Low Expectations or Different Evaluations: What Explains Immigrants’ High Levels of Trust in Host-Country Institutions?

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Several recent studies show that immigrants exhibit higher levels of trust in public institutions than natives. This study uses pooled data from the European Social Survey to examine possible reasons for this ‘over-confidence’ of immigrants, arguing that it is largely the relatively lower expectations of immigrants from countries with poorer institutional performance that account for this difference. The eminent role of expectations is also underscored by the finding that low social standing matters less for the level of trust of immigrants than it does for natives. The ‘frame of reference effect’ weakens over time and with increased acculturation in the country of residence, suggesting that expectations are less-strongly based on experiences in the country of origin the better integrated an immigrant is in the country of residence. Small parts of immigrants’ higher trust levels and of the dual frames of reference effect are mediated by the more conservative value orientations of immigrants from countries with lower political stability, who appear to regard stability and conformity more highly. However, the overall pattern of effects indicates that lower rather than different expectations explain immigrants’ higher levels of institutional trust.

Keywords: Migration; Confidence; Trust; Institutions; Expectations

Introduction

An increasing number of studies indicate that immigrants exhibit higher trust in political and public institutions than natives. Weaver (2003) and Wenzel (2006) find that Mexican-Americans exhibit higher levels of trust in political and societal institutions than the general population, while Maxwell (2008) shows that members
of British ethnic minority groups trust political institutions more than whites. Likewise, Bilodeau and Nevitte’s (2003) analysis of the political trust of migrants in Canada revealed that migrants are more trusting than native residents. Röder and Mühlau (2011) show that the trust levels of first-generation immigrants in European countries in public institutions are higher than those of the native populations, and the same holds for satisfaction with government (Maxwell 2010). This may seem counterintuitive, considering the relatively less favourable position of immigrants in many societies. Therefore we ask in this paper: What can explain the high level of trust of immigrants in European countries?

Previous studies indicate that ‘over-confidence’ in political institutions erodes over time and across generations: Canadian migrants from non-democratic states lose trust the longer they stay in Canada (Bilodeau and Nevitte 2003). Michelson (2001, 2003) and Wenzel (2006) show that Mexican-Americans are more sceptical of American institutions the more acculturated they are to mainstream society. Foreign-born Mexican-Americans are more trusting than Mexican-Americans born in the US (Wenzel 2006; see also Michelson 2001) and second-generation immigrants in Europe show lower levels of trust than natives and first-generation migrants (Röder and Mühlau 2011). We aim to replicate this finding for European countries to determine whether low assimilation into the host society is linked to higher trust levels. For the purposes of our ensuing analysis, we label this the acculturation hypothesis.

Yet this does not explain the initially high levels of trust amongst immigrants, and more recent research has suggested that different evaluative frameworks may be of importance. Firstly, immigrants may compare the host country’s institutions with those in their country of origin, and should therefore have lower expectations than natives (Maxwell 2010). We test whether the origin-country context has the predicted influence (reference-point hypothesis), and develop this argument further to determine to what extent this influence fades over time, and whether the generally observable negative impact of low social status is mitigated by these different evaluations (status-indifference hypothesis). We furthermore test the possibility that the expectations of immigrants may not only be lower, but may also be different from those of natives, as immigrants may have different value orientations that could explain their higher trust (value-mediation hypothesis). Immigrants often come from countries with different values than those prevalent in European countries (Inglehart 1997), and values in turn are linked to trust (Devos et al. 2002), making this a viable alternative explanation.

These hypotheses are tested using a double comparative design that permits the separation of ‘community effects’ from residence-country and origin-country effects (Van Tubergen et al. 2004). ‘Community effects’ are effects at the level of migrant groups from a specific source country in a specific host country. These are crucial for this study, as a core argument is that the comparison between institutions in the host country and those in the origin country guides the evaluation of host-country institutions. Using data from the European Social Survey allows us to analyse the
attitudes of migrants living in a variety of European states who originate from countries with very varied institutional settings. No other dataset that is currently available has included this range of countries or the necessary country-of-origin information for this type of study.

**Theory and Hypotheses**

**Acculturation**

In line with ‘classical’ assimilation theory (Alba and Nee 1997; Gans 1973), it may be assumed that immigrants’ expectations and values become more similar to the expectations and values of natives over time. The home-country frame of reference will become less salient as memories of the past fade, contacts with the home country become more sparse and social contacts with members of the host country become more prevalent. Similarly, immigrants are more likely to adopt the values prevalent in the host country, the longer they stay. These processes are likely to work more quickly for immigrants who are eager to integrate into the host society. Children of immigrants born in the country of residence have little or no contact with the home country of their parents and are likely to take their lead from peers rather than their parents. This leads us to formulate the following acculturation hypothesis: better-acculturated immigrants (in terms of length of stay, generation, language usage and citizenship) will have less trust than less-well-acculturated immigrants.

**Expectations: Dual Frames of Reference**

Research indicates that trust in institutions may depend more on the expectations of the citizens than on ‘objective’ indicators of economic and political performance. For example, rising expectations rather than declining performance are invoked as a cause for the decline in political trust that most democratic countries experience (Miller and Listhaug 1990; Orren 1997). Expectations of immigrants, however, are likely to be shaped not only by the realities in their host country but also by past experiences in their home country. Frequently, immigrants appear to evaluate their situation, for example regarding educational opportunities (Suárez-Orozco 1987) or working conditions (Binford 2009; Heath and Li 2008; Waldinger and Lichter 2003), more positively than natives would in the same context. A ‘dual frame of reference’ (Suárez-Orozco 1987) that anchors the evaluation of the present situation in the immigrants’ past experiences in their home country has been suggested as the underlying mechanism. Most immigrants leave their countries of origin because they expect better opportunities in the destination countries. As long as the circumstances in the host countries compare favourably to the situation in their home country, the ‘dual frame of reference’ will induce a more positive evaluation relative to people who lack this anchoring. There are indicators that ‘dual frames of reference’ govern not only the evaluation of individuals’ success and the opportunities of immigrants. For
example, immigrants judge moral behaviour (Reese 2001) or treatment by authorities (Menjivar and Bejarano 2004) relative to the standards of their home countries. It is likely that past experiences also shape the appraisal of societal and political institutions, inducing a more favourable view of host-country institutions for migrants who migrated from countries with poor state institutions.

Röder and Mühlau (2011) showed that the quality of host-country institutions, measured by World Bank quality-of-governance indicators (Kaufman et al. 2009), is an evenly strong predictor of the trust in public institutions of natives and of immigrants in European countries. According to the dual frame of reference theory, immigrants also compare the institutional reality of the host country with their experiences with institutions in the home country as a reference point. This leads to the *reference point hypothesis*, namely that immigrants’ trust in the institutions of the host country is expected to be larger the poorer the quality of home-country institutions relative to those of the host country. This reference-point hypothesis provides the most direct test for the ‘dual frame of reference’ theory. Support for the reference point hypothesis is further strengthened if the difference between the quality of home- and of host-country institutions bears a stronger relationship for recent immigrants than for established ones, and for first-generation than for second-generation immigrants, reflecting a decreasing salience of the home-country frame of reference.

In general, it is observed that citizens with a low standing in society exhibit lower trust in institutions than high-status citizens. The conventional explanations for this are that low-status citizens attribute their social position to the political system, that the institutions have a class bias or that—as Putnam (2000: 138) observed—the ‘haves’ are treated by others with more honesty and respect than the ‘non-haves’. However, immigrants’ comparison of their status with people in their home countries is expected to mitigate the corrosive effect of low-status positions in the country of residence. The *status indifference* hypothesis posits that the relationship between social-position variables (education, income) and trust in institutions is less negative for first-generation migrants than for the native-born.

### Value Congruence

An alternative explanation for the phenomenon that immigrants place more trust in public institutions than do natives is that immigrants, predominately socialised in ‘more traditional’ societies and frequently facing strong material constraints in their destination countries, have value orientations that lead them to appreciate—more than the native population—the institutional reality of their destination countries. According to this view, immigrants do not have lower expectations, they have *different* expectations. Inglehart argued that the declining trust in societal institutions can be explained by a ‘shift from materialist values, emphasizing economic and physical security, to postmaterialist values, emphasizing individual self-expression and quality of life concerns’ (Inglehart 1997: 28). Although the erosive effect of
postmaterialist values is assumed to pertain primarily to hierarchical institutions, postmaterialism is shown to be associated with lower political trust (Catterberg and Moreno 2006): ‘Although postmaterialism is fundamentally pro-democratic, it also reflects elite-challenging views and behaviour, as well as increased dissatisfaction with the established authority in today’s democracies’ (Catterberg and Moreno 2006: 42). Similarly, Devos et al. (2002) claim that trust in institutions is affected by human values: ‘Individuals who give high priority to conservation values are more likely to trust institutions, whereas individuals who cherish openness to change values adopt a more sceptical orientation toward institutions’ (Devos et al. 2002: 484). The underlying rationale is that institutions produce stability and hence are more congruent with conservation values and incongruent with ‘openness to change’ orientations. A positive correlation between religiosity and trust in institutions has been interpreted in a similar way: religiosity is understood as a proxy for conservative attitudes (Catterberg and Moreno 2006) or a proxy for an affinity to conservation values and a distance to openness to change values (Devos et al. 2002).

Based on this, we formulate a value mediation hypothesis that holds that the higher trust levels of immigrants, and also possible acculturation and reference-point effects, are mediated by the different value orientations of immigrants. Assuming that most immigrants in Europe have moved from countries with a higher prevalence of conservation values, less emphasis on change and stronger religious orientations, differences between immigrants and natives regarding their trust in institutions may be explained by differences in their value orientations. Similarly, it is expected that value differences underpin the relationship between indicators of acculturation and trust in institutions. Moreover, as countries with poor political institutions may be characterised by a high prevalence of conservation values and a low emphasis of ‘openness to change’ values, the reference-point effects on trust may prove spurious: it may not be the comparison of host- with home-country institutions, but the societal context nurturing conservation values and discouraging openness to change values that accounts for the relationship described as the reference-point hypothesis. A strong affiliation with religion may be one vehicle with which to stabilise these value orientations.

Data

The data, collected between 2002 and 2006, are extracted from the first three rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS). In the dataset for this analysis we include natives, defined as individuals whose parents and who themselves were born in a country, first-generation migrants, defined as respondents whose parents and who themselves were born abroad, and second-generation migrants, who were born in their country of residence, but both of whose parents were born abroad and in the same country. As the first round of the ESS does not include detailed information for parents’ country of origin, we exclude second-generation migrants from this round. We also exclude any cases that do not belong into any of the three categories, such as
return migrants or individuals with only one foreign-born parent. These criteria were
used to construct the three categories as clearly as possible, excluding any ambiguous
cases such as return migrants.

Individuals are seen as nested within their country of residence and their
‘community’. For first-generation migrants and natives, the ‘community’ is defined
by their country of origin and their country of residence. For second-generation
migrants, parents’ origin country and country of residence are used to define the
community the respondent belongs to. First- and second-generation migrants are in
separate communities, even if the origin is identical. If country-of-origin information
was missing, the respondent was excluded.

We use data from 26 of the 29 countries covered by the first three rounds of the
ESS. These include the EU-15 countries and the EFTA states of Iceland, Norway and
Switzerland. Further, eight new member-states (Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech
Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia) are included. We
excluded Turkey, Ukraine and Israel from the analysis. As there may be a different
relationship between quality of governance and trust in these countries, both a
dummy for new member-states and an interaction with quality of governance is
included. Also all analyses were performed on subsets of EU15/EFTA and EU15 to
test robustness. Findings do not change in substance when these subsets are used
alternatively.

Trust in public institutions is measured in the ESS with a range of variables that
assess, on a zero to ten scale, how much people trust the different public institutions
of the survey country. Four of these variables are present in all three rounds of the
ESS: how much people trust their country’s parliament, the legal system, the police
and politicians. The reliability of this four-item scale was confirmed with Cronbach’s
Alpha for individual survey countries between 0.655 and 0.785, and a sum score was
calculated from the four items, with higher scores indicating more trust. Cases with
missing values were excluded.

Acculturation is measured as follows. Length of stay was coded in five categories—
immigrants who arrived: within the last year, 1–5 years ago, 6–10 years ago, 11–20
years ago and more than 20 years ago. Product terms for interaction effects with this
variable have been formed with a binary coding (1 = 10 or fewer years, 0 = more than
10 years). The variable ‘different language’ indicates that a migrant mainly speaks a
language at home which is not an official language of the country of residence. Self-
reported citizenship in the country of residence is also used as proxy for
acculturation. All these variables are only included for first-generation migrants.

The social status of the respondent is measured by their education, household
income and main source of the household income. Education was measured in years
of education for the highest completed credential. Income is measured by the relative
income position of the household in the country of residence. Income source was
coded into three categories depending on the main source of income declared: the
first includes income from employment, self-employment and pensions (reference
category), the second income from welfare and unemployment benefit (‘benefits’), and the third covers income from savings and others sources (‘other income’).

The difference between the quality of host- and home-country institutions is measured by the Worldwide Governance Indicators (‘Quality of Governance’) dataset published by the World Bank (Kaufmann et al. 2009). This is a composite indicator incorporating six dimensions: voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption, all based on a large number of sources. One of the advantages of this index is that as it covers all host countries and almost all origin countries in our dataset. Figures from 2002 to 2005 inclusively are used to compute averages for the six dimensions. A factor score of these indicators is computed based on the values of host and origin countries included in the dataset. This factor explains 89.7 per cent of the variance of the six dimensions. These factor scores are also used to derive a measure for the difference between the quality of the origin-country and that of the host-country institutions. This measure is computed by subtracting the host-country score from the origin-country score. For second-generation migrants, the country of origin refers to the parents’ country of origin. Scores for respondents indicating that they were born in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia were computed as averages of the countries that these countries were divided into.

Values are measured by selected human values (Schwartz 1992). In the Schwartz value theory, ‘openness to change’ vs ‘conservation’ is one of two fundamental dimensions of human values. Openness-to-change values are measured as the average score on six items associated with ‘self-direction’, ‘stimulation’ and ‘hedonism’; conservation values as the average score of six items associated with ‘security’, ‘conformity’ and ‘tradition’ (see Davidov et al. 2008). As further measures of value orientation we included self-reported religiousness (0–10 scale), being a member of a non-Christian religion, and the product term between both. Table 1 reports all the independent variables summarised above, with their means for the three key sample groups: natives, first generation and second generation.

Missing values for independent variables were substituted, in hierarchical order, by the means of the community group (migrant status X country of origin X country of residence), the country of origin means (migrant status X country of origin) and the country of residence mean (migrant status X country of residence). All quantitative variables are centred around the sample mean with the exception of the quality of governance indicator. Household income is centred around the country mean. Dummies for cases with missing values on a variable are included in the regression, but not reported in the tables.

The data have been modelled as hierarchical linear models (multi-level models) using MLwiN 2.15. Three levels have been specified: individuals as the lowest (n = 105,878 of which 6,137 are first-generation migrants and 1,473 second-generation migrants), and countries of residence as the highest levels (n = 26). Units at the second level are ‘communities’. Communities are defined as (country of residence X country of birth X immigrant status)-cells. In total, there are 1,282
middle-level units: 26 units comprise natives, 995 units comprise first-generation immigrant communities from 172 countries of origin and 261 units comprise second-generation immigrant communities from 96 countries of origin. Random intercepts have been specified for the higher levels and random slopes for variables that are interacted with higher-level predictor variables. Only the variances of intercepts and slopes are estimated but not co-variances. Complex variance modelling at the individual level has been applied to take into account that the residual variance of the dependent variable differs between natives and first- and second-generation migrants. In the tables, we report only the main variance component at the respective level. All models have been estimated using full maximum likelihood estimation as implemented as IGLS in MLwiN.

Results

Models 1 to 5 (Table 2) present the findings that allow us to test the hypotheses outlined earlier. All models include natives and first- and second-generation immigrants, although some variables, such as length of stay, are only available and estimated for the subgroup of first-generation immigrants. Model 1 reports the differences between
natives and immigrants taking into account the nested structure of the data, i.e. the grouping of individuals in ‘communities’ and countries of residence. All models also control for age, gender, quality of institutions, education, household income, source of income and whether the host country is a new member-state. Differences in the models between natives and immigrants are therefore not the result of differences in group composition, but reflect actual difference if these factors are held constant.

Model 1 shows that first-generation immigrants exhibit significantly more trust in institutions than natives (b = .80). In line with the acculturation hypothesis, second-generation immigrants have significantly less trust (b = -.88) than natives (and first-generation migrants). Further findings to assess the support for the acculturation hypothesis are contained in Models 3 and 4. Support for the acculturation hypothesis is provided by the finding that immigrants speaking a different language at home than the official language of the host country put significantly more trust in public institutions than migrants who speak the official language at home, and that immigrants who acquired citizenship of the country of residence are less confident than immigrants who are not citizens of the host country (Model 3). Model 4 also includes length of stay for first-generation immigrants in order to examine whether migrants exhibit less trust in public institutions the longer they have lived in the country of residence. The reference category is immigrants staying longer than 20 years. In evaluating the results, it should be taken into account that the model also contains an interaction effect between staying less than 10 years and the difference between the quality of home- and of host-country institutions. Without this interaction effect, the coefficients for the three more recently arriving groups would be about .55 larger. The coefficients indicate that trust decreases continually with length of stay. Once length of stay is included, the effect of citizenship disappears, underscoring that the negative relationship between citizenship and trust levels reflects that citizenship for immigrants is a proxy for acculturation.

The reference-point hypothesis led us to expect that the trust level of immigrants is higher the poorer the quality of governance in the country of origin relative to the country of residence. The estimate for the difference between quality of host and of home country is significantly negative for first-generation immigrants (Models 2 and 3). Moreover, when comparing Models 1 and 2, it is clear that the contrast between host- and home-country institutions (average value: −2.1) fully accounts for the change in the coefficients for first-generation immigrants (Model 1: b = .80; Model 2: b = −.09), i.e. the home-country frame of reference explains the higher average trust of first-generation migrants. Model 2 also shows that the contrast between host- and home-country institutions is unrelated to the trust levels of second-generation immigrants and that this relationship is significantly stronger for first- when compared with second-generation migrants. Finally, the relationship is stronger for first-generation immigrants who migrated to the host country in the last 10 years (b = −.43) than for first-generation immigrants who have lived in their country of residence for more than 10 years (b = −.22). However, this difference is not statistically significant (see Model 4).
Table 2. Multi-level regressions of confidence in public institutions

|                      | Model 1         | Model 2         | Model 3         | Model 4         | Model 5         |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **FIXED PART**       |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Intercept            | 20.18** 0.62    | 20.14** 0.60    | 20.09** 0.59    | 19.68** 1.24    | 19.88** 1.22    |
| **Migrant status**   |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Immigrant (1st generation) | 0.80** 0.29    | −0.09 0.32      | 0.97 0.64       | 0.89 1.25       | 0.75 1.24       |
| Second generation    | −0.88* 0.36     | −0.84# 0.44     | −0.82# 0.45     | −0.86# 0.46     | −0.89# 0.46     |
| **Background**       |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Gender (1 = female)  | −0.11* 0.05     | −0.11* 0.05     | −0.10# 0.05     | −0.11* 0.05     | −0.47** 0.05    |
| Age/10               | 0.15** 0.01     | 0.16** 0.01     | 0.16** 0.01     | 0.17** 0.01     | −0.01 0.02      |
| **Social status**    |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Education            | 0.08** 0.02     | 0.08** 0.02     | 0.13** 0.02     | 0.13** 0.02     | 0.15** 0.02     |
| Income               | 0.21** 0.02     | 0.21** 0.02     | 0.22** 0.03     | 0.22** 0.03     | 0.24** 0.02     |
| Income × 1st generation | −0.01 0.06     | −0.00 0.06      | −0.00 0.06      | −0.01 0.06      | −0.01 0.06      |
| Benefits             | −1.15** 0.28    | −1.23** 0.21    | −1.51** 0.24    | −1.50** 0.24    | −1.41** 0.23    |
| Other income         | −0.77** 0.13    | −0.77** 0.13    | −0.77** 0.13    | −0.76** 0.13    | −0.74** 0.13    |
| Benefits × 1st generation | −0.97 0.48     | −0.84# 0.48     | −0.75 0.47      | −0.75 0.47      | −0.75 0.47      |
| **Acculturation**    |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Different language × 1st generation | 0.73** 0.23     | −0.58* 0.23     | −0.50* 0.23     | −0.50* 0.23     |
| Citizenship × 1st generation | −0.47* 0.22    | −0.07 0.23      | −0.14 0.23      | −0.14 0.23      |
| Length of stay: <1 year | 3.00** 0.96    | 1.39** 0.46     | 1.21** 0.46     | 1.21** 0.46     |
| Length of stay: 1–5 years | 1.39** 0.46    | 1.39** 0.46     | 1.21** 0.46     | 1.21** 0.46     |
| Length of stay: 6–10 years | −0.96* 0.45    | −0.85# 0.45     | 1.30 1.43       | 1.30 1.43       |
| Length of stay: 11–20 years | 0.88** 0.27    | 0.70** 0.27     | −0.24** 0.03    | −0.24** 0.03    |
| **Values**           |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Open-to-change values |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Conservation values  |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Non-Christian        |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Religiosity          |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Non-Christian × religiosity | −0.28** 0.07     | −0.28** 0.07     | −0.28** 0.07     | −0.28** 0.07     |
| **Country level**    |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| New member-state     | 0.69 1.63       | 0.85 1.62       | 1.01 1.58       | 1.18 1.55       | 1.30 1.43       |
## Table 2 (Continued)

|          | Model 1         | Model 2         | Model 3         | Model 4         | Model 5         |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **FIXED PART** |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Coeff    | SE              | Coeff           | SE              | Coeff           | SE              |
| Quality of governance | 2.40**          | 0.78            | 2.37**          | 0.77            | 2.41**          | 0.76            | 2.47**          | 0.74            | 2.72**          | 0.68            |
| New member-state × qual. gov. | 3.48#           | 1.92            | 3.50#           | 1.89            | 3.52#           | 1.85            | 3.54#           | 1.81            | 3.40*           | 1.68            |
| **Frame of reference** |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Coeff    | SE              | Coeff           | SE              | Coeff           | SE              |
| Difference qual. gov. × 1st generation | −0.43**         | 0.07            | −0.38**         | 0.07            | −0.22*          | 0.09            | −0.15#          | 0.09            |
| Difference qual. gov. × 2nd generation | −0.02           | 0.17            | −0.03           | 0.17            | −0.03           | 0.17            | −0.03           | 0.17            |
| Difference qual. gov. × length < 10 yrs | −0.21           | 0.14            | −0.19           | 0.14            |                 |                 |
| **RANDOM PART** |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Coeff    | SE              | Coeff           | SE              | Coeff           | SE              |
| Intercept | 3.39            | 1.07            | 3.39            | 1.06            | 3.24            | 1.03            | 3.16            | 0.99            | 2.60            | 0.83            |
| Immigrant (1st generation) | −0.21           | 0.36            | 0.45            | 0.41            | 0.74            | 0.30            | 0.55            | 0.43            | 0.46            | 0.40            |
| Second generation | 0.00            | 0.00            | 0.00            | 0.49            | 0.30            | 0.61            | 0.43            | 0.63            | 0.51            | 0.65            |
| **Notes** |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
|           |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Notes: All regressions further controlled for missing values (variable-specific dummies); no cases: n₁ = 105,878, n₂ = 1,282, n₃ = 26; significance levels # = p < .10, * = p < .05, ** = p < .01, two-tailed. |
To evaluate whether social status is less important for immigrants’ trust than for natives, Model 3 should be consulted. It contains the estimates of social status variables interacted with being a first-generation immigrant. For first-generation migrants, education is not significantly related to trust in institutions ($b = .13 - .08 = .05; \ t = 1.31$) and this relationship is significantly weaker for immigrants than for natives. Similarly, immigrants who depend on benefits as income source are not significantly less confident than other immigrants ($b = -1.51 + .97 = -.54; \ t = 1.14$) and the link between being a benefit recipient and trust is weaker for immigrants than for the native-born population. Both findings are in line with the status-indifference hypothesis. However, in contrast to this hypothesis, income has the same effect for first-generation migrants and the native-born population.

The idea of value congruence suggests that immigrants are more oriented toward conservation values and assign less priority to openness to change values. To test whether this holds, we firstly examine whether immigrants differ in these values from natives, which is reported in Table 3. As expected, on average first-generation immigrants exhibit stronger preferences for conservation values and are more religious (and more likely to be affiliated with a non-Christian religion) than the native-born population. Second-generation migrants are more similar to natives than first-generation migrants, although the differences between first- and second-generation migrants are not significant. However, the average immigrant does not differ from the typical native with respect to their endorsement of openness to change values (Panel 1). As Panel 2 of Table 3 indicates, intra-generational value acculturation appears to play a role: while the average immigrant who resides more than 20 years in the host country is in general indistinguishable from natives, more recent migrants have a consistently stronger conservation orientation, are less in favour of openness to change values and are more religious. Large value differences are associated with the migrants’ country of origin. The coefficients for the difference between home and host institutions are substantial, highly significant and indicate that migrants from countries with comparatively poor institutions are more conservation oriented, more religious and, albeit to a lesser degree, less open to change.

We now turn to the relationship between values and trust in institutions (Model 2, Table 2). As expected, openness to change values are negatively related to trust, whereas conservation values and religiosity are positively related to trust in institutions. More-religious people exhibit more trust in institutions, but this relationship is much weaker for people affiliated with non-Christian religions. The ‘reference-point effects’ and ‘acculturation effects’ appear to be partially mediated by values, in particular by a higher orientation toward conservation values, but also by a higher degree of religiosity. However, value mediation explains only a fraction of these ‘effects’: about 30 per cent of the effects of the contrast of home- and host-country institutions and, for example, less than 10 per cent of the difference between recent (less than 1 year) and established immigrants (more than 20 years
Moreover, value assimilation appears to be a slow process which extends over generations and shows substantial effects only for immigrants who are in the host countries for more than 20 years. In contrast, the ‘normalisation’ of trust happens quicker, is largely completed after 20 years of stay and does not extend to the second generation—as is plausible for a change of expectations as opposed to values. Taken together, the data are consistent with the value mediation hypothesis. The value orientations of migrants from less-well governed countries contribute to their strong trust in the institutions of the country of residence. Value orientations cannot, however, account for the overall pattern of relationships that has been found to be supportive for the acculturation and the reference point hypotheses.

### Conclusion

In line with previous studies (Bilodeau and Nevitte 2003; Maxwell 2008, 2010; Röder and Mühlau 2011; Weaver 2003; Wenzel 2006), first-generation immigrants are found to have higher levels of trust in host-country institutions compared to natives, whereas this is not the case for the second generation, who are in fact significantly less confident than both the first generation and native-born citizens. Over-confidence decreases the more acculturated immigrants are to mainstream society, whether this is measured with longer residence in the host country, generational status (see also Michelson 2001, 2003; Röder and Mühlau 2011; Wenzel 2006), or language and citizenship. This finding confirms for the European context what has been noted previously for the United States.

| Dependent variable | Conservation values | Openness-to-change values | Religiosity | Non-Christian religion |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| PANEL 1            |                     |                           |             |                       |
| Immigrant (1st generation) | 0.15** 0.05 | -0.01 0.03 | 0.71** 0.24 | 3.31** 0.30 |
| Second generation  | 0.09# 0.06         | 0.05 0.04                 | 0.41# 0.26  | 3.08** 0.32 |
| PANEL 2            |                     |                           |             |                       |
| Immigrant (1st generation) | 0.08 0.10 | 0.09 0.11 | -0.08 0.41 | 1.82** 0.58 |
| Length of stay: <1 year | 0.10 0.08 | -0.05 0.08 | 0.74** 0.28 | 0.05 0.34 |
| Length of stay: 1–5 yrs | 0.14** 0.03 | -0.13** 0.03 | 0.69** 0.11 | 0.08 0.14 |
| Length of stay: 6–10 yrs | 0.09** 0.03 | -0.14** 0.03 | 0.49** 0.11 | 0.16 0.13 |
| Length of stay: 11–20 yrs | 0.08** 0.02 | -0.09** 0.03 | 0.50** 0.09 | 0.04 0.12 |
| Second generation | -0.01 0.05 | 0.04 0.05 | -0.19 0.25 | 1.41 0.42 |
| Diff. qual. gov. × 1st gen | -0.10** 0.01 | 0.02** 0.01 | -0.36** 0.03 | -0.66** 0.05 |
| Diff. qual. gov. × 2nd gen | -0.07** 0.02 | -0.01 0.02 | -0.36** 0.07 | -0.73** 0.10 |

Notes: Controlled for gender, age, education, income, income source; significance levels # = p < .10, * = p < .05, ** = p < .01, two-tailed.
The main aim of this paper was to account for the higher trust levels of immigrants, with two main explanations being tested. Firstly we asked, does this ‘excess confidence’ of migrants stem from their lower expectations of institutional performance due to their experiences in their origin countries? Indeed, the ‘frame of reference’ explanation finds very strong support in the data. The overall higher trust level of the first generation could be fully explained by the difference in quality of governance between host and origin country. The better the institutional performance in the host country compared to the origin country, the higher the trust in these institutions. This is further supported by the decrease in this effect the longer migrants stay, the general decrease in trust levels over time, and the negative effect of acculturation. Furthermore, social position matters less for the first generation, so that the frame of reference effect seems to soften the impact of socio-economic disadvantage. Migrants give credit to public institutions in their host countries, but this credit fades away the more migrants are exposed to the working of these institutions and as the memories of the country of origin become more distant.

Secondly we asked: Do the high levels of trust of migrants indicate that they hold values that may be conducive to develop trust in public institutions? As expected, migrants, particularly recent arrivals, from countries with less political stability and lower quality of governance have more traditional and security oriented values and are less open to change and report higher levels of religiosity. This is in line with McAllister and Makkai’s (1992) findings that immigrants from non-democratic countries are more supportive of strong government, and may have more authoritarian values. Whilst most of these values are associated with trust in the expected direction, they do not explain the differences in trust in institutions between natives and immigrants, and only account for a relatively small part of the effect of difference between quality of governance in host and in origin country. They also mediate only a small proportion of the acculturation effect in terms of length of stay, and the timing of value change is different from the change of trust. Fears about the problematic nature of migrants’ values as expressed by some commentators (e.g. Huntington 2004) therefore seem unfounded—this study finds that value differences are of relatively minor importance for migrants’ higher trust levels. Additionally, values adjust over time—albeit slower than expectations—and the values of the second generation, in particular, are largely similar to those of natives.

In this study we evaluated trust in the four public institutions that were included in all of the first three rounds of the European Social Survey (parliament, the legal system, the police and politicians). This is a limitation because other institutions such as social, housing, educational and health services may be more important for the daily experiences of migrants and their well-being. Equally, when evaluating trust in individual institutions, somewhat different patterns may occur that are specific to how the performance of particular institutions is perceived. This was not the interest here, as we focused on general trust in public institutions, but may be an interesting subject for further research.
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