



Institutional Trust among second-generation immigrants in the Netherlands: a qualitative study on the role of familial socialization, transnationalism and political instability in the country of origin

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to scholarly debates on the sources of institutional trust in immigrant populations, specifically focusing on the factors influencing the trust of African second-generation immigrants in The Netherlands. Building on literature highlighting the role of pre-migratory experiences, as well as the influence of instability in the sending country on the political behaviour of immigrants in the receiving societies, the study explores how second-generations perceive political instability in their country of origin and how this shapes their trust in Dutch institutions. It brings an innovative contribution to the field from a methodological point of view, by adopting a qualitative research method to investigate narratives, opinions and reasoning behind the institutional trust of a demographic whose confidence in political institutions is often only represented in quantitative studies. It also brings further empirical evidence supporting the explanatory leverage of experiential theories on the sources of institutional trust by showing the important role played by day-to-day encounters with institutions in the development of second-generation trust or distrust.

Results show that the institutional trust of Dutch-African second-generations is predominantly limited to the dimensions of functioning and reliability of the institutions, and seldom extended to the dimensions of fairness, transparency, and representation. This scepticism is often grounded on personal experiences of discrimination with institutions. Familial political socialization also plays a role in the transmission of perceptions of political instability in the country of origin, with this encouraging a limited ‘trust bonus’ on the efficiency of Dutch institutions, especially compared to the institutional dysfunctionality in the origin countries.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

Confidence in democratic institutions is central to maintaining the stability of political regimes. For authorities to maintain the capacity to meet commitments and implement policies that concretely benefit the well-being of the population, citizens need to trust the transparency and fairness of the institutional set-up (Pietsch & Mcallister, 2016). With increased numbers of migrants settling in Europe, scholars have not overlooked the topic of immigrant institutional trust, investigating the factors influencing their levels of confidence in the host country (Kaasa & Andriani, 2022; van Slageren & van Tubergen, 202; Ziemes et al., 2020; de Vroome et al., 2013). Pre-migratory experiences of first-generation immigrants in Western societies have received particular attention, specifically regarding how experiences and socialisation in the country of origin affect their attitudes toward politics in their current country of residence (Okundaye & Ishiyama, 2024). Researchers have demonstrated significant effects of authoritarian and unstable political background on the political engagement and institutional trust of immigrants. However, there is no agreement on whether pre-migratory experiences of instability more commonly lead to a ‘trust increase’, or on the contrary, to interiorised distrust in institutions (Frazier et al., 2015).

Despite the lively debate, limited interest has been shown toward the institutional trust of second-generations born and raised in the host society. Given the influx of first-generation migrants possibly holding atypical levels of institutional trust due to pre-migratory experiences in unstable political environments, it is important to investigate such processes in second-generations socialised in Western societies. Addressing this need, Pietsch and Mcallister’s (2016) study explored the levels of confidence in Australian institutions among immigrant populations, examining whether they differed between first- and second-generations. Results from their study showed that first-generations from authoritarian or unstable political environments had generally higher levels of trust, compared to migrants from democratic countries, as well as the local population average. However, second-generations with parents from authoritarian countries showed lower-than-average trust levels. These—and other—findings inevitably lead to open questions about the role played by parental political socialisation in the transmission of institutional trust. Investigating whether pre-migratory experiences of instability of first-generations leads to reduced trust of their children represents a timely question to be addressed by literature.

Given these theoretical debates, this thesis aims to make a contribution by answering the following research question: *How do perceptions of political instability in origin countries of second-generation immigrants in the Netherlands influence their trust in Dutch political institutions?*

To do so, it focuses on African second-generations living or studying in Rotterdam, by adopting a transnational theoretical lens to understand the cross-border influence of origin country on their institutional trust. Focusing the study on African second-generations lends itself for research on perceptions of political instability, and its relationship with institutional trust in The Netherlands for several reasons: Firstly, Africa as a continent has seen considerable instability, both in terms of social turmoil and institutional dysfunctionality, generating a large number of people migrating to seek stability and better life conditions in The Netherlands (Blakely, 2005; Gemmeke, 2013; Van Hear, 1998). Secondly, according to the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS), African second-generations in the Netherlands are more than 127.000; a number predicted to increase in the coming years (CBS, 2021; Jennissen et al., 2022). Despite these numbers, scholars have dedicated limited attention to the African second-generation and their social and political behaviour, as well as identity-formation and belonging processes. Thus, understanding this expanding demographic represents a crucial research necessity.

1.2 Relevance

This study is both theoretically and societally relevant. Firstly, the dissertation addresses a significant gap in the literature on the institutional trust of African second-generations, by adopting a transnational research approach and addressing the influence of parental political socialisation, and perceptions of instability in the country of origin. Considering that c.19% of residents in the Netherlands with foreign-born parents are of African origin (CBS, 2022), it is important to give attention to this conspicuous category and the nexus between their transnational identities and political behaviour. Secondly, institutional trust represents a fundamental component of the legitimacy of institutions. It assures effective governance, facilitates social interactions and maintains the stability of democratic systems. Consequently, it is important to address the factors shaping and influencing the institutional trust of an increasing demographic in most European societies (Bornstein & Tomkins, 2015). Given the foundational importance of confidence in democratic institutions for the stability of the political regime, this research aims to contribute a

small-scale picture of the situation in the Netherlands, potentially offering policymakers a picture on an overlooked demographic. Finally, the study contributes to further knowledge in public policy due to the implications of institutional trust for social cohesion in increasingly multi-ethnic democracies, such as the Netherlands. By exploring patterns and factors influencing trust of second-generations, this research aims to uncover hidden variables impacting their democratic participation in the Dutch context, offering increased tools to policy-makers.

This thesis will begin with a theoretical framework addressing the main strands of literature that the research engages with, namely, conceptualisations of second-generations, theories of transnationalism, forms of political socialisation, definitions and metrics of political instability and, finally, the main schools of thought on the determinants of institutional trust. Following this review, the three primary expectations of the study will be laid out and explained, before presenting the research design and methodology used. The findings section will be structured in line with the three expectations, aiming to verify or disprove them through empirical analysis. Thus, it will first look at the impact of transnational identity and cultural factors on second-generations' worldviews, then examine their perceptions of political instability in origin countries and the links with host societies, and ultimately delve into what the interviews reveal regarding political socialisation processes of immigrants. The thesis concludes with final discussions on the findings and future research recommendations.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Second-generations in the Netherlands: definitions, characteristics, and the African diaspora

Second-generations are defined as children of immigrants born or raised in the destination country (Lazzari, 2010). However, specific interpretations vary, with some scholars adopting a more restrictive definition—solely including children born in the host country with one or two migrant parents—whereas others extend the definition to individuals who migrated in early-childhood and spent their major formative years in the host country (Corchia, 2015; Bello, 2018). Rumbaut’s (1997) “decimal” classification of the second generation (which uses the age of arrival in the host society as its main criterion) stands as one the most cited definitions. As table (2.1) shows, generation 2.00, 1.75 and 1.5 are characterised by socialisation in the destination country, whereas generation 1.25 and 1.00 involve individuals who have mostly been socialised in the country of origin.

Table (2.1) – Rumbaut’s classification of second-generations

Classification	Age of Arrival	Main Characteristics
Generation 2.00	Born in the receiving country	Full socialization in host country
Generation 1.75	0-5	Limited memories of origin country, similar to GEN2s, full socialization in host country
Generation 1.5	6-12	Start of socialization process in origin country, completion in host country
Generation 1.25	13-17	Situations of discomfort in socialization, adaptive situations similar to first-generations
Generation 1.00	18+	Full socialization in origin country

In recent decades, the adaptation, acculturation and socialization processes of second-generations in The Netherlands have received increasing scholarly attention, with substantial consideration

given to children of Surinamese, Turkish and Moroccan migrants, as these represent the country's largest ethnic minority groups (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015).

In this study, second-generations (or GEN2s) are understood as individuals with one or two parents of African origin, born and raised in The Netherlands, or migrated between the ages 0-12, following Rumbaut's (1997) classification of generations 1.75 and 1.5.

2.2 Transnationalism: a double frame of belonging, cultural identity and engagement

The concept of "transnationalism" was introduced by a number of key anthropological works, including Basch et al. (1994) and Schiller and Blanc (1994:7), who described it as a phenomenon where "migrants develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organisational, religious and political that span borders". This theoretical approach was soon embraced by migration scholars, who adopted transnationalism as an analytical lens to understand the home-host country nexus (Vertovec, 2001). According to Portes (1997:812) migrant transnational communities are networks that span borders, created by migrants themselves, through which they live dual lives. Specifically, "participants are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both". Undoubtedly, migrant experiences are highly complex and dynamic. Thus, as globalisation has facilitated and made long-distance communication more accessible, and international—including cross-continental—travel has become easier and more affordable, migrants now maintain regular and diverse ties with their countries of origin (Kyei et al., 2022; Burholt et al., 2016).

With many first-generations maintaining close ties and exchanges between the two different contexts, open questions remain on whether transnationalism has substantial social and cultural impacts on the identity construction processes of second-generations immigrants (Vertovec, 2001; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). Portes (2001) and Rumbaut (2002), for instance, argued that transnationalism is relevant for the first-generation, but not their children. Alba and Nee (2003) affirmed that it was less likely for immigrant transnational practices to extend beyond the first-generation. Others, however, counterargued that the transnational activities of second-generations should not be completely dismissed, despite their access to the transnational social field being potentially more limited compared to their parents' (Levitt, 2009).

Cultural identity—an important component of transnationalism—is primarily based on an individual's sense of belonging (Phinney & Ong, 1997) and influenced both by the culture and traditions of the origin country, and by the places in which one lives (Burholt et al., 2016; Somerville, 2024; Phinney & Ong, 2007). As literature suggests second-generations develop complex, multiple and context-specific identities spanning across borders. Studies made on the feelings of belonging of second-generations in The Netherlands reveal that they have relatively weaker feelings of belonging and emotional attachments to The Netherlands than Dutch natives (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015). As cultural aspects of belonging represent a significant determinant of institutional trust (Kaasa & Andriani, 2021), these findings are crucial for this study. Second-generations who adopt double frames of reference and are part of transnational social spaces, by speaking the native language, visiting family, participating in their ethnic community, etc. (Somerville, 2024), represent relevant subjects for studies on bicultural belonging and perception of public institutions.

2.3 Intergenerational transmission of values: the role of familial political socialization in immigrant households

The concept of political socialisation has been used to explain the role of familial and external factors influencing the formation of individual political values. It is a process involving both formal political training (through the education system or the media), and informal transmission of norms and values through familial socialisation (Niemi & Sobieszek, 1977). Childhood and young adulthood are highly sensitive for the development of political interest and civic participation, making parents and family members prime agents of political socialisation (Borkowska & Luthra, 2024). Parents influence the political engagement of their children through political characterisations of family life: political imagery, conversations and teachings, media consumed, all contribute to shaping political behaviour of children (Neundorf & Smets, 2017).

The applicability of the top-down model of familial political socialisation within immigrant families has been tested by different scholars (Terriquez & Kwon, 2015; Borkowska & Luthra, 2024). While traditional models of socialisation highlight the unidirectional influence of parental political engagement, increasing literature shows that influence is rather bidirectional, as the naturalisation processes of second-generations raised and socialised in the host country can compensate the migration-related political engagement barriers faced by first-generations

(Bloemraad & Trost, 2008, Borkowska & Luthra, 2024). Indeed, migration alters intergenerational family dynamics, leading to different political socialisation processes, for two main reasons: first-generations are usually socialised in political contexts different from the one they live in and, secondly, they spend part of their adult lives outside of the polity of the receiving country (Ibid).

2.4 Political Instability: perceptions and impact

The debate over root causes of political instability spans across various disciplines, involving political scientists, sociologists, and demographers, to name a few. Many economists, meanwhile, have focused on its relationship with economic growth (Venieris & Gupta, 1986; Gupta 1990; Jong-A-Pin, 2009; Carmignani, 2003; Gök, 2020). Crucially, however, scholars have struggled to find reliable empirical indicators measuring political instability directly. Consequently, different units have been adopted. Londregan and Poole (1990), for instance, relied on the number of *coups d'état*, while Barro (1991) used the number of political assassinations and revolutions. Others used the propensity of government change in relation to various institutional variables (Cukierman, Edwards & Tabellini, 1992). While most of these earlier studies viewed political instability as one-dimensional, Jong-A-Pin (2009) described political instability as a four-dimensional phenomenon involving: mass civil protest, politically motivated aggression, instability *within* the political regime, and instability *of* the political regime. Generally, the term has been used to indicate state-led violence, revolutions, insurrections, civil war, and riots (Feng, 2003; Jackman, 1976). A major consequence and implication of such events is mass migration (Williams, 2008).

Political instability has significant effects on individuals' internal worldviews. Some literature suggests that those whose pre-migratory experience is characterised by violence might develop low institutional trust in the receiving country (Kolczynska, 2014). Bilodeau (2008), for instance showed that migrants from autocratic or heavily repressive societies were much less likely to be politically engaged in the settlement country, generally feeling less positive about politics in the host society. However, Voicu and Tufiş (2017) have demonstrated that many migrants who experience political turmoil in their country of origin actually increase their political trust and engagement in the settlement country. Further studies support this, highlighting a more positive outlook on the receiving country due to comparison (Röder & Mülhau, 2012). In other words, the effects of political instability in the country of origin, although ambiguous, certainly have direct implications on the political engagement and democratic participation of first-generation

immigrants. As a consequence to the above-described processes of intergenerational political socialisation, this could then influence the institutional trust of second-generations also.

To capture the agency underlying migration decisions, this study will focus on the perception of disruptive economic, social and political events in the country of origin of second-generations. Based on the literature, political instability will be broadly understood as dysfunctional state-society relations, thus also including limited or compromised access to political rights and civil liberties, as well as violence and societal turmoil. A major consequence of political instability is declining political trust—considered a key indicator of state legitimacy, as it measures society’s confidence in the political institutions that create the state (Mishler & Rose, 2001). By understanding how perceptions of political instability have been transmitted to second-generations, and how second-generations approach and interpret the political situation in their origin countries through transnational ties, the study adds to the emerging debate on the importance of pre-migratory experiences.

2.5 Institutional Trust: sources, debates, and relevance

Institutions are generally described as “formal and informal norms and rules shaping human interactions and social exchanges” (Kaasa & Andriani, 2021). According to Bornstein & Tomkins (2015, p.4), institutional trust “promotes democracy, assures effective governance, facilitates social interactions, and optimises organisational productivity”, while also contributing to citizens’ overall living standard. Literature has defined and measured “trust” in different ways, including as part of the broader concept of “social capital” (Putnam, 1993). It is understood as the confidence individuals place in political, legal, and security institutions to act in a fair, competent, and impartial manner (Mishler & Rose, 2001). As developed by Easton (1965), ‘*political* trust’ can be understood as a general expectation for the institutions to act according to the rules and precepts of democracy. In other words, citizens acknowledging the authority and fairness of institutional actors (Hooghe & Zmerli, 2011).

A central debate within relevant literature regards the sources of institutional trust. Two main theoretical frameworks engage in this conversation: cultural and institutional (also called “experiential”) theories. Cultural theories suggest that institutional trust originates outside of the political sphere, stemming from cultural norms and representing an extension of interpersonal trust

(learned through socialisation), which is then projected to political institutions (Mishler & Rose, 2001). In line with sociological perspectives, institutions are viewed as more than rules and structures, but rather as social constructs that gain legitimacy through cultural norms and political socialisation (Schmidt, 2010). In this framework, political trust is understood as a “stable cultural trait passed on from one generation to the next through parental socialization” (Dinesen, 2012: 273). Kaasa and Andriani (2021) specifically looked at the influence of cultural context on institutional trust, using theoretical dimensions of individualism-collectivism, comparing contexts where group loyalty is expected with contexts where individual freedom and autonomy are valued. They showed that cultural context impacts institutional trust by preconditioning individuals’ perceptions of public institutions, adding explanatory leverage to cultural perspectives. Experiential theories, on the other hand, propose that trust is endogenous to the political system, representing a consequence of institutional performance, with well-performing institutions generating confidence, whereas un-trustworthy institutions become objects of scepticism (Hetherington, 1998). In other words, institutions are viewed as “incentive structures that reduce the uncertainties resulting from the multiplicity of individual preferences” and trust is seen as the rational consequence to institutional performance (Schmidt, 2010: 6). Broadly, the perspective emphasises the malleability of trust (Dinesen, 2012), as context-specific experiences of fairness, impartiality and transparency within institutions are viewed as what fosters or hinders trust, for both natives and immigrants.

2.5.1 Immigrant political trust

Immigrants represent an important category for understanding the explanatory leverage of both cultural and institutional theories (Dinesen, 2012). By examining whether trust remains the same as before the migratory experience or changes and adapts to the level of natives in the settlement country, it is possible to understand the impact of the institutional environment (Ibid). Voicu and Tufiş (2017) showed that institutional trust in immigrants is culturally embedded, thus dependent on both the origin country’s heritage and the host culture’s influence. Furthermore, studies from the Western context have shown that first-generation immigrants have generally higher levels of institutional trust than natives, with this gap being defined as “trust bonus” (Kolczynska, 2014; Wenzel 2006; Bilodeau & Nevitte, 2003). According to Röder and Mülhau (2012) this “trust bonus” can be explained through immigrants’ different expectations of governmental performance. The study showed that confidence increased when lower expectations have been set in the origin

country. Indeed, foreign-born individuals act according to a “dual frame of reference”, which anchors them to two different institutional contexts, leading them to benchmark the settlement country’s institutions based on the origin country’s reality (Kolczynska, 2014).

The “trust bonus” seemingly diminishes with second-generations, who adapt their political trust levels to the majority of the population (Maxwell, 2013). While for first-generations pre-migratory memories of unfavourable political and social conditions lead to optimism for the receiving country, for second-generations the process appears more complicated. According to Kolczynska (2014), the lack of direct pre-migratory experiences provides a weaker dual reference frame when evaluating institutions. Furthermore, second-generations are more aware of discrimination and marginalisation experiences compared to the first-generation, contributing to feelings of distrust towards institutions (Michelson, 2003). Dinesen’s (2012) research on second-generation trust in Denmark showed that while parental transmission of trust plays a significant part in their socialisation, first-hand experiences, and perceived performance and fairness of institutions appear more significant.

However, Pietsch and McAllister’s (2016) findings from Australia, mentioned above, showed that the origin country’s political environment does hold a notable, though ambiguous, link with second-generation institutional trust. Interestingly, second-generations with parents from authoritarian countries showed less trust in institutions, whereas first-generations from similar backgrounds had higher trust. Yet, the authors then stated:

“When looking at confidence in *political* institutions, why are immigrants’ political origins seemingly determinant for second-generation but not for first-generation immigrants?” (p.110)

Given the opposing perspectives characterising this debate, the sources of political trust of second-generations and the role of pre-migratory experiences of first-generations from unstable political environments stand as relevant research questions.

2.6 Study Expectations: Converging Transnationalism, Political Instability and Institutional Trust in Second-generations

This research project builds on the theoretical frameworks presented above to formulate three, multifaceted and broad exploratory expectations. Through a transnational framework, it converges theories on institutional trust, intergenerational political socialisation and political instability in

origin countries to investigate how origin influences institutional trust among second-generations socialised in the Dutch political context.

Academic debates have historically considered the nation-state as a container of social, economic and political processes. However, first- and second-generation migrants are involved in processes of “power, orientations, identities and networks” which “criss-cross sovereign national states” (Beck, 2000:11). For this reason, transnationalism is predicted to influence how second-generations interpret the political environment in the country of origin and in The Netherlands. Building on Sommerville’s (2008) research on the transnational identities of second-generations in Canada, the study expects second-generation Dutch-Africans to adopt identities that express their transnational connection to their parents’ origin country. This connection is predicted to develop through consumption of media from the country of origin, communication with family and the composition of their social network, creating a transnational space to develop their identities (Sommerville, 2008). The effects of transnationalism, however, are expected to go beyond cultural identity. Due to feelings of belonging splitting between The Netherlands and the African origin country, the study expects the interviewed second-generations to use their ‘dual frame of reference’ to compare the situations in the two different contexts (Röder & Mülhau, 2012). **(E1)**

Despite the different conceptualisations and debates on the objective causes of political instability, limited studies address citizens’ subjective perceptions of political instability on a micro-level. As migration *per se* has substantial impact on livelihood and family relationships (Levitt, 1998), this study expects pre-migratory experiences and perceptions of instability to have mixed effects on the worldview of second-generations (Kolczynska, 2014). These perceptions might either lead to relatively positive feelings towards Dutch institutions, thus creating a ‘trust bonus’ in the second-generations too, or heighten feelings of institutional betrayal, thus weakening trust in the host society’s institutions as already demonstrated through empirical research in the Australian context (Pietsch & Mcallister, 2016). **(E2)**

The study expects both cultural and experiential theories on the sources of institutional trust to hold partial explanatory leverage to the research question, however the experiential framework is expected to play a more dominant role. Thus, on the one hand, building on transferability theories—which argue that migrants transfer political knowledge and behaviour

from their origin country to the settlement country—and intergenerational processes of familial political socialisation, the study expects second-generations to interiorise (consciously or not) experiences and perceptions transmitted by first-generations (Borkowska & Luthra, 2014; Niemi & Sobieszek, 1977). Their trust in Dutch institutions is expected to be influenced by opinions, conversations and experiences heard from parents and family discussing political situations in the Netherlands and situations of instability in the origin country (Wu, 2022; Dinesen, 2012). On the other hand, due to these second-generations being politically socialised in The Netherlands, their day-to-day experiences of fairness, reliability, and representation with institutions are expected to be the major source of trust or distrust (Hetherington, 1998; Dinesen, 2012; Michelson, 2003; Pietsch & Mcallister, 2016). (E3)

Overall, through this theoretical framework, the study aims to uncover major influences of second-generations institutional trust, expecting it to be the fruit of a complex and layered process involving transnationalism, first-hand experience with institutions and inherited perceptions from the origin country

3. Research Design

3.1 Methodological Approach

This dissertation aims to answer the following research question:

RQ: How do perceptions of political instability in origin countries of second-generation immigrants in the Netherlands influence their trust in Dutch political institutions?

The main research question is then divided into the following sub-questions:

SQ1: How does transnationalism influence the perceptions of political environments of second-generations in The Netherlands?

SQ2: How do second-generations perceive political instability in the country of origin and how are these perceptions transmitted?

SQ3: To what extent do intergenerational processes of political socialization and day-to-day experiences with institutions influence the institutional trust of second-generations?

To answer the main research question and the attached sub-questions, the study adopted a qualitative methods approach. The large majority of the studies made on the topic of political trust, generally, and immigrant political trust, specifically, have been conducted quantitatively. This allowed for a broad knowledge of the trends and patterns on immigrant political trust across the European and North-American contexts. However, crucially, these studies lack an in-depth focus on the narratives and perceptions of immigrants themselves. For this reason, by adopting a qualitative approach, this study adds to the ongoing debate on first- and second-generation political trust by bringing forth opinions and experiences of the subjects involved. In other words, the qualitative method allowed for an in-depth investigation of second-generations' perceptions of political instability in the countries of origin, as well as opinions on the transparency, fairness, and reliability of Dutch political institutions (Ljunge, 2014; Dinesen, 2012). By exploring narratives on trust and/or distrust and personal recountings of experiences with institutions, the research considered different narratives and interpretation from the respondents themselves. In the context of this study, the qualitative approach represented a fit choice, as it allowed for a deeper exploration of meanings, perceptions and experiences (Zapata Barrero & Yalaz, 2018). Furthermore, the qualitative approach incentivised conceptual refinement throughout the data collection process, as well as the redefinition of expectations, by listening to the voices of individuals who are often

represented statistically, rather than qualitatively (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

3.2 Case selection

To answer the research questions, the main focus of the study is on second-generations of African descent living or studying in Rotterdam. This selection is justified by a number of reasons. Firstly, despite African immigrants representing a significant percentage of the immigrant population in the Netherlands, scholars haven't dedicated much attention to their political behaviours. For this reason, by focusing on African second-generations, this study aims to shed light on the realities of this demographic group. Secondly, according to various reports (including but not limited to the Freedom House 2025 report¹), the African continent saw a major trend of political instability, authoritarianism and weak governance structures, (although to a varying degree). This makes African second-generations an ideal population for the exploration of perceptions of political instability. An initial identification of political environments of origin countries of respondents was made through the Freedom House Index, which is an indicator that rates people's access to political rights and civil liberties in 210 countries, as well as the transparency of the political institutions, classifying them as "Free", "Partly Free" and "Non-Free".

In addition, the city of Rotterdam represents an ideal setting for a small-scale study on institutional trust due to its highly-diverse immigrant population and the high proportion of second-generations of African descent (Scholten et al., 2019).

3.3 Sampling Strategy

This study employed a snowball, purposive sampling strategy, predominantly aiming for respondents through referral processes in which participants nominated other potential participants from their social networks. Although this method facilitated the risk of participants nominating individuals who share similar characteristics, it also allowed the discovery of participants who otherwise might have been unreachable (Etikan et al., 2016). Initial recruitment happened through informal personal connections. Subsequently, participants were found through African student associations in Rotterdam and immigrant religious organisations attended by a significant number of African second-generations. After that, respondents were partitioned into subpopulations based on the political environment of their country of origin, age, and specific migratory background.

¹ Available at this link: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/FITW_World_2025_Feb.2025.pdf

By focusing on African second-generations and thus adopting a “small-n” case selection, the study prioritised depth over breadth, encouraging information richness, while still reaching meaningful conclusions within the limits of the designated time-frame. The main aim was not to create generalisations, but rather to obtain a deeper understanding of processes which are often only shown through statistics.

In terms of specific characteristics of respondents, the study involved generations 2.00, 1.75, and 1.5—following Rumbaut’s (1997) classification, thus including individuals who had undergone their core years of socialisation in The Netherlands.

3.4 Data collection

To better navigate the questions of the research, this study adopted semi-structured interviews, conducted both online and in-person at different facilities in Rotterdam. Interviews were conducted with ten (10) respondents, of whom five (5) were males and five (5) were females, between April and May 2025. Seven (7) of the interviewees belonged to generation 2.0, two (2) belonged to generation 1.75 whereas only one belonged to generation 1.5 (although only marginally). The majority (7) of the respondents were students whereas two (2) were professionals and one (1) was at that time unemployed. Table 2 shows a list of the origin countries of respondents, alongside the classification of their political situation according to the Freedom House Index. Three (3) interviewees were originally from countries described as “Free”, five (5) from “Not-Free”, and three (3) from “Partly Free” ones. Respondents were between the ages of 19 and 31 and all possessed a Dutch citizenship, thus having political rights in the Netherlands. The interviews were conducted in English, recorded and transcribed verbatim. In order to protect the privacy of respondents, the study uses pseudonyms when referring to testimonies in the results section.

Table 2- country of origin and FH classification of interviewees

Country of Origin	Freedom House classification	Nr of Respondents
Ghana	Free	2
Rwanda/Uganda	Not Free	1
Morocco	Partly Free	2
Egypt	Not Free	2

Cameroon	Not Free	1
Cape Verde	Free	1
Nigeria	Partly Free	1
Total	7	10

3.5 Data Analysis

In the phase of analysis, the study employed thematic coding through the software Atlas.ti as a method to look for patterns in the collected data. As a widely used method in studies, qualitative thematic coding allows for identification of topics, issues and similarities within the narratives of the respondents (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Although the data analysis phase was approached with some pre-conceived theoretical concepts on the topics of political trust, transnational engagement, political instability and parental political socialization (deductive coding), as the analysis proceeded some new patterns emerged from the data itself, allowing for the understanding of themes that were not addresses in the theoretical assumption (Thompson, 2022).

3.6 Operationalisation

Theoretical Concept	Source	Empirical indicators
Transnational Engagement Level of political, social or economic involvement of second-generations with their country of origin (Kyei et al., 2022)	Semi-structured interviews with second-generations	Awareness of political situation in country of origin
		Participation in diaspora activities
		Media consumption from origin country
		Frequent visits to country
		Culturally connected to traditions and customs
Intergenerational Political Socialisation 1. Intergeneration process through which first-	Semi-structured interviews with second-generations from	Frequency of family discussions of home-country and Dutch politics

generations transmit trust or distrust in political institutions; influenced by pre-migratory experiences (Dinesen, 2012) 2. Family political socialization: transmission of norms, values and behaviors of civic participation (Borkowska & Luthra, 2024)	politically stable and unstable countries	Parental opinions on institutions (both countries)
		Parental political engagement (e.g. voting)
		Influence of parental political attitudes on respondents' level of trust
		Parental pre-migratory political experiences
Perceptions of Political Instability 1. Propension to politically motivated violence, mass political violence, civil unrest and disruption of government functions (coups, revolutions, etc.) (Jong-A-Pin, 2009) 1. Limited or compromised access to political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House, 2025)	- Semi-structured interviews with African second-generations - Freedom House Index	Respondents perceive their parents' country of origin as politically unstable due to corruption, weak governance, lack of freedom, etc.
		Personal recountings of home country instability (during vacations or other occasions)
Institutional Trust 1. Confidence placed in political institutions to act in a fair, competent and impartial manner (Bornstein & Tomkins, 2015).	Semi-structured interviews with African second-generations	Trust
		Perception of fairness and legitimacy of Dutch institutions
		Confidence in institutional efficacy, efficiency, transparency and reliability Personal recountings of positive experiences with institutions (e.g. municipal authorities)
		Active political participation

		Distrust
		Avoidance of institutional engagement
		Feeling of institutional inefficacy
		Scepticism towards transparency and reliability of institutions

3.7 Ethical Considerations

My background as second-generation myself raises the occasion to make some ethnical considerations over the research process. To ensure a neutral, scientific stance throughout the research, critical reflection on all the findings represented the utmost priority. Although my experience as a second-generation is contextually tied to another country, which significantly differs from the Dutch context, the risk of a subconscious bias influencing the interpretations was acknowledged. As a result, external control from the supervisor and academic peers throughout the thesis writing process represented the best working strategy. Further ethical considerations were made on the confidentiality and privacy of participants, who were extensively informed of the research's objectives and assured of the respect of their wishes regarding anonymity and data protection. For this, information and consent forms were sent out and signed ahead of time, so to give respondents the time to make their decisions. Finally, a consideration was made on the categorization of African second-generations through an ethnic lens. In order to avoid the imposition of pre-conceived biases on second-generation identities, throughout the interview process respondents were allowed to self-identify and express their personal definitions of stability/instability in their country of origin, assuring the centrality of their perspective and mitigating the imposition of external assumptions.

4. Results and Analysis

This section will delve into the findings emerged through the research process, followed by a final discussion on the impact and relevance of the results. It answers questions on the factors influencing institutional trust of second-generations through three main thematic areas: the role of transnationalism, the role of political instability, and the role of intergenerational processes of political socialisation, as per the operationalisation table.

4.1 Transnationalism, cultural identity and influence on perceptions of political environments

The first sub-question this research hopes to answer is: *How does transnationalism influence the perceptions of political environments of second-generations in The Netherlands?*

4.1.1 Conditional belonging, ethnic versus Dutch identity

As mentioned above, institutional trust can be influenced by the same cultural aspects that determine one's sense of belonging (Kaasa & Andriani, 2021; Phinney & Ong, 1997). When interviewees were asked to describe their cultural identity, overall feelings of double belonging were expressed. Interestingly, however, the first answer of the majority of respondents showed a greater sense of belonging to their origin country. Studies have highlighted that Dutch second-generations' feelings of belonging are lower compared to natives, leading to limited emotional attachment and interest towards Dutch institutions (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015). For instance, Salma (19), of Moroccan descent affirmed: "I would say my cultural identity is definitely more Moroccan than Dutch".

Reasonings behind this identification differed. For many respondents it was a matter of feeling emotionally attached to the culture they were raised with in the household, highlighting a home-outside contraposition. Rena (25), of Cameroonian origin, explained: "*I would say I'm 70% Cameroonian because even though I grew up here in The Netherlands, at home, I was really brought up in the African way*". This reflects research on upbringing in transnational social spaces, where cultural practices are maintained and transmitted to second-generations, crossing spatial boundaries (Vertovec, 2001).

While many resonated with the emotional affinity behind their identification with the origin culture, other participants expressed their feelings of ethnic belonging as a consequence of social exclusion and racialised assumptions by the Dutch society. As Rena proceeded to share:

“I would say I never feel fully accepted by the Dutch people because [...] people always assume I don't speak Dutch [...]. And when I was back in high school, I used to work in a restaurant and sometimes we had to take reservations over the phone. So I took the reservation of a lady and then when she came to the restaurant, she recognised my voice and she was like, ‘oh, I was never expecting you to be a black girl’” (12/05)

These experiences coincide with what Aarset (2017:294) terms ‘conditional belonging’, which “underlines how feelings of belonging co-exist with awareness of the conditionality of this belonging and of not being in control of these conditions”.

The feeling of not being recognised as Dutch persisted regardless of educational background. James (20), who is currently a second-year university student, for example, said: “*No matter how high I get in the education system, at the end of the day, I’m not treated by others as if I’m a Dutch person*”. Safia (25), of Egyptian origin, currently pursuing two Master’s degrees, explained: “*For example, if you asked me ‘why are you finishing two Masters?’, well it’s because I feel like I have to show that I’m worthy. So that’s always coming from the fact that I am an Egyptian person and not ‘Safia Janssen’², so to say*”. These findings apparently reflect the process through which second-generations experience the so-called ‘integration-paradox’, which sees higher educated first- and second-generations feeling unfairly disadvantaged compared to majority members, thus distancing themselves psychologically from the host society (Verkuyten, 2016).

4.1.2 Going beyond the nation-state

On several occasions, respondents’ ethnic identification went beyond the nation-state of the origin country. Some participants expressed how rather than feeling a unidirectional connection to their country of origin, they felt a broader sense of pride and connection to the African continent. James, when describing his connection to his origin countries —Uganda and Rwanda—explained: “*I take a lot of pride in being African, not necessarily the two countries because everything that comes with it, everything that I’ve learned about it, is something I’m really proud of and I really*

² Janssen is a typical Dutch surname.

value a lot". This feeling of belonging is fostered through media consumption (respondents particularly mentioned social networks such as Instagram, music, and books), membership in African diasporic organisations involved in cultural events or fair trade, and friends and family. Particularly, travels to the origin country emerged as significant for fostering belonging, reflecting literature on the elements constituting the transnational social space (Sommerville, 2008; Kyei et al., 2022). When asked, many respondents expressed that they visit often, with answers spanning from every six months to every few years, further confirming the presence of the transnational social space. Multiple respondents stated they travelled more frequently when they were younger, showing that transnational engagement can be present, while significantly weakening at the same time (Jones, 2020). Despite this, the majority described these travels as overwhelmingly positive, linked to feelings of warmth and closeness from spending time with wider family, often in lively family homes. Louisa (27), originally Cape-Verdean, and Rena, Cameroonian, recounted:

"I went to visit my aunt, and as soon as I went to her house, it was so familiar. I felt like at home. And she's one of those people that raises a lot of children, so her house is very full [...] It was a very warm embrace." (16/05)

"So, it was just nice being there with the whole family [...] I think we're, like, over 15 to 20 people in one house. So even though it was chaos, it was a really good time." (12/05)

4.1.3 Negotiating ethnic identity: processes of othering

Many respondents, however, also shared that during trips to their origin countries, they were often labelled "foreigners" or "Europeans" when interacting with family and locals, typically because of their accent or behaviours. For some, being "othered" felt demeaning. For Daniel (23) from Egypt, and Ife (25) from Nigeria, it meant having limited movements and feeling like a tourist in the country they identify with, whereas for Emmanuel (27) from Ghana and James (20) from Uganda and Rwanda, it meant accepting the label and the complexities surrounding their identities. These findings add to literature on the fluidity of second-generation experiences, which are built on experiences both in the host and origin countries, as well as symbolic transnational ties, which in some cases, do not translate into full acceptance in the origin country (Kyei et al., 2022; Evans-Kwamla, 2023; Kılınç, 2022).

Feelings of connection with family, in fact, create empowering effects for some second-generations, as the previous testimonies showed. However, biculturalism does not always translate

positively for those directly interested. In some cases, feelings of “in-betweenness” can lead to feelings of marginalisation from both cultures one belongs to (Corchia, 2015). For instance, Youssef, originally Moroccan, expressed: “*It’s very conflicting [...]. It’s almost like being country-less...*”. This feeling of exclusion and disempowerment reflects Berry’s (2006) model of marginalisation, which highlights the identity dissonance and emotional baggage of holding together two different cultural worlds.

4.1.4 Cultural identity and political worldview

When asked about the role of ethnic identity on their political views about institutions in The Netherlands, responses were split exactly in half. Five (5) respondents expressed that to their knowledge, their ethnic background and their connection with their origin country does not significantly impact their day-to-day in Dutch society and their general worldview and approach to political environments. The other five (5) expressed that their ethnic identity influenced their values, and their approach to political environments and institutions. This finding resonates with theories on the complexity of transnationalism (Vertovec, 2001). Transnational identity represents an interpretative framework through which second-generations can interpret the two different contexts, however not all of them do. This could be explained by external factors, such as religious belonging.

4.1.5 The role of external factors: religious belonging

The role of religiosity in the political socialisation of second-generations emerged as a key factor in the interviews. For various respondents, individual religiosity and belonging to specific religious communities represented major determinants of their worldview in their upbringing. This meant limited engagement with the larger society aside from the education setting. Ife (25), for instance, affirmed: “*When I was younger, I was just not involved in Dutch politics because most of my time I spent in the church or in school*”.

This pattern reflects research that finds religious communities to be alternative places of integration, through which first- and second-generations alike go through alternative or complementary forms of socialisation (Kyei et al, 2019). In Ife’s case, for instance, belonging to an ethnic church meant focusing on the day-to-day aspects of belonging in her religious community, rather than engaging with larger sociopolitical phenomena. For Daniel (23), a member of the Egyptian Coptic Church in The Netherlands, religiosity played a limited role in his

upbringing. However, as his individual faith became stronger, he pursued more active roles in his religious community, and developments in that space became his priority, rather than the broader Dutch political situation:

“When I grew in faith and had a bigger connection with the church, I was more prone to have my opinions based around that, rather than the Dutch government, as a whole. I did have a time when I was really interested in politics and investigated a lot, but now I've turned 180 degrees”. (06/05)

This recalibration of priorities does not necessarily indicate that religiosity suppresses political interest in the receiving society, as demonstrated by Kyei et al. (2019) studying Ghanaian Churches in Amsterdam. However, it suggests the complexity of elements underlying the engagement and worldview of second-generations, and the potential impact of religious organisations. These findings complicate the unidimensional expectations of political socialisation in second-generations, suggesting that political socialisation is a dynamic process to be approached sensitively, considering individual trajectories and religious affiliation, among other variables.

Overall, the first expectation (**E1**) appears broadly confirmed, as findings indicate that second-generations do engage transnationally, through the adoption of hybrid identities that manifest connection to their origin country. Transnationalism and ethnic belonging, however, cannot singlehandedly explain levels of institutional trust, as only some respondents appeared to reflect on trust through culturally transmitted or identity roots. To properly understand whether second-generations' transnational dual frame of reference leads them to compare the two different political contexts they belong to (E2), it is important to understand what they know of the origin country and how they know it.

4.2 Political instability: exploring narratives

This section addresses the second sub-question (SQ2): *How do second-generations perceive political instability in the country of origin and how are these perceptions transmitted?*

Findings from the collected data point to a general awareness of the socio-political situation in the countries of origin. Poverty, corruption, authoritarianism and limited safety themes which recurred often, thus addressing some of the indicators used by Jong-A-Pin (2009) in his multi-dimensional model on political instability. Some of the interviewees had never been personally impacted by instability and attributed their source of knowledge to family conversations to the

larger part, and news updates from social media, in a marginal way. For most, conversations were described as infrequent, with their knowledge coming from sporadic comments, whereas others expressed that their parents would have active conversations on the political situation. John (31), for instance shared: *“What I know is mostly from what I heard from my dad while he was commenting on stuff that was happening on the radio”*. Cape-Verdean Louisa (27), on the other hand, stated: *“Yes, they definitely talk about it actively”*. This pattern shows that parental conversations represent a further strategy through which transnationalism is maintained (Neundorff & Smets, 2017). Rena (25) was one of the few with a personal encounter with instability. She recounted how social disruptions in the country (due to civil war between the Anglophone and the Francophone regions) and rampant gun violence led to changes and precautions in her family’s movements during a recent visit: *“The conflict is going on more in the English region, and when we went back in 2023, I couldn’t visit my birth town. [...] It was unsafe to travel with the whole family”*. This type of personal experience, however, rarely emerged throughout the interviews. It was rather parental recounting, and narratives circulating in the respective ethnic communities, that informed the knowledge of these second-generations (Sommerville, 2008).

4.2.1 The interiorisation of negative perceptions

Despite the rarity of conversations, findings show that they still left a significant impression, building the foundation of participants’ perception of political instability in the origin country.

Interestingly, they seemed to mostly interiorise negative perceptions on the functioning and stability of the institutions. It was often expressed that parents would talk negatively about the institutions in their country of origin, as well as complaining about the economic state, socio-economic conditions of the larger population and the lack of action from politicians. In some cases, specifically, the history of political violence and repression intertwined with family history. Youssef (23) (who belongs to the Moroccan native sub-group of Berbers) shared how the political persecution faced by an uncle for sharing Berber news led to the family member’s exile. This inevitably shaped his perception of the situation in Morocco, leading to significant awareness on the lack of civil rights in particular. This finding seems to align with transferability theories, as familial pre-migratory experiences of state repression and political persecution in the origin country leave an impact on second-generations too (Borkowska & Luthra, 2014).

Throughout interviews, politicians in the country of origin were often described as untrustworthy and out of touch with the hardships of the majority of the population, while poverty and large societal inequality emerged as pressing topics. Ife (25), when describing the situation in Nigeria, stated: *“Politics is quite corrupt. There's a very big gap between the poor and the rich”*

An interesting pattern emerged when community was often described as the main drive of positive change, with collective values underlying the cultural context of origin countries compensating the absence of governments *“It has been shown that the people have to build Nigeria themselves, and they have been”* (Ife). As Kaasa and Andriani (2021) state in their research, collective versus individualistic cultural contexts play a significant role in the political integration of migrants in European societies. Given that in collectivistic societies people are motivated to cooperate, especially in the face of institutional dysfunctionality, settling in an individualistic society where autonomy is the primal value might complicate the political integration process of migrants (Ibid). A similar pattern was reflected in the findings, with respondents highlighting the resilient nature and the collective values in their origin countries in the face of instability, as opposed to Dutch individualistic cultural values. Safia (25), from Egypt, while specifically talking about the predominance of an individualistic mindset when it comes to voting in The Netherlands, said the following: *“The thing is that the people themselves don't understand that they can vote to help another person instead of just for themselves. It's not only the institutions that are not helping, but Dutch people as well”*

This testimony suggests that collectivistic and individualistic values are worth considering when understanding the influence of ethnic background on the political worldview of second-generations (Kaasa & Andriani, 2021).

4.2.2 Transnational dual frames: comparing countries of origin and The Netherlands

Another interesting reflection came from Safia when asked about the impact of political instability in her country of origin on her view on institutions in The Netherlands. She stated that ultimately, she saw The Netherlands as a place where she could feel safe and have greater opportunities, compared to Egypt. This narrative emerged through all the interviews, however in her case, a compelling reflection on the collectivistic, community-based cultural and political system in Egypt as opposed to the individualistic culture in The Netherlands, was made. Specifically, she argued that community resilience is a necessary strategy in Egypt, that is slowly making its way to The

Netherlands too, due to the increasing inaccessibility of the welfare state: *“Here [in The Netherlands] we also have to rely more on the community. The Netherlands was at first a welfare state, and now it's moving to a participatory state, but we are not helping the people that cannot participate”*.

This reflection shows how collectivistic backgrounds of second-generations can create expectations on the role played by individuals that, when not met, can lead to frustration. This aligns once more with the debate initiated by Kaasa and Andriani's study (2021) on the impact of cultural background. Several respondents affirmed that they often compared their two different contexts, and that the political instability in the origin countries led to overall better appreciation of the functioning of institutions in The Netherlands. Ife (25) for instance, when asked if the things she had heard from her parents and known on Nigeria impacted her worldview, affirmed: *“I feel like they have. They make me more grateful for the way things are organized here”*. Similarly, Youssef expressed: *“At the end of the day, I will always see the Netherlands as better than Morocco because it's a stable economy and I have the freedom to say whatever I want”*. This seems to align with Röder & Mülhau's (2012) research, which showed that migrants from politically unstable realities develop a more positive outlook on the receiving country's institutions due to comparison.

4.2.3 Freedom House Classification: Western versus local perceptions

Despite the study initially dividing the respondents according to their 'Free', 'Partly-free' and 'Non-Free' classifications, patterns of difference in the attitudes and opinions of interviewees rarely emerged. On the contrary, respondents from 'Free' countries still seemed to have interiorised negative perceptions. Rampant poverty, strong inequality, and institutional dysfunctionality were brought up similarly as most respondents from 'Non-Free' countries. This follows debates raised in critical development studies on the differences between local understandings of instability, compared to externally applied hierarchies and classifications (Barros, 2024). James (20), in particular, raised concerns over Western applied labels of progress and development: *“What I find difficult is how the West perceived these countries and how the citizens of these countries perceive it. For example, with Rwanda, everyone says ‘most developed country in Africa’, but at what cost? And what's going on behind that?”*.

To sum up, this section showed that parental narratives appear to be the primary source of knowledge of second-generations when it comes to political instability in the origin countries,

however fragmented. In addition, these findings seem to confirm that perceptions of political instability do indeed have an effect on the political view of second-generations, thus giving confirmation to the second expectation (E2). It is shown that second-generations do use a dual framework of reference to compare their different contexts and that perceptions of political instability in the country of origin seem to have an effect on the political worldview of second-generations, by creating more positive feelings towards Dutch institutions.

4.3. Institutional trust: the explanatory leverage of cultural and institutional theories

This section addresses the third and final sub-question: *To what extent do intergenerational processes of political socialization and day-to-day experiences with institutions influence the political trust of second-generations?*

As mentioned before, institutional theories claim that trust in institutions is the result and rational consequence of institutional performance, thus rooted in day-to-day experiences (Hetherington, 1998), whereas cultural theories argue that institutional trust is the fruit of parental socialization (Dinesen, 2012). To answer the question on how parental pre-migratory experiences might influence second-generations, the study expected transferability theory—which argues that migrants transfer the political knowledge acquired through socialization from their origin country to their current contexts—to play a role (Borkowska & Luthra, 2014). Overall, however, while expecting parental political behaviour to have some influence on the political trust of second-generations in The Netherlands, institutional theories rooting the source of political trust in the institutional performance and individual experiences were expected to have stronger leverage (E3).

4.3.1 Voting culture and ‘Political talk’ in immigrant families

When asked about the frequency of conversations on politics and institutions in The Netherlands, most answers pended on ‘not-frequently’. Some participants expressed that, on the surface, their parents do not show open interest to ‘political talk’, deciding rather to focus on practical day-to-day aspects instead, whereas others stated that although the conversations don’t come up very often, there are occasions in which their parents engage with the Dutch institutional environment and political situation. This divided pattern was reflected also when asked about parental voting patterns, with some respondents claiming that their parents don’t vote in Dutch local or national elections, while others expressed that they do. Voting does not translate into active political engagement for most of the parents. For instance, Ife (25) said the following: “My *mom*

is not very much about Dutch politics. She doesn't care that much. She votes, but for the rest, she doesn't really care to look into things". This low level of political discussion and voting turnout among first-generations reflects broader research on limited civic and electoral engagement among migrant groups in Western European democracies (Fennema & Tille, 1999; Terriquez & Kwon, 2015).

The effects of parental voting culture on the participants showed a complex image. Some respondents expressed that despite their parents not believing in voting, they still participated when needed and strongly believed in democratic participation. Others showed detachment from the whole system, showing scepticism towards the real impact of voting. In some cases, strong patterns of parental political modelling emerged, with participants like Safia and Ife admitting that their sense of civic duty was learned from their parents. Ife, in particular, stated: *"People in Nigeria, even if it's corrupt, they'll still vote. So, I think voting is a very important thing that I guess I got installed from my mom"*. This narrative illustrates a situation where processes of intergenerational political socialization intertwine with pre-migratory experiences in the origin country, despite the context being institutionally dysfunctional. In this finding, the previously mentioned transferability theory (Borkowska & Luthra, 2014) is reinforced, thus showing its explanatory leverage.

4.3.2 Language Barriers and bi-directional political influence in immigrant families

Language barriers represent significant obstacles to immigrants' political socialization in the host country (Erdocia, 2023). This was reflected in the collected data, as participants recalled parental struggle when approaching institutions. Louisa (27) from Cape Verde, shared:

"My dad always says the institutions are very annoying because they're very bureaucratic, and not very accessible for people who don't know the language very well. Sometimes he gets letters and he's like, what is this letter saying? He reads Dutch right, but the language used is just not non-Dutch speak friendly." (16/05)

This was also reflected in James' (20) answer: *"My mom and my dad did not completely master the language. It was really difficult for them. They always had troubles trying to understand"*.

This parental language barrier often leads to what literature describes as "Child Language Brokering", which is a socio-linguistic practice involving immigrant bilingual children acting as

bridge between different cultures, *de facto* taking an important role in the integration process of their families and communities (Peppoloni, 2021). Narratives from the interviews reflected this process, with respondents like John (31), explaining that they tried to help their parents with understanding and navigating the context they found themselves in: *“It was always very difficult for my father to understand certain letters he would receive. And I just remember from a very young age having to translate ‘what’s in the letter? what do they want?’ “*.

Interestingly, Ife (25) expressed that her mother became accustomed to the Dutch environment partly thanks to her progression in the education system, with the mother’s understanding of the Dutch institutional system growing as Ife went from primary to secondary school in particular. This increased parental awareness coincided with her own personal development and engagement with Dutch politics: *“I didn’t really get politics till I got to secondary school. By then I was doing more research to get what party to vote for. At that point even my mom started to invest in politics”*

This finding reflects the bidirectional model of familial political socialization described by Terriquez & Kwon (2015). According to scholars of this new school, the socialisation of second-generations in the host country compensates barriers faced by first-generations and leads to children and parents influencing each other (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008). This testimony suggests that processes of familial political socialization are considerably complex and need to be approached holistically.

4.3.3 Institutional Trust of second-generations: leveraging personal experiences and scepticism

When asked to reflect on the elements influencing their views and opinions on Dutch institutions, the participants mostly pointed to their personal knowledge and experiences on the functioning of the institutions, showing a first strong alignment with institutional theories on the sources of trust (Hetherington, 1998).

Interestingly, when asked about trust and reliability on Dutch institutions, all respondents expressed mixed feelings. Patterns showed a mix of trust in the efficiency and functionality of Dutch institutions—in some cases comparatively to the country of origin—but not in terms of fairness, representation and transparency. In terms of positive aspects, it was mentioned that Dutch

institutions do work, with this feeling being enhanced when compared to the respective situations in the origin country, thus further highlighting the role of dual frameworks of reference in second-generations (Röder & Mühlau, 2012; Kolczynska, 2014). On the negative side, it was also frequently mentioned that while systems function on the surface, they do so better for people who are already privileged. James (20), for instance, stated: *“I feel like they are working [the institutions] but not on the same level for everyone. Definitely if you’re white and rich you benefit more [...] than if you’re anything else”*. A similar opinion came from Youssef (23): *“I think in this country, if you have money, you can do whatever you want”*. These narratives seem to support Slooman and Duyvendak’s (2015) findings on low feelings of belonging and attachment of second-generations in The Netherlands. This institutional scepticism could be explained by a convergence of ‘conditional belonging’, the ‘integration paradox’ and perceived discrimination (Verkuyten, 2016; Aarset, 2017).

Like Youssef and James, many of the other respondents attributed their current opinions on encounters, interactions and experiences with bureaucratic authorities. Some of the mentioned institutions were DUO (*Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs*), an institution part of the Dutch executive government handling education-related matters (e.g. student finance, Dutch integration exams or *Inburgeringsexamen*), the Rotterdam municipality, the Dutch government, and the Tax and Customs Administration (*Belastingdienst*). A strongly negative experience with this institution, in particular, played a major role in shaping John’s (31) opinion on Dutch institutions. He explained how a close family member was directly affected by the Dutch childcare benefits scandal (*Toeslagenaffaire*), in which the Tax Administration wrongfully accused more than 35,000 Dutch parents of committing fraud with childcare subsidies, based on ethnic profiling (Arts & van den Berg, 2024). The long-term mental and physical toll of this event created a sense of profound distrust in the overall Dutch political system, causing John to cease any sort of democratic participation for an extended period of time. He affirmed: *“This event just gave me a lot of distrust in the government [...] And I just noticed that people would say one thing and then do something completely opposite [...]”*.

James (20), who had very limited negative encounters with institutions, recalled one in particular with DUO which led him to reevaluate his opinions:

“The day I turned 19 people from Duo came to my house and went to check if I actually lived there to see if I deserved student finance stuff. And then later in the year, I saw they do that with multiple second-generation immigrant students. So that’s the first moment I felt like, okay, so this is this on a discriminatory basis” (02/05)

Overall, these experiences suggest that the personal experiences with institutions are the major source of limited trust in Dutch institutions of the participants (Hetherington, 1998). An interesting pattern that emerged from analysis, however, shows that respondents whose parents had stronger political awareness, instilled voting culture during socialization and mostly reported hassle-free interactions with the institutions, had fewer negative opinions on Dutch institutions, whereas respondents who expressed low political engagement from their parents seemed to have stronger negative opinions on the subject. This would further support transferability theory and the importance of parental socialisation, showing the effect of parental political behaviour on second-generations (Borkowska & Luthra, 2014; Pietsch & Mcallister, 2016). It is important to approach this pattern with caution however, as believing in the functioning of the institutions does not immediately translate into believing in its transparency. Safia (25), for instance, stated that despite her parents being politically engaging, and positively evaluating Dutch institutions compared to Egypt, they still made her aware of racism and institutional discrimination in The Netherlands, with this knowledge still actively shaping her current opinion: *“What they usually said was that here, at least, it was not as unfair as there. But that you still have to look out because racism is real and institutional racism is definitely real”*.

To sum up, the findings from this section seem to suggest that intergenerational political socialization and parental opinions play a relatively marginal role on the trust of second-generations, thus giving less explanatory leverage to cultural theories on the sources of institutional trust. This would confirm the study’s third expectation (E3). Transferability theory confirms why some second-generations internalize specific political habits (e.g. voting) transferred from previous pre-migratory experiences of first-generations in the country of origin, however this transmission seems to be more latent. A stronger pattern emerged when looking at the individual, day-to-day experiences and knowledge of the institutions, thus aligning and giving more explanatory leverage to institutional theories. Moreover, the analysis showed that there are various external elements that complicate traditional top-down models of political socialization, among

the mentioned ones: language brokering and personal experiences with discrimination, among others.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This research project aimed to contribute to scholarly debates on the sources of institutional trust in immigrant populations, specifically focusing on the factors influencing the trust of African second-generation immigrants in The Netherlands. It did so for mainly two reasons. Firstly, scholars have so far dedicated relatively little attention to the institutional trust of second-generations immigrants socialised in Western societies; and secondly, literature on African immigrant populations living in The Netherlands still remains surprisingly low. Building on literature highlighting the role of pre-migratory experiences, as well as the influence of instability in the sending country on the political behaviour of immigrants in the receiving societies, this study explored how second-generations perceive political instability in their country of origin and how this shapes their trust in Dutch institutions. The specific research question was: *How do perceptions of political instability in origin countries of second-generations in The Netherlands influence their trust in Dutch institutions?*

To answer the question, interviews were conducted with ten (10) second-generations of African descent, either born in The Netherlands (generation 2.00) or brought between the ages of 0 and 12 (generations 1.75 or 1.5), living or studying in Rotterdam (Rumbaut, 1997). Results from the interviews showed the intersection between three main theoretical concepts: transnationalism, perceptions of political instability, and intergenerational political socialization. Although approached as separate and distinct thematic categories, throughout the entirety of the research process, these themes intertwined, showing an interrelated and nuanced effect on the findings. Firstly, when it comes to the institutional trust of second-generations in Dutch institutions *per se*, the research showed that despite having positive feelings towards the functionality and reliability of the institutions in terms of their efficiency, especially when compared to the country of origin, this trust was seldom extended to the dimensions of fairness and transparency. This result seems to align with the findings of Pietsch & Mcallister (2016) on the institutional trust of second-generations in the Australian context. The findings from the research project suggest that this distrust stems in a larger part from negative personal experiences with the institutions, rather than parental transmissions of distrust, thus confirming Dinesen's (2012) research on institutional trust

of second-generations in Denmark. Given this, experiential theories on the sources of trust (Hetherington, 1998) demonstrated a stronger explanatory leverage compared to cultural theories (Kaasa & Andriani, 2021), thus confirming one of the study's main expectations (E4; SQ3).

Specifically, answers from the first sub-question (SQ1: *How does transnationalism influence perceptions of political environments of second-generations in The Netherlands?*) confirmed that through the adoption of a transnational dual frame of reference, second-generations compare the political institutions in their origin countries and in The Netherlands. This dual frame of reference used by the respondents often showed positive effects on the otherwise negative perceptions on Dutch institutions. The perceived and interiorized unreliability of institutions in the origin countries, seemed to confirm the “trust bonus” shown in Röder and Mülhau's (2012) research on the political confidence of immigrants, although only conditionally, as seen before. It seems, nevertheless, that not only immigrant trust in institutions in the settlement country increases when facing lower expectation based on their experience in the country of origin, but that this process happens in second-generations too, despite having limited experience with institutions in the country of origin. This suggests that the effects of pre-migratory experiences could last beyond the first-generation. These findings confirm the study's initial expectations on transnational frameworks of comparison representing a strategy through which second-generations assess Dutch institutions (E1).

Furthermore, while understanding how second-generations perceive instability in the country of origin, and how these perceptions are transmitted (SQ2), the study showed that it happens primarily through parental recountings, and narratives promoted in the specific ethnic communities. These transmissions shape the perception and knowledge on the political situation in the origin country, however, they do not happen actively but rather through fragmented conversations in sporadic occasions. Despite this, the results showed that societal turmoil, poverty, corruption and institutional unreliability were the primal sources of instability according to the respondents, and that these inherited perceptions shaped their political worldview. Specifically, aligning with several research on the effect political instability in the origin country on the institutional trust of immigrants (Voicu & Tufiş, 2017; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Röder and Mülhau, 2012), this study's findings suggest that institutional dysfunctionality in the origin countries has implications on the political worldview of second-generations too in significantly complex ways.

Overall, this thesis contributed to the scholarly debate on two main fronts: methodologically and theoretically. Methodologically, by adopting a qualitative research method and exploring personal narratives through semi-structured interviews it brought an illustration of the feelings, opinions, and reasonings behind the institutional trust of second-generations. Due to most studies done on the subject being quantitative, a significant methodological gap was observed in literature. By bringing forth the narratives of second-generations themselves, the study aimed to understand the worldview of subjects who are often only represented statistically, and uncovered significantly complex relationships between institutional trust, transnationalism, political instability in the country of origin, familial socialization, and personal experiences. Furthermore, by using African second-generations as case studies, it has brought attention to a population which has received limited attention from scholars, despite increasingly growing in The Netherlands, and in Europe more generally.

Theoretically, it has adopted an innovative framework for the understanding of institutional trust of second-generations by investigating the role of perceptions of political instability, specifically, using the Freedom House classification as an initial benchmark. Scholars have given little attention to ‘perceptions’ per se, and in an even lesser manner to how these perceptions unfold and transmit from one generation to the other. By using this specific framework, this study hopes to start a scholarly debate which further investigates the role played by political instability, specifically, in the institutional trust of second-generations. In addition, this thesis has demonstrated that institutional trust is not a unidirectional and unidimensional process, but is instead rather simultaneously inherited, constructed and negotiated. Although proving the predominant leverage of experiential theories on the sources of trust, it showed at the same time that transnational dual frameworks and family narratives continue to maintain an influence, which could be further investigated in future research

Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

The study tried to open up a debate, however there are some limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the research was done on a relatively small-scale, with the case-study being set on ten (10) African second-generations living or studying in Rotterdam alone. Findings from this sample can hardly be generalisable, as the experiences of these ten respondents cannot represent the experiences of all second-generations. Furthermore, the study could not employ African second-

generations from each of the countries, thus limiting potential internal comparisons. Future research could build on the insights from this study and use a larger, more representative sample size, which involves second-generations from each African country. Furthermore, questions remain open on the institutional trust of second-generations compared to the institutional trust of natives. Such comparison, when done in the framework constructed in this dissertation, could lead to interesting findings on potential differences between second-generations from specific political backgrounds and natives. On a last note, this research could not include the narratives and perceptions of political instability of first-generations, thus building the insights on intergenerational political socialization on second-generations themselves. To compensate this, future studies could add the voices of first-generation parents as well, thus obtaining a more nuanced understanding of intergenerational process of socialization in immigrant families without relying on the perceptions of second-generations alone.

6. Recommendations

The research showed that the institutional trust of second-generations in Dutch institutions, (as well as the approach of first-generations) is compromised by three main elements: heavily formal and complex language used in institutional communications, perceived lack of fairness and transparency, and finally, discrimination. Building on these findings, there are two main recommendations given out in this study, which go towards the Rotterdam municipality specifically.

Firstly, to improve the accessibility of institutions to immigrant populations and thus reduce the perceived distance, the study recommends a simplification of bureaucratic communications, especially when reserved to foreign-born migrants. This could be done in different ways, by using a less formal language in institutional communications or by investing in a multilingual service in the Municipality which can be easily accessed by individuals struggling to understand letters, phone-calls or other forms of institutional communications.

Secondly, to address the perceived missing fairness of institutions, especially after high-profile national scandals such as the Childcare Benefits Scandal, improving and increasing initiatives such as neighbourhood talks (especially in neighbourhoods with significant immigrant populations such as the *Afrikaanderwijk*) and community audits between citizens and institutions

could represent ways to reduce the institutional gap and show transparency efforts. These community-based approaches should also involve informal, non-traditional civic socialization spaces which are frequented by immigrants: churches, mosques, community centres and ethnic organisations, among others. By addressing and understanding the important role played by these spaces in the development of a sense of belonging in the Dutch society, institutions could cross the bridge which puts distance between immigrant populations and them.

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Appendix I

Table 1 – Coding Tree

Code Group	Code Subgroup	Code
Demographics	Age	18-25
		25+
	Arrival in the NL	< 12
		Born in the NL
	F.H. classification of country of origin	Free
		Partly-Free
		Non-Free
	Gender	Male
		Female
		Non-binary
	Occupation	Professional
		Student
		Unemployed/ Other
Transnational Engagement	Open Sub-group Coding	
	Balance between cultures	
	Being treated as a tourist	
	Better relationship with country of origin getting older	
	Civic Engagement and post-colonial identity	
	Cocoa Fair trade	
	Connection to culture rather than country	
	Contact & Knowledge through community/social networks	
	Critiques of Diasporic Inaction	
	Desire to return for visits	
	Involvement in diaspora activities	
	Emotional interest without political involvement in country of origin	

	Ethnic Media consumption
	Experience in country of origin
	Family Contact
	Family as Bridge or Obstacle to connection
	Family home warmth
	Heavy emotional baggage of family history
	Increased Interethnic friendships in higher education
	Interest in country of origin history
	Maintenance of specific cultural traits
	Native language barrier
	Peer influence on ethnic identity formation
	Perceived lack of credibility in diaspora spaces
	Perceived marginalization within diaspora
	Pride in being African
	Feeling privileged for living in Europe
	Recent travel experience
	Relationships in country of origin
	Significant emotional experience in country of origin leading to reconnection
	Visa costs impeding travel
<i>Feelings of Identity</i>	‘Both but neither’
	Dutch on paper
	Ambiguous
	Dutch = Ethnic

	Ethnic < Dutch
	Ethnic > Dutch
	Sub-ethnic identity
	Influence of being black
	ID shaped by colonial history
	Influence of ethnic ID on worldview in the NL
	Not recognised as Dutch
	Upbringing in ethnic community
	Upbringing in Dutch majority
	Multicultural Upbringing
	Yearning for connection with c.o.o. as you get older
	Acknowledgement of institutional racism
Familial Political Socialisation	Better language knowledge one parents
	Language brokering for parents
	Parents more concerned over day to day practical hardships
	Conversations on institutions
	Different political opinions between parents
	Different parental political involvement
	Influence of parental opinion
	Knowledge on c.o.o. from parents conversations
	Knowledge on c.o.o. politics through personal interest
	Parents access to institutions growing as child grows
	Parents don't believe in voting
	Parents follow c.o.o. news
	Parents not interested in NL politics
	Parents opinion on c.o.o. institutions
	Parents relationship to c.o.o.
	Parents vote
	Politically active/aware parent or close family member
	Politics not popular topic in community
	Positive aspects of c.o.o. rarely mentioned
	Pride in family political engagement
	Uncertainty on family political leaning
	Voting culture instilled by parents

	Awareness on political situation in c.o.o.
Perceptions of P.I.	Community builds the country
	Conversations on co.o. institutions
	Knowledge from parents conversations
	Lack of opportunity in c.o.o. unless wealthy
	Negative parental perceptions on c.o.o. influence
	Larger family recountings of instability
	Negative mention of political/civil rights
	Parental recountings
	Personal experience
	Political conflict
	Positive mention of political/civil rights
	Poverty
	War
	Political persecution in family history
	Police brutality
	Potential in co.o.
	Tribalism in politics
	Western perception vs local perception
	Europe always better than Africa'
C.o.o. - NL relation	Infrastructure comparison
	NL as benchmark
	NL as priority
	NL better safety
	NL system shifting to community based rather than welfare state based
	privilege
	Accessibility of knowledge
Institutional Trust	Ambivalent feelings
	Atleast there's no corruption'
	Budget cuts
	Critique of individualistic mindset in voting behaviour
	Disagreement with decisions but trust
	exclusion of the vulnerable
	Gaza vs Ukraine institutional attitude
	General institutional scepticism
	Growing distrust

	Identity politics
	Impact of toeslager scandal
	Importance of democratic participation
	Importance of information spaces
	Importance of institutional knowledge
	Lack of best interest from institutions
	Discrimination
	Comparatively positive efficiency
	Limited fairness
	Inequality
	Institutional racism
	Negative experiences
	Opportunity through institutions
	Lack of representation
	Lack of transparency
	Long bureaucratic processes
	Mismatch of political priorities from institutions
	'From institutions to individuals'
	Personal experience root of distrust
	Relative optimism
	Respect rather than trust
	Voting as a tool
	Strong contempt for voting
Religiosity	Religion and Ethnicity as one
	Religion-centred socialisation
	Strengthening of faith identity --> disengagement from national politics

Appendix II

Table 2 - Overview of respondents

Name (pseudonyms)	Age	Country of Origin	Generation	Occupation
Rena	25	Cameroon	1.5	Student
Salma	19	Morocco	2.00	Student
Emmanuel	27	Ghana	2.00	Professional
Safia	25	Egypt	2.00	Student
James	20	Rwanda-Uganda	2.00	Student
Youssef	23	Morocco	1.75	Student
Louisa	27	Cape Verde	2.00	Professional
Daniel	23	Egypt	2.00	Student
John	31	Ghana- Netherlands	2.00	Unemployed
Ifeyoma (Ife)	25	Nigeria	1.75	Student

Appendix III

Interview Guide

- Start by presenting myself and the project (again) to give ultimate clear understanding
- Remind of confidentiality, privacy, that they can take their time to answer the questions and that there is no right or wrong answer
- Answer any further queries that might come up before the start of the interview

Questions (no fixed order, more of a thematic framework, additional questions might come up as interview proceeds)

General Background Info

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? For example, your age and what you study/what you do for a living?
2. What's your parents' country of origin?
3. Were you born in the Netherlands or did you move here? If so, how old were you when you arrived?

Transnationalism and Identity

4. How would you best describe your cultural identities? And have they changed over time?
5. How connected are you to your parent's country of origin?
6. Have you ever visited ""? If yes, how often and what was/is the experience like?
7. Do you stay in touch with friends and family living in ""?
8. Do you follow media content from ""? (Influencers, Instagram pages, artists, news, etc.)
9. Are you involved in any diaspora organisations? Both political and non-political
10. (If applicable) Do you feel link staying connected to your roots influences the way you view yourself here in the Netherlands?

Perceptions of Political Instability

11. Do you keep up with the political situation in ""? From what you've seen/hear/know, how would you best describe it?
12. Have the things you've heard or seen about it ever shaped how you see things in the Netherlands?

Generational Transmissions of Trust

13. Did your parents ever talk about the political situation in "" growing up? If so, what kind of opinions came up?
14. What do they think of Dutch institutions? (for example, offices of the Geemente Rotterdam, DUO, etc.) Do they find them efficient, fair, have they had negative experiences? Do they often come up in discussions?

15. Do your parents vote during elections? Do they believe Dutch politics to be relevant? If yes why, if not why.
16. Have their opinions ever impacted the way you view political systems in general? Both in the Netherlands and in “” (even if you don’t agree with them)

Institutional Trust

17. How do you generally feel about the political institutions in the Netherlands? Do you think they act efficiently and in the best interest of everyone? Do you feel fairly treated?
 18. Do you think your trust (or distrust) comes more from your personal experience, your family’s background or other factors?
 19. Has your trust in Dutch institutions changed over time or has it stayed stable more or less?
- Conclude with final (optional) reflections (e.g. more on living in the Netherlands as a second-generation, country of origin political environment, etc.)