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Homeland Political Trust Among Emigrants: The Case of Finland-Swedes

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How does emigrating affect one's political trust for their native country's political and state institutions? This question is increasingly relevant as a result of growing migration in the wake of globalization and the willingness to widen electoral laws and channels for participation to also include emigrated citizens in homeland politics. Despite the research conducted on homeland politics and voting from abroad in political science, the question of homeland political trust among emigrants has not been given sufficient attention. This could be seen as surprising from the perspective of trust research, which has exhaustively analyzed political and social trust. This paper seeks to map the effect of migration on political trust by comparing the trust in Finnish political and state institutions of emigrated Swedish-speaking Finns, also known as Finland-Swedes, and Finland-Swedes living in Finland. The Finland-Swedes are a resourceful minority with a sizeable diaspora, which in relative terms is comparable to nations with a renowned diaspora. The paper analyzes the political trust of migrants and residents with two high quality random surveys and using two methods, linear regression and propensity score matching, with analysis of average treatment effects to counter potential endogeneity of political trust and migrating citizens. The analyses show emigrants have on average significantly higher homeland political trust. Comparing the linear regression analysis and the average treatment effects after matching we get similar results, although the linear regression analysis that controls for potentially endogenous factors seems to somewhat exaggerate the effect of migration.

Keywords: political trust, emigrant citizenship, matching, election, OLS

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INTRODUCTION

Researchers have increasingly been interested in political trust among emigrants (Dahlberg and Linde, 2018). As individuals between the institutional and cultural expectations of their native and host countries they have provided a methodologically sound object of study for testing competing explanations of the sources of political trust (Adman and Strömblad, 2015). In addition, the advances in technology and institutional development that provide new and extended ways for expats' political participation in their homeland from abroad has led to researchers approaching emigrants also from the point of participation among emigrants in their homeland politics (Lafleur, 2013). Research into homeland politics has shown the lowering of barriers to potentially increase turnout among emigrant citizens which, all other things equal, are as potent voters as their homeland compatriots (Peltoniemi, 2018). There is also evidence mounting about the potential electoral surprises produced by the growing interest to vote among emigrated citizens

[e.g., the presidential election in Moldova 2020, see The Economist. (2020)]. As democratic enfranchisement is extended to expat citizens who have encountered different experiences than resident citizens, and there being a link between political trust and institutional participation (Hooghe and Marien, 2013) and satisfaction with the societal model and support for democracy or authoritarian values (Norris and Inglehart, 2019), it is of increasing importance to acknowledge the variation of migrant citizens' political trust to their homeland institutions.

To date, the trust in native country institutions among emigrants has been insufficiently analyzed. To what extent does the change of institutional setting affect the trust in homeland political institutions? And what explains the variation of political trust in homeland institutions among emigrants? Emigrants may, for example, have acquired a broadened perspective based on their lived experiences in another country with a different societal model that can affect their evaluation of their native country's system (Adman and Strömblad, 2015). Expatriate citizens may also be nostalgic about their native country (Wessendorf, 2007), which possibly spills over to the political institutions. As such, we have at least two theoretical mechanisms setting them apart from their compatriots living in the native country.

However, explaining the political trust of migrated citizens requires capturing the effect of emigration on political trust to homeland institutions. The task is complicated by the fact that emigrants from rich Western societies are not randomly assigned to emigration. On the contrary, they tend to be highly educated and well-off citizens, which are also factors that are known to explain variations of political trust (Norris, 2011; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). As such, studying the difference between residents and emigrants in political trust is suspect to the problem of confounding variables.

The study seeks to follow as far as possible the conception of political trust in empirical studies both among migrants (Dahlberg and Linde, 2018) and among regular studies on citizens (see e.g., Norris, 2011; Kestilä-Kekkonen and Söderlund, 2016), increasing the comparability of trust in homeland institutions to previous findings on political trust. With a careful analysis of the unique data, the article sheds light on the potential mechanisms of homeland political trust among emigrated citizens.

METHODS

Political trust among migrants has mostly been studied with regard to the new country's political institutions for necessity of available measurements. National surveys allow researchers to distinguish between native-born or migrant respondents, but for natural reasons only ask about trust in the country's own institutions. The few studies explicitly focusing on emigrants have relied on unique surveys while simultaneously also adhering to the standards of regular national surveys as far as possible (Bergh and Öhrvall, 2018; Dahlberg and Linde, 2018). This study addresses the question similarly with an analysis of two comparable surveys: one unique survey of expatriate Finland-Swedes and a standardized European Values Study

among the Finland-Swedes living in Finland (EVS, 2020). The study of emigrant Finland-Swedes, which translates the uniform European Values Study (EVS) survey for an expatriated population, allows for analyzing the political trust in native country institutions of expatriated citizens. The Finland-Swedes provide an interesting population for study by being a relatively mobile group with ~13% of the linguistic-ethnic group living outside of Finland. As citizens of Finland, which maintains a detailed population register, it is also possible to acquire concise register data on the emigrated Finland-Swedes.

The sample of emigrated Finnish Swedes consists of a stratified random sample of 4,800 Finland-Swedes in 15 democratic Western countries¹, drawn from the Digital and Population Data Services Agency registry over Finnish citizens living abroad. The respondents received an invitation by mail to respond to the online survey in the summer of 2019. In total, the survey received 1,971 responses, amounting to a response rate of 41%. For the purpose of the article, respondents that had always lived abroad and respondents from Åland islands, which is an autonomous region with its own government, parliament, police, and other authorities and who have largely separate state-like institutions, were excluded. The sample was $N = 1,508$ after the demarcations. In structure and question formulation, the survey was in many ways identical to the standardized EVS done among Finland-Swedes in Finland. The exceptions were that the survey for emigrants was shorter since some of the regular questions of the EVS were redundant for emigrants.

The sample of Finland-Swedes in Finland consisted of a randomly drawn sample of 3,600 Finland-Swedes living in Finland from the Digital and Population Data Services Agency registry over Finnish citizens. The survey for Finland-Swedes residing in Finland consisted of an online survey and an identical paper survey sent to the respondents by mail. In total, the survey received 1,341 responses, or a response rate of 37%. The respondents from the Åland Islands were also excluded from the sample of Finland-Swedes living in Finland, resulting in a sample with $N = 1,136$.

The response rates of both surveys are excellent on contemporary standards of national citizen surveys, resulting in comparable high quality survey data of two populations.

The Dependent Variable

The dependent variable "political trust" is operationalized with the question "How much confidence do you have in the following agencies?," with the alternatives "Parliament," "Civil services," "The justice system," and "The police." The answering options "A great deal," "Quite a lot," "Not very much," and "None at all" have been coded 0–3 and normalized between 0 and 1, where 0 reflects low levels and 1 reflects high levels of political trust.

The Explanatory Variable and Covariates

To study how emigration affects political trust in homeland institutions, a dummy variable is created in the merged data set

¹The countries are (country specific respondents in parenthesis): Sweden (708), Germany (147), Great Britain (134), Norway (132), USA (101), Denmark (62), Switzerland (59), France (35), Spain (29), Belgium (23), Canada (21), Luxembourg (15), Australia (14), Austria (14), and Italy (13).

by coding the emigrated group² with a 1 and the group living in Finland with a 0.

To control for potential alternative explanations, the study introduces covariates. The valuation of democracy to the respondent is operationalized with the question “How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?”³ and the answer is on a 1–10 scale, where 1 is “Not at all important” and 10 “Absolutely important.” Respondents’ values on the traditional left–right political axis are operationalized with the question “In political matters, people talk of ‘the left’ and ‘the right.’ How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?” The answer scale is 1 = “the left” and 10 = “the right.” The three covariates were normalized between 0 and 1 to improve comparison of coefficients’ effects.

The study also controls for education, which is operationalized as a dummy on higher education (tertiary degree = 1 and lower degrees = 0), employment dummy (full-time employed = 1, other = 0), and income operationalized as high-income dummy (5,701 €/month or 68,501 €/year or more = 1, less = 0). Demographics are controlled for with age and sex from the register data. The respondents’ environment of living is controlled for with degree of urbanization dummy variable on municipality size according to population size on the scale 0–10,000, 10,001–30,000, 30,001–100,000, 100,001–500,000, and 500,000+ and with the official language status of the birth municipality (Finnish = 0, bilingual with Swedish minority = 1, and bilingual with Swedish majority = 2).

OLS and PSM

With the use of OLS regression, the study analyzes if political trust among expats in their native country’s institution is different from homeland residents. In addition, the article examines to what extent perception of democracy and political orientation and socioeconomic, demographic, and geographical factors explain the variation in political trust.

Finally, the article provides a methodological contribution to the study of political trust among emigrants. The emigrants from wealthy welfare states, such as Finland, can be assumed on average to be more educated and have higher income than resident citizens (see e.g., Kepsu and Henriksson, 2019). Research has shown these socio-economic factors to be related to higher social and political trust (Inglehart, 1999), although the relation can be complex, as for instance between education and political trust (Norris, 2011). As such, measuring the trust among emigrated citizens to homeland institutions is prone to the problem of confounding variables. This article compares linear regression analysis and controls for covariates with propensity score matching (PSM) with treatment effects for explaining if emigration affects trust in the political and state institutions of the native country. The propensity score, on which the individuals are matched

in both groups, are counted as their likelihood of being a member of that group based on education, employment, income, sex, level of urbanity, and official language of birth municipality.

A high degree of explanatory power of the dummy in the OLS analysis can be assumed to indicate endogeneity, which means the analysis should be done with more sophisticated models, such as matching techniques and instrumental variable analysis, that can estimate the influence of such confounding variables. We therefore compare the effect size of OLS with that of PSM treatment effect analysis. Instrumental variable analysis is demarcated from this study due to the limited scope of one research article.

RESULTS

In the first part of the analysis, we explore descriptively the trust of emigrated Finland-Swedes to Finnish political and state institutions and factors that can potentially explain its variance among them. By comparing the levels of political trust among emigrated Finland-Swedes to Finland-Swedes residing in Finland, we attain an initial overview of how expats perceive the democratic institutions of their native country.

As we can see (Table 1), political trust is on average considerably lower among Finland-Swedes living in Finland (0.388) than among emigrant Finland-Swedes (0.726). The difference is also statistically highly significant on a *t*-test ($p < 0.000$). The similarities and disparities on potential explanatory factors are mixed. Democracy is on average perceived as more important among residents (0.949) than among emigrants (0.553). Political orientation on the traditional left–right axis is more or less equal in the two groups. However, the high education dummy, employment dummy, and high-income dummy show the emigrants are on average more educated, employed, and economically better off than residents of Finland. The respondents are also on average younger among the emigrants than among Finland residents, live in somewhat more rural areas and have departed from more monolingual Finnish municipalities than residents on average. The two groups also comprise almost equal shares of men and women.

Political trust in Finnish institutions between the two groups can also be analyzed by comparing the within-group distribution of trust. As we can tell (Figure 1) from the illustration, the distribution of trust among Finland-Swedes living in Finland is concentrated on lower values with a median on 0.33. This can be contrasted to the distribution of trust in homeland institutions among emigrant Finland-Swedes, which is concentrated to the higher values. The median emigrant has a political trust of 0.67, double that of the resident.

What then explains the difference? The linear regression analysis among the Finland-Swedes residing in Finland (model 1, Table 2) shows the perception of importance of democracy reduces political trust. High education is also related to lower political trust, a spontaneously unintuitive direction that has been explained as the phenomenon of

²On average the emigrants have been living abroad for 22 years.

³Note that the question can conceptually be distinguished from asking how high one values democracy. In this study it is assumed to equal the respondent’s preference for governing system.

TABLE 1 | Trust in Finnish political and state institutions among residents and emigrated Finland-Swedes and factors potentially explaining it.

Variable	Residents					Emigrants				
	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Political trust	990	0.388	0.164	0	1	1,120	0.726	0.169	0.083	1
Importance of democracy	1,066	0.949	0.117	0	1	1,063	0.553	0.246	0	1
Left-Right orientation	937	0.584	0.239	0	1	1,385	0.529	0.261	0	1
High education dummy	1,079	0.396	0.489	0	1	1,442	0.704	0.457	0	1
Employment dummy	1,097	0.352	0.478	0	1	1,487	0.506	0.500	0	1
High income dummy	934	0.327	0.469	0	1	1,367	0.421	0.494	0	1
Age	1,136	54,445	18,332	18	80	1,508	49,830	16,178	18	80
Urban-rural	1,136	1,760	1,356	0	4	1,508	2,111	1,449	0	4
Municipal language	1,136	1,368	0.562	0	2	1,508	1,278	0.542	0	2
Sex	1,136	0.480	0.500	0	1	1,508	0.351	0.477	0	1

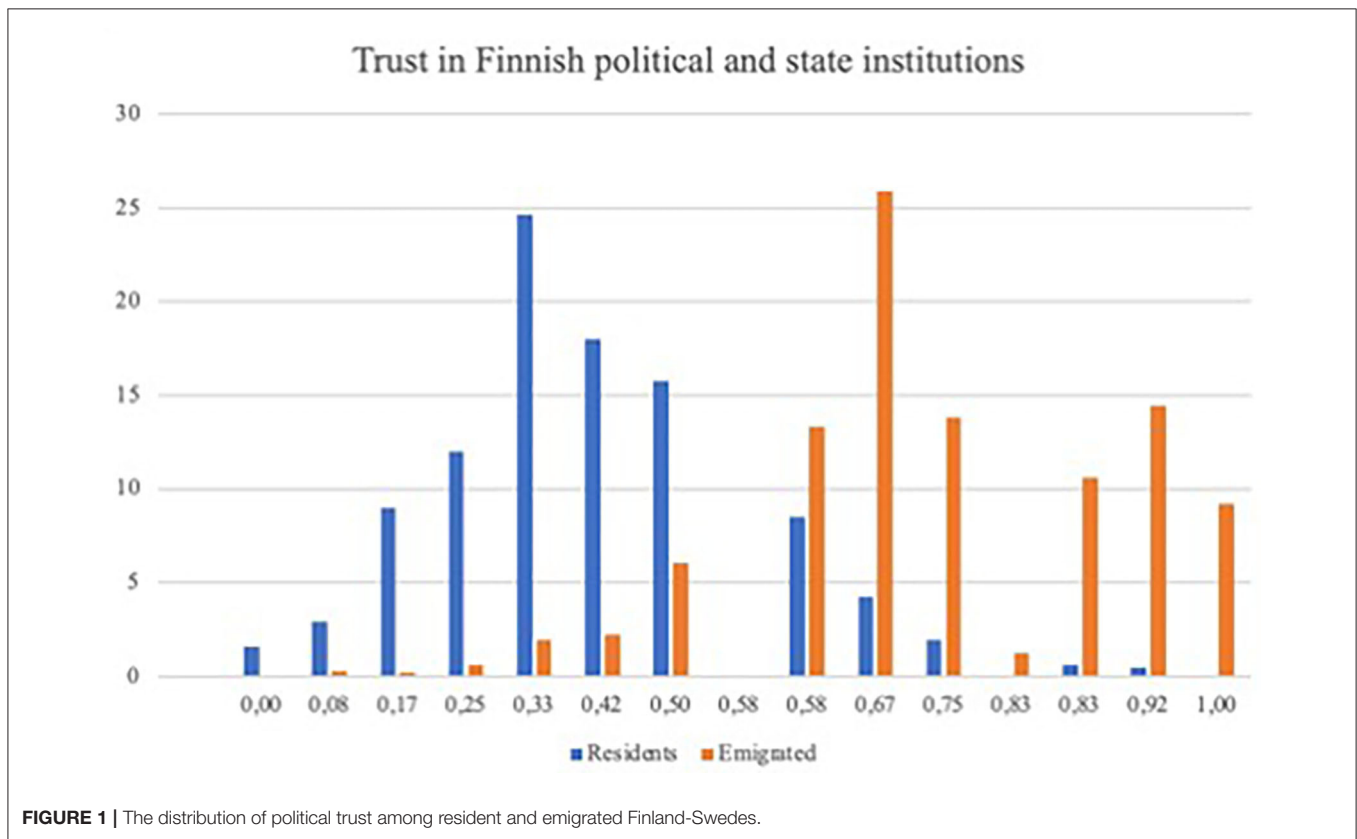


FIGURE 1 | The distribution of political trust among resident and emigrated Finland-Swedes.

the critical citizen (Norris, 2011). Political orientation, the other SE, and demographic factors and geography are not statistically significant.

Among migrant Finland-Swedes, considering democracy important is related to higher levels of political trust (Model 2). So is high income, which increases political trust. Thirdly, sex is related with a negative effect size on the (female) dummy, meaning males are, on average, less trusting of political and state institutions of Finland.

Finally, the analysis of the merged data shows the emigration dummy to have a considerable impact on homeland political

trust (Model 3). Controlling for the other factors, emigrants have a higher level of homeland political trust of 0.464 points, which on a scale from 0 to 1 is sizeable. In this model, importance of democracy shows a rather strong positive relation to trust. High education is negatively related and high income positively related to trust in Finnish political and state institutions.

Notably, the r^2 for model 1 is 0.07, for model 2 0.251, and for model 3 0.598. It seems the expat dummy included in model 3 more than doubles the degree of explaining the variance in political trust compared to the model excluding the

dummy on emigration. The seemingly impressive explanatory rate ought to make us suspect of endogeneity between migration and political trust.

One way for treating the suspected endogeneity is treatment effect analysis with propensity score matching that matches the trust of migrated to similar resident citizens. We use probit modeling for estimating the propensity score for being included in the group of emigrants or residents in Finland. By matching on propensity score, we can treat the unequal distribution in the two groups that is a result of the non-random assignment of people to emigrate.

The first analysis, where we analyze the average treatment effect (ATE) by seeking to match each individual on the propensity score and analyze the resulting averages, the effect from migration on political trust in native country institutions is 0.352 (Table 3). The ATE is, however, susceptible to lack of common support between the two groups, meaning we can have situations where the matching suffers from inadequacies. An alternative analysis, the average treatment effect of the treated, which matches only to the average of emigrated individuals using the propensity score for matching to the nearest neighbor, gives a similar effect of 0.362 on political trust from migration. The effect sizes of the two models are roughly equal, lending evidence for the robustness of the results.

DISCUSSION

The practical development of channels for participation from abroad in real democracies, which has earned the label “homeland politics,” has been of increasing interest for political science. Despite the growing body of literature on the subject, we to date lack any systematic analysis of migrants’ trust in native country political and state institutions. Analogously, political scientists have exhaustively studied political trust of citizens to the state’s institutions (see, e.g., Zmerli and Newton, 2008; Norris, 2011; Uslaner, 2017; Newton et al., 2018; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Migrants have been seen to present a methodologically interesting case for studying the mechanisms of political trust by comparing their trust in the new country’s institutions to their compatriots trust in the institutions of the country they live in (Adman and Strömblad, 2015; Dahlberg and Linde, 2018). However, the emigrants’ trust in their native country’s institutions, or homeland political trust, has been insufficiently studied.

The analysis reveals several interesting aspects of political trust to homeland institutions among emigrated Westerners. Firstly, emigrated Finland-Swedes have higher levels of trust in native country political and state institutions than Finland-Swedes

TABLE 2 | OLS regression analysis of trust in Finnish political and state institutions among resident and emigrated Finland-Swedes.

	(1)			(2)			(3 ^a)		
	Residents			Emigrants			Merged		
	B	SE	p > t	B	SE	p > t	B	SE	p > t
Emigrate dummy							0.464***	0.011	0.000
Importance of democracy	-0.181**	0.0601	0.003	0.325***	0.0200	0.000	0.271***	0.0197	0.000
Political orientation	-0.0401	0.0252	0.112	0.00490	0.0205	0.811	-0.00648	0.0162	0.690
High education dummy	-0.0491***	0.0122	0.000	0.0101	0.0126	0.422	-0.0257**	0.009	0.004
Employment dummy	0.000410	0.0133	0.975	0.000256	0.0114	0.982	0.00339	0.00883	0.701
High income dummy	0.00180	0.0120	0.881	0.0227*	0.011	0.036	0.0227*	0.008	0.008
Age	0.000577	0.000392	0.141	-5.39e-05	0.000365	0.883	9.34e-05	0.000273	0.733
Municipality size	-0.00583	0.00509	0.252	-0.00507	0.00460	0.271	-0.00551	0.00349	0.115
Municipality language	0.0146	0.0123	0.236	-0.00698	0.0122	0.568	0.00178	0.00889	0.841
Sex	0.0116	0.0115	0.312	-0.0206*	0.0105	0.050	0.00154	0.00790	0.846
Constant	0.552***	0.0687	0.000	0.559***	0.0356	0.000	0.131***	0.0317	0.000
Observations	712			839			1551		
R ²	0.070			0.251			0.598		

^aA similar model without Emigrate dummy gave R² 0.17, F_(9,1541) = 34.00.

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

Political trust as dependent variable, unstandardized coefficients (B), standard errors and p-value.

TABLE 3 | Treatment effects with propensity score matching on migration on political trust to native country institutions.

Political trust	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P > z	[95% Conf. Interval]
ATE Emigration (Emigrated vs. resident)	0.352	0.009	40,530	0.000	0.335 0.369
ATET Emigration (Emigrated vs. resident)	0.362	0.010	34,950	0.000	0.342 0.383

residing in Finland. Tellingly, the median of political trust among emigrants are double that of citizens living in their native country. The results can be taken as indication of emigrants viewing the native country institutions in a more favorable light as a result of either a broader perspective acquired by living in another country or by longing for the “good old” homeland. The first mechanism can be called enlightening (Adman and Strömblad, 2015; Dahlberg and Linde, 2018) and the second nostalgia (Wessendorf, 2007).

The study has also shown that perception of democracy, income, and sex are related to the variations of homeland political trust among emigrated Finland-Swedes. Emigrants with higher valuations of democracy and higher incomes are more trusting, whereas males are less trusting than females.

However, the high degree of explanatory power of the linear regression analysis is not cause for celebration. On the contrary, it raises suspicions of endogeneity between emigration and political trust. An apparent connection confounding the explanation of migrants receiving increased homeland political trust is high income and education. Emigrants from rich Western welfare states, such as Finland, tend to be high earners with a high education, and income and education are factors known to affect political trust. The analysis has shown that the relation can be complex, as noted in previous research (Norris, 2011). For instance, the lower political trust among highly educated residents was also found in the model for the pooled data controlling for emigration. Although the OLS method of analyzing the effect of the explanatory variable emigration on political trust while controlling for endogenous factors is sometimes presented as an adequate solution, it is also widely known for its inaccuracies and problems that can give false positive results (see e.g., LaLonde, 1986).

A matching technique, PSM, was used to balance the two groups that were not randomly assigned as residents and emigrants. The average treatment effect of comparing the two groups matched according to their likelihood of being included in either group shows emigration is still a strong explanation for political trust. On average, the emigrated Finland-Swedes clearly have more homeland political trust than the equal average

Finland-Swedes living in Finland. The effect size is somewhat smaller than that found in the regression analysis with a dummy of emigration, but nevertheless is still strongly significant and sizeable.

Although scrutinizing the effect of emigration on homeland political trust, this study has not been able to pit the two potential mechanisms for emigrants who have higher degrees of political trust to native country institutions, enlightening and nostalgia, against each other. Instead, it has provided a description of the variation between emigrants and residents, but not explained why the variation occurs. Future studies should operationalize the mechanisms and test their explanatory power with longitudinal analysis. Moreover, the mechanism should be analyzed in detail with qualitative studies of emigrants' trust in homeland institutions. The findings ought to also be studied with regard to other institutional systems and political cultures with comparative designs.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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Conflict of Interest: The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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