

Undermining Political Integration Processes: The Corrosive Effect of Right-Wing Populism on Immigrants' Political Trust

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Previous research shows that first-generation immigrants trust political institutions more than natives, but that this surplus becomes smaller with longer staying in the receiving societies and for the second generation. As an underlying reason, the so-called integration paradox suggests that immigrants adapt their expectations to the host society over time. What remains largely unaddressed is that immigrants' trust varies substantially across and within immigrant-receiving countries, pointing to the role of subnational factors. This study examines how the regional political context, specifically right-wing populist party success, influences immigrants' political trust. Empirical results from multilevel models with macro-unit and time-fixed effects using survey data from the European Social Survey (2012-2018) combined with regional data shows that increases in regional populist radical right party success relate to decreasing trust levels among immigrants, particularly for first-generation immigrants. Second-generation immigrants, by contrast, are not sensitive to the presence of right-wing populist parties. Further analyses with geo-coded individual panel data and included fixed effects for the specific case of Germany on an individual level confirm these results.

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, European countries have experienced a significant increase in the number of immigrants from non-European countries. Previous research has revealed that migration inflows and increasing ethnic diversity have manifold consequences, for example, an increase in natives' negative attitudes toward immigrants (Ceobanu & Escandell 2010). Moreover, these hostile attitudes have also political consequences, in particular an increase in the share of votes for right-wing populist parties, which seek to restrict migration (Berman 2021). While previous research has primarily focused on the motivations of populist voting among the native population (Rooduijn 2018; Spruyt et al. 2016), the impact of populist electoral success on immigrants remains largely unexplored. This is remarkable given that the electoral success of right-wing populist parties can be a political expression of cumulated anti-immigrant attitudes and thus has multiple consequences for the everyday life of immigrants. For example, past research shows that with the presence of right-wing populist parties, moderate right-wing parties also adopt more culturally protectionist positions, making the overall political discourse more hostile to immigrants (Abou-Chadi 2016). Additionally, right-wing populist political success leads to a stronger legitimization of hostile attitudes, which in turn contributes to increased incidences of violent attacks against immigrants in contexts with high electoral shares of right-wing populist parties (Jäckle & König 2017). At the same time, as immigrants have become large minorities in European countries, immigrants' trust in the political system is an increasingly important influence on the legitimacy of democracies.

This article thus aims to address the question of how the regional electoral success of right-wing populist parties affects immigrants' political trust. More specifically, the study examines how first- and second-generation immigrants respond to the regional presence of right-wing populist parties. While both generational groups may react equally with a loss of trust to the presence of right-wing populist parties, differing reactions are also likely. Analogous to very recent research on the “integration paradox”, second-generation immigrants are more sensitive to perceiving discrimination than first-generation immigrants (Schaeffer & Kas 2023). On the other hand, the second generation has significantly higher levels of political knowledge and political efficacy as a result of their political socialization, which supports the interpretation of political events. At the same time, first-generation immigrants exhibit significantly higher levels of trust in political institutions compared to second-generation immigrants (Röder & Mühlau 2012a).

The literature on the impact of rising electoral shares of right-wing populist parties on political trust has generated ambiguous results. While some studies have found an increase in political trust

(Mauk 2020; Haugsgjerd 2019; Hajdinjak 2022), others have reported a decrease in political trust (Grzymala-Busse 2017; Rooduijn et al. 2016) among the overall electorate. Thus, the impact of populist parties on political trust among immigrant populations remains ambiguous, although the majority are likely to perceive the populist messages as discriminatory. However, the political output of perceptions of discrimination is also inconclusive and can have both depoliticizing (Fleischmann et al. 2011; Schildkraut 2005; Bilodeau 2017) and activating effects (Oskoi 2016a, 2020). Moreover, the immigrant population is heterogeneous, raising the question of the extent to which first and second-generation immigrants differ in their reactions.

To empirically assess the relationship between immigrants' political trust and populist electoral success on the regional level, I conduct two separate analyses. While Study I uses data from the European Social Survey (ESS) from 2012 to 2018 for the European context, Study II is based on three waves from the panel dataset “Attitudes and Reported Experiences of the German Welfare State: A Panel Study” from 2015 to 2017 for the particular case of Germany. Both datasets are combined with electoral data on the subnational level of NUTS2 (Study 1) and NUTS1 (Study 2). Results of multilevel models with fixed effects show that an increase in the share of votes for right-wing populist parties is associated with lower levels of political trust, particularly for first-generation immigrants. In contrast, political trust levels for first-generation immigrants and natives are not affected by contextual populist electoral success.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 POLITICAL TRUST AMONG IMMIGRANTS

Political trust, or more specifically trust in political institutions such as politicians, parties, and incumbent government, is a fundamental pillar of democracies, reflecting the degree of legitimacy that political elites receive from the population (Hetherington 1998). Past research shows that high levels of political trust have several positive consequences. For example, countries with higher levels of political trust have higher institutionalized participation rates and greater democratic stability (Hooghe & Marien 2013; van der Meer 2017; Easton 1965). Given its importance, much research has been done on the determinants of political trust that can explain different levels of trust between different segments of society. In general, there are two diverging explanations in terms of varying levels of political trust, the performance-based and the cultural-based explanation. The performance-based approach defines political trust as a subjective perception of political systems, which means that political trust is a volatile evaluation of the respective system (Mishler

& Rose 2005; Newton & Norris 2000). Thus, political trust is higher or lower depending on the evaluated current performance and effectiveness of the political system. In contrast, the cultural approach regards political trust as constituted by cultural factors, i.e., norms and values. Political trust is thus deeply constituted in early socialization and is mainly shaped by socioeconomic factors and education level (Hakhverdian & Mayne 2012). Consequently, the cultural approach defines trust in political institutions as a stable value, whereas the performance approach specifies political trust as a volatile assessment of actual performance¹. From an empirical perspective, there is evidence in both directions of the argument, making an interrelationship between the two explanations likely (Superti & Gidron 2022): Depending on personal background, a person has a certain baseline of basal political trust, which in turn varies intra-individually depending on the actual performance evaluation.

Beyond the general benefits of higher levels of institutional trust for the stability of democracies, political trust is also relevant in the context of immigration and immigrant integration. Hence, it is a widely used measure of immigrants' attachment to mainstream politics and political integration (Maxwell 2010; Tillie 2004). In addition, immigrants' political trust is important as immigrants have become large minorities in European countries, thus the legitimacy of the political system is stabilized by their political trust as well. Research on political trust among immigrants is scarce, but there is evidence that immigrants show systematically different levels compared to natives (Röder and Mühlau 2012b; Maxwell 2013). The broad explanations outlined above can also be applied to specific differences between immigrants and natives (Röder & Mühlau 2012a). According to the acculturation hypothesis, which argues in line with the performance-based approach, different expectations towards the political system are crucial. While first-generation immigrants typically arrive with very high expectations of the political system, the expectations of second-generation migrants are already lower and adjusted to the expectations of the native population. These different expectations finally lead to the reduced trust levels of the second generation. The second approach, by contrast, argues culturally and refers to the different frames of reference for assessing political systems. Thus, the lower the quality of the home country's institutions, the higher the trust in the political institutions of the host country (Dollmann 2022). According to this, the first generation comes with a different frame of reference that evaluates European institutions positively due to their high degree of institutionalization. The second generation, on the other hand, already incorporates the frame of reference of the host countries' citizens due to the political socialization

¹ Following David Easton's (1965) theory of political support, the performance-based approach defines political trust as specific political support, whereas the culturally-based approach defines political trust as a diffuse form of political support.

experienced, resulting in average levels of institutional trust (Menjívar and Bejarano 2004; Röder & Mühlau 2012a).

The empirical evidence on the prevalence and reasons for the differences between immigrants and the native population is mixed. There are country-specific studies for Germany and the Netherlands that systematically find lower levels of political trust among immigrants and attribute them to immigrants' economic deprivation (De Vroome et al. 2013) or to the illiberality of the political systems in the countries of origin (Dollmann 2022). However, comparative studies reveal a more nuanced picture of these differences between immigrants and natives and more importantly, within the specific group of immigrants, i.e., between the first and second generation. Hence, first-generation immigrants show so-called 'over-confidence', i.e., above-average levels, while second-generation immigrants tend to express average or even below-average levels of institutional trust (Röder & Mühlau 2012b). Lower expectations on the part of the first generation and greater sensitivity to discriminatory behavior on the part of the second generation are discussed as the cause of these differences (Röder & Mühlau 2011; Lajevardi et al. 2020)².

At the individual level, in line with former studies, I assume that first-generation immigrants have higher levels of trust in political institutions, whereas second-generation immigrants should exhibit equal or even lower levels of political trust compared to the native population.

H1a: First-generation immigrants show higher levels of political trust compared to native-born persons.

H1b: Second-generation immigrants show comparable levels of political trust compared to native-born persons.

1.2 THE IMPACT OF RIGHT-WING POPULIST PARTIES ON IMMIGRANT'S TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Previous research on the political trust of immigrants has already revealed geographical variation at both the national and subnational levels (André 2014; Maxwell 2013). On the one hand, these differences are due to varying conditions in the respective host country, i.e., the quality of political institutions or other economic factors, such as job availability. On the other hand, as outlined

² Related research in the regarding generalized trust also provides empirical evidence for the so-called 'integration paradox' (Schaeffer & Kas 2023; Ziller & Heizmann 2020; Ziller & Spörlein 2020). Accordingly, unequal treatment and discrimination experiences in intergroup interactions lead to a reduction of social trust.

above, immigrants bring different economic and social resources depending on their country of origin, which also affects the formation of political trust. Hence, political trust among the immigrant population varies according to the immigrant's country of origin as well as the specific characteristics of the host country. A further important source of trust in political institutions is the assessment of a person's immediate political environment. For example, perceptions of racist election campaigns or contact with public administration shape support for the entire political system through spill-over effects (Easton 1965, Melgar et al. 2010). With regard to immigrants' trust, there is also evidence of alignment processes with the political trust of the proximate native-born population through intergroup contact between immigrants and natives (Maxwell 2013). In this sense, the regional level appears to be more salient than the national level for the constitution of political attitudes.

Yet, to what extent does the regional electoral success of right-wing populist parties affect immigrants' political trust? The consequences of right-wing populist electoral success are manifold, in particular for immigrants. With regard to migration-related issues, the evidence to date on the consequences of the rise of right-wing populism is also mixed, but consistently points to an increase in hostile attitudes toward immigrants: First, the political success of populist parties leads to the legitimization of hostile attitudes by the political system, which eventually culminates in an increased willingness to use violence against immigrants (Jäckle & König 2017). Second, the political discourse is also becoming more hostile toward migrants due to the presence of right-wing populist parties (Abou-Chadi 2016). Similarly, political campaigns are visible to all citizens and may be perceived as discriminatory due to anti-immigrant slogans on the posters (Dumitrescu 2010). Third, media analyses also show that populist content—mainly characterized by anti-immigrant messages—is becoming more prevalent and that populist rhetoric is receiving more attention in the mass media (Hameleers & Vliegenthart 2020). Importantly, experiments show that exposure to populist rhetoric and discriminatory content is associated with increased perceptions of discrimination among immigrants (Schmuck & Tribastone 2020, Schmuck et al. 2017) and reduced intergroup contact (Kteily & Bruneau 2017). In sum, an increased regional presence of right-wing populist parties is associated with increased perceptions of discrimination among immigrants.

More specifically, discrimination can be perceived in two ways, with different consequences. On the one hand, the share of right-wing populist parties may be perceived as *political* discrimination because right-wing populist parties are perceived as a part of the political system. On the other hand, it has been argued that in contexts with higher vote shares for right-wing populist parties, the potential for anti-immigrant attitudes along the native-born electorate is greater, which may

indicate an anti-immigrant norm that leads to an increased prevalence of *social* discrimination in everyday life of immigrants (Jäckle & König 2017). The specific type of discrimination influences the effect on political attitudes, such as political trust. While everyday *social* discrimination by others (e.g., in the form of verbal or non-verbal hostility) can have an inhibitory effect on political attitudes and actions (Bilodeau 2017, Fleischmann et al. 2011; Schildkraut 2005), exposure to *political* discrimination (e.g., in the form of political discourse or laws) initiates a motivational effect on political attitudes and actions (Oskoi 2016a, 2020). These opposing outcomes result from different psychological mechanisms: While the general experience of *social* discrimination has an inhibitory effect on a person's entire mind (e.g., in the form of reduced self-esteem) and thus has an overall discouraging effect, *political* discrimination is cognitively perceived as a political threat that can be actively addressed through (political) actions (e.g., voting and political protest) (Oskoi 2016a, 2016b, 2020; Dollmann 2022; Bilodeau 2017; Grewal & Hamid 2022). In this vein, the regional presence of right-wing populist parties is expected to be perceived as *political* discrimination, which may lead to an increase in political trust.

H2a: The higher the electoral share of right-wing populist parties within a region, the lower the political trust of immigrants.

H2b: The higher the electoral share of right-wing populist parties within a region, the higher the political trust of immigrants.

However, this reasoning is highly dependent on third factors, that determine how people cope with perceived discrimination. First, it is crucial whether a person is eligible to vote. Consequently, political discrimination can only have an activating effect on those who are either eligible to vote or have sufficient resources to participate informally in politics. In most European countries, formal political participation is reserved for (at least European) citizens, which usually allows second-generation immigrants to participate politically, while first-generation immigrants have to be naturalized to participate formally. Accordingly, the activating effect of perceived discrimination should be empirically evident for second-generation immigrants and naturalized persons. First-generation immigrants, by contrast, can barely participate in politics, which is why the presence of right-wing populist parties is perceived as a threat and thus as social discrimination, which makes an inhibitory effect more likely. Second, the more cognitive factor of adherence to democratic values and political efficacy is crucial because it shapes the interpretation of political events (Tillie 2004). Immigrants with less knowledge of and adherence to democratic values may perceive the success of right-wing populist parties as a threat from political actors, while those with more

knowledge may see populism as a less threatening political phenomenon, that can be controlled by democratic authorities. When individuals perceive a strong threat from the political system, they may lose trust in the system as a whole, leading to lower levels of institutional trust. Assuming that first-generation immigrants have lower levels of knowledge about the political system due to their foreign political socialization, they should react with lower levels of trust to the presence of right-wing populist parties. In contrast, second-generation immigrants have been politically socialized in the host country and incorporate a certain degree of knowledge of the political system. Therefore, the second generation should be less concerned about the presence of right-wing populist parties in the overall political system. Consequently, first-generation immigrants should react to the presence of right-wing populists with a loss of trust, while second-generation immigrants should react less strongly to the electoral success of right-wing populists.

In sum, first-generation immigrants (a) have a limited political response to right-wing populist electoral success and (b) rely on less democratic understanding and political efficacy. Both factors make it more likely that first-generation immigrants will react with a loss of political trust to right-wing populist electoral success compared to second-generation immigrants.

H3: First-generation immigrants respond more strongly to increases in right-wing populist vote shares than second-generation immigrants.

2. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The present research aims to examine the relationship between trust in political institutions and increasing regional vote shares for right-wing populist parties among first- and second-generation immigrants. Based on the outlined theoretical framework, the first set of hypotheses states that first-generation migrants show systematically higher levels of political trust compared to second-generation migrants. The second set of hypotheses is at the regional level and examines how the presence of right-wing populist parties affects immigrants' political trust. The third hypothesis tests whether immigrant generations react differently to right-wing populist parties. In the following, the hypotheses are tested with survey data for the European context (Study 1) and with panel data for the specific case of Germany (Study 2).

2.1 STUDY 1 – THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Study 1 examines the relationship between right-wing populist parties and political trust for different generations of immigrants using pooled cross-sectional data from the European Social Survey.

DATA & VARIABLES

Study 1 uses pooled cross-sectional data from the European Social Survey (ESS) from 2012 to 2018 (rounds 6-9) at the individual level. The ESS is a reliable dataset obtained through probability-based sampling in different European countries (Schnaudt et al. 2014). The use of multiple waves allows the study to observe changes in the data structure over time at the regional level (region-years) and to test how changes in the electoral success of right-wing populist parties are related to variations in trust in political institutions while controlling for time-constant regional characteristics using fixed effects models. As a regional reference system, the analyses are based on NUTS2 regions, which stands for “Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques” and divide the EU into 242 regions. NUTS is a geo-coding standard developed by the EU, which divides Europe into administrative units of three different sizes (NUTS1/2/3) for statistical purposes. The sample includes 166 subnational NUTS2 regions, resulting in 504 region-year combinations from the following countries Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, and Slovakia. Each country included in the analysis has at least two points in time (see Appendix A1 in the Online Appendix for further information).

The dependent variable is trust in political institutions, measured by an index of trust in three institutions of the political system: parliament, politicians, and parties. Respondents were asked to

rate their level of trust in each of these institutions on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating no trust at all and 10 indicating complete trust. The items showed strong internal consistency, as reflected in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.9. The central independent variable at the individual level is the grouping variable capturing the immigrant status of respondents, with dummy variables distinguishing between those born in the country (0 = no immigrant background), those born abroad (1 = first-generation immigrant), and those whose parents were born abroad (2 = second-generation immigrant).

The EU-NED dataset (Schraff et al. 2023) was used to obtain the key independent measure at the regional level that captures the electoral success of right-wing populist parties. The dataset provides votes at the NUTS level for both parliamentary and European elections. The percentage of votes for right-wing populist parties was calculated using PopuList, which classifies all relevant right-wing populist parties in Europe (Rooduijn et al. 2019). Regions with no votes for right-wing populist parties were included in the models as zero.

At the individual level, several socio-demographic factors are used as control variables. These include gender (coded 1 for female and 0 for male), age in years, and education in years. To control for economic conditions, dummy variables are used for employment status (employed, unemployed, retired/sick, and housewife/student) and a variable for the perceived household financial situation (ranging from 1 for 'very difficult to live on current income' to 4 for 'living comfortably on current income'). The area in which the respondent lives is also controlled by three dummy variables distinguishing between rural, urban, and suburban areas. Finally, a dummy variable has been included which takes the value 1 if the respondent is a national of the country of the survey and 0 if not.

At the regional level, GDP per capita (in thousands of purchasing power standards) is used as a control variable for differences in economic prosperity between regions. The share of unemployed and the annual net migration rate are also included as control variables. The GDP data are taken from the Eurostat database, while the unemployment rate and the net migration rate are taken from the multi-level datasets of the ESS. Descriptive statistics and a correlation matrix for all variables used can be found in A2 and A3 in the Online Appendix.

METHODS

To assess the stated hypotheses, the empirical analysis employs multilevel regression models with region and time-fixed effects, in which respondents are nested within region-years. The first model analyses how different immigrant generations differ in terms of political trust, controlling for

individual and contextual confounders. The second model also includes a cross-level interaction between the individual grouping variable capturing different immigrant generations and the regional vote share for right-wing populist parties. The estimates of these cross-level interactions show the extent to which different generations respond to differences in the electoral success of right-wing populist parties. In addition, the models include two-way fixed effects for regions and years, i.e., dummy variables for waves and regions. The advantage of the fixed effects approach is that it captures the unobserved time-constant variance across units and over time that could affect the estimates (Andreß et al. 2013). While time-fixed effects control for changes in the dependent variable over time that are common to all regions (e.g. due to trends), regional fixed effects control for time-constant political culture and institutional factors. Thus, estimates of the electoral success of right-wing populist parties are based exclusively on changes in right-wing populist vote shares *within* regions (i.e. within-variance). This methodological approach has the advantage that selection effects (i.e. the systematic selection of certain migrant groups into areas with high/low right-wing populist vote shares) do not affect the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the results of multilevel models estimating the relationship between the immigrant generation, the electoral success of right-wing populist parties, and trust in political institutions. Model M1 examines how immigrant generations differ in terms of political trust, controlling for individual and contextual confounders. Consistent with previous research, the estimates provide empirical evidence that first-generation immigrants have significantly higher levels of political trust than second-generation immigrants or natives. The second generation, on the other hand, does not show this 'overconfidence' but tends to have slightly lower levels of political trust. However, the difference between the first and second generations is not statistically significant. Thus, according to the stated hypothesis, the results indicate lower levels of political trust for the first generation (H1a) and broadly the same levels of political trust for the second generation (H1b) compared to the native-born. In addition, the included individual control variables show the expected effects, according to which higher education, and higher individual income are associated with higher levels of political trust. Being employed and living in an urban area are also correlated with higher levels of trust.

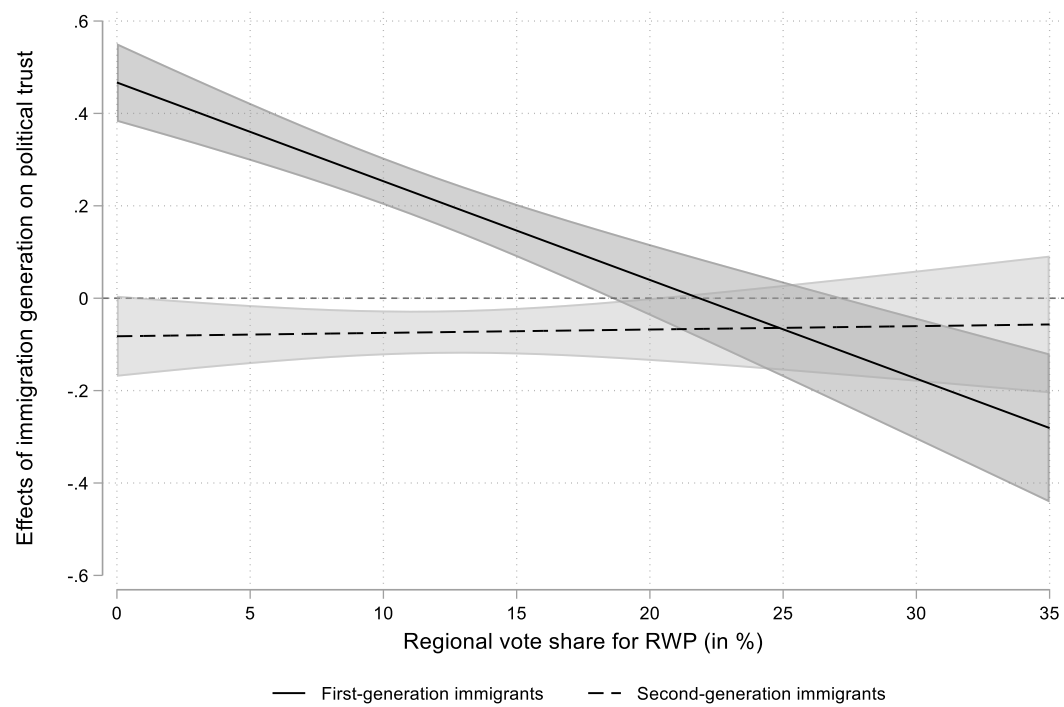
Table 1: Results from multilevel models explaining trust in political institutions in the European context

	(M1)	(M2)
<i>Individual level predictors</i>		
Migration background	0.000	0.000
Ref.: No migration background	(.)	(.)
First generation	0.255*** (0.037)	0.467*** (0.062)
Second generation	-0.075* (0.035)	-0.082 (0.064)
Age in years	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)
Gender (1 = female)	-0.063*** (0.014)	-0.063*** (0.014)
Years of education	0.039*** (0.003)	0.039*** (0.003)
Urbanization of living area (ref. rural area)	0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)
Towns and small urban area	0.073*** (0.022)	0.073*** (0.022)
Urban areas	0.096*** (0.027)	0.097*** (0.027)
Evaluation of income (1-4)	0.402*** (0.014)	0.401*** (0.014)
Occupation status (ref. employed)	0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)
Unemployed	-0.059 (0.034)	-0.059 (0.034)
Housework / education	0.340*** (0.025)	0.342*** (0.025)
Retired / sick	0.083*** (0.024)	0.082*** (0.024)
Citizenship (1 = yes)	-0.392*** (0.058)	-0.389*** (0.056)
<i>Macro-level predictors</i>		
Share of foreign-born in %	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
GDP/c	-0.001 (0.011)	-0.001 (0.011)
Unemployment rate in %	-0.035*** (0.009)	-0.034*** (0.009)
Votes share RWP	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.000 (0.004)
<i>Cross-level interactions</i>		
Migration background X Votes share RWP (ref. no migration background)		0.000 (.)
First-generation migrant X Votes share RWP		-0.021*** (0.005)
Second-generation migrant X Votes share RWP		0.001 (0.004)
Constant	3.424*** (0.409)	3.402*** (0.408)
Variance: Region-Years	0.037*** (0.006)	0.037*** (0.006)
Variance: Residual	3.596*** (0.048)	3.594*** (0.048)
<i>N(respondents)</i>	89,300	89,300
<i>N(region-years)</i>	498	498
<i>Unit fixed effects</i>	Yes	Yes
<i>Time fixed effects</i>	Yes	Yes

On the other hand, people who are not citizens of the country in question have significantly higher levels of trust, although it should be noted that this variable splits first-generation immigrants into naturalized and not-yet-naturalized citizens. At the contextual level, there is a slightly negative but statistically insignificant estimate for the central independent variable of right-wing populist vote share. Regarding the contextual control variables, a higher unemployment rate is significantly associated with lower levels of political trust. In contrast, regional economic conditions (measured by GDP/c) and the net migration rate show no statistically significant effects.

The second model includes the cross-level interaction to test H2 and H3. According to the interaction coefficient, the first generation in particular shows a statistically negative interaction term, while the second generation shows no significance and an estimate very close to zero. Thus, the 'overconfidence' of first-generation immigrants decreases significantly as the regional vote share of right-wing populist parties increases. Instead, the effect of second-generation immigrants remains consistently insignificant and close to zero across the range of vote shares. Consequently, the results point in the direction of the inhibition hypothesis (H2a), i.e. immigrants' political trust decreases as the share of right-wing populist parties increases. The contextual moderation is remarkably substantial, as shown by the marginal effects plot (see Figure 1). While second-generation effects remain stable, the effect of first-generation immigrants is, in line with previous research, significantly positive in contexts with a low vote share for right-wing populist parties. However, as the vote share of right-wing populist parties increases, this overconfidence diminishes and the estimate even becomes negative. Thus, according to hypothesis H3, an increase in the vote share of right-wing populist parties is perceived differently by each immigrant generation. The moderation by context has strong consequences, as it completely reduces the political trust surplus of first-generation immigrants when the vote share of right-wing populist parties is above about 23%. Moreover, the effect is very robust and evident despite the inclusion of individual and regional control variables as well as two-way fixed effects that capture time-constant heterogeneity.

Figure 1: Marginal effects of different immigrant generations by vote share for right-wing populist parties in the European context



Note: Dashed lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

2.2 STUDY 2 – THE GERMAN CONTEXT

Study 2 examines the contextual influence of the regional share of votes for right-wing populist parties on political trust by different generations of immigrants using panel data from the particular case of Germany. The use of individual-level panel data allows controlling for all time-constant variance at the individual level, which increases the robustness of the results. It also allows a statement about the explicit dynamics, i.e. the extent to which immigrants' political trust increases intra-individually when right-wing populist electoral success increases.

DATA & VARIABLES

Study 2 is based on the dataset of the survey called “Attitudes and Reported Experiences of the German Welfare State: A Panel Study” of the years 2015, 2016, and 2017. The study includes three waves with respondents from Germany who were surveyed online. The study's selection procedure was a quota sample. The marginal distribution of the sample using the weights corresponds to that of the German population in terms of gender, age, and region of residence. By providing geocoding information for each respondent, the study allows for analysis at the NUTS1 level. Due to missing data, the analysis is based on 15 out of 16 German NUTS1 regions, reflecting the German Länder ($15 \times 3 = 45$ region/year combination).

As a dependent variable, the analysis considers trust in political institutions which is measured by a mean index of four item index regarding trust in the following political institutions: federal government, state government, political parties, and the parliament. The answer scale ranges from 0 “no trust at all” to 4 “very high level of trust”. The index has strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.9). At the individual level, the central independent variable is again the grouping variable differentiating between respondents born in the country (coded as 0), first-generation immigrants (e.g. born in a foreign country; coded as 1), and second-generation immigrants (born in the host country, but at least one parent was born in a foreign country; coded as 2). At the contextual level, the central independent variable is the share of votes for the German right-wing populist party (in %) “Alternative for Germany” at the regional level of NUTS1, which is equivalent to the German Bundesländer. The election data, reflecting the election results of the 2013 and 2017 federal elections, were obtained from the open data portal of the statistical offices³.

As control variables at the individual level, the models consider sociodemographic factors such as age in years, gender (1 = female, 0 = male), and education levels from low (coded as 1) over the

³ See www.regionalstatistik.de; table number – 14111-01-04-4

middle (coded as 2) to high level of education (coded as 3). Moreover, political interest, ranging from 1 “no interest” to 4 “very high interest in politics” and a dummy variable capturing the respondent’s living area (1 = rural, 2 = suburban, 3 = cities) are included. The dataset also contains data on (household) income, but about 15% of the respondents did not provide any information regarding this variable. Consequently, adding this information would significantly reduce the analysis sample, which in turn would lead to less precise estimates, especially of contextual effects. Therefore, income is not included in the main models, but further analyses including the personal income do not show substantial differences from the analyses presented (see Model M2 in Appendix A8). At the contextual level, similarly to Study 1, the models control for GDP per capita (in thousand euros) and the unemployment rate as a percentage capturing the regional economic condition. Additionally, the share of foreign-born persons (in %) is considered. All three contextual control variables were obtained from the data portal of the German Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs, and Spatial Development (BBSR)⁴. An overview of the descriptive characteristics of the used sample as well as a correlation matrix of the dataset appears in A5 and A6 in the Online Appendix.

METHODS

Similar to the former study, Study 2 uses multilevel regression models to investigate the central relationship and its contextual moderation. Due to the dataset’s panel structure at the regional and the individual level, this dataset enables capturing all time-constant variance at the regional, temporal as well as individual level, making the results less biased compared to Study 1. However, the inclusion of individual fixed effects also leads to the omitting all time-constant individual characteristics, including the main independent grouping variable which reflects the individual immigration background. Consequently, a fixed effects model does not provide estimates for time-constant characteristics, e.g. the central independent variable. Nevertheless, it is possible to estimate interactions between time-constant and time-varying characteristics, including the cross-level interaction between regional right-wing populist vote share and type of migration history. Thus, the model specification of Study 2 is as follows. Models M3 and M4 are multilevel models with two-way fixed effects (regions and years), similar to the model specification of Study 1 and thus enabling investigation differences between immigration generations. While M3 examines the extent to which natives and immigrants differ in terms of the political trust by controlling for individual and contextual confounders (H1), M4 considers the cross-level interaction between the

⁴ See www.inkar.de

regional share of votes for right-wing populist parties and immigration background to test hypothesis H2a, H2b, and H3. Eventually, model M5 includes fixed effects on the individual level in combination with the cross-level interaction, serving as a robustness check. Hence, model M5 provides no estimates for the grouping variable, but only for the cross-level interaction. Therefore, it is not possible to calculate group differences in levels of political trust, but it is possible to examine how groups react to an increase in the regional vote share of right-wing populist parties based solely on the change within individuals. Moreover, analogous to Study 1, all models include fixed effects for regions and years, which control for changes over time and for time-constant political culture-related and institutional factors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the panel data multilevel models are presented in Table 2. As in Study 1, Model M3 examines the individual relationship between different immigrant generations in terms of trust in political institutions, controlling for individual and contextual confounders. In contrast to the previous study, the estimates in model M1 show neither substantial nor significant group differences between native-born, first-generation, and second-generation immigrants. In terms of individual confounders, there is a statistically significant and negative effect for women and a positive effect for higher levels of political interest. At the contextual level, the central independent variable, the vote share of right-wing populist parties, shows no direct effect on trust in political institutions, suggesting that an increase in regional right-wing populist parties is not directly related to overall political trust. The contextual control variables show no statistically significant effect on the outcome variable. Therefore, no empirical evidence can be found for the first set of hypotheses H1a and H1b suggesting generational differences.

Table 2: Results from multilevel models explaining trust in political institutions in the German context

	(M3)	(M4)	(M5)
Individual level predictors			
Migration background	0.000	0.000	
Ref.: No migration background	(.)	(.)	
First generation	0.010 (0.074)	0.234** (0.090)	
Second generation	0.027 (0.042)	0.036 (0.050)	
Gender (1 = female)	-0.078* (0.032)	-0.078* (0.032)	
Age in years	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.018* (0.008)
Political interest (1-4)	0.053*** (0.015)	0.049*** (0.015)	0.023 (0.019)
Education	0.000	0.000	
(ref.: Low education)	(.)	(.)	
Medium education	0.044 (0.042)	0.045 (0.042)	
High education	0.068 (0.035)	0.069* (0.035)	
Urbanization of living area	0.000	0.000	
(ref. rural area)	(.)	(.)	
Suburban area	-0.013 (0.029)	-0.015 (0.029)	
Urban area	-0.008 (0.031)	-0.006 (0.031)	
Macro-level predictors			
Share of foreign-born in %	0.004 (0.041)	0.001 (0.041)	0.002 (0.041)
GDP/c in 1.000 €	-0.015 (0.018)	-0.015 (0.018)	-0.013 (0.018)
Unemployment rate in %	0.063 (0.051)	0.063 (0.050)	0.095 (0.051)
Votes share RWP in %	0.002 (0.005)	0.002 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)
Cross-level interactions			
Migration background X Votes share RWP		0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)
(ref. no migration background)			
First-generation migrant X Votes share RWP		-0.033*** (0.008)	-0.035*** (0.008)
Second-generation migrant X Votes share RWP		-0.001 (0.004)	-0.003 (0.004)
Constant	1.075 (0.932)	1.136 (0.928)	-0.270 (0.969)
Variance: Individual	0.296*** (0.013)	0.297*** (0.013)	
Variance: Region-Years	0.092 (1.015)	0.091 (0.849)	
Variance: Residual	0.024 (1.015)	0.024 (0.849)	
N(observations)	3404	3404	3404
N(region-years)	45	45	45
Unit fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes

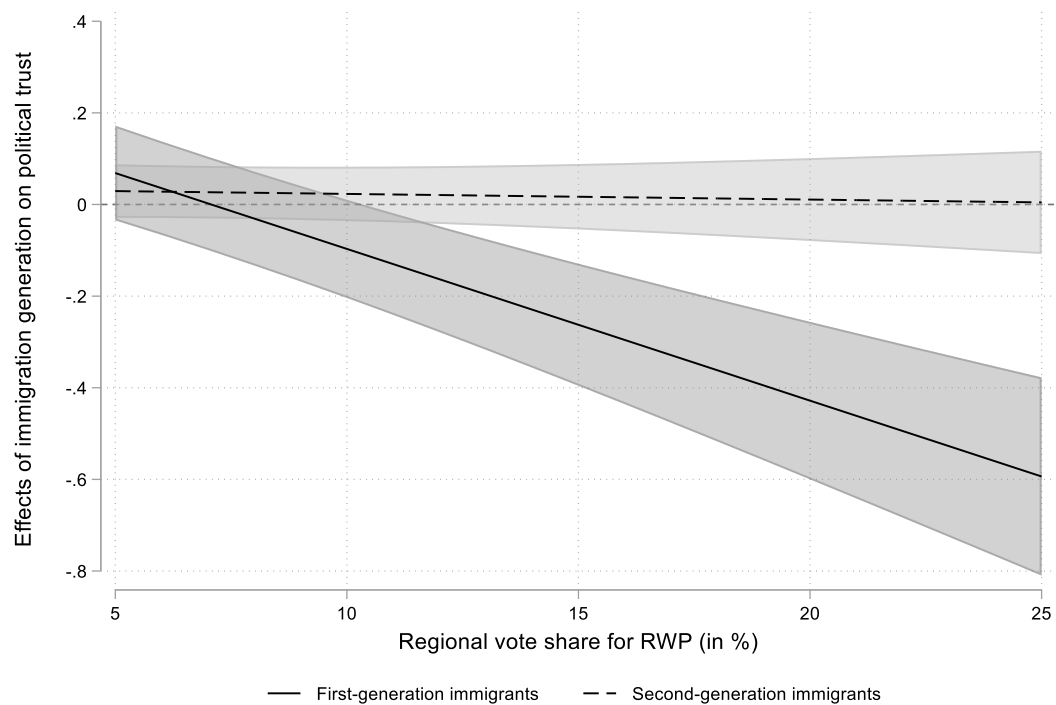
Standard errors in parentheses. Including fixed effects for waves and NUTS1-regions (M3 & M4) and for individuals (M5).

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

However, this changes in the following model M4, which includes the cross-level interaction. In this model, the difference between native-born and first-generation immigrants becomes positive and statistically significant, suggesting that higher levels of trust among first-generation immigrants are also empirically present in this specification (according to hypothesis H1a). In addition, the cross-level interaction coefficient for first-generation immigrants is also statistically significant and negative, while the estimate for second-generation immigrants is close to zero. These estimates are similar to those in Study 2 and suggest a contextual moderation by the share of votes for right-wing populist parties, especially for first-generation immigrants. In contrast to the previous study, however, there is no positive effect for the first generation that decreases, but the effect becomes significantly negative as the right-wing populist voting share increases. Thus, while the second generation shows no sensitivity to the presence of right-wing populist parties, the first generation is sensitive to the presence of right-wing populist parties. The contextual moderation for first-generation immigrants is substantial, as shown in the marginal effect plot (see Figure 2). While an increase in right-wing populist parties reduces the political trust of first-generation immigrants, the effect of the second generation remains consistently insignificant and very close to zero over the whole range of right-wing populist party vote shares. This means that there is a reduction in political trust (analogous to H2a) exclusively for the first generation (analogous to hypothesis H3). Overall, these findings confirm the results of Study 1 for the European context for the specific case of Germany, showing that certain first-generation immigrants react with a loss of political trust to higher vote shares for right-wing populist parties.

In addition, the use of panel data has the advantage of allowing for additional fixed effects at the individual level, which allows us to examine the extent to which intra-individual confidence in an increase in right-wing populist electoral success changes while controlling for all individual time-constant characteristics. As explained in the methods section, this does not allow us to compare levels across groups, but it does allow us to estimate the variation in the dependent variable in response to fluctuations in the regional right-wing populist share. As in the previous models, this model confirms the finding that it is mainly first-generation immigrants who react to the presence of right-wing populist parties with a loss of trust. In contrast, the coefficient for the second generation is also slightly negative, but not significant. In sum, there is robust empirical evidence for H1a and H1b that the first and second generations differ in terms of baseline levels of political trust. Moreover, they react differently to the presence of anti-immigration parties, with the first generation responding with a loss of trust. The second generation, however, shows no reaction to the presence of right-wing populist parties.

Figure 2: Marginal effects of first- and second-generation immigrants by vote share for right-wing populist parties in Germany



Note: Dashed lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

3. GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although the reasons for right-wing populist elections and also the consequences of populist policies are extensively the subject of research studies, empirical research on the consequences of the presence of right-wing populists, especially for immigrants which are one central topic of right-wing populist policy, is scarce. The present study examines the influence of the regional share of votes for right-wing populist parties on immigrants' political trust. More specifically, the analyses distinguish between effects on first- and second-generation immigrants.

The results show that, in line with previous studies, first-generation immigrants tend to have slightly higher levels of trust than second-generation immigrants, who have aligned their levels of trust with the native population. Further analysis shows that the presence of right-wing populist parties has an impact on immigrants' political trust. However the two generations differ fundamentally: while no reaction to the presence of right-wing populist parties can be observed for the second generation, first-generation immigrants react with a substantial loss of political trust. This contextual moderation is demonstrated by two independent studies, one for the European context using European Social Survey data and one for the German context using the individual panel data study. Both analyses are based on longitudinal data and include fixed effects, which increases the robustness of the estimators by controlling for unobserved time-constant variance at the regional, temporal, and individual levels.

The central finding of the present study is therefore the observation that the second generation does not react to the presence of right-wing populist parties in terms of political trust, whereas the first generation does react with a loss of political trust. Thus, although the second generation has lower levels of trust than the first generation, it is significantly more resilient to populist influences. Political trust among the second generation appears to be robust in this regard. This is particularly remarkable given that the second generation of immigrants is significantly more sensitive to discriminatory behaviour and more likely to perceive discrimination (Ziller & Spörlein 2020; Schaeffer & Kas 2023). Thus, the results suggest that the political integration of the second generation is not reflected in levels of political trust, but in their patterns of behavior. However, more research is needed on this issue.

The study has limitations that should be addressed by future research. First, the analysis conducted already distinguishes between the first and second generation and thus already takes into account a certain degree of heterogeneity of the immigrant population. However, the heterogeneity of the

group is much greater, which means that a more disaggregated analysis of different (immigrant) groups, for example, according to the political system of the country of origin, would provide new insights. Second, although the longitudinal structure of the datasets at all central levels already allows the estimators to be largely free of omitted variable bias of time-constant characteristics, the results are still far from causal identification. Accordingly, future research adding an experimental setup could shed more light on the explicit mechanisms and thus investigate why the first and second generations respond so differently to the presence of right-wing populist parties. In this sense, it is of particular interest to what extent third factors such as political interest, efficacy, and identification with the host country influence the relationship examined here.

In general, it is very important to further investigate political integration processes, such as the political trust of immigrants. As immigrants have become large minorities in European countries, the basis of the future legitimacy of democratic systems also lies in the political trust values of immigrants.

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ONLINE APPENDIX

APPENDIX A1 – NUTS2-YEAR-COMBINATIONS OF STUDY 1

Country	2012	2014	2016	2018
AT		✓	✓	✓
BE		✓	✓	✓
BG	✓			✓
CZ	✓	✓	✓	✓
DE		✓	✓	✓
DK	✓	✓		✓
ES		✓	✓	✓
FI	✓	✓	✓	✓
FR	✓	✓	✓	✓
HU	✓	✓	✓	✓
IT	✓		✓	✓
NL	✓	✓	✓	✓
NO	✓	✓	✓	✓
PL	✓	✓	✓	✓
SE	✓	✓	✓	✓
SK	✓			✓

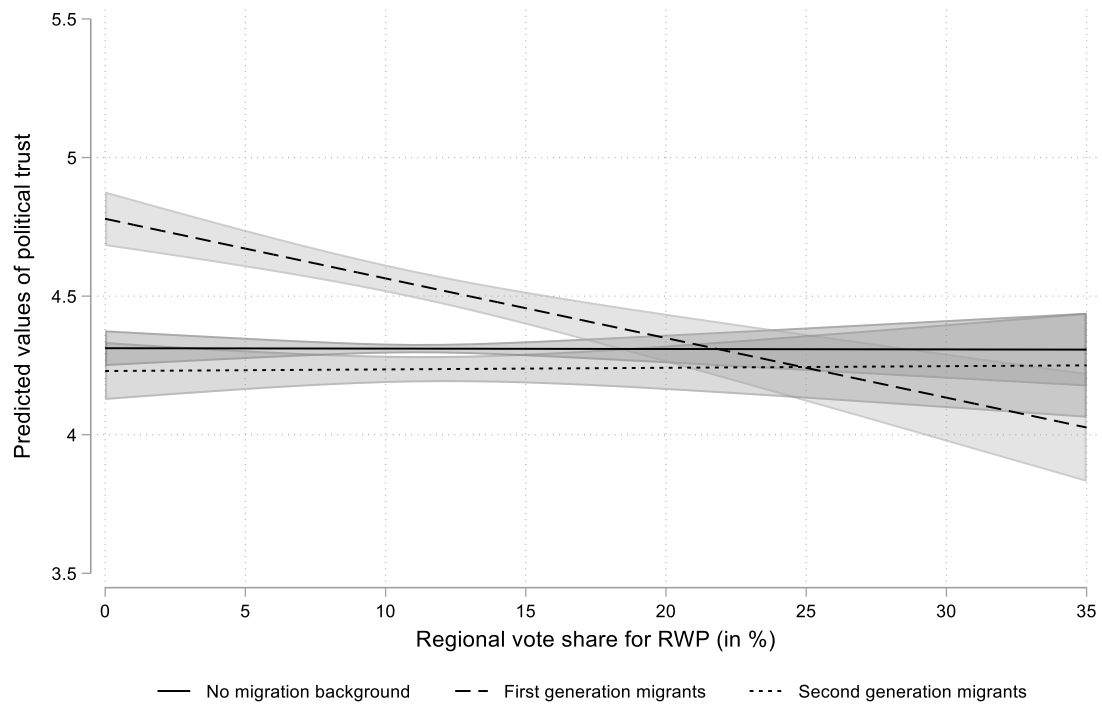
APPENDIX A2 – DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF STUDY 1

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Individual level</i>				
Political trust	4.33	2.31	0	10
Migration background	.87	.34	0	1
Native				
First-generation immigrant	.08	.27	0	1
Second-generation immigrant	.06	.23	0	1
Age in years	49.86	18.38	14	114
Gender (1 = female)	.52	.5	0	1
Education in years	12.79	4.29	0	60
Urbanization of living area	.38	.49	0	1
Rural area				
Suburban area	.31	.46	0	1
Urban area	.31	.46	0	1
Evaluation of income	3.02	.86	1	4
Occupation status	.52	.5	0	1
Employed				
Unemployed	.06	.23	0	1
Housework/education	.14	.35	0	1
Retired/sick	.28	.45	0	1
Citizenship (1 = yes)	.96	.19	0	1
<i>Regional level</i>				
Share of votes for RWP	12.59	7.95	.67	32.34
Number of foreign-born	13988.85	22597.66	-68033	135975
GDP/c	28964.23	9721.95	9103.07	61570.34
Unemployment rate	8.47	5.34	2.2	33.5
Total	89.300			

APPENDIX A₃ – CORRELATION MATRIX OF STUDY 1

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)
(1) Political trust	1.00																			
(2) No migration backgrdd.	-0.07	1.00																		
(3) First-generation	0.08	-0.73	1.00																	
(4) Second-generation	0.01	-0.64	-0.07	1.00																
(5) Age	-0.04	0.08	-0.06	-0.06	1.00															
(6) Gender (1=female)	-0.03	-0.01	0.01	0.00	0.03	1.00														
(7) Education in years	0.17	-0.04	0.03	0.02	-0.21	-0.01	1.00													
(8) Rural areas	-0.05	0.10	-0.08	-0.05	0.05	-0.01	-0.14	1.00												
(9) Suburban areas	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	-0.00	0.00	0.01	-0.00	-0.53	1.00											
(10) Urban areas	0.06	-0.11	0.09	0.05	-0.05	0.00	0.15	-0.53	-0.45	1.00										
(11) Evaluation of income	0.35	0.00	-0.02	0.01	-0.06	-0.07	0.24	-0.02	-0.01	0.02	1.00									
(12) Employed	0.05	-0.01	0.02	-0.01	-0.32	-0.09	0.29	-0.03	-0.00	0.03	0.19	1.00								
(13) Unemployed	-0.08	-0.04	0.05	0.01	-0.11	-0.02	-0.03	0.00	0.00	-0.00	-0.21	-0.25	1.00							
(14) Housework / education	0.04	-0.04	0.02	0.04	-0.36	0.11	-0.07	0.00	-0.01	0.01	0.00	-0.42	-0.10	1.00						
(15) Retired / sick	-0.04	0.06	-0.06	-0.02	0.69	0.02	-0.26	0.03	0.01	-0.04	-0.10	-0.66	-0.15	-0.25	1.00					
(16) Citizenship (1 = yes)	-0.06	0.47	-0.61	0.01	0.08	0.01	-0.02	0.05	0.01	-0.06	0.02	-0.02	-0.04	-0.03	0.07	1.00				
(17) Share of votes for RWP	0.22	0.03	-0.02	-0.01	0.00	-0.00	0.02	-0.01	0.00	0.01	0.15	0.02	-0.06	-0.03	0.03	0.02	1.00			
(18) Share of foreign-born	0.20	-0.06	0.06	0.02	-0.02	-0.02	0.07	-0.01	-0.02	0.03	0.21	0.06	-0.06	0.00	-0.03	-0.04	0.04	1.00		
(19) GDP/c	0.39	-0.19	0.17	0.08	-0.02	-0.03	0.15	-0.06	-0.07	0.13	0.40	0.06	-0.06	-0.00	-0.04	-0.12	0.15	0.38	1.00	
(20) Unemployment rate	-0.24	0.01	0.01	-0.04	-0.01	-0.00	-0.05	0.03	-0.00	-0.04	-0.15	-0.06	0.12	0.05	-0.03	-0.02	-0.41	-0.35	-0.34	1.00

APPENDIX A₄ – PREDICTED VALUES OF POLITICAL TRUST FOR DIFFERENT IMMIGRANT GENERATIONS DEPENDING ON REGIONAL VOTE SHARE FOR RWP – STUDY 1



APPENDIX A5 – DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF STUDY 2

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Political trust	.83	.65	0	3
Age in years	51.61	14.14	18	90
Political interest	3.04	.82	1	4
Gender (1 = female)	.49	.5	0	1
Education	.56	.5	0	1
Low education				
Medium education	.15	.36	0	1
High education	.29	.45	0	1
Urbanization of living area	.3	.46	0	1
Rural area				
Suburban area	.3	.46	0	1
Urban area	.4	.49	0	1
Migration background	.77	.42	0	1
No migration				
First-generation immigrant	.05	.21	0	1
Second-generation immigrant	.18	.39	0	1
Share of votes for RWP in %	7.37	4.7	3.66	27.43
GDP/c in 1.000 €	38.69	7.11	24.66	49.41
Share of foreign-born in %	11.2	3.9	3.62	17.38
Unemployment rate in %	6.22	1.92	3.51	10.36

APPENDIX A6 – CORRELATION MATRIX OF STUDY 2

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)
(1) Political trust	1.00																
(2) Age	-0.01	1.00															
(3) Political interest	0.11	0.18	1.00														
(4) Gender (1=female)	-0.07	-0.00	-0.24	1.00													
(5) Low education	-0.08	0.15	-0.23	0.16	1.00												
(6) Medium education	0.04	-0.25	0.00	0.01	-0.48	1.00											
(7) High education	0.05	0.03	0.25	-0.18	-0.72	-0.27	1.00										
(8) Rural area	-0.01	0.06	-0.05	0.04	0.10	-0.05	-0.07	1.00									
(9) Suburban area	0.00	0.04	-0.01	-0.03	-0.01	-0.02	0.03	-0.43	1.00								
(10) Urban area	0.01	-0.10	0.05	-0.02	-0.08	0.07	0.04	-0.53	-0.53	1.00							
(11) Native	-0.02	0.12	0.05	-0.01	0.02	-0.02	-0.01	0.05	0.03	-0.07	1.00						
(12) First-generation immigr.	-0.00	-0.06	-0.10	0.04	-0.05	0.01	0.05	-0.06	0.00	0.06	-0.41	1.00					
(13) Second-generation immigr.	0.02	-0.10	-0.00	-0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.01	-0.02	-0.03	0.05	-0.87	-0.10	1.00				
(14) Share of votes RWP	-0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.00	-0.02	0.01	0.02	-0.04	0.02	0.04	-0.03	-0.03	1.00			
(15) GDP/c	0.03	0.04	0.04	-0.03	0.03	-0.02	-0.02	0.02	0.01	-0.02	-0.10	0.03	0.10	-0.09	1.00		
(16) Foreign-born share	0.04	0.04	0.02	-0.04	0.01	0.01	-0.01	-0.03	0.04	-0.01	-0.07	0.04	0.06	-0.18	0.89	1.00	
(17) Unemployment rate	-0.01	-0.03	-0.02	0.01	-0.07	0.06	0.03	-0.14	0.02	0.11	0.06	-0.01	-0.06	-0.09	-0.72	-0.48	1.00

APPENDIX A7 – ROBUSTNESS MODEL OF STUDY 2

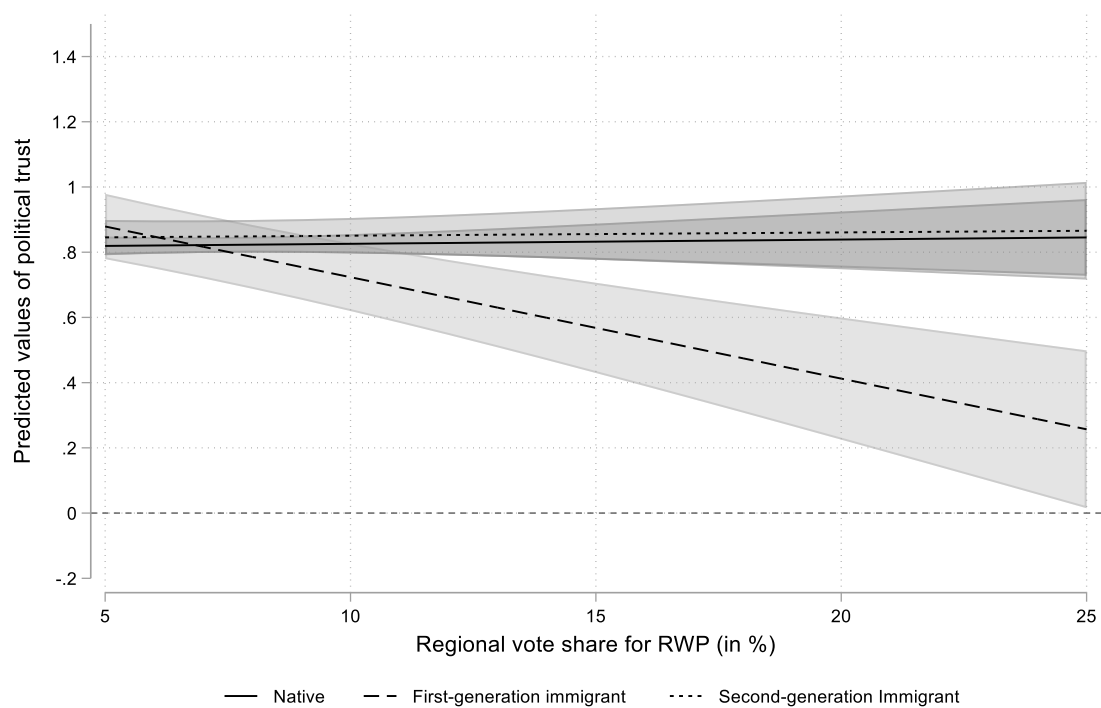
	(R1)	(R2)
	NUTS 2	Including Income
Individual level predictors		
Migration background	0.000	0.000
Ref.: No migration background	(.)	(.)
First generation	0.205*	0.191
	(0.089)	(0.097)
Second generation	0.030	-0.024
	(0.050)	(0.054)
Gender (1 = female)	-0.056	-0.059
	(0.031)	(0.034)
Age in years	-0.002	-0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Political interest (1-4)	0.045**	0.044**
	(0.015)	(0.016)
Social trust (1 = Most people can be trusted)	0.189***	0.192***
	(0.021)	(0.023)
Education	0.000	0.000
(ref.: Low education)	(.)	(.)
Medium education	0.042	0.019
	(0.042)	(0.045)
High education	0.061	0.062
	(0.035)	(0.038)
Urbanization of living area	0.000	0.000
(ref. rural area)	(.)	(.)
Suburban area	-0.029	-0.028
	(0.029)	(0.032)
Urban area	-0.021	-0.027
	(0.030)	(0.033)
Personal Income		0.012
		(0.007)
Macro-level predictors		
Share of foreign-born in %	0.018	-0.027
	(0.026)	(0.047)
GDP/c in 1.000 €	-0.002	-0.032
	(0.008)	(0.020)
Unemployment rate in %	0.059	0.051
	(0.042)	(0.057)
Votes share RWP in %	0.003	0.001
	(0.004)	(0.005)
Cross-level interactions		
Migration background X Votes share RWP	0.000	0.000
(ref. no migration background)	(.)	(.)
First-generation migrant X Votes share RWP	-0.030***	-0.029***
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Second-generation migrant X Votes share RWP	-0.000	0.003
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Constant	0.228	2.325*
	(0.431)	(1.053)
Variance: Individual	0.268***	0.274***
	(0.012)	(0.014)
Variance: Region-Years	0.092	0.092
	(0.733)	(0.616)

Variance: Residual	0.023 (0.733)	0.023 (0.616)
N(respondents)	3303	3303
N(region-years)	45	45
<i>Unit fixed effects</i>	Yes	Yes
<i>Time fixed effects</i>	Yes	Yes

Standard errors in parentheses. Including fixed effects for waves and NUTS1-regions (R2) and NUTS2-regions (R1).

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

APPENDIX A8 – PREDICTED VALUES OF POLITICAL TRUST FOR DIFFERENT IMMIGRANT GENERATIONS DEPENDING ON REGIONAL VOTE SHARE FOR RWP – STUDY 2



Note: Dashed lines represent 95% confidence intervals.