

Social cohesion: Definition, measurement and developments

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There is no evidence that the ethos of a people can be changed according to plan. It is one thing to engineer consent by the techniques of mass manipulation; to change a people's fundamental view of the world is quite a different thing, perhaps especially if the change is in the direction of a more complicated and demanding morality.
(Banfield 1958:165)

Introduction

At the World summit for social development in Copenhagen in 1995 the member states committed themselves to “creating an economic, political, social, cultural and legal environment that will enable people to achieve social development” (Commitment 1). This overall commitment was followed by nine additional commitments, which to a large extent can be seen as means to achieve social development; one of them was the commitment to facilitate social integration (commitment 4). In the two decades that followed, the world did indeed experience social development. Especially, the rapid economic growth in China has lifted a large proportion of the world population out of severe poverty. And so has the economic development in India, Indonesia and other emerging countries (UNDP 2014). However, the same process has pushed the issue of social integration to the forefront. Terms such as “inclusive economic growth” and “social inclusion” have in many countries reached the top of the political agenda, e.g. in China were Prime Minister Hu Jintao in 2004 launched the concept of a “harmonious society”. The idea was to create a “better balance” than had been the case in the social development that China had experienced so far. In the last two decades, most of the rich Western countries have also experienced a rapid increase in economic inequality (OECD 2011). These economic developments have pushed the issue of “social integration” or “social cohesion” up the political agenda; but so has the general economic and cultural globalization, the flow of migrants across nation borders and the security concerns after 9/11.

This report sets out to explore whether social cohesion within countries have increased or decreased since the World summit was held in 1995. In order to do so the report starts with a discussion about what social cohesion is, in a modern society, and how it should be measured.. Based on a review

of research in this field, the report suggests that the presence or absence of social trust, measured as trust between citizens within counties, is a fruitful way to analyze social integration and social cohesion.

In the first section, the report explores the early roots of the term “social cohesion” and provides a formal definition. The second section provides the main argument for the relevance of social trust. The third section introduces how social trust has been measured, discusses some caveats and introduces the available data material. The fourth section presents levels of social trust across countries, based on the latest wave of the World Value Survey (collected 2010 to 2014) and the latest wave of the European Value Study (collected 2008 to 2010). The fifth and sixth sections describes changes in levels of social trust over time. The former provides measures of trust levels found in each wave of the World Value Survey (WVS) and European Value Study (EVS), the latter describe changes over time within counties from the 1990s to the 2000s. The overall finding is little change in overall trust levels. There are indeed examples of increased social cohesion but unfortunately there are as many examples of the opposite. One of the explanations for this stability is that social trust is stable over the life course. Therefore the seventh section describes whether the generation socialized since the World summit display higher or lower trust than older generations. Again the overall conclusion is stability; the new generation socialized since the World summit in 1995 does, in general, not trust fellow citizens more than the older generations. Again variation can be found but the few examples of higher trust among the new generation is balanced by examples of lower trust. In the last section, the report discusses these empirical findings; emphasizing the importance of reduced economic inequality and reduced corruption in the state apparatus if progress is to be achieved in terms of social cohesion.

The early roots and definitions of social integration and social cohesion

Social integration and social cohesion are difficult terms to define. I simply suggest that we define social integration as the process that lead to social cohesion. Thereby we are left with the job of defining social cohesion, which ordinary citizens, policymakers and social scientists often just refer to as the “glue” or the “bonds” that keep societies integrated. However for academic purposes it is important to be more specific about what is actually meant by the terms we use. Based on the review below, I suggest that we define social cohesion as the belief held by citizens of a given nation-state that they share a moral community, which enables them to trust each other (Larsen 2013). This definition brings us a bit closer to a common understanding. But despite the focus on social cohesion, it is often the absence of social cohesion that is central to the discussion. The very discussion of social cohesion often implies its absence and, even more specifically, the decline of social cohesion. I suggest that we label the decline of social cohesion “social erosion”, which we then can define as fewer citizens in a given nation-state having the belief that they share a moral community that enable them to trust each

other. Following these definitions, which are in line with the academic origin of the concept (see below), social cohesion is a non-material phenomenon to be observed in the cognitions of citizens. And following this line of reasoning, phenomenon such as equal objective chances of citizens, employment and the rule of law are indeed important, maybe more important than social cohesion, but they are in themselves not indicators of social cohesion.¹

The question of social cohesion is by no means a new theme. It is a classic concern within social science that the bonds that keep societies together might erode in modern societies or highly differentiated societies. This question was at the very heart of the new discipline of sociology in the nineteenth century. In Durkheim's (1858-1917) terms, the question was what could replace the so-called mechanical solidarity found in pre-modern societies – the solidarity that is established among people who are similar. This similarity could be both material: similar work, housing and food; and non-material: similar beliefs, morality and feelings. Durkheim labelled the non-material part of the community the *conscience collective*, which is the academic origin of the term “social cohesion”. Pre-modern societies were according to Durkheim characterized by a sizeable and strong “collective consciousness”, which typically had a strong religious fundament, so that any deviation from the moral codex was typically interpreted as a religious violation. Thus, strong norms of right and wrong and intense monitoring in small communities upheld non-material similarities. Or using the provided definition of social cohesion, the strong religious fundament and close monitoring made the member of society believe that they shared a moral community that enable them to trust each other.

It was an insightful observation that this kind of solidarity based on material and non-material similarity would come under pressure from the processes of industrialization, urbanization and democratization that marked the shift from pre-modern to modern societies. Therefore many of Durkheim's contemporaries were convinced that the larger differences between citizens in modern society would lead to much higher levels of conflict between them. Among those concerned with the impact of increased differences in material conditions, the most influential thinker is without doubt Karl Marx. Among those concerned with the impact of increased differences in non-material differences, I would point to the conservative ideology, which developed as a reaction to the (at that time) revolutionary ideas found in liberalism and socialism. It is a main line of reasoning within conservative thinking that societies earlier were kept integrated by good moral standards, respect for the family, the law and the king (or in the modern version, the nation-state) – which standards have

¹ Another commonly used term in social inclusion that has its origin in the EU policy making process. It is a difficult term as it is both used to define a process (primarily the process of bringing segments of the adult European population into the labour market) and to define a state (to what extent this and other goals were achieved). There is little link between the term social inclusion and social cohesion (at least in the form used in this report) as social inclusion is much closer linked to material conditions. Thus, often measures of a poverty rates and unemployment level are such as indicators of levels of social inclusion.

now been eroded. And, in order to restore harmony, one needs to strengthen the old “collective consciousness”. In the Chinese case, the idea of “a harmonious society” has also been followed by a promotion of the moral codex provided by Confucianism. In other countries, political projects to restore social cohesion have been linked to the moral codex of Islam, e.g. in Turkey, or Christianity, e.g. the American Tea-party movement or the right wing parties in contemporary Western Europe.

In a modern globalized and multicultural world, it is difficult and problematic to cultivate a similarity of mind. It might actually be in direct conflict with the idea to ensure “non-discrimination, tolerance [and] respect for diversity”, which also were stated in commitment four in the declaration from 1995. Durkheim also rejected the idea that modern societies could be kept together by shared moral standard, though he shared the worries of modern conservative thinking. Instead Durkheim argued that the increased interdependence found in more differentiated societies could develop into a new kind of “organic solidarity”. The increased interdependence is easily spotted in the production structure. In the agrarian economy, a large number of citizens could be more or less self-sufficient, while in a modern society, industrial or service workers are dependent on raw material delivered by others, food produced by others and markets where products can be exchanged. This could, according to Durkheim, establish an organic solidarity, the consciousness in citizens of being dependent on each other (as organs in a body are dependent on each other). Most contemporary sociology question the idea that organic solidarity, the consciousness of being dependent on each other, is sufficient to uphold social cohesion in highly differentiated societies. However, Durkheim’s interdependence argument points to a very fundamental aspect of modern society: We all need to interact with persons we do not know. This idea of interdependence is the backbone of the modern sociological thinking concerned with the issue of trust.

Social cohesion and the importance of trust

The shift from pre-modern to modern societies can according to Giddens (1990) be described as a shift from embeddedness to disembeddedness (Giddens 1990). In such a situation, trust becomes a fundamental precondition for the ontological safety for the individual, as when by simply taking the bus you have to trust in the abilities of the experts who invented the bus, in those of the unknown bus driver, and those of all the other unknown drivers on the road. One can argue that in a “risk society” (Beck 1992) many risks can only be overcome by placing trust in unknown fellow citizens and the roles they fulfill in the social system as policemen and women, social workers, bank advisors and countless others. Even more convincing is the argument that trust in unknown fellow citizens, besides influencing individuals ability to cope with modernity, is crucial for the functioning of modern institutions such as the market, democracy, and the state (Luhmann 1979). Therefore the importance of

trust has been so strongly emphasized in contemporary sociological thinking (e.g. Möllering 2013, Frederiksen 2012, Reemtsma 2012, Barbalet 2009, Cook, Hardin et al. 2005, Hardin 2004).

Especially horizontal trust between citizens has become a major field of interest, and not only for the discipline of sociology. In political science, trust between citizens is perceived to be a resource that enables societies to overcome the basic problems of collective action (Axelrod, Hamilton 1981, Rothstein 2005). The problem of collective action is highlighted for example by the famous prisoner's dilemma which shows that players without mutual trust choose a sub-optimal solution. The most famous field-study is Putnam's description of how democracy's failure in South Italy and success in North Italy was due to different levels of social trust (1993). Trust also has a prominent place in economics with the basic idea that trust is a way to reduce transaction costs (the cost of using the market), an approach promoted by a number of leading economists (e.g. Oliver Williamson, receiver of the Nobel memorial prize in economic sciences in 2009). Empirically, economists have also been able to show a strong correlation between trust between citizens and economic growth (Knack, Keefer 1997).

If we return to the definition of social cohesion provided above – the belief held by citizens of a given nation-state that they share a moral community – the point is that we are now able to specify the most important aspect of the content of the “shared moral community”. For modern (or post-modern) societies, the most important aspect is not that citizens believe they share the same religion, family values, attitude towards homosexuality or other ideals; for the everyday operation of highly differentiated societies, *the most important aspect of social cohesion is that citizens believe they share the norm of not cheating each other*. And fortunately, a number of international surveys allow us to measure this pivotal aspect of social cohesion.

Measuring social trust

In empirical analyses, horizontal trust between citizens is typically measured by the question; “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted – or – that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?” As high trust levels go together with well-functioning democracies, economic growth and satisfaction with living in a modern society, this item seems to capture what many contemporary sociologists, political scientists and economists are looking for. Furthermore the question has the great advantage that it has been asked in a number of older surveys; especially its inclusion in the WVS is of great importance. Finally, I want to emphasize that the question of trust in “most people” also has the big advantage that it does not aim to measure past experiences, that is, whether the respondent has previously been cheated. Instead, the item tries to measure the “rule of thumb” used by individuals when they interact with unknown fellow citizens. It is exactly these socially constructed

rules of thumb that are important when disembodied persons interact in a highly differentiated modern or post-modern society.

The answers given to the standard question of social trust have been given many different interpretations. It is common to make a distinction between this generalised trust (trust in strangers) and specific trust (trust in people one knows e.g. family and friends). However, the term generalised trust is a bit misleading as it is not a trust without boundaries; when answering this question, respondents are likely to think of persons within their nation state. Most people still live their life within national boundaries and therefore “most people” (still) refers to other people within these national boundaries. Furthermore, the respondents that answer the trust question have often been through a questionnaire that constantly refer to the national level, e.g. should it be a governmental responsibility to reduce income differences, should taxes increase etc. Therefore Newton is right in arguing that the answers can be interpreted as the respondents’ evaluation of the moral standard of the society in which they live (Newton 2004). But it should be added that for most current societies the natural boundaries for society have become the territory of the nation state.

Finally, there is an important issue about whether citizens in different countries actually think along the same line when they answer the standard question about trust. Torpe & Lolle (2011) have analyzed this question by comparing how the same respondents answered the standard question about trust and a new question about trust in a person one “meets for the first time”, which was introduced in the fifth wave of the WVS. For some countries, especially countries found in Africa and Asia, there was a significant discrepancy between the responses given to the two questions. This implies that some respondents do not think of “most people” as somebody they do not know. Where possible, therefore the report will there adjust the standard measure by treating those answering that “they do not at all” or “not very much” trust a person, which they met for the first time, as belonging to the group of non-trusters. This will be labelled the adjusted trust measure. Unfortunately, the adjusted trust measure cannot be used back in time, i.e. the comparisons over time are based on the standard measure.

The report uses the World Value Survey (WVS) and European Value Study (EVS), which provides the two largest available data sources in this field. The latest wave of the WVS was collected in the period from 2010 to 2014 and included 52 countries (for further introduction to the data material please visit www.worldvaluessurvey.org). The latest wave of the EVS was collected in the period from 2008 to 2010 and included 47 countries (for further introduction to the data material please visit www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/). Thus, for the 2000s, the report is able to cover around half of the nation states of the world. For the 1990s and 1980s, the data material is less comprehensive.² The

² The analyses are on WVS are based on the file WVS_Longitudinal_1981-2014_spss_v_2014_06_17_Beta retrieved from www.worldvaluessurvey.org June 2014. The analyses on EVS are based on the European Values Study Longitudinal Data File 1981-2008 (EVS 1981-2008) retrieved from GESIS Data Archive, Cologne (ZA4804 Data file Version 2.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.11005). “Do not know” answers have been excluded. WVS is weighted data (S017) EVS is also weighted data (s017).

Latinobarometro also has the standard trust question included but only covering 19 countries it is a less comprehensive dataset. Furthermore, WVS allow us to study trends from 1990s to the 2000s (see section six) for eight of the 19 Latin American countries.

Cross-national levels of social trust around 2008 to 2013

Figure 1 show the unadjusted measure of social trust as measured in the latest wave of the WVS collected between 2010 and 2014. The main result is that a high level of social trust is a rare phenomenon. Only in five out of the 52 countries included in the survey do those answering that “most people can be trusted” outnumber those answering that “one needs to be very careful”. These five countries were the Netherlands, China, Sweden, New Zealand and Australia. In the other 47 countries, those answering “one needs to be very careful” outnumbered the group indicating social trust. Among societies with less than ten percent of the citizens believing most people can be trusted one find countries such as the Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, Ghana, Ecuador, Cyprus, Romania, Zimbabwe, Peru and Malaysia. And this result is actually the most optimistic, which can be derived from the data. If one takes into account that some of the respondents indicating trust in most people actually pose very little trust in a person they met for the first time, the result become even grimmer. Figure 2 display the share of “trusters” after reclassifying the respondents with no trust in a person they met for the first time as “non-trusters”. After this adjustment only one out of the 52 countries, New Zealand (57 percent) passes the threshold of having a majority of trusters. Sweden (46 percent) is also close to this threshold, while the social trust in Australia (33 percent), Netherlands (25 percent) and especially China (14 percent) is reduced to much more modest levels.

Figure 1: Social trust. Measured by trust in “most people”. WVS 2010-14. N=52

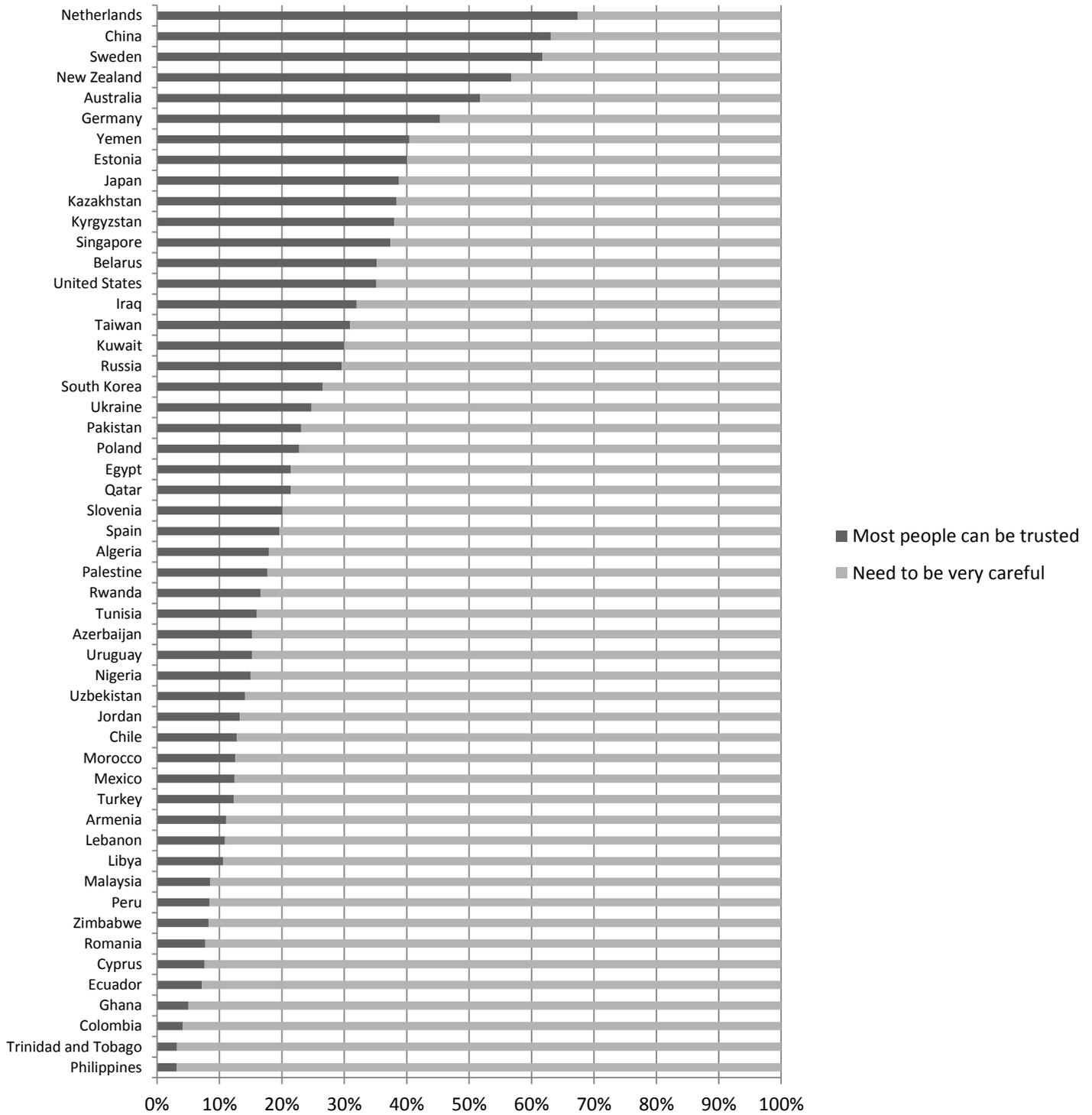
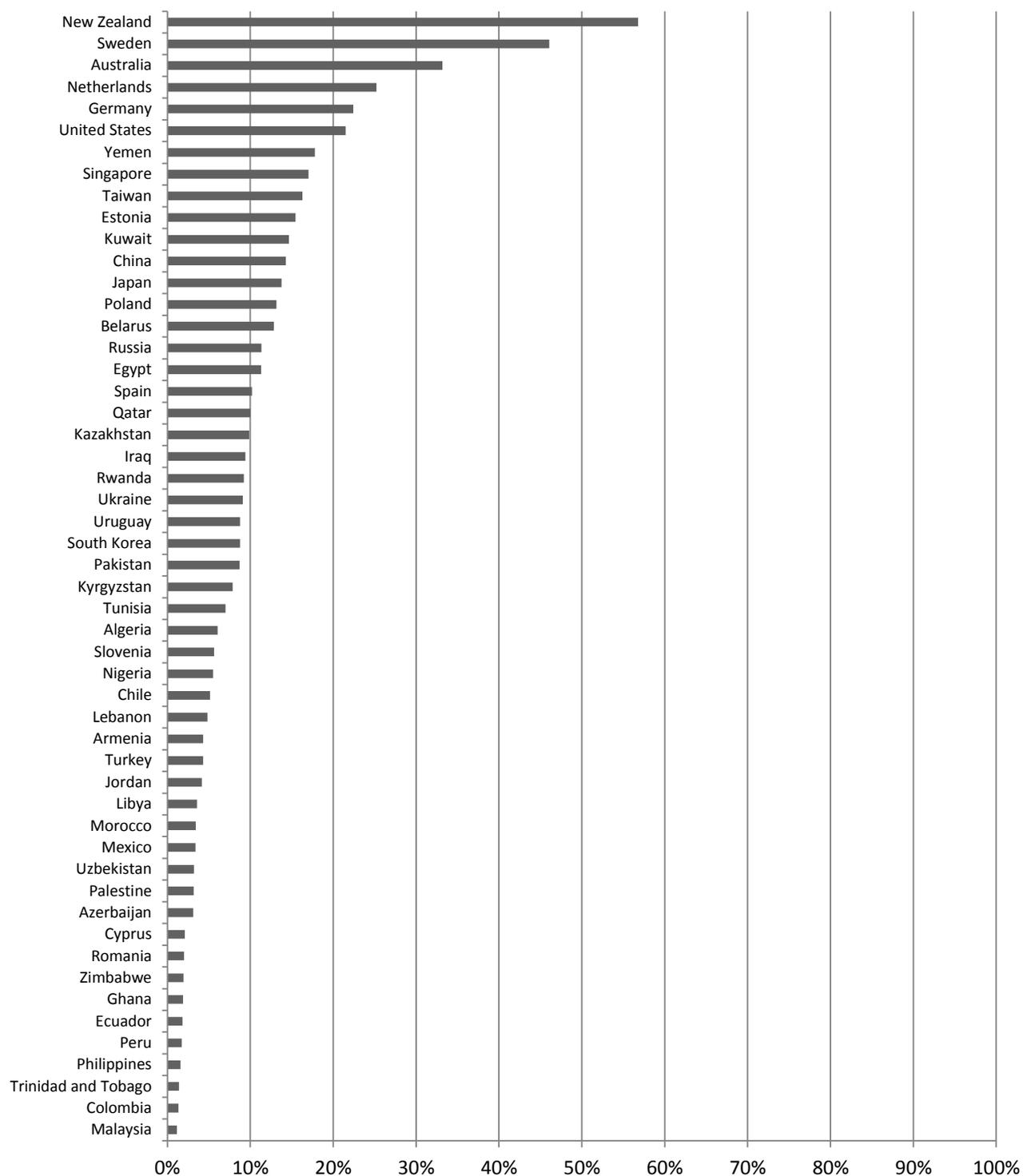


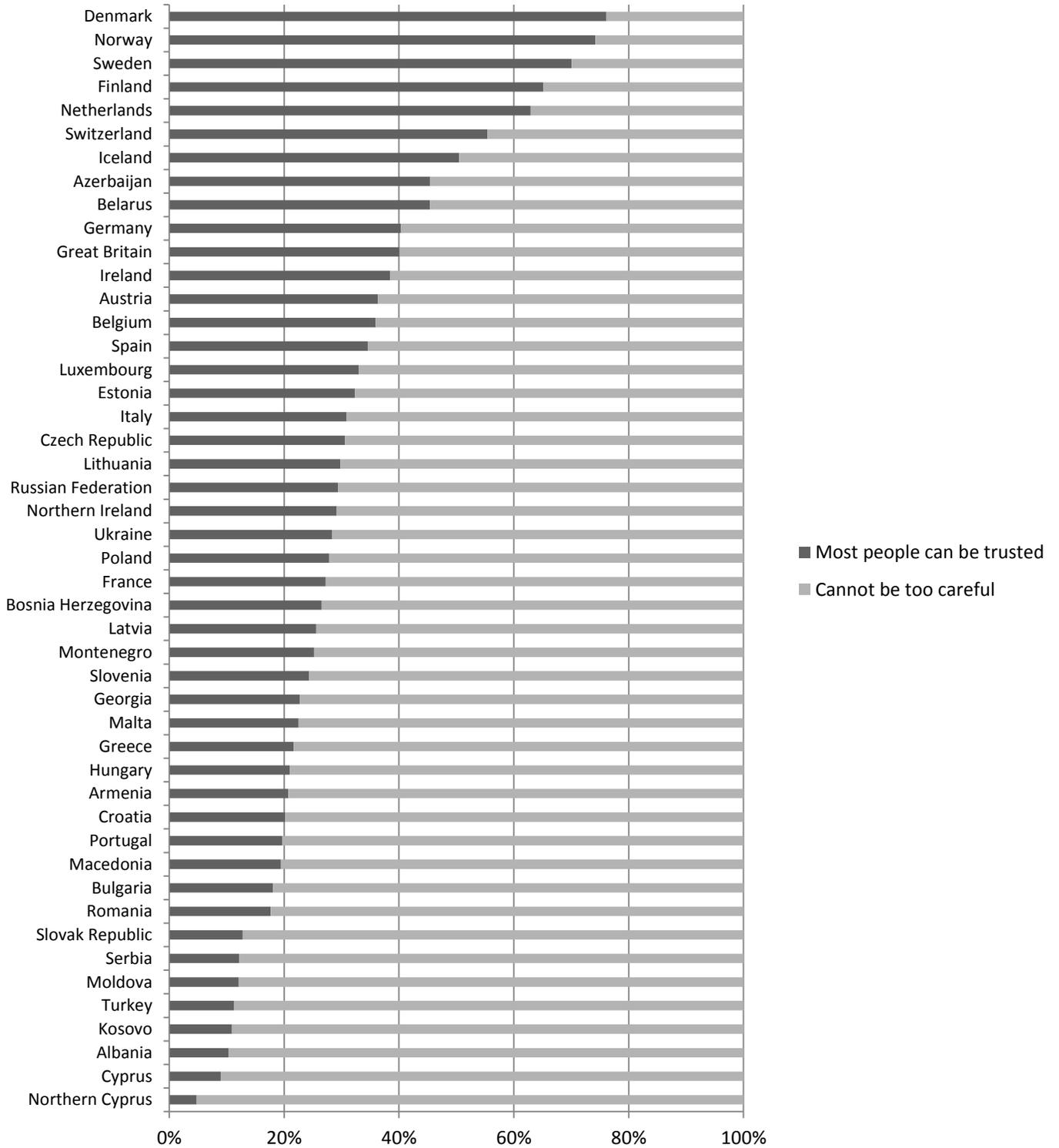
Figure 2: Social trust. Measured by trust in “most people” adjusted for distrust in a person met “for the first time”. WVS 2010-14. N=52



The finding that social trust is a rare phenomenon is naturally contingent on the countries that conducted the six wave of the WVS. Higher trust levels have indeed been found among the rich Western countries, which historically have been better represented in international databases. Figure 3 display the trust level measured in the European Value Study (EVS) collected between 2008 and 2010. As the question about trust in a person met for the first time is not included in the EVS, one cannot adjust the levels. However, this is not of crucial importance as the standard measure is fairly valid in the Western countries (Torpe, Lolle 2011).

Only analyzing Europe, one can indeed find additional countries, which around 2008-10 made it above the majority threshold. Among other countries with a high share of trusters, one finds Denmark (76 percent), Norway (74 percent), Finland (65 percent), Switzerland (55 percent) and Iceland (51 percent). However, one also find additional low-trust-countries such a Albania, Kosovo, Turkey, Moldova, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Portugal, where more than 80 percent of the respondents answer that one cannot be too careful.

Figure 3: Social trust. Measured by trust in “most people”. European Value Study 2008-2010, N=47

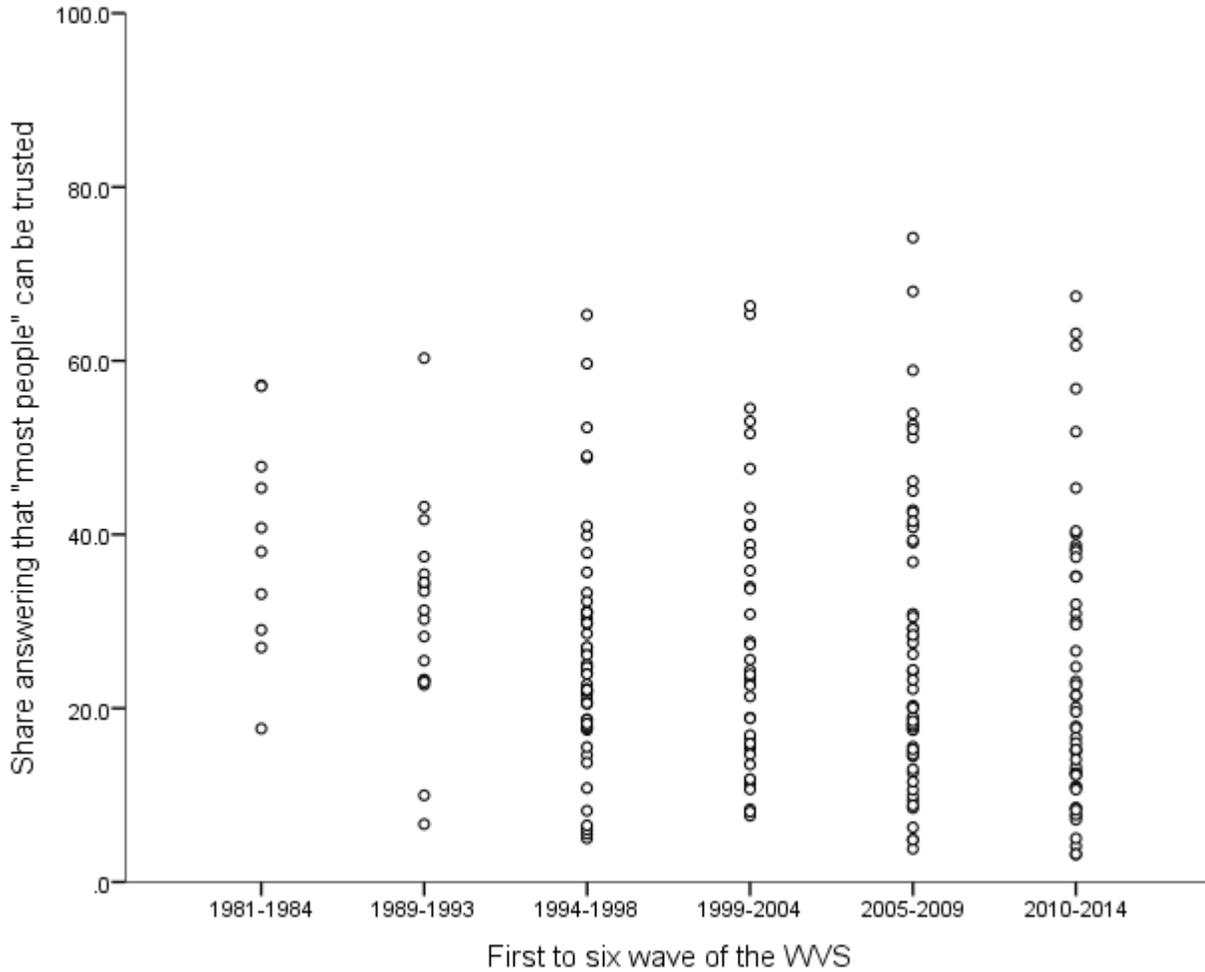


The overall conclusion is that no matter what part of the world one studies, one only finds few high-trust countries. So despite the importance given to trust by sociology, political science and economics, the conclusion is that by 2008-2014 the most common situation is that citizens around the globe display very little trust in their fellow citizens. In the light of such findings it is indeed of relevance to discuss issues of social integration, social cohesion and inclusive growth. The problem is, however, that social trust is not easy to establish. Despite economic growth and the political commitment to social integration, the next two sections will demonstrate that little actually happened in terms of social cohesion since the world summit in Copenhagen in 1995; at least when measured by indicators of social trust.

Trust levels measured in various waves of the WVS and EVS

The WVS and the EVS provide the best possibilities to access changes in social trust over time; though, as it will be clear, one cannot cover all nation states of the world. In Figure 4 is shown the share answering “trust in most people” (unadjusted) in each of the countries that has taken part in the WVS, i.e. each dot represent a country. In the first wave of the WVS (1981-1984) only ten countries conducted the survey, i.e. ten indications of the share of trusters, ten dots, are found in the line above the first wave. As Figure 4 indicates more and more countries have taken part in the following waves of the WVS; 18 countries took part in the second wave (1989-93), 51 took part in the third wave (1994-98), 41 took part in the fourth wave (1999-2004), 58 took part in fifth wave (2005-2009) and finally 52 took part the sixth wave (2010-2013). In the latter wave, one finds the 52 countries, which were used in Figure 1. Thus, the dot at the top of the line is Netherlands, which in the last wave had the highest share of persons indicating that most people can be trusted (unadjusted). The dot of the bottom is the Philippines, which had the lowest share of trusters (see Figure 1).

Figure 4. Share in each country answering that “most people” be trust. All six waves of WVS

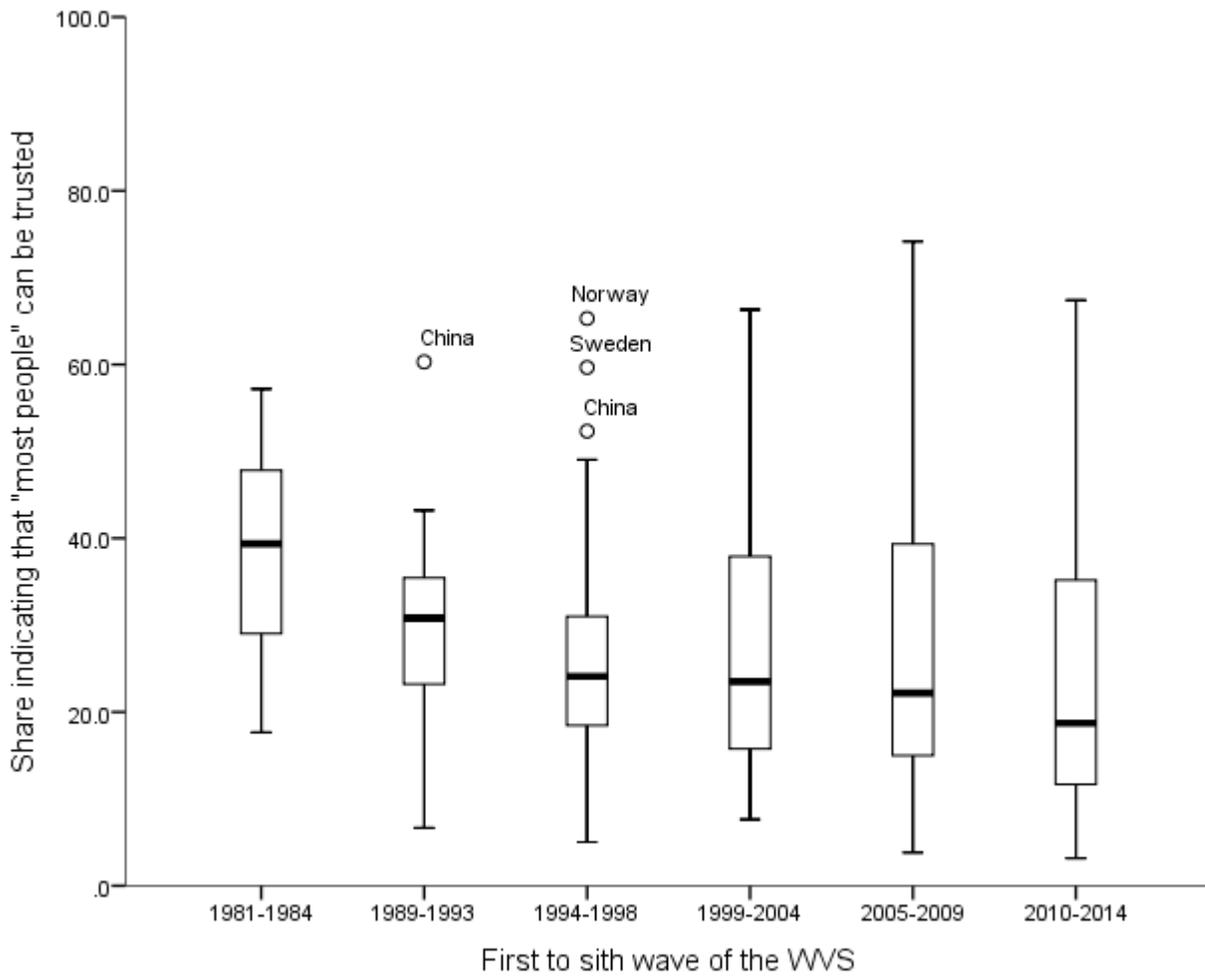


A so-called box-plot, see Figure 5, is a convenient way to get an indication of the development over time in the data material. The horizontal bold line in the middle of the boxes is the median found in each wave, i.e. the country where half of the countries have a higher share of trusters and another half of the countries have a lower share. In the first wave, the median country had 39 percent indicating that most people can be trusted. As can be seen from the horizontal bold lines in the boxes, the median social trust levels have declined over time. In the last wave, the median country only had 19 percent indicating that most people can be trusted. The boxes and the Ts are indications of the variation in the trust levels across countries. The upper- and lower value of the boxes are set so the range between them include half of all the countries (the first and third quintiles). In the first wave, one finds a trust level between 29 and 50 percent in half of the countries. In the last wave, half of the countries had a share of trust between 11 percent and 35 percent. Thus, the larger the boxes, the larger the variation in trust levels across countries. Finally, the Ts define the maximum and minimum share of trusters in the wave. Thus, in the last wave, the upper T stops at 67 percent, the share of trusters in the Netherlands, and the

lower T stops at three percent, the share of trusters in the Philippines. However, in cases where the maximum or minimum share of trusters is more than 1.5 times the length of the box away from the lower or higher bound of the box, then the name of country is stated (and the next highest/lowest value defines the T).³ This is a standard way to spot extreme outliers. As can be seen in Figure 5, China, Sweden and Norway did stand out as extreme outliers (judged by the trust levels found in the other countries in the wave). As demonstrated in the previous section, these extremely high trust levels in China are partly an artifact whereas the trust levels found in the Nordic countries might indeed be exceptional. Figure 5 also shows that the variation in trust levels across countries increases over time; at least from the second and third wave to the following waves. In the third wave half of the 51 countries had between 18 and 31 percent trusters, i.e. a range of 13 percentage points. In the sixth wave a range of 24 percent (11 percent to 35 percent) was indeed to have half of the countries included. Thus, the box for the sixth wave is therefore longer than the box for the third wave.

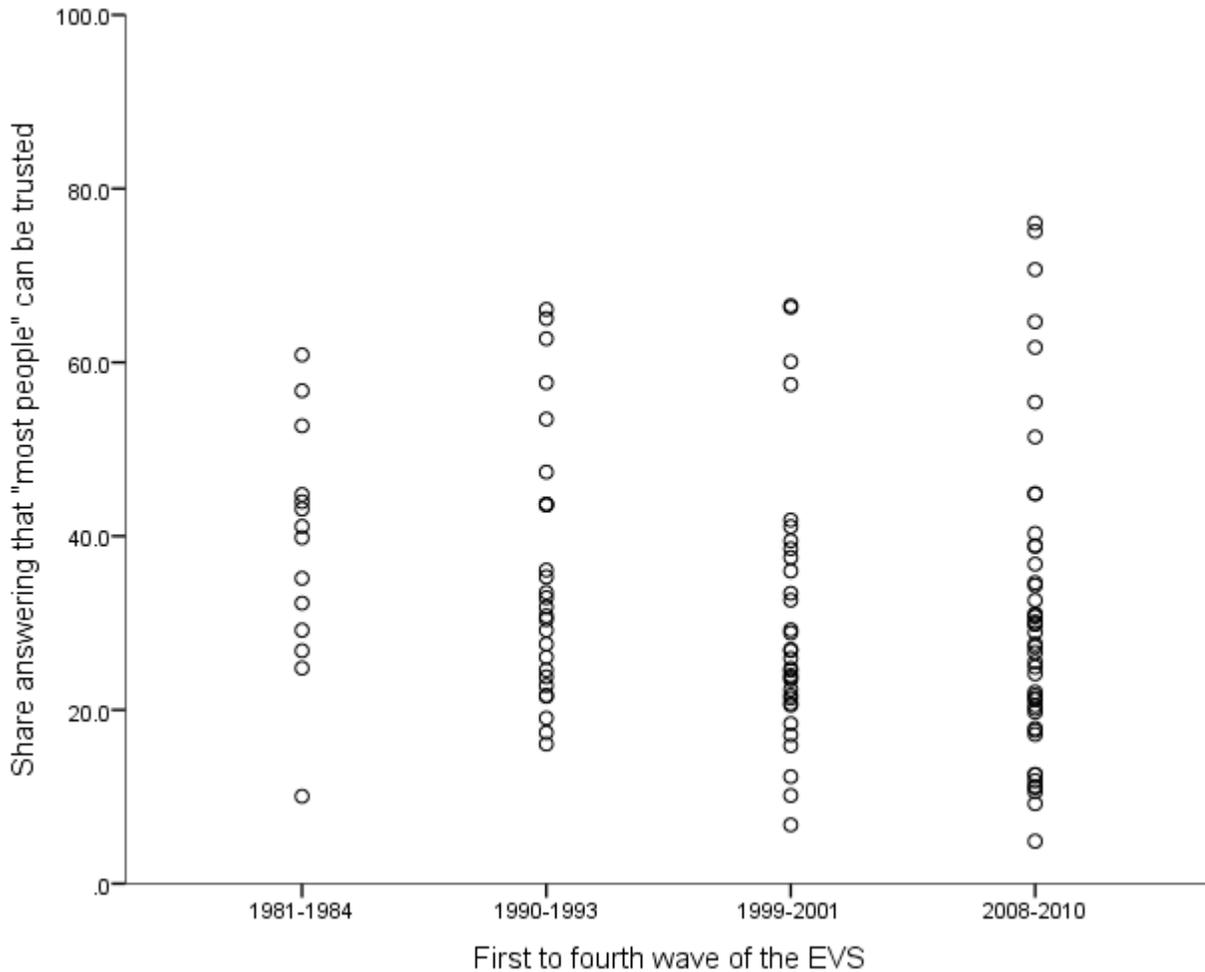
³ Thus, in the first wave, the box goes from 29 to 50, which gives a box “length” of 21. Therefore a country with a trust level 31.5 (21×1.5) percentage point above the box (50) or below the bound (29) would be considered an outlier.

Figure 5. Box plot of the share answering that “most people” can be trusted (unadjusted). All countries included in the WVS



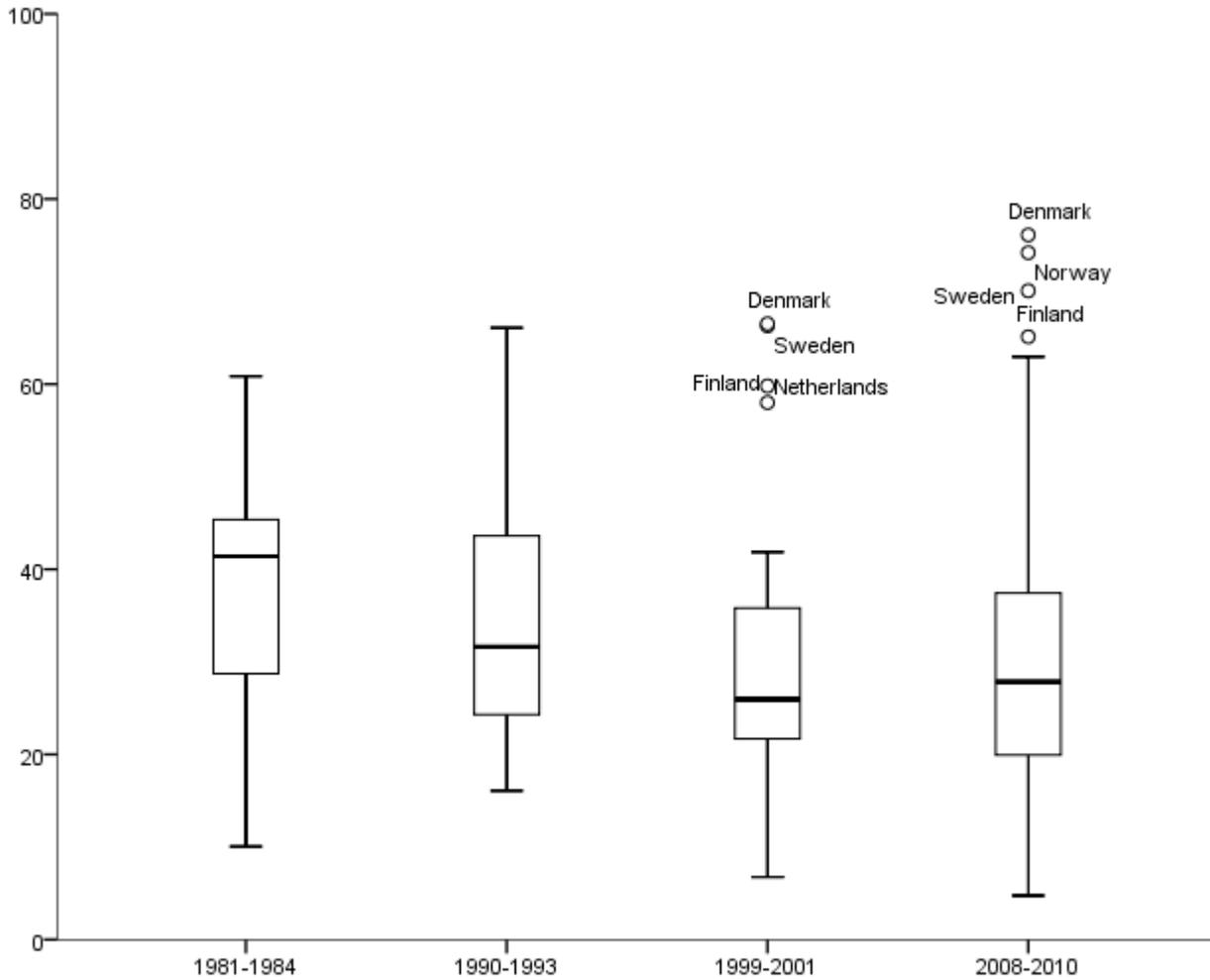
The same kind of analysis can be applied to EVS. Figure 6 show the share answering that most people can be trusted for all the countries that took part in the EVS. In the first wave (1981-1984), 14 countries participated, in the second (1990-1993) 27 countries participated, in third (1999-2001) 33 countries participated and the latest wave (2008-2009) 47 participated.

Figure 6. Share in each country answering that “most people” be trust. All four waves of EVS



Using the same procedure as in Figure 5, the box-plot in Figure 7 summarizes the median trust levels and the variation in trust levels across countries in each wave of the EVS. The tendency to a lower median trust level (the horizontal line within the box) can also be found in the EVS data. In the first wave of the EVS (1981-1984), the median trust level of countries was 41 percent; compared to a median trust level of 32 percent in the second wave (1990-93), 26 percent in third wave (1999-2001) and finally 28 percent in the fourth wave (2008-09). In contrast to the WVS, the variation across the European countries has not increased much; the boxes are not larger in the newest wages. In each wave of the EVS, half of the countries can be found within 20 percentage point bracket (the length of the box). Finally, the EVS also indicate that the Nordic countries, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland (and the Netherlands around 2000), have indeed come to have exceptional high level of social trust also in comparison with other European countries.

Figure 7. Box plot of the share answering that “most people” can be trusted (unadjusted). All countries included in the EVS



If we for a moment imagine that the countries taken part in the WVS and EVS were randomly selected, the overall conclusion would be that there is a general trend towards lower levels of social trust; both in Europe and in the world as such. In the WVS there is also a trend towards higher variations in levels in social trust. Thus, in terms of social cohesion, the world seems to grow apart. Now, taking part in the WVS and EVS is clearly not a random process. Thus, the decline in trust as well as the increased variation could simply be a matter of low trust-countries increasingly taken part in the WVS and EVS. This is indeed a possibility and probably part of the explanation. This holds especially true for Europe, where the EVS started out in the old Western block and only after 1989 came to include the Eastern European countries and later the new established countries in the Balkans. In the WVS there was also an overweight of more developed countries in the initial rounds (see Appendix 1 and 2 for participating countries).

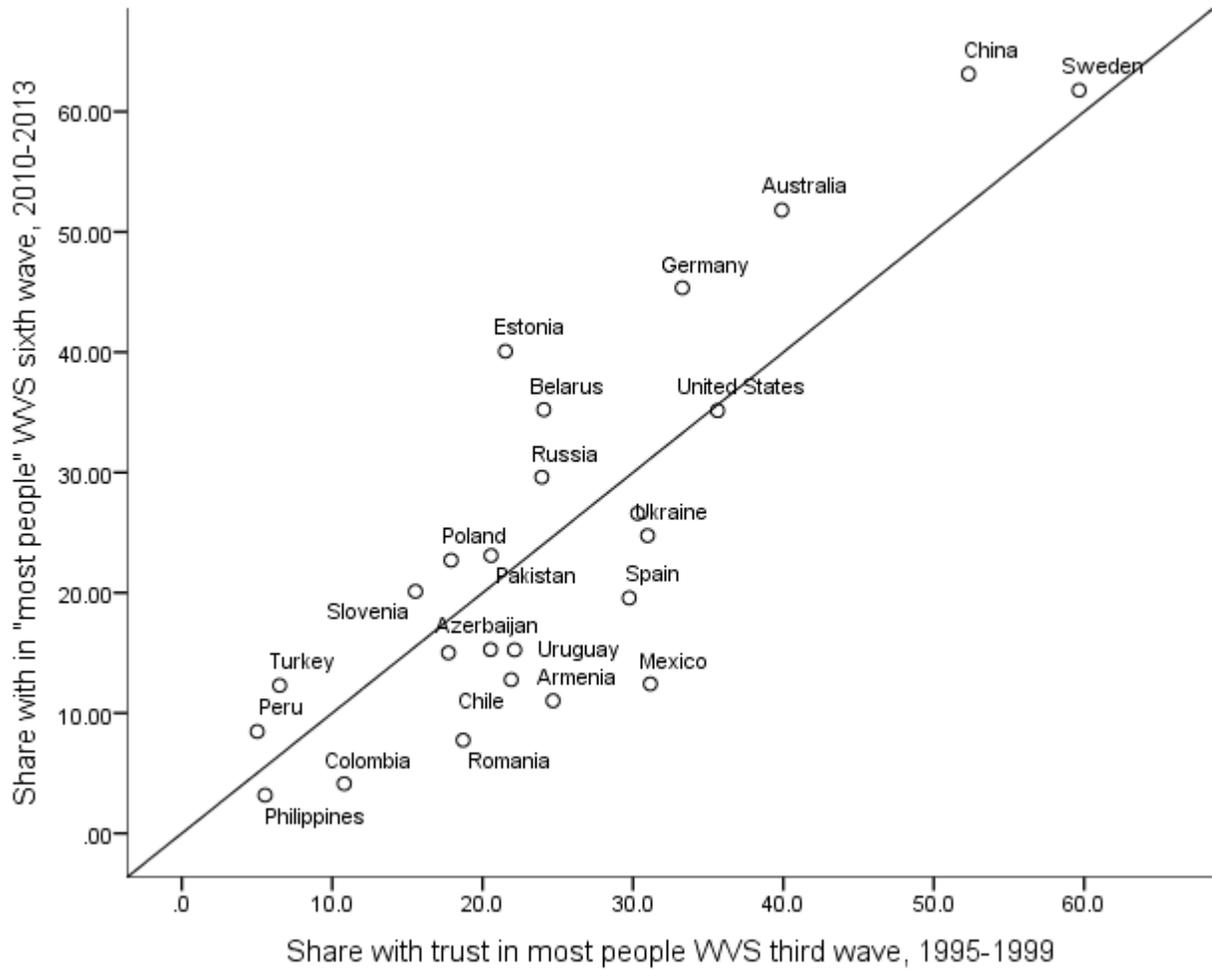
However, it is an important observation that as the scope of the WVS and EVS have increased, one have had to adjust the assessment of what constitutes a typical level of social trust in a nation states. With results from close to half of all countries of world we know by now that many countries lack the kind of trust, which contemporary social science find to be pivotal for a well-functioning democracy, market economy and civil society. What to infer from this is, as always, a matter of interpretation. One interpretation is that there simply is a Western bias in social science. Due to this bias social science put too much emphasis on elements present in the old Western countries, such as moderate to high trust levels, and fails to acknowledge elements that make non-Western countries function. I believe there is some truth in this interpretation; at least it is a fact that the most cited sociologists within trust research come from Western countries and most research have been conducted on Western countries (especially high trust countries such as the Nordic countries and previously also the US have been analyzed). Another, and more worrisome, interpretation is that contemporary social science actually got it right and we are at the root of why it is so difficult to establish a well-functioning democracy, market economy and civil society in many countries around the World. This is, in my opinion, also a plausible interpretation, Therefore it is of interest to study whether one finds an increase or decrease within countries; for this report especially in the period since the World summit in 1995.

Development in social trust since the World summit

It is well-established in previous trust research that levels in social trust are “sticky”, i.e. there is simply no quick fix to increase the level of social trust in a country. Therefore it would be too optimistic to expect that the commitments at the World summit in 1995 should have resulted in a large increase in social trust within countries. However, even without a naive belief in the importance of international declarations it is relevant to analyze whether the last two decades have resulted in less or more social trust. This is not an easy task as the available data material is scarce. In the WVS, the comparison between the third (1994-98) and the sixth wave (2010-2013) is the most relevant. However, we only have 25 countries, which took parts in both waves; this is a little above ten percent of the countries of the world. However, this is the point of departure.

In Figure 8 is shown the share of respondents answering that most people can be trusted (unadjusted) in the 25 countries, which both took part in the third and sixth wave of the WVS. The first thing to be noticed is that overall trust levels are rather stable over time. Trust is indeed sticky. The correlation between the trust level measured in mid- and end of the 1990s and the one measured from 2010-14 is high (0.84 at the aggregated level, Pearson).

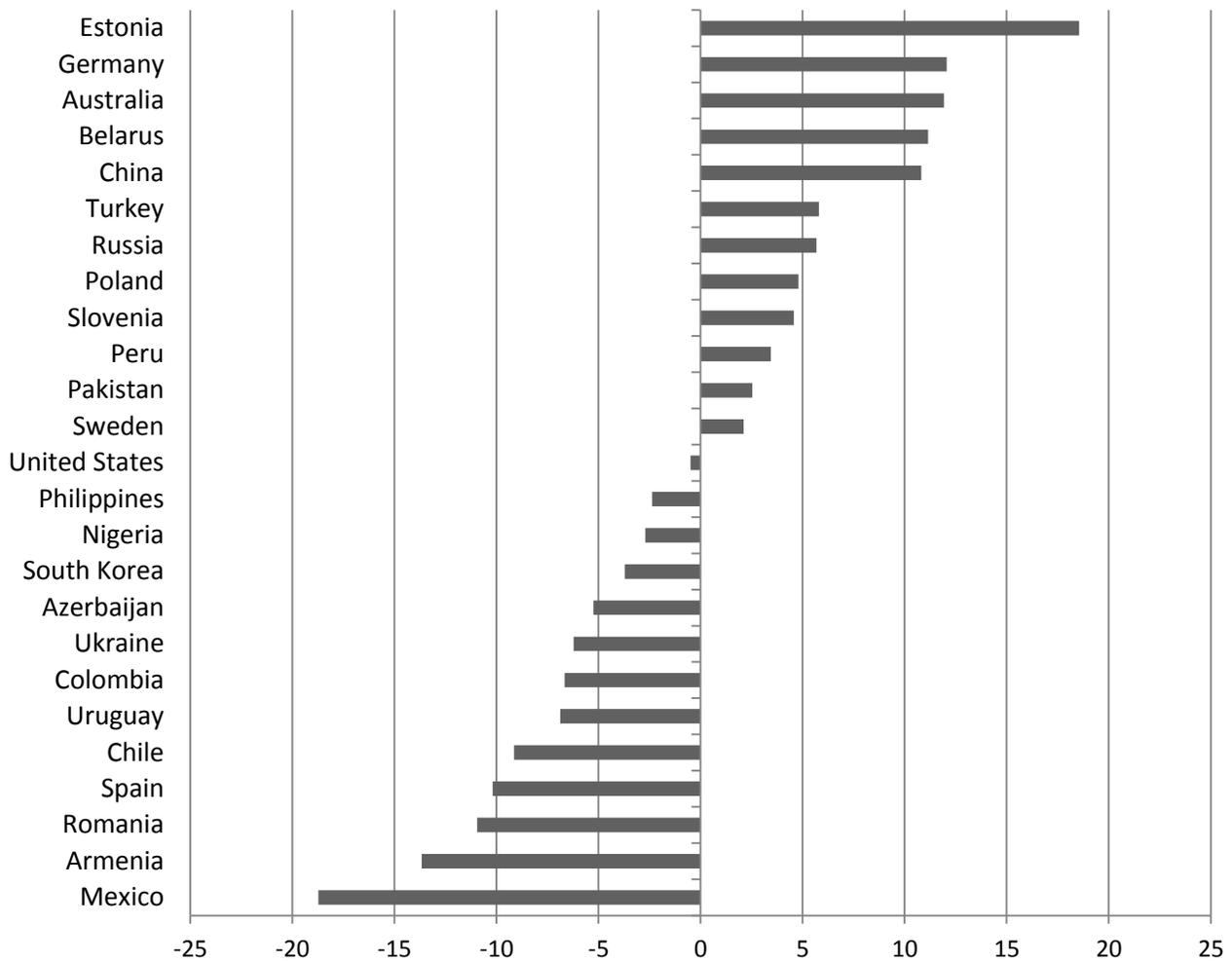
Figure 8: Share of citizens with trust in “most people” respectively in the WVS third wave, 1994-98, and sixth wave, 2010-14. Including reference line. N=25



There are, however, some differences between the trust levels measured at the two points in time. In the 12 countries, which are placed above the reference line in Figure 8, the share answering that most people can be trusted was higher in the sixth than in the third wave. In the 13 countries, which are placed below the reference line, the share answering that most people can be trusted was lower in the sixth than in the third wave. Some of these differences can simply be caused by random measurement errors. As our measurement of social trust is based on samples of citizens, there will always be small variations caused by the fact that a different group of citizens has been asked at the two points in time. Thus, as a rule of thumb, differences below five percentage points could simply be a matter of measurement errors. In Figure 9 is shown the percentage point difference in trust levels measured at the two points in time in the 25 countries. So due to potential measurement errors, we cannot be certain that social trust actually increased in Poland, Slovenia, Peru, Pakistan and Sweden and actually

decreased in South Korea, Nigeria, the Philippines and the United States. For these nine countries, the main conclusion is that social trust levels have been stable.

Figure 9: Change in share that “trust most people” from the third (1995-1999) to the sixth (2010-14) WVS wave

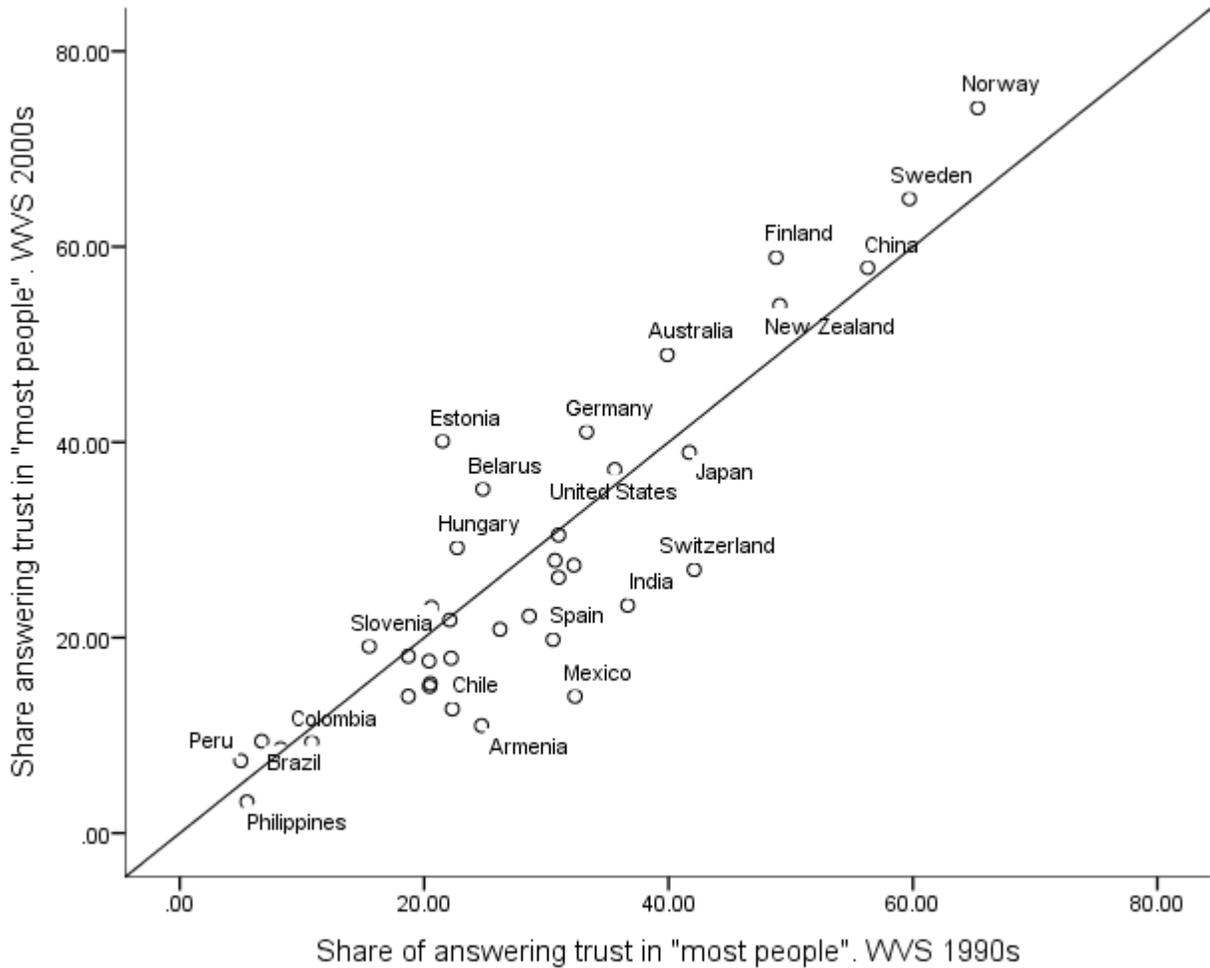


For the other 16 countries, the differences in trust levels are so high that it is unlikely that they are simply caused by measurement errors. In five countries, Estonia, Germany, Australia, Belarus and China, one finds an increase in the share answering that most people can be trusted above 10 percentage points. In Turkey and Russia, the increase in social trust level is around six percentage point. As for the decreases, one finds four countries, Mexico, Armenia, Romania and Spain where the drop in share answering that “most people” can be trusted is above 10 percentage points. Furthermore, five countries, Chile, Uruguay, Colombia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan, experienced a drop in social trust

between five and ten percentage points. Based in this little subsample of the countries of the world, which both took part in both the third and sixth wave of the WVS, the main conclusion is that social trust levels have not changed much in the two decades that followed the World summit in 1995. And for the changes that do occur, one finds as many cases of decreased levels of social trust as of increased levels of social trust.

If we accept a less focused comparison between the 1990s and the 2000s, the WVS enables us to study 38 countries; around 20 percent of the countries of the World. The data constitutes the countries, which either took part in the second (1989-1993) or third (1994-1998) wave of the WVS and at the same time took part in either the fifth (2005-2009) or sixth (2010-2014) wave of the WVS. In case the country took part in both surveys in either the 1990s or the 2000s, the report uses the average of the trust level found in the two surveys. Using this method, Figure 10 shows the share of trusters in the 38 countries respectively in the 1990s and 2000s.

Figure 10: Share of citizens with trust in “most people” respectively in the 1990s (based on second and third wave of WVS) and the 2000s (based on the fifth and sixth wave of WVS). Including reference line. N=38

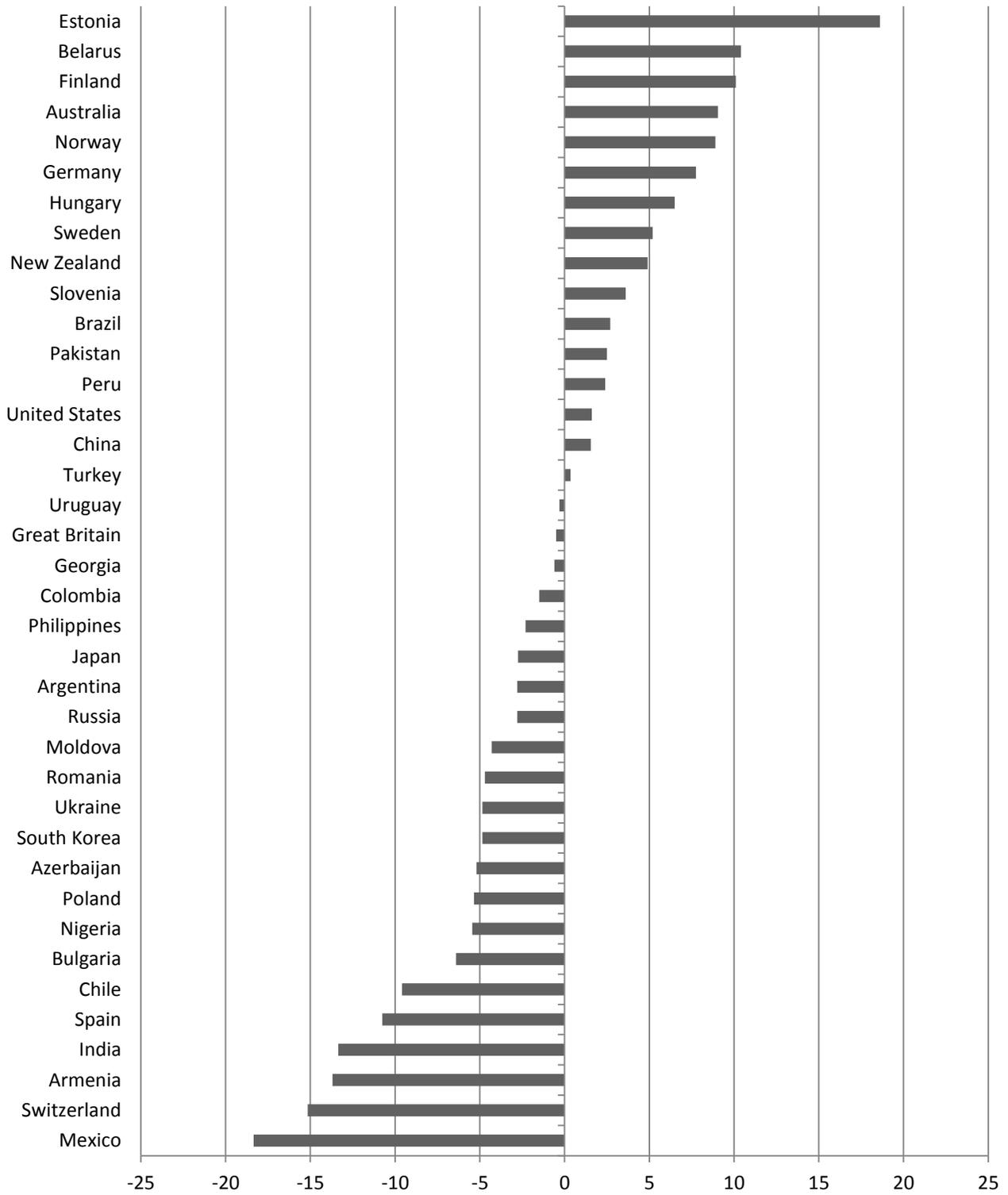


Again the stickiness of social trust is evident; also among the larger sample of countries, the trust level found in the 1990s is a very strong predictor for the trust levels found in the 2000s (Pearson correlation 0.89). And again the countries above the reference line are those with higher trust levels in the 2000s than in 1990s and the opposite for those below the reference line (not all country labels plotted). Figure 11 show the exact percentage point change from the 1990s to the 2000s for each of the 38 countries.

Calculated this way, eight out of the 38 countries have experience an increase in social trust above 5 percentage points from the 1990s to the 2000s. Some of the countries with increased social trust is naturally the same as in Figure 9; among additional countries Sweden and Hungary has also experienced a clear increase in trust. The increase shown in Figure 9 for China, Turkey and Russia is smaller than the one shown in Figure 11. In the case of China this is primarily caused by a lower trust

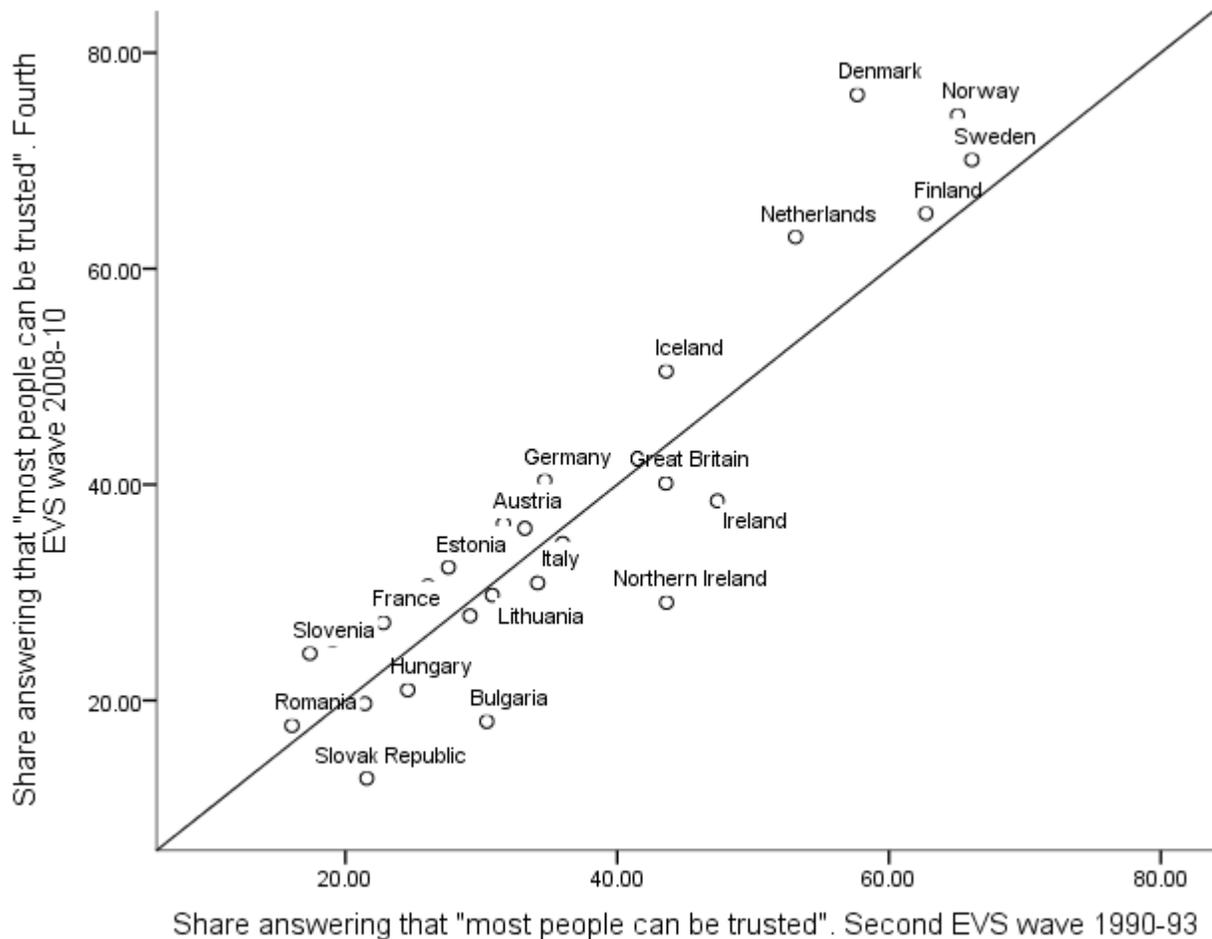
level in the fifth wave (53 percent) than in the sixth wave (63 percent). Thus, in the Chinese case the increase in the trust has happened in the second half of the 2000s. The same holds for Turkey (where the level in the fifth wave was 5 percent versus 12 percent in the sixth wave) and Russia (where the level in the fifth wave 26 percent versus 30 percent in the sixth wave). In terms of decreased social trust, a decline above five percentage point can be found in 10 out of the 38 countries. Besides Mexico, Armenia and Spain (displayed in Figure 9), Switzerland and India also belong to the countries with a clear tendency to decline in social cohesion. Finally, changes within five percentage points can be found in remaining 20 countries. Thus, also calculated this way, the main tendency is stability in trust levels.

Figure 11: Change in trust in most people (unadjusted) from 1990s (second/ third wave) to the 2000s (fifth/sixth wave) N=38



Finally, we are able to describe the changes over time found in the EVS. The relevant cases are the 27 countries, which both conducted the second (1990-93) and fourth (2008-10) wave. Figure 12 show the share of trusters respectively in the second and fourth wave. Again the overall finding is a strong correlation across time (Pearson correlation 0.93). Furthermore, there is a tendency to find increased trust among countries, which already in the early 1990s had high trust levels. Thus, all the high countries in the EVS are placed above the reference line. Thus, countries such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands seem to be caught in virtuous circle of trust.

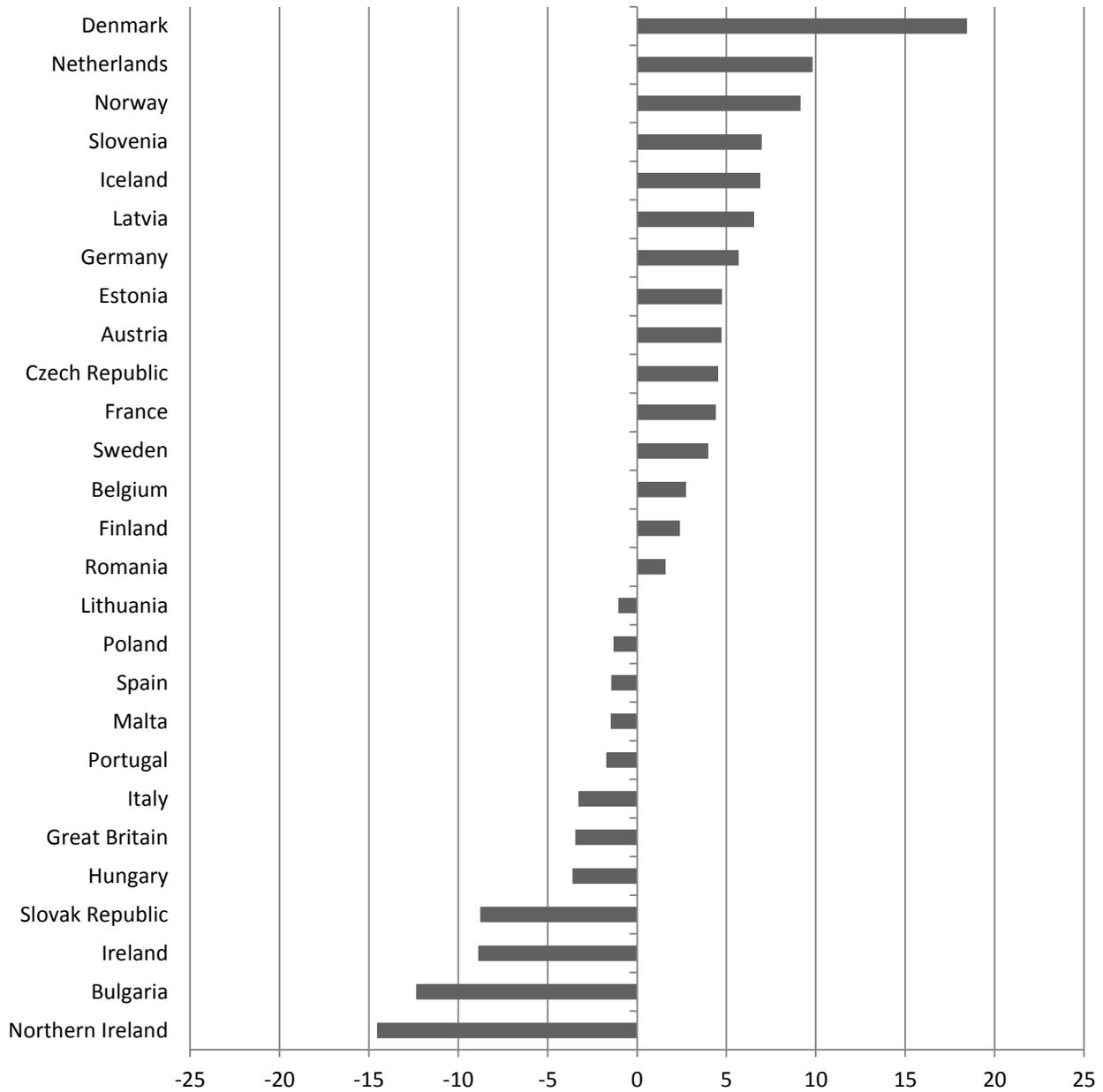
Figure 12: Share of citizens with trust in “most people” respectively in the second wave (1990-93) and fourth wave (2008-10). EVS. Including reference line



In seven of the 27 EVS countries, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Iceland, Latvia and Germany, one finds an increase above five percentage point (see Figure 13). In four countries, Northern

Ireland, Bulgaria, Ireland and Slovak republic a decrease above five percentage points is present. Finally, 16 countries have changes within five percentage points.

Figure 13. Change in share that “trust most people” from second (1990-93) to fourth (2008-10) EVS wave. Percentage point.



Based on both the WVS and EVS, the two most comprehensive data source available, the overall conclusion is that in terms of social trust little has changed since the World summit in 1995. Indeed the data are not perfect and for the data we have, there is always uncertainties attached to representative country samples. Nevertheless, pushing the data to the limits one can cover around one third of the countries of the world and having approximate measure of social trust is clearly better than not having any at all. Thus, today's sociologists are much suited to make conclusions about social cohesion than our former colleagues. And the data points in a clear direction: The level of social cohesion has not changed within the last two decades. There are indeed cases of increased social trust. But these cases are balanced by a more or less equally large number of countries where the level of social trust has decreased. In the WVS and EVS there are some indications of increased polarization but it can simply be a matter of more and more countries entering the WVS and EVS. In terms of polarization, the most clear pattern is that countries already having a high level of trust seem to be caught in a virtuous circle of trust. Whether this overall stability within the last two decades is good or bad news is a matter interpretation. However, measured against the goals stated at the World summit it is naturally disappointing that little have been achieved in terms of social trust.

Trust among the generation socialized after the World summit

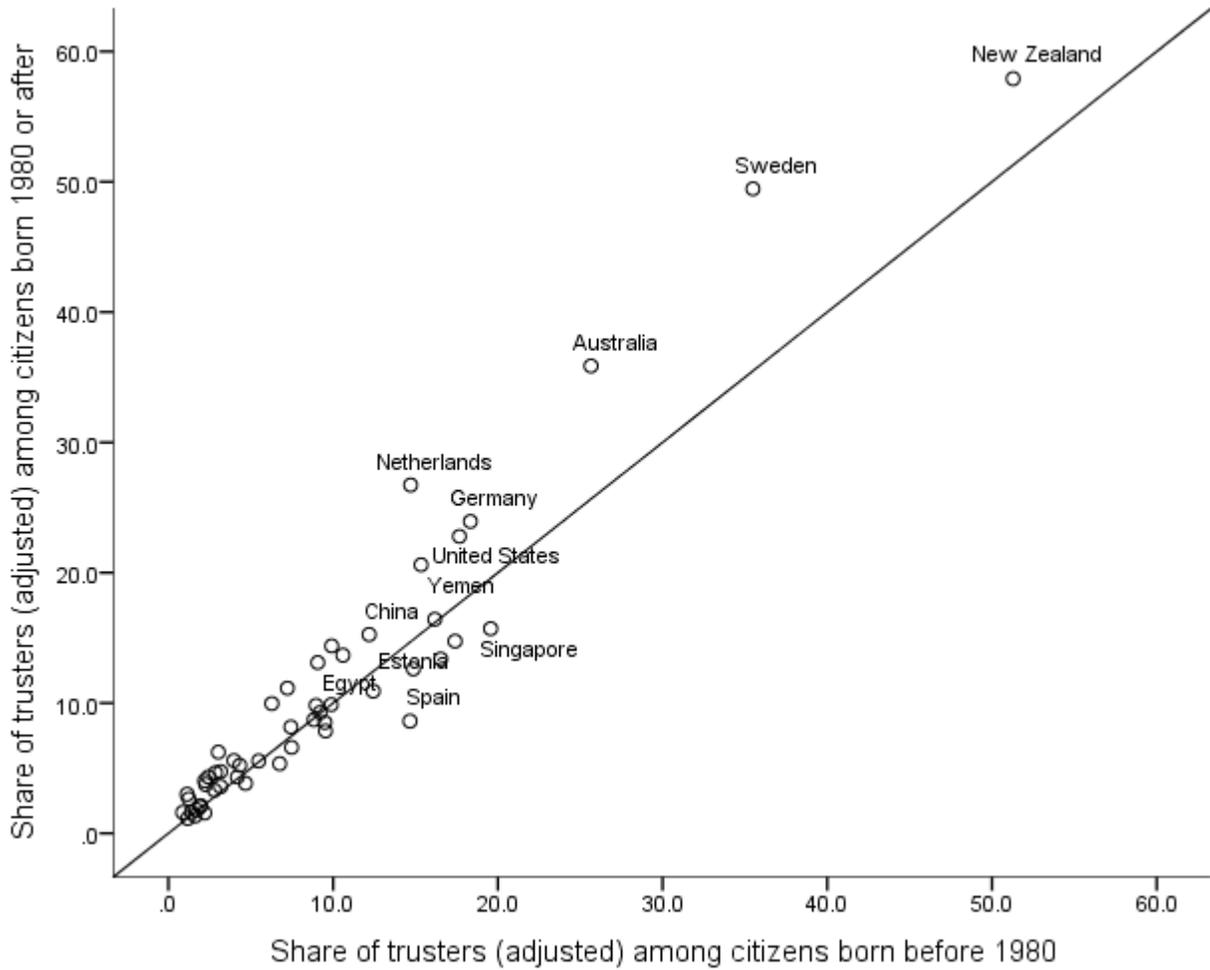
A general pattern of stability is the standard finding within trust research. And it is well-known that two decades is actually a rather short timespan for observing changes in social trust. One of the reasons is that trust in fellow citizens has found to be rather stable over the life course. As one grows up in a given society, one forms a basic understanding of this society and its citizens. And these basic impressions from the socialization in youth are hard to shake (Uslaner 2002). This is one of the most common ways to explain the stickiness over time within countries as well as the stickiness among migrants (in the US context trust levels of country of origin have been found to have effects across many generations, Uslaner 2008, however, different results have been found from the Nordic context, Dinesen 2012). Thus, when overall trust levels in a society increases overtime it is often caused by the coming a new generation with more faith in the trustworthiness of fellow citizens and the dying of a generation with less faith in fellow citizens. And the other way around, a decline in overall trust levels over time is typically caused by the coming of a new generation with low social trust and the dying of a generation with higher social trust. The classic example is the US, the best analyzed case of a decline in social trust (Putnam 2000, Uslaner 2002, Larsen 2013). The decline in social trust in the period from 1959 (when it was first measured in the US) to the 1990s was not a matter of everyone losing trust in other citizens. Asked in 2010, almost half of the Americans born in the 1940s responded that most people could be trusted (Larsen 2013). This generation, often labelled the baby boomers, which grew up in 1950s and 1960s, often label the "golden age", displays the highest trust levels ever experienced in the US. And within this generation, one actually finds a counter-trend; the so-called early baby-boomers (born between 1946 and 1955) actually increased their trust levels somewhat over

the period (Uslaner 2002:174). Thus, the American decline in trust is primarily caused by younger generations having less trust.

Due to this importance of socialization in youth it is interesting to analyze whether the new generation, socialized in the two decades after World submit indicates more or less social trust than the older generation. If the young generation indicates higher trust than the older, it is a sign that the given society could be on a path towards social coherence. If the opposite it the, it is a sign that the given society could be on a path towards social erosion. As the new, post-world-submit-generation, the report classifies respondents born in 1980 or thereafter. Thus, the oldest from this generation was 15 years old when the World Submit was held and around 31 years old, when the latest wave of WVS was collected, and around 28 years old, when the latest EVS was collected. The youngest from this generation, from which we have survey data in the WVS, was 18 years old when the latest wave was collected and thus around three years was three years old when the world summit has held. In the EVS the youngest was around five years old when the summit was held.

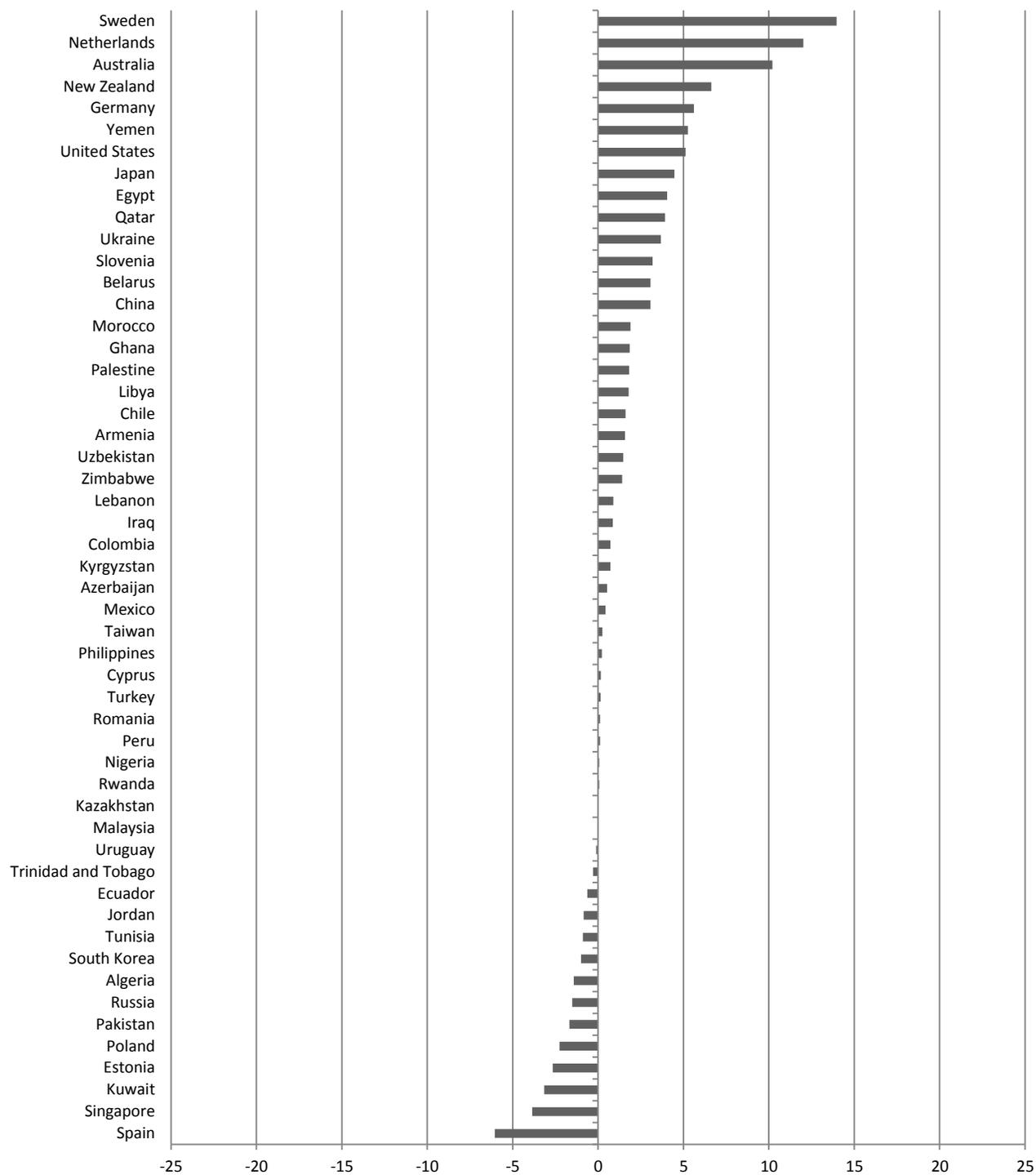
For the WVS the adjusted trust measure can be used as the data only is based on the latest wave. Figure 14 show the adjusted share of trusters respectively in the old generation (x-axis) and the post-world-submit-generation (y-axis).

Figure 14 : Share of trusters (adjusted) among the young (born 1980 or after) and old generation (born before 1980). All available countries in the sixth wave of WVS, 2010-13



As expected, there is a very strong correlation when the trust level of the old and young generation. Actually, the correlation is close to perfect linear (Pearson correlation = 0.96). In the language of statistical modelling, one is able to explain 92 percent of the cross-national variation among the young generation with the trust level found among the old generation ($R^2 = 0.92$). Thus, we simply do not find a country where those born before 1980 has high trust level and those born after had a low trust level (the lower right space in Figure 14); neither can one find the opposite (the higher left space in Figure 14). But still there is a little variation; in countries above the reference line, the young generation indicates more trust than the old and the opposite is the case in countries below the reference line. Figure 15 indicate the exact percentage point difference between the trust levels in the old and young generation.

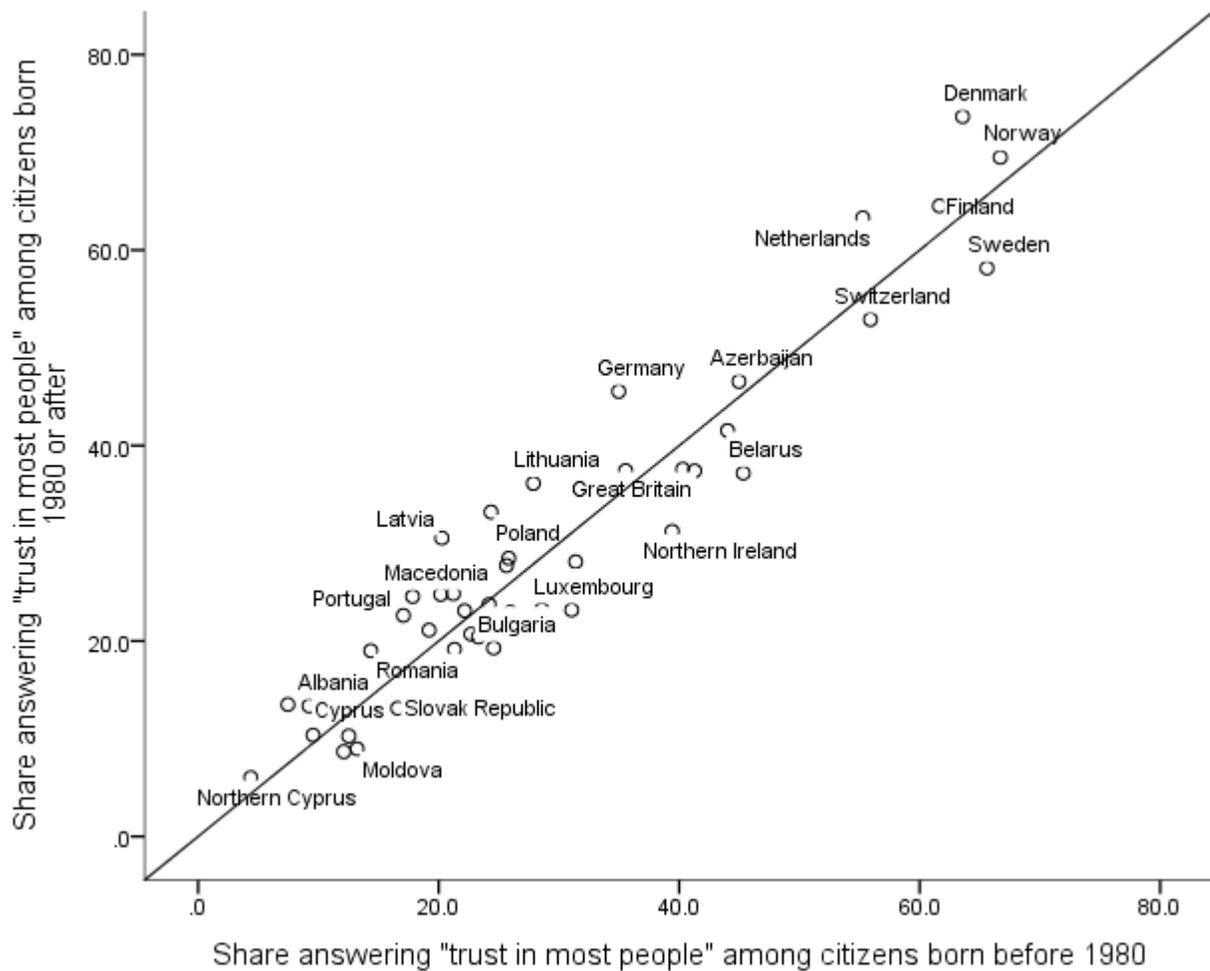
Figure 15: Difference in share of trusters (adjusted) between the young (born 1980 or after) and old generation (born before 1980). Percentage point



As with country differences and differences across time, the variation between generations can be caused by simple measurement errors related to the sampled group of citizens within the countries. Thus, only looking at difference above five percentage point, one only find one country, Spain, where the young generation indicate less trust than the old. One obvious explanation is that the economic crises of 2008 in Spain created a record high youth unemployment rate (a little below 50 percent when the WVS was fielded in Spain 2011). In five countries, Sweden, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Yemen and United states, the young generation has a trust level above five percent higher than the old. For the rest of the 44 countries, there was not any mentionable difference between trust levels of the youngest and the old generations.

The EVS data material demonstrates a very similar pattern. In the 47 surveyed countries there is again a close to perfect correlation between the trust level of the old generation and the trust level of the young generation (Pearson $r = 0.95$). Thus, in Figure 16 all countries are placed close the reference line. The little variation present are displayed in Figure 17.

Figure 16. Share with trust in “most people” among the young (born 1980 or after) and old generation (born before 1980. All available countries in the fourth wave of EVS, 2008-10. Including reference line

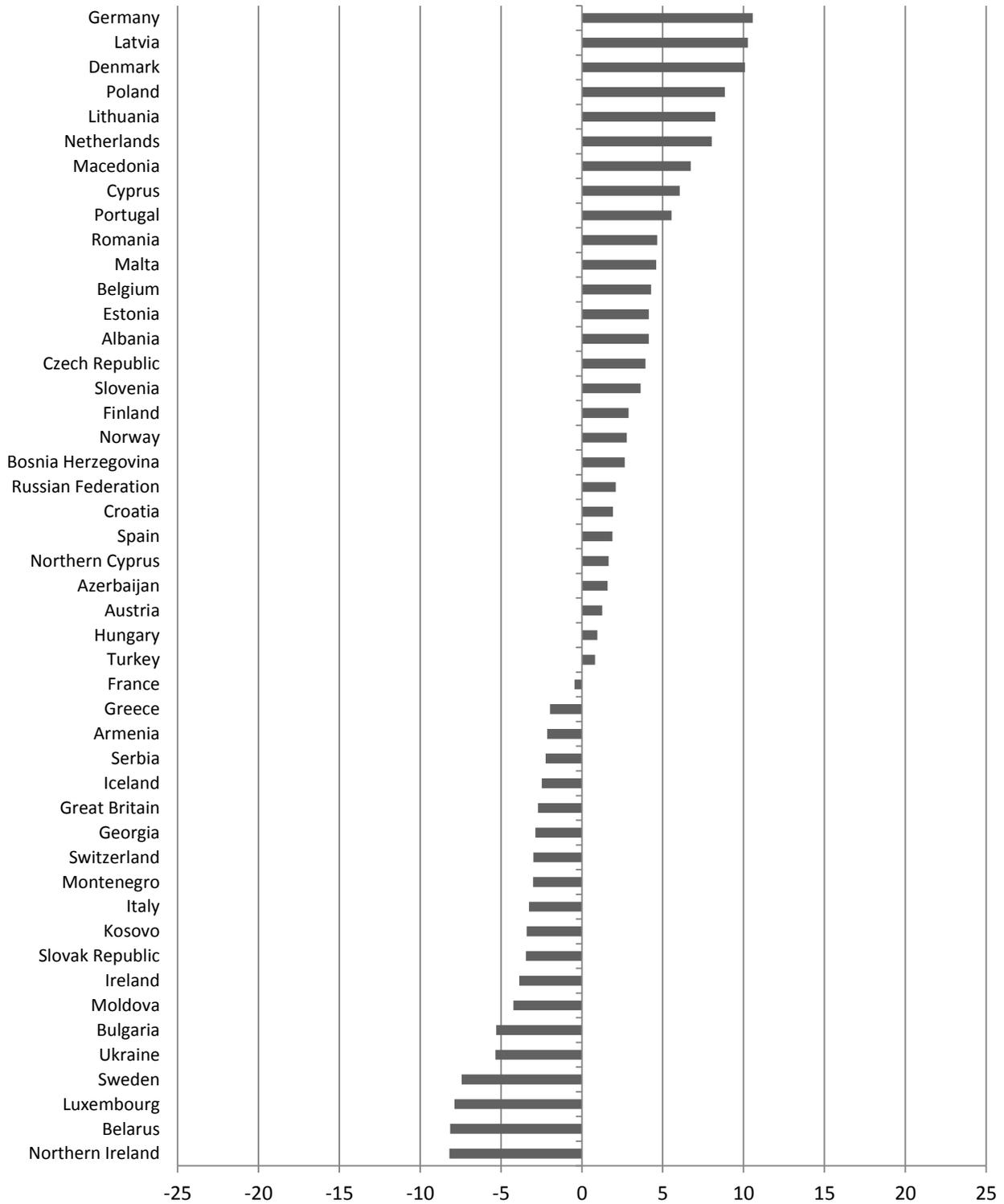


Asked around 2008-10, the young generation had a five percentage point or higher trust level in nine out of the 47 countries. These were Germany, Latvia, Denmark, Poland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Macedonia, Cyprus and Portugal. Sweden is not among these countries; actually the young generation display above five percentage lower trust than the old generation.⁴ But one also finds six countries where the young generation indicates a trust level below five percentage point of that of the old. Besides Sweden, these were Northern Ireland, Belarus, Luxembourg, Ukraine, and Bulgaria. Spain was not among these countries; properly due to the fact the youth unemployment was not nearly as severe

⁴ It is a little puzzle why the young Swedish generation indicate significantly less trust than the old generation when interviewed for the EVS in 2009, while the opposite is the case when interviewed for the WVS in 2011. It could be a matter of sudden optimism among the young Swedish generation around 2011 but it could also be a matter of simple measurement error caused by the sample (though measurement error of this size is unlikely, it is always a possibility when working with samples).

when the EVS was collected in 2008. For the rest of the 30 countries, there were not any mentionable difference between the youngest and the older generations.

Figure 17. Difference in share with trust in “most people” between the young (born 1980 or after) and old generation (born before 1980. All available countries in the fourth wave of EVS, 2008-10



The overall conclusion is that even focusing on the social trust of the young generation, which should be more sensitive to change than the overall trust levels studied in the previous sections, little has happened within the last two decades. One can naturally make more fine-grained studies of the generational differences but such analyses are unlikely to change the overall conclusion. In general, there is no sign of the coming of a more trusting generation; though exception such as Denmark can be found. And neither is there any sign of the coming of a less trusting generation; though exceptions such as Spain and Northern Ireland can be found. In terms of social trust, the world largely seem to reproduce it selves as it was in the 1990s. Young citizens in low trust environments turn into distrusters while young citizens in high trust environment turn into trusters.

Conclusion and discussion

Little has been achieved in terms of social integration within countries in the last two decades. This is the conclusion reached if one accepts the dominant view within current sociology that social trust among citizens is a valid indicator of social cohesion. The data are clearly not perfect but on the other hand the conclusion is not unsubstantiated; it relies on survey interviews with thousands of citizens around the world, which survey institutes have done their best to turn representative for whole populations of a given country.. Furthermore, the few additional data sources we have, e.g. the Latinobarometro, provide very similar evidence. Despite positive economic development in Latin America within the last two decades, the Latinobarometro demonstrates that horizontal trust between citizens has remained stable at a medium to low level in the 19 countries covered; the only exception is Venezuela, which experienced an increase in the share of trusters from 12 percent at the first measurement in 1996 to 26 percent at the last measurement in 2011(www.latinobarometro.org).

That social cohesion, measured as horizontal trust among citizens, has not increased, in general, does not necessarily imply that the world has not become a better place since the World summit in the mid1990s. If one extends the notion of social cohesion to also include objective living conditions (which runs against Durkheim's old definitions and therefore, in my opinion, only blur the discussions about social cohesion) there are indeed clear signs of improvement. The OECD report "Perspectives on Global Development 2012. Social cohesion in a shifting world" e.g. takes such a broad perspective and includes a number of objective measures such as trends in absolute and relative poverty rates (labelled "social inclusion") (2012). And in terms of number of humans lifted out of severe poverty, the development in emerging countries is indeed remarkable. The report has less indicators on "social mobility" (the other dimension in its broad approach to social cohesion) and no firm conclusion is reached. Finally, in terms of "social capital" (the third suggested dimension of social cohesion) the analyses are also sparse; the report is primarily concerned with trust in central governments and tax morale. Thus, in the OECD report it remains unclear whether social cohesion actually have increased or decreased when it comes to the cognitive elements, which are at the core of the academic

sociological discussions in this field (see above). Nevertheless, based on the findings from WVS and EVS analyzed in this report, the conclusion is that the improvements in objective living conditions have not (so far) brought much social integration. From what we know about social trust this is actually not surprising. Based on cross-sectional data, the finding is that economic prosperity (typically measured as GDP per capita) and social trust levels are only weakly correlated. This implies that economic prosperity in a country does not, in general, go together with a higher level of social trust. But it also implies that economic prosperity neither, in general, goes together with a lower level of social trust. Therefore it is not surprising that the economic crises of 2008 has not influenced trust levels around the world; with the exception of such cases as the youngest Spanish generation, which experienced unemployment rates around 50 percent.

The right answer is, probably, that trust is dependent on the *type* of economic growth in place. Thus, in line with the arguments also found in the OECD report on social cohesion (2012), one can perceive economic growth as an window of opportunity to increase social cohesion; not in itself a sufficient condition. Previous research has demonstrated that especially the level of economic inequality is of crucial importance; the level of economic inequality is among the strongest, and typically the strongest, predictor of cross-national differences in social trust (Bjørnskov 2007, Rothstein, Uslaner 2005). In the period from the end of the Second World War to the mid1970, the Western countries experienced a rapid economic growth combined with a modest level of economic inequality (Piketty 2014). This probably helped to pave the way for the high trust levels found in some of the Western countries, when the WVS and EVS started to measure social trust in the early 1980s. Since the 1970s economic growth largely takes place in an environment of increased economic inequality, both in the old Western and in the new emerging economies, not the least China (UNDP 2014). This type of growth is unlikely to generate social trust among citizens in society. At least in the short run, it is much more likely to erode social trust.

Why levels of economic inequality are so strongly linked to social trust have been somewhat of a puzzle for trust research. Larsen (2013) recently delivered a detailed account of the American and British way to the relative low trust level found in the mid1990s and the Danish and Swedish way to the current exceptional high trust levels (from a common part of departure as medium high trust countries) . The main argument was that these developments are closely linked to perceptions of living in a meritocratic middleclass society. On that basis the current political slogans of inclusive economic growth and social integration are indeed timely; and the development of a marginalized precariat, e.g. as the case with rural migration worker in China, is indeed likely to decrease levels of social trust among citizens. The is the emergence of a low educated group of citizens, often with a overrepresentation of immigrants or ethnic minorities, which cannot find jobs at the post-industrial labour markets of the richer Western countries. Thus, social trust is indeed dependent on the degree to which two other of the main goal from the World summit in Copenhagen can be met; the goal to “eradicate absolute poverty” (goal two) and to “support full employment”.

Another stable finding in previous research is that social trusts are linked to levels of corruption in the state apparatus (Rothstein 2005). This relationship can be given different explanations. One is that the state functions as guarantee when citizens in a society interact with each other, i.e. policy and court systems secure trustworthy behavior of other citizens. Another explanation is that the state and its civil servants come to serve as “role model” or standard for the rest of society. So the logic is that if corruption is (perceived to be) present in the state apparatus, the same judgments can easily be applied to the rest of society, including fellow citizens. Finally, a third explanation is that a corrupt state apparatus actually force ordinary citizens, even citizens with a will to be non-corrupt, to engage in corruptions. This kind of “social trap” is mainly theorized within political science and is excellent described by Rothstein (2005). The importance of building non-corrupt state institutions received less attention the UN declaration from 1995 and there is no sign that corruption, in general, have decreased with the last two decades. The “rule of law” and “control with corruption” indicators provided by the World Bank e.g. indicate that from 1996 to 2012, the number of countries with improved performance is balanced by an equally large number of countries with reduced performance (see e.g. Mungiu-Pippidi 2013 for trends in other measures). Thus, the continued presence of corruption is another plausible explanation for stability in social trust within the last two decades.

The “stickiness” of social trust within the last two decades demonstrates that it is by no means an easy task to create social trust within nation states. It should also be remembered that despite our ability, based on cross-sectional correlation analyses, to point to the importance of economic inequality and corruption in the state apparatus, high level of trust is the outcome of a multitude of processes connected to a long nation-building process. Neither does a clear pattern emerge from the countries, which we can follow over time. Thus, Banfield might actually be right that... *“there is no evidence that the ethos of a people can be changed according to plan”* (see quote in the introduction). To underline such a point one could point to experiences from e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. However, that establishing social trust between citizens is a difficult task should, in my opinion, not make world leaders refrain from setting political goals in this area. The argument is that attempts to create democracy, market economy and civil society without the presence of mutual trust among citizens are likely to fail.

Policy relevant implications and questions:

- Similarity of mind is difficult and problematic to create in diverse multicultural and highly differentiated societies. However, a shared perception of unknown fellow citizens being trustworthy is highly relevant in order to make such societies work.
- A shared perception of fellow citizens being trustworthy is not easily achieved. Such “societal glue” is unlikely to be created by societies simply being wealthier. On the country, the increased economic inequality often attached to economic progress is likely to lower trust levels.
- Social trust in diverse multicultural and highly differentiated societies is dependent on collective political actions aiming at creating a coherent society; this is an ongoing nation building process. Pivotal in this nation building process are a moderation of economic inequalities and the establishment of a uncorrupt state institutions.

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Appendix 1: Trust levels (standard) measured in the WVS (weighted)

	First wave 1981-84	Second Wave 1989-1993	Third Wave 1994-98	Fourth wave 1999- 2004	Fifth wave 2005-09	Sixth wave 2010-14
Albania			27	24		
Algeria				11		18
Andorra					20	
Argentina	27	23	18	15	18	
Armenia			25			11
Australia	48		40		46	52
Azerbaijan			21			15
Bangladesh			21	24		
Belarus		26	24			35
Bosnia			26	16		
Brazil		7			9	
Bulgaria			29		22	
Burkina Faso					15	
Canada				39	43	
Chile		23	22	23	13	13
China		60	52	55	53	63
Colombia			11		15	4
Croatia			25			
Cyprus					10	8
Czech Rep.		30				
Dominican Rep.			26			
Ecuador						7
Egypt				38	19	22
El Salvador			15			
Estonia			22			40
Ethiopia					24	
Finland	57		49		59	
France					19	
Georgia			19		18	
Germany			33		37	45
Ghana					9	5
Great Britain			31		31	
Guatemala					15	
Hong Kong					41	
Hungary	33		23		29	

India		35	38	41	23	
Indonesia				52	43	
Iran				65	11	
Iraq				48	41	32
Israel				24		
Italy					29	
Japan	41	42		43	39	39
Jordan				28	31	13
Kazakhstan						38
Kuwait						30
Kyrgyzstan				17		38
Latvia			25			
Lebanon						11
Libya						11
Lithuania			22			
Macedonia			8	14		
Malaysia					9	9
Mali					18	
Mexico	18	34	31	21	16	12
Moldova			22	15	18	
Montenegro			32	34		
Morocco				24	13	13
Netherlands					45	67
New Zealand			49		51	57
Nigeria		23	18	26		15
Norway			65		74	
Pakistan			21	31		23
Palestine						18
Peru			5	11	6	9
Philippines			6	8		3
Poland		35	18		19	23
Puerto Rico			6	23		
Qatar						21
Romania			19		20	8
Russia		38	24		26	30
Rwanda					5	17
Saudi Arabia				53		
Serbia			30	19		
Serbia and Montenegro					15	

Singapore				17		37
Slovakia		23	27			
Slovenia			16		18	20
South Africa	29	28	18	12		
South Korea	38	34	30	27	28	27
Spain		31	30	34	20	20
Sweden	57		60	66	68	62
Switzerland		43	41		54	
Taiwan					24	31
Tanzania				8		
Thailand					42	
Trinidad and Tobago					4	3
Tunisia						16
Turkey		10	7	19	5	12
Uganda				8		
Ukraine			31		28	25
United States	45		36	36	39	35
Uruguay			22		28	15
Uzbekistan						14
Venezuela			14	16		
Viet Nam				41	52	
Yemen						40
Zambia					12	
Zimbabwe				12		8

Appendix: Trust levels (standard) measured in the EVS (weighted)

	First wave 1981-84	Second wave 1990-93	Third wave 199-2001	Fourth wave 2008-10
Albania				10
Armenia				21
Austria		32	34	36
Azerbaijan				45
Belarus			42	45
Belgium	29	33	31	36
Bosnia Herzegovina				27
Bulgaria		30	27	18
Croatia			18	20
Cyprus				9
Czech Republic		26	24	31
Denmark	51	58	67	76
Estonia		28	23	32
Finland		63	58	65
France	24	23	22	27
Georgia				23
Germany ¹	31	35	35	40
Great Britain	44	44	30	40
Greece			24	22
Hungary		25	22	21
Iceland	41	44	41	51
Ireland	42	47	36	38
Italy	25	34	33	31
Kosovo				11
Latvia		19	17	26
Lithuania		31	25	30
Luxembourg			26	33
Macedonia				19
Malta	10	24	21	23
Moldova				12
Montenegro				25
Netherlands	44	53	60	63
Northern Cyprus				5
Northern Ireland	45	44	40	29
Norway	61	65		74

Poland		29	19	28
Portugal		21	10	20
Romania		16	10	18
Russian Federation			24	29
Serbia				12
Slovak Republic		22	16	13
Slovenia		17	22	24
Spain	34	36	39	35
Sweden	57	66	66	70
Switzerland				55
Turkey			7	11
Ukraine			27	28

¹ First wave, only West Germany included.