)	0.009** (0.004)
Age squared	-0.00010*** (0.00004)	-0.00008** (0.00004)
Education	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)
Constant	0.293** (0.117)	0.246** (0.117)
R^2	0.08	0.12
N	538	538

Statistical significance: *** $p < 0.01$ ** $p < 0.05$ * $p < 0.10$

Note: Entries are ordinary least-squares estimates with robust standard errors in parentheses (adjusted for cluster correlation within 89 countries of origin), and based on a sample weighted to be representative of foreign born people living in Sweden. The analyses include only respondents who were 15 years or older upon immigrating to Sweden. The dependent variable *political trust* is a continuous scale running from 0 (very low trust) to 1 (very high trust). *CPI* is the Corruptions Perceptions Index, indicating corruption experiences in the country of origin among (adult) immigrants in Sweden; the measure is rescaled to run from 0 (very low levels of corruption) to 1 (very high levels of corruption). See Table A1 in appendix for descriptive statistics.

Table A1. Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Std. dev	Min	Max
Political trust	0.57	0.19	0.00	1.00
CPI	0.43	0.28	0.07	0.90
Years in Sweden	24.21	14.90	2.23	60.08
CPI × Years in Sweden	7.83	6.00	0.96	36.57
Swedish language skills	5.29	1.85	0.00	10.00
Discrimination	0.20	0.40	0.00	1.00
Income (SEK × 1000)	266.77	151.31	0.00	1433.70
Female	0.55	0.50	0	1
Age	50.69	14.44	21	81
Education	11.44	3.87	0	25

Note: Entries are based on a sample weighted to be representative of foreign born people living in Sweden, and refer to respondents who were 15 years or older upon immigrating to Sweden.

