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Corruption exposure, political trust, and immigrants[☆]Cevat Giray Aksoy^a, Barry Eichengreen^b, Anastasia Litina^c, Cem Özgüzel^d, Chan Yu^{e,*}^a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, London, UK^b University of California, California, USA^c University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, Macedonia, Greece^d Paris School of Economics, Paris, France^e The University of International Business and Economics, Chaoyang, Beijing, China

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ABSTRACT

Scholars and politicians have expressed concern that immigrants from countries with low levels of political trust transfer those attitudes to their destination countries. Using large-scale survey data covering 38 countries and exploiting origin-country variation across different cohorts and survey rounds, we show that, to the contrary, immigrants more exposed to institutional corruption before migrating exhibit *higher* levels of political trust in their new country. Higher trust is observed for national political institutions only and does not carry over to other supra-national institutions and individuals. We report evidence that higher levels of political trust among immigrants persist, leading to greater electoral participation and political engagement in the long run. The impact of home-country corruption on political trust in the destination country is further amplified by large differences in levels of income and democracy between home and host countries, which serve to highlight the contrast in the two settings. It is lessened by exposure to media, a source of information about institutional quality. Finally, our extensive analyses indicate that self-selection into host countries based on trust is highly unlikely and the results hold even when focusing only on forced migrants who were unlikely to have been subject to selection.

1. Introduction

Political trust, defined as the trust that individuals place in political institutions, matters importantly for political participation and societal outcomes. As John Locke famously argued in *the Second Treatise of Civil Government*, trust of citizens in their government is essential for an open society governed by rule of law. When people distrust political institutions, they may view public policies and processes as illegitimate

and resort to irregular methods, including violent protests and demonstrations, to achieve political ends (Easton, 1965; Papaioannou, 2013). To take a topical example from the United States, if people distrust the authorities responsible for counting ballots, they may disregard election results and organize protests that threaten the peaceful transition of power. More generally, evidence shows that political trust matters for the effectiveness of a wide variety public policies and outcomes such as, for example, compliance with public health advisories and regulatory

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^{*} Corresponding author.E-mail address: chanyu@uibe.edu.cn (C. Yu).<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdevec.2024.103440>

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rules (Levi and Stoker, 2000; Bargain and Aminjonov, 2020).

Societies with high levels of immigration thus face a challenge centered around immigrants' political trust and participation. The trust that immigrants have in the institutions of their host country can significantly impact their engagement and integration into civic and political life. Without trust in political institutions, immigrants may feel marginalized and disconnected from the broader society, which can lead to social tensions and other negative consequences (see e.g., Easton and Dennis, 1967; Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022).

Moreover, some observers argue that immigrants from countries with widespread distrust of government may bring this skepticism with them. This reflects a broader concern that immigrants from source countries with weak institutions could potentially weaken the functioning of institutions in their host countries. Thus, Borjas (2014, p.169) writes, "For immigration to generate substantial global gains, it must be the case that billions of immigrants can move to the industrialized economies without importing the 'bad' institutions that led to poor economic conditions in the source countries in the first place." Clemens and Pritchett (2019, p.154) point to the possibility that "low productivity spreads from poor countries to rich countries via cultures and institutions carried by migrants ..." Nowrasteh and Powell (2020, p.30) summarize the so-called new economic case for immigration restrictions as positing that "immigrants can transmit the traits responsible for low productivity in their old countries of origin to their new destination countries and thus lower productivity there." Specifically, they raise the possibility that "origin-country corruption might migrate with immigrants" because beliefs about corruption are deeply ingrained in long-standing cultural norms and beliefs: "Thus, as the immigrants move, these beliefs and norms move with them."¹ Populist, anti-immigrant politicians have echoed these concerns, often using more direct and less politically sensitive language.

Although these concerns have a long history, they have not been examined systematically. In this paper, we therefore study whether immigrants who encountered poor institutions prior to migrating exhibit more or less trust in the institutions of their host country. Specifically, we test whether immigrants who were exposed to more corruption in their native country vest greater trust in the parliaments, political parties, and politicians of their country of destination.

We use data from eight waves of the European Social Survey spanning the period 2004–2018, conducted in 38 European countries, to measure the political trust among immigrants. We then measure immigrants' exposure to corruption in their home-country using Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) data. Our empirical strategy exploits within-origin country, within-host country, between-age cohort variation. Put simply, we compare immigrants with similar observable characteristics, coming from the same origin country, residing in the same host country, but exposed to different levels of origin-country corruption before migration. We achieve this by controlling for pair (origin-host), origin country by year, host country by year, and age cohort fixed effects.

We find that immigrants' exposure to corruption in their native country is an important determinant of the trust they place in parliaments, political parties and politicians of their country of immigration. Strikingly, exposure to more corruption in the native country affects trust in the political institutions of the host country *positively*, not negatively. Moreover, it is not exposure in general that matters, but rather exposure in early adulthood, i.e., at ages 18–25.² We find that a one standard deviation increase in immigrants' corruption exposure increases their average political trust in host institutions by approximately 0.044 standard deviations in the level of trust. Importantly, the

higher levels of political trust associated with this pre-immigration experience have concrete behavioural implications. More political trust in the host country leads to more political action: immigrants more exposed to corruption in their country of origin are more likely to be interested in politics, to have voted in the last election, and to work in a political party or political action group. Not only survey responses reflecting attitudes but also actual behavior is affected.

We address concerns over robustness through five distinct and complementary ways. First, we show that our results are not driven by other past economic, social and political shocks that individuals experienced in early adulthood. Second, we show that the results are robust to controlling for country-by-age, subnational-region-by-age-cohort or age-of-arrival fixed effects, migrant networks, and household income. Third, results hold across a variety of specification checks (using alternative indices for measuring corruption, excluding potential bad controls, conducting multiple hypothesis tests, ruling out influential observations, focusing only on a subsample of immigrants coming from countries with corruption levels that are lower than their host countries, and using alternative sampling weights). Fourth, we document that corruption in the origin country in the period before an immigrant is born has no impact on their political trust in the destination country; this finding mitigates concerns about our results being driven by broad social changes affecting political trust. Fifth, we show that when we associate first-generation immigrants not with the institutional quality of their origin country but instead with the institutional quality of the host country, we do not find significant effects.

These results are also unlikely to be explained by self-selection into destination based on political trust for several reasons. Our empirical strategy compares only immigrants moving from the same origin to the same destination while also controlling for observable characteristics and age cohort fixed effects. By introducing origin-destination pair fixed effects, we control for time-invariant factors specific to each origin-destination pair. This means that differences between immigrants in terms of pre-migration corruption exposure are analyzed within the context of each specific origin-destination pair. Any characteristic that makes individuals more likely to migrate from a particular origin to a particular destination will be accounted for in this fixed effect. Moreover, by focusing on relative differences in corruption exposure among immigrants from the same origin country who all migrate to the same host country, our approach compares only those who have already made the decision to migrate. This within-group comparison can mitigate selection bias because it does not compare migrants to non-migrants, but rather to other migrants who may share many similar selection factors (like the decision to emigrate from the same origin country).

The results are also not driven by the fact that more trusting people tend to emigrate. If immigrants are more trusting by nature, then they should exhibit greater trust not only in their host-country political institutions but also in other institutions and individuals. This is not the case (in particular, we find no effects on other outcomes such as social trust and trust in supra-national organizations); the positive effects are limited to political institutions. Balance tests show that individual-level past corruption exposure and the socio-demographic characteristics of immigrants are not correlated with host country characteristics (e.g., GDP, population, exports, physicians per capita, etc.). Finally, the results also hold when focusing only on migrants originating from countries affected by wars, who are forcibly displaced and thus unlikely to be subject to selection.

Our findings also reveal notable differences between natives and immigrants. Specifically, natives who were more exposed to corruption in their formative years exhibit lower, not higher, levels of political trust. The magnitude of the impact, if not also its sign, is comparable for natives and immigrants, underscoring the contrasting attitudes observed for these two groups.

In the final section of the paper, we investigate whether individuals assess outcomes in relation to a reference point established by previous experience. Specifically, we examine whether immigrants hold more

¹ Nowrasteh and Powell (2020), p.99. The authors themselves are agnostic about the hypothesis; as they go on to write, "there are also strong reasons to doubt that corruption migrates with immigrants."

² The early adulthood (i.e., impressionable years) hypothesis traces back to Newcomb (1943) and Newcomb et al. (1967).

positive views of the political institutions of their host country when they compare favorably to those in their country of origin where their attitudes and expectations regarding political institutions were presumably formed. Our findings suggest that migrants, when faced with large differences in income and democratic practices between the countries of origin and destination, tend to place greater trust in the political institutions of the host country. This higher political trust in the host country can be plausibly attributed to experience with improved living conditions. We also observe that migrants from less democratic countries exhibit higher levels of political trust.

In contrast, the impact of past exposure to corruption on political trust is less pronounced among immigrants with more exposure to media in their host country. An interpretation is that by following local media immigrants expand their understanding of institutions of their host country, which attenuates the positive effect of home-country corruption.

2. Related literature and our contribution

Our paper contributes to several literatures. First is the recent literature on the determinants of political trust, particularly the role of early life events.³ Guiso et al. (2024) analyze how negative economic shocks early in life negatively affect political trust. Acemoglu et al. (2024) show that greater exposure to democracy leads to more trust in democratic institutions. Eichengreen et al. (2024) find that epidemic exposure early in life has a persistent negative effect on trust in political institutions and leaders.⁴ Daniele et al. (2023) find that young first-time voters exposed to the large-scale corruption scandal in Italy in the early 1990s exhibit significantly less institutional trust and were more likely to support populist parties in 2018 national elections. Our results are similar in highlighting the importance of past experience, but they differ in the sign of the effect. Specifically, more exposure to low-quality, corrupt institutions in an immigrant's country of origin has a *positive* effect on the trust that they vest in the political institutions of the country of immigration.⁵

Second there is literature on the persistence of family and economic outcomes in the context of immigration – that is, how home-country norms, practices and institutions shape expectations and behaviour in the host country. This literature finds persistence in fertility outcomes (Fernández and Fogli, 2009), labour force participation (Alesina and Giuliano, 2010), and preferences for redistribution (Luttmer and Singhal, 2011). While contributing to this literature, our results also differ sharply from these earlier studies. In contrast to result in these earlier papers, we find that low trust in the political institutions of the country of original results in unusually *high* trust in the political institutions of the country of immigration. Thus, our contribution is not only to document the persistence of an effect but to identify a novel mechanism through which individuals update, as opposed to simply retaining, their beliefs.

Third is literature on how institutions shape individual behaviour. For example, Shiller et al. (1992) and Alesina and Fuchs-Schundeln (2007) explore the effect of exposure to the institutions of socialism

on entrepreneurship, leadership, and attitudes towards redistribution and state intervention. Fisman and Miguel (2007) examine the impact of exposure to corrupt institutions on subsequent corruption norms.⁶ We show that exposure to corrupt institutions similarly affects trust in political institutions, albeit in a different fashion than would be expected on the basis of this literature. Our paper also presents causal cross-country evidence on this question by drawing on data from a larger number and a more varied sample of countries, which allows greater confidence in the generality of the findings.

Fourth, we contribute to the literature on voter turnout. Existing research has demonstrated that citizens may be discouraged from participating in the electoral process by their perceptions of corruption (Chong, De La O, Karlan, and Wantchekon, 2015; Sundström and Stockemer, 2015). In contrast to these studies, we present evidence that immigrants exposed to corruption in their country of origin are *more* likely to be interested in politics and to *more* likely have voted in the last election in the host country.

Finally, our paper contributes to the debate on economic case for immigration restrictions.⁷ Advocates of such restrictions argue that international migrants have the potential to transfer factors responsible for low productivity in their countries of origin to wealthier destination countries (see, Clemens and Pritchett, 2019 for a detailed discussion). Collier (2013) and Borjas (2015) argue that immigrants introduce low-quality norms prevalent in their countries of origin, thereby generating a negative externality that affects both formal and informal institutions within the destination countries. Our findings present a contrasting perspective. They do not support the notion that immigration from poor countries with weak norms and institutions undermines prevailing norms in destination countries in the case political trust and participation.

3. Data and variables

Our data on trust in institutions come from Waves 2–9 (2004–2018) of the European Social Survey (ESS).⁸ These surveys are fielded every two years in 38 European countries.⁹ Interviews are conducted in local languages. Our main sample includes 31,797 migrants aged 15 years and older from 196 countries.

We consider three measures of trust in political institutions: “Please tell me on a score of 0–10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust: (i) parliament; (ii) politicians; (iii) political parties.”¹⁰ We consider these measures individually and combine them into a single index by taking the average of three outcomes. We exclude observations with missing responses for political trust in the ESS survey data.¹¹ To test whether the effects are specific to political trust, we also examine answers about other dimensions of trust, such as social trust, trust in non-national institutions (such as the United Nations), or non-political attitudes (such as views of homosexuality and fairness). This allows us to examine whether our results are specific to political institutions.

³ There is also an extensive literature on interpersonal trust (see, e.g., Guiso et al., 2006).

⁴ Eichengreen et al. (2021) also examine how exposure to epidemics during the impressionable years (ages 18–25) affects trust in science and scientists, using data from a 2018 global survey and epidemic records since 1970. The findings reveal that while such exposure does not alter views on science itself, it significantly reduces trust in scientists and their work, particularly among individuals with limited science education, leading to lower compliance with health policies like vaccination.

⁵ Our paper is on the determinants of political trust, not on perceptions of corruption, but it is related to the perceptions-of-corruption literature insofar as a measure of corruption is our key independent variable (Olken, 2009; Gutmann, Padovano and Voigt, 2019).

⁶ Analysing variations in the number of unpaid parking tickets among foreign diplomats at the United Nations, they show that diplomats coming from countries with weaker institutions tend to break the rules more frequently and are less likely to pay fines.

⁷ See, Nowrasteh and Powell (2020) for comprehensive empirical assessment of the new economic case for immigration restrictions.

⁸ We drop the first round of the survey because it does not include information of country of origin of migrants.

⁹ The sample is an unbalanced panel because not all countries were surveyed in every round.

¹⁰ The actual question queried also about trust in the legal system. Since the legal system is not a political institution per se, we do not consider it here.

¹¹ In our sample, fewer than 10% observations are with missing values in political trust variables in the ESS data.

Our variable of interest is corruption exposure in the respondent's home country between the ages of 18–25. To investigate the role of early adulthood exposure compared to exposure in other age ranges, we also calculate corruption exposure in ages 0–9, 10–17, 26–33, and 34+. We measure corruption using Varieties of Democracy (V-DEM) data covering 202 countries from 1900 to 2018.¹² V-DEM provides an executive and public sector corruption index, a judicial corruption index, and a legislative corruption index.¹³

Executive and public sector corruption measure how routinely public-sector employees grant favors in exchange for bribes, kickbacks or other material inducements and how often they steal, embezzle or misappropriate public funds or other state resources for personal or family use. Legislative corruption indicates how often members of the legislature abuse their position for financial gain by receiving bribes, obtaining government contracts for firms that legislators own, doing favours for firms in order to obtain the opportunity of employment after leaving the legislature, or stealing money from the state or campaign donations. Judicial corruption captures how often individuals or businesses make undocumented payments or bribes to obtain favorable judicial decisions.¹⁴

In our baseline analysis, we use an average of executive corruption, judicial corruption, legislative corruption, and public-sector corruption. Values range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating more corruption. Online Appendix Fig. 1 displays the time series of the corruption index used in the main analysis for 196 countries. The figure highlights the variation for India, Iran, Italy, and Russia for illustrative purposes. These suggest that exposure to corruption varies by country but, importantly, also across cohorts within countries.

We use country of birth to identify first-generation immigrants.¹⁵ We also construct a sample of natives born in the country of residence, whose fathers and mothers were also born in the country of residence.¹⁶ To control for other aspects of past economic and political shocks in respondents' early adulthood, we use variables from Penn World Tables and Cross-National Time-Series (CNTS). Penn World Tables provide country-level GDP per capita since 1950. CNTS provides data on exchange rates as well as political events such as, assassinations, strikes, purges, riots, revolutions and anti-government demonstrations.

Online Appendix Tables 1A and 1B presents the summary statistics for the corruption-exposure, outcome and control variables used in this study.

¹² The V-DEM dataset includes information from the years 1789–2020. Since our earliest cohorts were born in 1900, we use 1900 as the starting point for our main sample. For more detail see <https://www.v-dem.net/en/news/political-corruption-persistent-global-phenomenon/>.

¹³ Each index is based on factual and evaluative indicators. The former use data from current and historical sources, while the latter are based on ratings from some 4000 experts specialized by country and dimension. These experts are carefully selected to reflect diverse perspectives, and their responses are processed using a Bayesian Item Response Theory (IRT) model to reduce individual biases and increase accuracy. Full details on the methodology are at <http://www.v-dem.net/en/data/reference-material-v11/>. In additional analyses, we conduct a principal component analysis and find that our results remain robust when using the first principal component, which captures the most variation in our political trust variables.

¹⁴ While our variable of primary interest is the aggregate index of institutional corruption, we also examine the results of each component in a later section.

¹⁵ First-generation immigrants are defined as the individuals who themselves migrated to the host country (i.e., born outside the host country), whereas second-generation immigrants are individuals who were not foreign-born but whose father and/or mother were immigrants.

¹⁶ We also use a definition of natives as individuals born in the country of residence whose fathers and mothers were not also born in that country. Our results are not sensitive to these different definitions.

4. Empirical strategy

4.1. Construction of the treatment variable and the importance of early adulthood

Our treatment variable captures the exposure to corruption that individuals experienced during their early adulthood, between the ages of 18–25, in their country of origin. The relevance of this life stage in shaping enduring attitudes and values is highlighted in a seminal study by Newcomb and coauthors (Newcomb, 1943; Newcomb et al., 1967). Their study showed that beliefs and values formed during this period persist over long periods. Subsequent research, such as that by Krosnick and Alwin (1989), identified the formative years as spanning the ages of 18–25.¹⁷

In terms of applications, using survey data from the United States, Cotofan, Cassar, Dur, and Meier (2020) show that job preferences vary in systematic ways with macroeconomic conditions experienced in early adulthood. Recessions create cohorts of workers who give higher priority to income, whereas booms make cohorts care more about job meaning, for the rest of their life. Eichengreen et al. (2021) show that exposure to previous epidemics affected young people's trust in science and scientists.

To measure corruption exposure during early adulthood, our treatment variable is calculated as:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{CorruptionExposure}_{io}^{18-25} &= \sum_{\text{age}=18}^{\text{age}=25} \text{CorruptionIndex}_{ot} \times I(\text{DepartureAge} \\ &\geq 25) + \sum_{\text{age}=18}^{\text{age}=\text{DepartureAge}} \text{CorruptionIndex}_{ot} \\ &\times I(\text{DepartureAge} < 25) \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where $\text{CorruptionExposure}_{io}^{18-25}$ corresponds to the V-DEM Corruption Index (i.e., average of executive corruption, judicial corruption, legislative corruption, and public-sector corruption) in the country of origin o when the individual i is between ages 18 and 25.

If an individual left the country of origin before age 25 ($\text{DepartureAge} < 25$), then the measure only includes corruption exposure between age 18 and the age of immigration (DepartureAge).¹⁸ By construction, individuals migrating before age 18 have zero exposure to home-country corruption during early adulthood.¹⁹

Main specification

We estimate the following specification:

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{iht} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{CorruptionExposure}_{io}^{18-25} + \beta_2 X_i + \alpha_{\text{cohort}} + \alpha_{ho} + \alpha_h \times \alpha_t \\ &+ \alpha_0 \times \alpha_t + \alpha_h \times \alpha_{\text{immigration year}} + \varepsilon_{iht} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

the outcome variable, Y , is the index of the level of trust of individual i in the political institutions of their host country h , where that individual is from home country o , and participates in the survey round in year t . β_1 captures the effect of early adulthood exposure to corruption in the country of origin on immigrants' trust in host country political

¹⁷ Similarly, if an individual continued to reside in their country of origin beyond age 25. In that case, the baseline measure does not account for the corruption exposure in additional years.

¹⁸ While this measure is our baseline measure of corruption, we also consider alternative measures by changing the age bracket or using the per year corruption exposure instead of the cumulative one. The results are also robust to excluding all individuals who migrated before the age of 18, who therefore have zero exposure.

¹⁹ There are many missing values in marital status, religion, living in urban or not, and the presence of children in the household. We do not consider these control variables in our specifications. However, our results are robust to the inclusion of these additional control variables.

institutions. As noted, we explore four measures of political trust: trust in parliament, in politicians, and in political parties, as well as a simple average of these three variables. We estimate ordinary least squares models for ease of interpretation.

The vector X_i includes demographic and labour market controls: age, gender (male), educational attainment (tertiary education, secondary education), and employment status (employed, unemployed).²⁰

Cohort fixed effects α_{cohort} account for factors that might affect trust specific to each cohort, which may be important for trust. For example, individuals born in the late 1930s and early 1940s may trust political institutions less because they experienced widespread protests against political systems during their early adulthood in the late 1960s. We therefore include dummies for birth years so as to compare the individuals only within the same birth cohort.

We also include fixed effects for pairs of host (h) and origin country (o) (i.e., α_{ho}). By using origin-destination fixed effects, we exploit the variation between immigrants who come from the same origin country and reside in the same host country yet exposed to different levels of corruption during their formative years. This approach allows us to control for any unobserved, time-invariant factors unique to each origin-destination pair—such as shared cultural or historical influences—isolating the specific impact of corruption exposure on political trust.

We further control for host-country-by-year ($\alpha_h \times \alpha_t$) and origin-country-by-year fixed effects ($\alpha_o \times \alpha_t$) capturing possible omitted host-country and origin-country factors that change with time (such as GDP per capita, population, political regime, etc.). These eliminate heterogeneity in our outcome variables attributable to origin country-specific or host country-specific time-varying factors.

Finally, we include an interaction between host country and year of immigration, $\alpha_h \times \alpha_{immigration\ year}$, which allows us to control for cohort effects for immigrants to a particular country (where cohorts are defined by year of immigration).

As a result, the treatment compares individuals within the same origin-host country pair, birth cohort, and survey year, while controlling for both origin- and host-country-specific time-varying factors and accounting for host country and immigration year interactions to control for immigration cohort effects, ensuring these individuals face the same political institutions, leaders, and time-specific conditions, thereby isolating the effect of pre-migration corruption exposure on political trust.

Standard errors computed with two-way clustering at the origin and host-country level are robust to heteroscedasticity.²¹ Although sample weights are not used in the baseline specification, we consider robustness with respect to population size weight and design weight, as provided by ESS.

While using a demanding set of fixed effects helps in obtaining unbiased estimates of the role of past exposure to corruption on political trust, it also reduces variation. [Online Appendix Fig. 2](#) plots the distribution of residuals after accounting for each set of fixed effects. Each line corresponds to the set of fixed effects used in each model presented in our main estimation table ([Table 1](#)). While the sequential increase in the number of fixed effects slightly reduces the dispersion of residuals, substantial variation remains even in the most saturated model.

5. Main results

[Table 1](#) shows that exposure to home-country corruption during early adulthood (ages 18–25) increases immigrants' political trust in the host country. Panel A uses the political trust index that averages all

outcomes, while the subsequent panels consider, successively, trust in parliament, political parties, and politicians. Column (1) includes pair (host-origin country) fixed effects. Column (2) adds cohort fixed effects and demographic and labour market controls. Column (3) introduces host-country-by-survey-year fixed effects, controlling for potential omitted variables that vary across host countries and years and comparing immigrants living in the same host country in the same survey year. Column (4) adds host-country-by-immigration-year fixed effects. In column (5), we include origin-country-by-survey-year fixed effects, controlling for potential omitted variables that vary across home countries and years. This nets out home country economic and political conditions that change over time. In column (6), we additionally control for GDP per capita in the country of origin during the immigrant's early adulthood.²² In all remaining analyses, we include the complete set of controls in column (5), while using the version controlling for GDP as a robustness check.

The coefficients on early adulthood home-country corruption exposure are uniformly positive and significant. To facilitate interpretation, we interpret our results in terms of standardized coefficients. Column 5 of [Table 1](#) suggests that a one standard deviation increase in immigrants' corruption exposure (i.e., an increase of 1.92 units on a scale from 1 to 7.6) increases their average political trust in host institutions by approximately 0.044 standard deviations in the level of trust. To put effect sizes in perspective, [Foster et al., \(2017\)](#) show that a one-point rise in aggregate unemployment reduces the likelihood of trusting one's national government by two percentage points, or about 7%. Similarly, [Dinesen \(2012\)](#) finds that immigrants experience significant trust gains when moving from more corrupt to less corrupt countries. For example, Turks, Poles, and Italians migrating to Northern Europe exhibit trust increases ranging from 0.33 to 0.65 standard deviations per standard deviation decrease in corruption compared to non-migrants remaining in their home countries. Moreover, in the [Online Appendix Table 2](#), we also report an analog of [Table 1](#) where we recode the dependent variables as 0 when recorded as 5 or less and as 1 when recorded as greater than 5 (the untransformed dependent variables run on a scale from 0 to 10).²³

It is worth reemphasizing how different our results are from earlier studies finding persistence in, inter alia, fertility, marriage and labour-force behavior of immigrants. That literature finds that individuals display the same attitudes and behaviors before and after immigration, even when the attitudes and behaviors of natives in the country of destination are quite different. In contrast, we show that individuals display very different attitudes before and after immigration, when it comes to trust in political institutions. This contrasting result is consistent with a “reference point” as opposed to a pure “persistence” interpretation, as we explain below. The reference point perspective suggests that immigrants assess political institutions in their host country through the lens of formative experiences from their origin country, rather than solely based on their current observations. In this view, early exposure to factors such as corruption or institutional quality provides a benchmark against which host-country institutions are evaluated. This approach allows for a degree of flexibility, as immigrants continuously measure the host environment against their formative reference, adjusting their trust if the host-country conditions diverge significantly from those in their origin.

²² The absence of an effect for younger individuals is consistent with evidence in [Hess and Torney \(1967\)](#) that young children associate politics with individuals rather than institutions.

²³ According to column (5) of [Online Appendix Table 2](#), an individual with the highest exposure to corruption (7.67) relative to individuals with no exposure is on average 6.14 percentage points (0.008×7.67) more likely to trust institutions in their destination country. Given that the mean level of this outcome variable is 61 percent, this effect is sizable.

²⁰ Our results are also robust to clustering at alternative levels including the origin-destination-country pair level. Results are available upon request.

²¹ Because GDP data from Penn World Tables is not available until 1950, including this variable reduces the sample size.

Table 1
Impact of corruption exposure (18–25) on political trust.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A Outcome: Political Trust Index						
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.090*** (0.011)	0.098*** (0.011)	0.100*** (0.011)	0.053*** (0.016)	0.053*** (0.016)	0.057*** (0.016)
Mean of the outcome	4.049	4.049	4.049	4.049	4.049	4.049
Observations	24911	23360	23360	22891	22713	19023
R ²	0.221	0.231	0.257	0.317	0.341	0.348
Panel B Outcome: Trust in Parliament						
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.090*** (0.014)	0.097*** (0.016)	0.101*** (0.015)	0.045** (0.019)	0.048** (0.020)	0.053** (0.020)
Mean of the outcome	4.695	4.695	4.695	4.695	4.695	4.695
Observations	25813	24199	24199	23724	23548	19687
R ²	0.198	0.211	0.237	0.296	0.320	0.327
Panel C Outcome: Trust in Parties						
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.078*** (0.011)	0.087*** (0.011)	0.087*** (0.011)	0.048** (0.018)	0.045** (0.018)	0.050*** (0.018)
Mean of the outcome	3.738	3.738	3.738	3.738	3.738	3.738
Observations	25844	24233	24233	23760	23587	19789
R ²	0.183	0.191	0.211	0.272	0.296	0.308
Panel D Outcome: Trust in Politicians						
A	0.095*** (0.009)	0.100*** (0.009)	0.102*** (0.011)	0.055*** (0.017)	0.053*** (0.018)	0.056*** (0.018)
Mean of the outcome	3.754	3.754	3.754	3.754	3.754	3.754
Observations	26221	24590	24590	24113	23935	20098
R ²	0.190	0.199	0.220	0.280	0.304	0.318
Paired Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cohort Fixed Effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic and labour market cont.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Host Country × Year	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Host Country × Immigration Year	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Origin Country × Year	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
GDP Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Number of Origin Countries	196	196	196	196	196	196
Number of Host Countries	38	38	38	38	38	38

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$. This table estimates of the baseline model specified in equation (2). Ordinary least squares models are estimated for ease of interpretation. Each panel displays the result for a different political trust variable. The political trust index is defined as the average trust in parliament, parties, and politicians. Corruption Exposure₁₈₋₂₅ corresponds to the cumulative V-DEM Corruption Index in country of origin o when individual i is between ages 18 and 25. Paired country fixed effects are host country $\times$ origin country paired level fixed effects. Demographic and labour market controls include: age, a male dummy, employment status, and educational attainment (tertiary education, secondary education). Two-way clustered standard errors by host and origin country are in parentheses. Data Sources: European Social Survey and V-DEM.

5.1. Persistence

We study persistence in Table 2, where we consider (i) an interaction between exposure to corruption in early adulthood and length of stay in the host country, and (ii) also test the quadratic relationship between length of stay and political trust of immigrants on the grounds that political trust may decline with the length of stay in the destination country, as immigrants gain more exposure to destination country institutions. These interaction terms are statistically insignificant and very small in magnitude, suggesting that the effect persists over time.

5.2. Are effects specific to the early adulthood exposure?

One may be concerned that our focus on early adulthood is arbitrary and restrictive. We, therefore, re-estimate our specification for alternative age windows (0–9, 10–17, 26–33, and 34+). Table 3 shows that the impact on political trust is statistically insignificant when individuals are exposed to corruption before age 18 or after age 25.²⁴ The positive effect of home-country exposure is only evident when such exposure is during the individual's early adulthood.

²⁴ Democracy indices are sourced from V-DEM data, and observations with missing values are excluded when calculating these indices.

5.3. More political action

Table 4 reports evidence on actual political behaviour. More political trust in the host country leads to more political action: immigrants more exposed to corruption in their early adulthood in their country of origin are more likely to be interested in politics, to have voted in the last election, and to have worked in a political party or political action group in the last 12 months. The findings highlight a significant connection between immigrants' political trust and their subsequent engagement in the democratic landscape through various political activities.

5.4. Mechanisms

Our results can be interpreted in terms of Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) reference-point hypothesis. In the present context, their hypothesis suggests that when current institutions compare favorably with institutions on whose basis attitudes and expectations were formed, the former are viewed more positively in an absolute sense. In our setting, attitudes and expectations are shaped by first-hand experience in early adulthood (between ages 18 and 25). Thus, when individuals are exposed to low-quality political institutions in their country of origin during this stage of the life cycle, they come to regard that level of institutional quality as the norm and adopt it as a reference point. When institutions in the country of immigration then compare favorably with that reference point, individuals regard those institutions more positively in an absolute sense.

In addition, two further additional factors may matter for how

Table 2
Persistence over time.

Outcome $\hat{\epsilon}$	(1)	(2)	(2)	(4)
	Political Trust Index	Trust in Parliament	Trust in Parties	Trust in Politicians
Panel A				
Corruption	−0.002	−0.002	−0.002	−0.002*
Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅ × Length of stay	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Corruption	0.102***	0.101***	0.089***	0.105***
Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.028)
Length of stay	−0.008***	−0.010***	−0.007***	−0.008***
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Observations	23189	24031	24067	24418
R ²	0.282	0.263	0.236	0.245
Panel B				
Corruption	0.000**	0.000**	0.000*	0.000**
Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅ × Length of stay- squared	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Corruption	−0.004	−0.003	−0.004	−0.004*
Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅ × Length of stay	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Corruption	0.083***	0.073**	0.074***	0.090***
Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	(0.026)	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Length of stay- squared	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Length of stay	−0.030***	−0.036***	−0.027***	−0.030***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Observations	23189	24031	24067	24418
R ²	0.284	0.264	0.237	0.246

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$. This table reports estimates of the baseline model specified in equation (2) with additional interaction terms: length of stay in host country and its squared term (in Panels A and B). Ordinary least squares models are estimated for ease of interpretation. Each column displays the result of a different political trust variable. Each panel displays the result of a different regression. The political trust index is defined as the average of trust in parliament, parties, and politicians. Corruption Exposure₁₈₋₂₅ corresponds to the cumulative V-DEM Corruption Index in country of origin o when individual i is between ages 18 and 25. The specification includes the full set of controls as Column 5 of Table 1. See notes to Table 1. Two-way clustered standard errors by host and origin country are in parentheses. Data Sources: European Social Survey and V-DEM.

individuals evaluate current outcomes relative to the reference point formed on the basis of earlier life exposure: differences in GDP per capita, and differences in levels of democracy between host and home countries. Differences in living standards and differences in political conditions between two countries may direct attention toward differences in the quality of their respective institutions. If so, this may amplify the impact on evaluations of the quality of institutions in the host country of reference-point conditions in the country of origin.

We therefore examine whether first-generation immigrants exhibit greater political trust when there are substantial differences in living conditions between their countries of origin and destination at the time of immigration. To do so, we calculate the differences in GDP per capita and V-DEM democracy scores between the two countries for each respondent in our sample. We then create an indicator variable equal to 1 if the observation is above the median difference, reflecting larger disparities in economic and political conditions across all respondents. Finally, we interact this indicator variable with our main explanatory variable to analyze whether there is a differential effect for countries with differences above and below the median.²⁵

Panels A and B of Table 5 confirm that the effect of home-country

²⁵ In contrast, the presence of media (measured as the sum of radio and television sets, newspaper circulation, book production per capita) in the country of origin prior to immigration has no detectable impact on political trust (Panel C).

Table 3
Impact of corruption exposure on political trust in alternative treatment years.

Outcome $\rightarrow$	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Political Trust Index	Trust in Parliament	Trust in Parties	Trust in Politicians
Corruption	0.057**	0.068**	0.040*	0.047*
Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	(0.024)	(0.030)	(0.024)	(0.025)
Corruption	0.017	0.025	0.014	−0.006
Exposure ₀₋₉	(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.032)	(0.031)
Corruption	−0.022	−0.028	−0.020	0.001
Exposure ₁₀₋₁₇	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.025)
Corruption	0.014	0.001	0.022*	0.018
Exposure ₂₆₋₃₃	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.012)	(0.015)
Corruption	0.015	0.018	0.020	0.012
Exposure ₃₄₊	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.013)
p-value	0.010	0.000	0.049	0.209
Observations	20646	21410	21458	21777
R ²	0.331	0.312	0.288	0.295

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$. This table reports estimates of the baseline model specified in equation (2). Ordinary least squares models are estimated for ease of interpretation. Each panel displays the result of a different political trust variable. The political trust index is defined as the average of trust in parliament, parties, and politicians. Corruption Exposure₁₈₋₂₅ corresponds to the cumulative V-DEM Corruption Index in country of origin o when individual i is between ages, 0 and 9, 10 and 17, 18 and 25, 26–33 and 34+. P-value reports the results of a joint test of the coefficients equality in the regression. The joint tests are: (1) Corruption Exposure₁₈₋₂₅ - Corruption Exposure₀₋₉ = 0; (2) Corruption Exposure₁₈₋₂₅ - Corruption Exposure₁₀₋₁₇ = 0; (3) Corruption Exposure₁₈₋₂₅ - Corruption Exposure₂₆₋₃₃ = 0; (4) Corruption Exposure₁₈₋₂₅ - Corruption Exposure₃₄₊ = 0. The specification includes the full set of controls as Column 5 of Table 1. See notes to Table 1. Two-way clustered standard errors by host and origin country are in parentheses. Data Sources: European Social Survey and V-DEM.

exposure to corruption is amplified by large differences between the home and host country in terms of GDP per capita (Panel A) and democracy (Panel B). An interpretation is that better living and political conditions in the destination country lead to more positive evaluations of the political performance of the host country relative to the international-reference-point benchmark.²⁶

5.5. Media consumption as a mediating factor

Finally, we consider whether media consumption in the destination country mitigates or reinforces the reference-point effect (Panel C and D of Table 5). We again use our fully saturated specification (Column 5 of Table 1) but now interact our treatment variable with measures of media consumption. The ESS reports four media channels: newspaper, TV, radio, and the internet. We group the three traditional forms of media (newspaper, TV and radio) together while keeping modern electronic media (internet) separate.²⁷

Results presented in Panel C and D show that media consumption in the host country reduces the impact of early corruption exposure on trust in host-country political institutions. An interpretation is that media consumption is associated with greater access to information about the host country, allowing information about the actual quality of host-country institutions, as opposed to memories of home-country institutions formed during early adulthood, to dominate assessments, weakening the international reference-point effect. A comparison of the coefficients indicates that traditional channels and the internet have

²⁶ One potential concern with this exercise is that immigrants are selected on media consumption. Therefore, we further address our concern about the selection bias by implementing a propensity score reweighting approach. Our new results are robust to the propensity score reweighting. The results are available upon request.

²⁷ See Appendix for related variable definitions.

Table 4
Impact on political behaviour.

	(1)	(2)
Panel A Political action index		
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.005*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)
Observations	19231	18678
R ²	0.283	0.330
Panel B Voted in the last nat. election		
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.011*** (0.002)	0.008*** (0.002)
Observations	19328	18774
R ²	0.342	0.388
Panel C Worked in political party in the last 12 months		
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.001*** (0.000)	0.001 (0.001)
Observations	27388	26772
R ²	0.126	0.165
Panel D Contacted politician or government official last 12 months		
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.005** (0.002)	0.004** (0.002)
Observations	27372	26758
R ²	0.138	0.174
Paired Country Fixed Effects	No	Yes
Cohort Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Demographic and labour market cont.	Yes	Yes
Host Country × Year	Yes	Yes
Host Country × Immigration Year	Yes	Yes
Origin Country × Year	Yes	Yes

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$. Political action index in Panel A refers to the average of the outcome variables used in Panels B–D. Panel B displays the result of voting in the last national election, where vote equals to “1” if individuals voted in the election, and “0” if not voted. Panel C displays the results of working in political party. Working in political party is coded as “1” if individuals worked in political party and “0” if not. Panel D shows the results of contacting politician or government official last 12 month or not and is coded as “1” if individuals contacted and “0” if not. Corruption Exposure₁₈₋₂₅ corresponds to the cumulative V-DEM Corruption Index in country of origin o when the individual i is between ages 18 and 25. Paired country fixed effects are host country × origin country paired level fixed effects. Demographic and labour market controls include: age, a male dummy, employment status, and educational attainment (tertiary education, secondary education). Two-way clustered standard errors by host and origin country are in parentheses. Data Sources: European Social Survey and V-DEM.

similar effects.

6. Robustness

In this section we establish the robustness of the results and consider potential threats to identification. In the first part of section (6.1) we focus on identification issues related to our analysis. The second part (6.2) explores whether our results are robust to alternative specifications and conceptual concerns.

6.1. Robustness of the identification

6.1.1. More demanding fixed effects and selection on unobservables

Additional analyses, reported in the Online Appendix Table 3A, show that our results are again similar when we focus on more fine-grained variation by including age × origin country fixed effects (Column 1), age × year × subnational region (Column 2) or both (Column 3). The results are also robust to the inclusion of age-of-arrival fixed effects (Column 4). Essentially, these specifications eliminate the variation that arises from comparing a particular age group to other age groups within the same destination country (or detailed subregion) or the same age group from other origin countries. Instead, they concentrate on the changes in host political trust and exposure to home country corruption over time within a specific age group.

Table 5
Mechanisms.

Outcome →	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Political Trust Index	Trust in Parliament	Trust in Parties	Trust in Politicians
Panel A Differences in GDP per capita				
High Δ GDP × Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.041* (0.022)	0.045* (0.024)	0.049* (0.026)	0.042* (0.026)
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.054*** (0.016)	0.052*** (0.017)	0.045*** (0.017)	0.065*** (0.018)
Observations	21974	22774	22788	23116
R ²				
Panel B Differences in Democracy				
High Δ Democracy × Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.052*** (0.017)	0.058*** (0.019)	0.042** (0.019)	0.049** (0.021)
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.052*** (0.013)	0.056*** (0.014)	0.049*** (0.014)	0.054*** (0.014)
Observations	21974	22774	22788	23116
R ²				
Panel C the Role of Traditional Media Consumption				
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅ × Traditional Media	−0.093** (0.039)	−0.078 (0.048)	−0.076* (0.044)	−0.119*** (0.038)
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.159*** (0.044)	0.129*** (0.042)	0.152*** (0.049)	0.184*** (0.051)
Observations	5385	5537	5547	5615
R ²	0.354	0.334	0.309	0.329
Panel D the Role of Internet Usage				
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅ × Internet	−0.096*** (0.025)	−0.108*** (0.033)	−0.090*** (0.031)	−0.090*** (0.025)
Corruption Exposure ₁₈₋₂₅	0.160*** (0.037)	0.147*** (0.028)	0.156*** (0.044)	0.162*** (0.048)
Observations	5497	5656	5667	5737
R ²	0.356	0.335	0.310	0.329

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$. Ordinary least squares models are estimated for ease of interpretation. Each panel displays the result for a different interaction variable. Differences in GDP per capita (democracy) reflects the differences between host and origin country. GDP per capita data is from the Penn World. Democracy measure is from the V-DEM dataset. For each variable, we calculate the average in the individual's early adulthood. We then construct an indicator that takes the value of 1 if the observation is in the above median of early adulthood scores across all respondents. We include this variable categorically rather than in continuous form to limit the likelihood of a response to corruption experience. Traditional media on political/current affairs per week takes the average of newspaper, TV, and radio use on political/current affairs. Internet use is an indicator variable telling whether individuals use internet every month or not. The specification includes the full set of controls as Column 5 of Table 1. See notes to Table 1. Standard errors are in parentheses and clustered at the origin-host country pair level. Data Sources: European Social Survey and V-DEM.

Online Appendix Table 3B applies a robustness check to evaluate how much stronger the effect of unobservables would need to be, relative to all observables, to fully account for our results. This approach uses the technique developed by Oster (forthcoming), based on Altonji et al. (2005). Using the estimates in all 6 columns of Panel A in Table 1 (which is our baseline table) we report Oster's δ , the level at which the true β_1 from equation (2) would equal zero. This statistic indicates the degree of selection on unobservables, relative to observables, required to fully explain our results through omitted-variable bias. With all additional controls included, Oster's δ values are 2.06 (Column 5) and 2.16 (Column 6), indicating that unobserved factors would need to exert twice the influence of all observed variables for omitted-variable bias to explain the results. Considering the comprehensive set of fixed effects employed, this scenario appears highly unlikely.

6.1.2. Are we picking up the effects of other shocks?

Our estimates could be capturing early-adulthood exposure to other

conditions in the home country correlated with the level of corruption, such as democracy, freedom and electoral fraud. We therefore add early-adulthood exposure to five other aspects of institutional quality: electoral democracy, participatory democracy, additive polyarchy, freedom of expression, and clean election; see Online Appendix Table 4.²⁸ In addition, to insure that other economic and political shocks in the country of origin during the individual's early adulthood are not driving the results, we calculate measures of early-adulthood year exposure to several economic and political shocks (GDP growth, inflation, assassinations, purges, riots, general strikes, terrorist attacks, and so on); see Online Appendix Table 5.

None of these additional controls impacts the coefficients for early adulthood corruption exposure. Point estimates and statistical significance remain stable, indicating that our results are robust to controlling in these ways for additional economic, social, and political exposures that individuals may have experienced in their early adult years.

6.1.3. Ruling out pre-trends

We test whether different immigrant age groups within the same host country are on differential trends in terms of their political views, even absent differences in their exposure to corruption. We ask whether pre-birth "exposure" (that is, corruption in a country ten years before the respondent was born) affects political trust. In Online Appendix Table 6, the coefficients on pre-birth exposure are small and insignificant. This confirms that we are not capturing differential trends in the political views of different immigrant age groups across host countries.

6.2. Robustness to alternative specifications and conceptual concerns

6.2.1. Robustness to alternative corruption measures

In our baseline specification, we measure exposure to corruption cumulatively between ages 18 and 25. In Online Appendix Table 7, we use an alternative measure obtained by dividing the cumulative corruption exposure by the length of stay in the home country. This alternative measure captures the intensity of corruption exposure over a year. The results are again similar, confirming that the estimated effect is not sensitive to how we measure corruption exposure.²⁹

6.2.2. Measuring corruption by alternative indices

In our baseline, we use V-DEM for the corruption measure as it provides the largest coverage in terms of country and time. One might be concerned that the results might be driven by how the corruption is measured in this specific index. To ensure that this is not the case, we confirm that the corruption index measured using V-DEM, is highly correlated with measures using measures obtained using World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) (Pearson Correlation of 0.81) and International Country Risk Guide (ICRG) (Pearson Correlation of 0.72).

We then reproduced the baseline results when constructing the corruption exposure during early adulthood using the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI). WGI scores various dimensions of governance for some 200 countries for the period 1996 and 2021. We construct our corruption measure by using "control of

corruption," which is a composite index that includes several indicators measuring the level of public power exercised for private gain and "capture" of the state by elites and private interests.³⁰ Results in Online Appendix Table 8 show that our results remain robust when using this alternative measure.

6.2.3. Do migrant networks shape perceptions?

It could be that immigrants place more trust in political institutions in a country with a large immigrant population better able, by sheer numbers, to influence the operation of those institutions. We therefore construct a measure of the immigrant network using the Database on Immigrants in OECD Countries (DIOC) and non-OECD destination countries (DIOC-E or DIOC extended).³¹ We interact the migrant stock with year fixed effects to construct time-specific trends in the growth of the immigrant population originating in the same country as the respondent. Not only does Online Appendix Table 9 rule out the possibility that such networks drive our results, but the coefficient of interest becomes even stronger.

6.2.4. Controlling for income deciles

Our baseline specification does not control for household income, as it may be influenced by individuals' past experiences in their home countries. However, as a robustness check, we include household income deciles (since the data does not provide actual income but only within-country income deciles). The results, presented in Online Appendix Table 10, remain unchanged when household income deciles are added to the specification.

6.2.5. Can a specific type of corruption be driving the results?

In the baseline, corruption exposure is calculated as the average of executive corruption, judicial corruption, legislative corruption, and public sector corruption. Online Appendix Table 11 investigates how the sub-components matter for trust in political institutions. We present separate point estimates for each treatment variable to facilitate interpretation. While all four indicators matter for political trust, home-country executive corruption and public sector corruption have the strongest effects on immigrants' political trust in the destination.

6.2.6. Robustness to using sampling weights

To account for the fact that countries in the ESS have different population sizes, we weight our regressions by host-country population. We also correct for the under- and over-representation of ESS respondents by using the sampling weight provided by the ESS. Online Appendix Table 12 shows that the results are qualitatively similar to those from unweighted regressions.

6.2.7. Multiple hypothesis tests

We conducted multiple hypothesis testing using the randomization inference technique of Young (2019). This helps to establish the robustness of our results both for individual treatment coefficients in separate estimations and also for the null that our treatment does not have any effect across any of the outcome variables. Online Appendix Table 13 shows that our findings remain robust both for the individual coefficients and the joint tests of treatment significance.

6.2.8. Ruling out influential observations

To check whether our results are driven by influential observations, we exclude migrants whose corruption exposure is in the top 5 percentiles of the distribution. Panel A of Online Appendix Table 14 shows

²⁸ Another potential concern related to V-DEM measure is the challenge of measuring corruption especially further back in time. To alleviate any concerns, we run a test where we exclude immigrants who have emigrated prior to 1960. Even when we focus on immigrants who have arrived since that year, the results remain unchanged. The results are available on request.

²⁹ The World Bank collects perception indicators with information for assessing quality of control of corruption in different countries. Then the WGI corruption measure is obtained by weighting the average of individual indicators of corruption based on Unobserved Component Model (Kaufmann et al., 2011). See more at <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Documents>.

³⁰ See more detail in <https://www.oecd.org/els/mig/dioc.htm>. Because the OECD database is only available every five years, we measure immigrant networks using the total number of immigrants in 2005, the year closest to the start of our sample.

³¹ These further results are available on request.

that results remain robust. The results also remain robust to the exclusion of immigrants from countries with fewer than 150 immigrants or more than 1000 immigrants (Panels B and C, Online [Appendix Table 14](#)).

One might be concerned that the migrants coming from Russia and other former Soviet Republics countries associate differences in economic models with differences in political institutions. Panel D of the Online [Appendix Table 14](#) excludes immigrants from these countries. Results remain unchanged.

Results are also robust to the exclusion of migrants coming from specific continents, distinguishing cohorts of migrants by decade of arrival, and excluding those coming from former colonies or countries with socialist legal origin, from those with high ethnic diversity, and from those with low polity scores or high inequality. Results remain unchanged.³²

6.2.9. Focusing on migrants from less corrupt countries?

Much of the sample consists of immigrants coming from countries with higher levels of corruption compared to their host countries. One might be concerned that the effect captured in the analysis is due not to past corruption but to a third factor related to moving from to a less corrupt country. To dispel this concern, we focus only on a subsample of immigrants coming from countries with corruption levels that are lower than their host countries. While sample size falls dramatically, the results, in Online [Appendix Table 15](#), again remain unchanged.

7. Additional analysis

In this section, we provide additional results to test whether past exposure to corruption has uneven effects on individuals with different education backgrounds, and how if at all the political trust of natives is affected.³³

7.1. Do effects vary with education?

The analysis here focuses on the impact of past exposure to corruption on the political trust on average of all migrants. However, some migrants might be more sensitive to these past effects if they are more perceptive or better informed as a result of exposure to education.³⁴

Online [Appendix Table 16](#) confirms that more educated individuals are more influenced by early adulthood exposure. An interpretation is that more educated individuals are more involved in and conscious of politics at this age. They may be more active as citizens, translating into a stronger effect of early adulthood exposure to political institutions.

7.2. Are natives exposed to corruption also more trusting?

The evidence presented so far shows that past exposure to corruption tends to increase the trust that immigrants vest in the host-country institutions. To benchmark our immigrant analysis, we replicate the same

analysis for the sample of natives, again derived from the European Social Survey, while introducing the same set of controls.³⁵ Online [Appendix Table 17](#) confirms a difference between the two groups. As indicated in Column 1, more exposure of natives to corruption in their formative years is associated with less political trust, the opposite of what we find for immigrants. The results are significant for each of our four proxies of political trust. We obtain similar results, albeit slightly stronger in magnitude, when also excluding second-generation immigrants (see Column 2).³⁶ Magnitudes are similar to those for the immigrant sample, but opposite in sign, as noted.

In contrast to the results for immigrants, we do not observe any heterogeneity among natives by level of education. In addition, the mitigating effect of media exposure is considerably smaller than that observed for immigrants.³⁷ Again, this highlights differences between immigrants, whose attitudes toward their host country are shaped by a foreign reference point, and native individuals.

7.3. Trust of second-generation immigrants

To study second-generation immigrants, we construct their corruption exposure during their impressionable years. Second-generation immigrants are individuals born in the host country but whose parents were immigrants. As such, they are exposed to host-country corruption during their formative years, similar to native-born individuals. Unfortunately, we cannot measure the corruption exposure of their parents as we do not know when they arrived to the host country, we estimate second-generation immigrants' exposure based on the corruption levels in their host countries during their impressionable years.

Online [Appendix Table 18](#) presents the regression analysis, where we present the impact of corruption exposure for natives excluding the second-generation (Column 1), the first-generation immigrants (Column 2), and the second-generation immigrants (Column 3). We find that second-generation immigrants, like natives, show lower political trust when exposed to higher levels of corruption in the host country. This differs from first-generation immigrants, who tend to use their origin countries' institutions as a reference point.

7.4. Are the effects non-linear?

Online [Appendix Table 19](#) tests for the presence of non-linear effects by introducing the squared term of early adulthood corruption exposure, which allows for the effect of corruption exposure on political trust to increase up to a certain point and then decrease beyond that point. We find a weakly significant and quantitatively small effect of the quadratic term.

8. Ruling out selection based on political trust

In this sub-section, we examine whether our results can be explained by self-selection of migrants into destinations based on political trust. First, as a broader comment about our identification strategy, our identification strategy relies on origin-destination pair fixed effects. By introducing origin-destination pair fixed effects, we control for time-invariant factors specific to each origin-destination pair. This means that differences between immigrants in terms of pre-migration corruption exposure are analyzed within the context of each specific origin-destination pair. Any characteristic that makes individuals more likely to migrate from a particular origin to a particular destination will be accounted for in this fixed effect. Moreover, by focusing on relative

³² We also examine the heterogeneity effect between naturalized and non-naturalized immigrants by interacting the corruption exposure variable with the citizenship status as an additional exercise. As a result, we do find that being naturalized mitigates the positive effect of corruption exposure on political trusts. Once immigrants become citizens, the overall effect of corruption exposure is somewhat weaker. The results are available upon request.

³³ One potential concern with this exercise is that immigrants are selected on education. Therefore, we further address our concern about the selection bias by implementing a propensity score reweighting approach. Our new results are robust to the propensity score reweighting. The results are available upon request.

³⁴ We construct a sample of natives born in the country of residence, whose fathers and mothers were also born in the country of residence. The only difference between the two sets of controls lies in the host country fixed effects, which is present only in the immigrant sample.

³⁵ We do so under the assumption that inertia in cultural attitudes may extend even to the second generation of immigrants in a country.

³⁶ These additional results are available on request.

³⁷ The results are robust to focusing on immigrants originating from countries who experienced a war in the same year of migration (i.e., in year t).

differences in corruption exposure among immigrants from the same origin country who all migrate to the same host country, our approach compares only those who have already made the decision to migrate. This within-group comparison can mitigate selection bias because it does not compare migrants to non-migrants, but rather to other migrants who may share many similar selection factors (like the decision to emigrate from the same origin country).

8.1. Are immigrants more trusting?

Immigrants are self-selected by ability, education, risk-tolerance, and social attitudes (Chiswick, 1999; Heitmueller, 2005; Aksoy and Poutvaara, 2021). What is relevant here, however, is not selection in general but selection on political trust. Suppose, for example, that more trusting individuals have a tendency to select into immigration. Immigrants' higher political trust in host-country institutions then might reflect their trusting nature, as opposed to their exposure to corruption in their home country.

We know of no evidence that more trusting individuals select into immigration. In any case, our identification strategy compares not immigrants and natives but, rather, the corruption exposure of different immigrants. If the selection bias resulting from immigrants' trusting nature relates to their identity as immigrants, then our estimates of differences in political trust within the immigrant group will not be biased by selection.

Alternatively, immigrants could display unusually high levels of trust in host-country institutions not because of their status as immigrants but because of other unobserved factors. This makes it important to explore whether immigrants are selected on other dimensions of trust and social attitudes. In Online Appendix Table 20 we check the effect of early adulthood corruption exposure on eight other dimensions of trust and non-political attitudinal outcomes. The outcomes are Trust in the United Nations (Panel A), Social trust (Panel B), People are fair (Panel C), People try to be helpful (Panel D), Important to understand different people (Panel E), Important to help people and care for others well-being (Panel F), Important to be loyal to friends and devote to people close (Panel G), and Important to try new and different things in life (Panel H). Particularly, the result for trust in the United Nations is statistically insignificant in Online Appendix Table 20. Finding no effect of corruption exposure on the United Nations is in line with our reference point hypothesis because immigrants would not change the reference point for the international institution whether they are in origin or destination countries.

Column 1 presents results for our main sample, while column 2 focuses on European immigrants only. We find no relationship between past corruption exposure and these variables, suggesting that self-selection into host countries on the basis of trust is unlikely. This is consistent with our hypothesis that any gain of trust by individuals with earlier corruption exposure is specific to host country political institutions and not a reflection of general of trust in host society.

8.2. Balance tests

A possible concern is that immigrants coming from countries with institutional and economic problems select into host countries which they think have good and trustworthy institutions. We therefore implement a balance test examining whether immigrant status is uncorrelated with observable institutional characteristics (different population sizes, military expenses, GDP, etc.). Online Appendix Table 21 confirms that our treatment is not correlated with these host country characteristics, confirming that in this sense it is plausibly exogenous.

We also contend with the selection into the migration of a specific set of cohorts. For example, migrants might have a lower social-economic status that determines their subsequent political trust in host country institutions. We there provide a cohort-level analysis examining whether cohorts exposed to different levels of corruption during early

adulthood differ substantially in terms of age, gender, education, ethnicity, household income and employment rate from other cohorts. Online Appendix Table 22 shows that none of these socio-demographic characteristics (that is, age, gender, marital status, education and religion) is correlated with host country GDP, government revenue, defense expenditure, school enrolment per capita, and physicians per capita. This supports the view that the migrants' main observable characteristics are orthogonal to destination-country characteristics.

Finally, in Online Appendix Table 23, we regress individual characteristics—such as age, gender, education, marital status, and religious affiliation—on immigrant status, while controlling for individuals' country of origin. The results indicate that there is little to no correlation between immigrant status and these characteristics. This provides additional evidence that, within the same country of origin, immigrants do not differ substantially from non-immigrants in terms of these observable characteristics.

8.3. Migrants from countries affected by war

As an additional test to alleviate concerns related to selection, we focus on immigrants originating from countries experiencing wars. As people fleeing wars are less likely to be selected based on their observable or unobservable characteristics, limiting the analysis to such individuals should further mitigate selection concerns (Bahar et al., 2024).

We rely on Correlates of War Dataset (Sarkees and Wayman, 2010) which offers extensive data on conflicts from 1816 onwards, including inter-state, extra-state, and intra-state wars. We match individual-level migration data with the incidence of war in the migration year. This allows us to examine the impact of war as a driver of migration, focusing on wars likely to have affected entire countries.

We therefore restrict our sample to immigrants coming from countries that experienced any type of war (Panel A of Online Appendix Table 24) or only wars that involve third countries (Panel B) in the year before they migrated.³⁸ While restricting the sample to individuals coming only from countries affected by a war reduces the sample size, the results confirm our benchmark results.

9. Conclusion

Lower institutional quality in an immigrant's country of origin is associated with a *more* favorable evaluation of host-country institutions. This pattern can be explained by the tendency of an immigrant to evaluate the quality of current host-country institutions relative to the quality of the home-country institutions to which they were exposed in the past. What matters is exposure to corruption during early adulthood (ages 18–25), not exposure overall. This last finding is consistent with work in sociology, psychology, cognitive science, and economics on the importance of early adulthood.

Political commentators and leaders worry about whether immigrants have adequate regard for their host-country institutions, values, and cultures. Some scholars advocate immigration restrictions on grounds of avoiding degradation of host-country norms, values and institutions by immigrants bringing very different values. In response, some governments restricted immigration, while others have adopted practices intended to impart better understanding and greater respect for host-country institutions.³⁸ These initiatives reflect the belief that immigrants from countries with poor institutional quality will import skepticism about the quality of host-country institutions. In fact, when it comes to political attitudes and behaviors, such immigrants hold host-country institutions in higher, not lower, regard. In this respect, they may be easier, not harder, than the average citizen to integrate into host-country politics and society.

³⁸ Examples include the Dutch citizenship test and citizenship education in UK schools designed to impart a sense of "Britishness" (Miller and Ali, 2014).

CRediT authorship contribution statement

All authors contributed equally to the writing of this manuscript.

Cevat Giray Aksoy: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Barry Eichengreen:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Anastasia Litina:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Cem Özgüzel:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Chan Yu:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2024.103440>.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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