The Rise and Fall of Social Cohesion

The Construction and De-construction of Social Trust in the US, UK, Sweden and Denmark

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Introduction

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This book is about how social cohesion can be established and demolished. The US and UK, where social cohesion declined in the latter part of the 20th century, and Sweden and Denmark, where social cohesion increased in the latter part of the 20th century, will serve as examples of this. This book defines social cohesion as the belief—held by citizens in a given nation state—that they share a moral community, which enables them to trust each other. Thus, more concretely, this book will try to answer why Americans and Britons lessened their trust in each other, while Swedes and Danes developed more trust in the citizens of their countries.

This book argues that trust decreased in the US and UK because many Americans and Britons came to believe that most fellow citizens belong to 'the bottom' rather than 'the middle' of society. Following the same line of reasoning, this book argues that trust increased in Sweden and Denmark because many Swedes and Danes came to believe that most fellow citizens belonged to 'the middle' and not to a distinguished 'bottom' or 'top' of society. Furthermore, it is not only the very size of 'the middle', 'the bottom', and 'the top' that matters. It is also the perception of the character of—especially—those at the bottom of a society that matters. This book argues that many Britons and Americans came to consider the (perceived) sizeable bottom of society as untrustworthy, undeserving, and even dangerous, while many Swedes and Danes came to consider the (perceived) small group of citizens left at the bottom of their societies as trustworthy, deserving, and peaceful. Why those in the middle of society are thought trustworthy, and why those at the bottom of society are not, is theorized in Chapter 4.

From the very first lines of this book, the observant reader will have noticed that this book emphasizes the importance of perceptions and misperceptions. Thus this book provides a social constructivist perspective on trust. Trust and distrust towards fellow citizens are understood as judgments depending on citizens' perceptions of the society in which they live. This is not to say that the 'real' society does not matter for the citizens' perception of society; a

large part of this book will look at the socio-economic conditions behind the changed perceptions of society (Chapters 2 and 3). There is indeed a kernel of truth in the belief that the middle of society has decreased and the bottom of society increased in the US and UK. There is also a kernel of truth in the belief that the middle of society has increased and the bottom of society decreased in Sweden and Denmark. But the main contribution of this book is to demonstrate the interplay between the real socio-economic changes and the changes in public perceptions of fellow citizens. The premise is that one cannot expect a one-to-one relationship between real fellow citizens (if one manages to uncover them) and 'imagined' fellow citizens. Many things intercede between reality and the perception of reality, such as the human inability to understand the world in its complexity, the human tendency to build identity based on in-group/out-group mechanisms, the limited interaction between citizens within a large 'imagined community' as a nation state, the simplifications (and sometimes distortions) made by mass media and political elites, and others. Therefore this book has taken human perceptions of reality as the starting point for explaining changes in citizens' beliefs in the trustworthiness of fellow citizens.

That citizens' perceptions of reality have real consequences for the functioning of society is another premise of this book. This point is nicely stated in the 'Thomas theorem': 'If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences' (W. I. Thomas and D. S. Thomas 1928: 571–2). In terms of trust there are indeed good reasons to believe that whether citizens find fellow citizens trustworthy or not has real consequences for the functioning of highly differentiated postmodern societies. The perception of the trustworthiness of fellow citizens might influence how we behave in civil society, in markets, and in the political system. This book will elaborate especially on the latter—how large majorities' perceptions of society through voting have a real impact on socio-economic conditions within given countries. Later in this book it is argued that negative public perceptions of those at the bottom of society help explain why American and British politicians do little to combat social erosion and sometimes even seem to facilitate the process. Following the same logic, it will also be shown that positive public perception of those at the bottom of society helps explain why even right-wing Swedish and Danish governments have been forced to combat the mechanisms which lead to poverty and economic inequality. By unraveling these mechanisms, I reach the pessimistic conclusion that the US and UK were (and are) caught in a vicious circle which made (and makes) it politically difficult to combat the mechanisms that lead to social erosion, and the optimistic conclusion that Sweden and Denmark are caught in a 'virtuous circle' which made (and makes) it politically difficult not to combat the mechanisms that lead to social erosion.

Finally, this book argues that increased ethnic heterogeneity is the largest contemporary challenge to social cohesion in Sweden and Denmark. The big question is whether the increased social cohesion experienced in Sweden and Denmark was only possible in rather ethnic homogeneous nation states. This book supports the thesis that this may be so. The problem is that low-skilled immigrants from countries (believed to be) culturally distinct can easily come to be seen as an untrustworthy, undeserving, and dangerous new 'bottom' of society. Thereby, Sweden and Denmark are currently exposed to some of the mechanisms which led to the erosion of social cohesion in the US and UK. However, it follows—from my arguments to come—that the impact of such 'external shocks' on social cohesion is contingent on institutions and political power structures which historically have worked in favor of increased social cohesion in Sweden and Denmark. Therefore, this book predicts that despite the fact that the US and UK have much more historical experience with fighting negative ethnic stereotypes, Sweden and Denmark are the most likely to be successful in combatting negative ethnic stereotyping. This will be a cornerstone for establishing social cohesion in the nation states of the 21st century.

In this first chapter, this book's topic is brought into relation with the dominant public debate about social cohesion (section 1.1), and to both the historical and current academic debates on the importance of trust (section 1.2). The third section substantiates that trust levels have decreased in the US and UK and increased in Sweden and Denmark (section 1.3). The theoretical ambition of this book is discussed in the fourth section (section 1.4). The argument here is that the trust literature has done a lot to explain stability but very little to explain change. Therefore change in trust levels is still an academic puzzle. In the fifth section (section 1.5), I explain why a comparison between the US, UK, Sweden, and Denmark provides a key to understanding how social cohesion is established and demolished. One obvious reason is that one finds a profound change in trust levels in these four countries. However, historically these four countries also have a lot in common, which makes them a suitable choice for comparison. Finally, the chapter briefly introduces the unique data material upon which this book is based (section 1.6) and outlines the overall structure of this book and its main line of reasoning (section 1.7).

1.1 The debate over social cohesion

We live in a time when citizens, policymakers, and even social scientists in some of the most affluent nation states have the feeling that their societies are falling apart. This feeling of falling apart can be given many different names dependent on one's basic values, interests, and favored policy solutions,

but the term 'social cohesion' seems to be central in the discussion. As most other terms that successfully capture a broad societal feeling, it is undefined, unclear, and positively loaded. Often ordinary citizens, policymakers, and social scientists just refer to the 'glue' or the 'bonds' that keep societies (in this context advanced Western nation states) integrated. However for academic purposes it is important to be more specific about what is actually meant by the terms we use. As already mentioned, I suggest that we define social cohesion as the belief held by citizens of a given nation state that they share a moral community, which enables them to trust each other. This definition brings us a bit closer to a common understanding. But despite the focus on social cohesion, it is actually the absence of social cohesion that is central to the discussion. The very discussion of social cohesion implies its absence and, even more specifically, the decline of social cohesion. I suggest that we label the decline of social cohesion 'social erosion', which we then can define as fewer citizens in a given nation state having the belief that they share a moral community that enables them to trust each other. Thus, a precondition for social erosion is that citizens in a given nation state previously believed that they shared a moral community. This idea of losing a moral community that previously kept society integrated is central in current (as well as previous) public debates.

The diagnosis of social erosion has been strongly emphasized in the US and is supported by the work of American social scientists. As social scientists we can start to measure the moral standards citizens hold, see whether they are good for society, measure whether there is a consensus about them (the good ones), and see whether they have declined over time. Such a task was undertaken for example by Robert Putnam, who presented the diagnosis of social erosion in the US in his bestselling book *Bowling Alone* (2000). Charles Murray's book *Losing Ground* (1984) was another major contribution that supported the thesis of social erosion. The claim was that, within the leading Western country, the US, one could find a distinct underclass culture which totally disregarded that society's broader norms and values. Murray updated this diagnosis in the book *Coming Apart* (2012), which created a new media fuss. The basic idea is that there is no longer only the black underclass but also a new white under- and upper class, which have come to dismiss the 'good' American values. To this idea we shall return.

The clearest example of amoral behaviour is crime. Especially when crime comes in the form of riots, it produces the feeling that societies are falling apart. The riots in Los Angeles in 1992, in which young black Americans demolished parts of the city (53 persons were killed and thousands injured), became an important symbol for the social erosion diagnosis established by American academics. At the time of writing, the clearest symbol of social erosion in the US is the killing of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black 17-year-old

wearing a hoodie. He was killed by a 28-year-old 'Neighborhood Watch' volunteer, who claimed self-defense. In his call to the 911 operator, the volunteer found the hoodied teenager 'real suspicious'. Sadly, the Neighborhood Watch volunteer was not arrested immediately. He was only charged and prosecuted after intense national media attention.

The same diagnosis of social erosion has also been strongly emphasized in the UK. Hall (1999) replicated parts of Putnam's study and confirmed that social erosion was also taking place there. Murray's diagnosis of underclass culture was also brought into the UK context and fuelled a wide discussion (Dean and Taylor-Gooby 1992). However, for the public debate, the most important factor is the incidence of rioting. At the time of writing it is the riots in August 2011 in London and other large British cities which shake British perceptions of a shared moral community. More than 3,000 persons were arrested for looting and other crimes within a week. Earlier, in 2001, the UK experienced riots (in the three Northern cities of Burnley, Oldham, and Bradford) which also attained high symbolic value. Therefore it is no wonder that the American diagnosis of social erosion has resonated in the British context. It is telling that the British Prime Minister David Cameron won that office by campaigning on the slogan of the 'broken society' (2010).

It seems to be a shared concern among Western policymakers, social scientists, and even ordinary citizens that social cohesion has been threatened. One of the reasons is that what happens in the US and UK has a strong influence on the thinking of society in other Western countries. This is partly because these two countries have symbolic value; they were once the leaders of the 'advanced' Western countries. But most importantly this is due to the fact that the English language has been globalized. Policymakers, social scientists, and even ordinary citizens are able to absorb the ideas developed in the Anglo-Saxon countries, including the idea of social erosion. The French (which consistently resist the absorption of Anglo-Saxon ideas) have also developed a diagnosis of social erosion. Again, riots took on high symbolic value. In 2005, France experienced severe riots in which for a month, youngsters, from poor neighborhoods and primarily of Muslim background, burned cars in the suburbs of major towns. Around 9,000 cars were burned and 3,000 persons arrested. And even Scandinavians can come up with terrible stories. In 2011 an extremist, Anders Breivik, killed 77 Norwegians, most teenagers, in order to promote his anti-immigrant attitudes. Another extremist shot at immigrants in the Swedish city Malmoe during 2009 and 2010. However, for the public interpretation it makes a big difference whether the crimes were committed by large groups, as in riots, or just a single extremist.

If social cohesion is threatened, the next question is naturally what or who is to be blamed. This is a complicated issue which will be discussed throughout this book. However, in the European context, it is currently the

continent's non-Western immigrants who seem to be blamed. Thus leading politicians argue that social cohesion can be restored by abandoning previous multiculturalist policies. The British Prime Minister David Cameron argued in 2011 that 'under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We've failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We've even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values' (5 February 2011). Five days later the French President Nicolas Sarkozy declared that multiculturalism had failed in France and argued that 'of course we must all respect differences, but we do not want . . . a society where communities coexist side by side. . . . If you come to France, you accept to melt into a single community, which is the national community, and if you do not want to accept that, you cannot be welcome in France' (10 February 2011, cited by AFP). A half-year earlier (October 2010) the German Chancellor Angela Merkel had also proclaimed that multiculturalism had 'failed totally' in Germany. In Denmark and Norway the anti-immigrant parties have gained influence and recently so has the Swedish counterpart (5.7 per cent of the votes in the 2010 election).

Nevertheless, this could have been a story about social erosion in the US and UK and not a story about general social erosion in Western societies. This book will illustrate this point by comparing the US and UK with Sweden and Denmark. The latter two countries have been exposed to many of the same societal forces that are believed to have caused social erosion in the US and UK. To start with, both Sweden and Denmark are strongly exposed to the general forces of individualization, urbanization, and economic globalization. More specifically, both Sweden and Denmark have also been de-industrialized, they have experienced a break-up of family structures, and both countries have experienced a great influx of non-Western immigrants (see Chapter 2). But in contrast to the US and UK, neither Sweden nor Denmark seems to have experienced any decline in the public perception of social cohesion. The examples of social erosion, some of them mentioned above, are more spectacular and therefore easier to remember than those that demonstrate social cohesion. However, when I ask elderly Danes whether social cohesion has decreased, they do not give an affirmative answer. Normally, they state that the bonds of society have definitely changed but not weakened. Measured in survey studies on the best indicator of social cohesion (see section 1.3), both Sweden and Denmark have experienced an increase in social cohesion over the last three decades. Thus the empirical puzzle of this book is why social trust declines in some advanced Western countries and increases in others.

To answer this question, one needs to go back in time. The main thesis of this book is that the answer is to be found in the way these countries responded to external shocks that could potentially threaten the public's perceptions of living in a meritocratic middle-class society. Above all the response to de-industrialization is believed to be of great importance. In line with previous comparative welfare state research, it will be argued that after the economic crises of the 1970s, the US and UK entered a neo-liberal, post-industrial path that created a poor and deprived underclass (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1996), the existence of which came to threaten people's perception of living in a middle-class society. By contrast, Denmark and Sweden entered a social democratic post-industrial cycle that prevented the emergence of a poor and deprived underclass (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1996), ensuring thereby the public's perception of living in a meritocratic middle-class society. Thus the basic causal argument is that increases and decreases in (perceptions of) social cohesion are to be explained by a complex interaction between basic changes in the production structures (for other important socio-economic variables, see Chapter 2) and socially constructed perceptions of society.

The aim of this book is to qualify the debate about social cohesion, to highlight the specific forces behind what seems to be a vicious neo-liberal post-industrial circle, and to show the possibility of what seems to be a social democratic 'virtuous circle'. The aim is not to present two ideal countries and promote the idea of social democratic policy solutions. I do not believe there was any great social democratic master plan behind the Swedish and Danish post-industrial circle; a lot happened by chance and luck. Nor am I fully convinced that social cohesion will not (eventually) decline in Denmark and Sweden.

1.2 The importance of trust in modern societies

The question of social cohesion is by no means a new theme. It is a classic concern within social science that the bonds that keep societies together might erode in the rich Western capitalist countries. One can also label them highly differentiated societies. This question was at the very heart of the new discipline of sociology in the 19th century. In Durkheim's (1858–1917) terms, the question was what could replace the so-called mechanical solidarity found in pre-modern societies—the solidarity that is established among people who are similar. This similarity could be both material: similar work, housing, and food; and non-material: similar beliefs, morality, and feelings. Durkheim labelled the non-material part of the community the *conscience collective*, which is the academic origin of the term 'social cohesion'. Pre-modern societies were according to Durkheim characterized by a sizeable and strong 'collective consciousness', which typically had a strong religious foundation,

so that any deviation from the moral codex was typically interpreted as a religious violation. Thus, strong norms of right and wrong and intense monitoring in small communities upheld non-material similarities (Durkheim1893).

It was an insightful observation that this kind of solidarity based on material and non-material similarity would come under pressure from the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and democratization that marked the shift from pre-modern to modern societies. Therefore many of Durkheim's contemporaries were convinced that the larger differences between citizens in modern society would lead to much higher levels of conflict between them. This is exactly the same line of reasoning that can be found in current conservative thinking about social cohesion, in which it is typically believed that societies earlier were kept integrated by good moral standards, respect for the family, the law, and the king (or in the modern version, the nation state)—which standards have now been eroded. And, in order to restore harmony, one just needs to strengthen the old 'collective consciousness'. This is what European leaders are trying to do currently.

However, despite sharing the worries of today's conservative thinking, Durkheim rejected the idea that modern societies could be kept together by shared moral standards. Instead he argued that the increased interdependence found in more differentiated societies could develop into a new kind of 'organic solidarity' (Durkheim 1893). The increased interdependence is easily spotted in the production structure. In the agrarian economy, a large number of citizens could be more or less self-sufficient, while in a modern society, industrial or service workers are dependent on raw material delivered by others, food produced by others, and markets where products can be exchanged. This could, according to Durkheim, establish an organic solidarity, the consciousness in citizens of being dependent on each other (as organs in a body are dependent on each other).

The idea of organic solidarity can be questioned but at least Durkheim's interdependence argument points to a very fundamental aspect of modern society: we all need to interact with persons we do not know. In Giddens' terms it can be described as a shift from embeddedness to disembeddedness (Giddens 1990). In such a situation, trust becomes a fundamental precondition for the ontological safety for the individual, as when by simply taking the bus you have to trust in the abilities of the experts who invented the bus, in those of the unknown bus driver, and those of all the other unknown drivers on the road. One can argue that in a 'risk society' (Beck 1992) many risks can only be overcome by placing trust in unknown fellow citizens and the roles they fulfil in the social system as policemen and women, social workers, bank advisors, and countless others. Even more convincing is the argument that trust in unknown fellow citizens, besides influencing individuals' ability to cope with modernity, is crucial for the functioning of modern institutions such as the market,

democracy, and the state (e.g. Luhmann 1979). Therefore the importance of trust has been so strongly emphasized in contemporary sociological thinking.

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

If we return to the definition of social cohesion provided above—the belief held by citizens of a given nation state that they share a moral community—the point is that we are now able to specify the most important aspect of the content of the 'shared moral community'. For modern (or postmodern) societies, the most important aspect is not that citizens believe they share the same religion, family values, attitude towards homosexuality or other ideals; for the everyday operation of highly differentiated societies, *the most important aspect of social cohesion is that citizens believe they share the norm of not cheating each other*.

In empirical analyses, horizontal trust between citizens is typically measured by the question: 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted—or—that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?' As high trust levels go together with well-functioning democracies, economic growth, and satisfaction with living in a modern society, this item seems to capture what many contemporary sociologists, political scientists, and economists are looking for. Furthermore the question has the great advantage that it has been asked in a number of older surveys; especially its inclusion in the World Value Survey (WVS) is of great importance. Thus one of the most convincing pieces of evidence behind the erosion thesis is that, in the US and UK, there is a decline in the share of people who answer that most people can be trusted (see section 1.3). Finally, I want to emphasize that the question of trust in 'most people' also has the great advantage that it does not aim to measure past experiences; that is, whether the respondent has previously been cheated. Instead, the item tries to measure what in Chapter 4 will be labelled the 'rule of thumb' used by individuals when they interact with unknown fellow citizens. It is exactly these socially constructed rules of thumb that are important when disembedded persons interact in a highly differentiated postmodern society.

1.3 Trends in the horizontal trust between citizens

That the level of social trust has declined in the US and UK and increased in Sweden and Denmark can be demonstrated by means of the WVS, which has been conducted since the early 1980s. Fortunately we also have two 'early' survey observations from the US and UK, respectively from 1959 and 1960. Table 1.1 shows the respondent share answering that most people can be trusted. The table includes the 25 countries that conducted the first wave of the WVS. An additional 61 countries have since joined the project and conducted one or more of the later surveys (not shown).

Table 1.1. Share of respondents answering 'most people can be trusted', including countries that participated in first World Value Survey (WVS); trend calculated as the share in the earliest observation minus share in the latest observation; regime classification (S = Social democratic; L = Liberal; C = Conservative)

	Early 1979/59/60	WVS 1981–84	WVS 1990–93	WVS 1994–99	WVS 1999–04	WVS 2005–08	Trend (earliest—latest)	Regime
Norway	-	61	65	65	-	-	+4	S
Sweden	-	58	66	60	66	68	+10	S
Finland		57[3]	63	49	57	59	+2	S
Denmark	47[4]	53	58	-	67	76	+29	S
Canada	-	49	53		37	-	- 12	L
Australia	-	48	-	40	-	48	0	L
The Netherlands	-	45	54		60	45	0	C/S
N. Ireland	-	44	44		40	-	-4	-
UK	56[2]	43	44	30	29	30	-26	L
Japan		42	42	42	43	39	-3	
US	55[1]	41	51	36	36	40	-15	L
Ireland	-	41	47		36	-	-5	-
Iceland	-	40	44	-	41		+1	-
South Korea	-	38	34	30	27	30	-8	-
Spain	-	35	34	30	36	20	-15	C
Russia	-	35[3]	38	24	24	27	-8	-
Hungary	-	34	25	23	22	-	-12	-
Germany (west)	-	32	38	42	32	41	+9	C
South Africa	-	31[3]	28	18	12	18	-13	-
Belgium	-	29	34	-	29	-	0	C
Italy	-	27	36	-	33	29	+2	C
Argentina	-	26	23	18	16	17	-9	-
France	-	25	23		21	19	-6	C
Mexico	-	18[3]	34	31	22	16	-2	-
Malta		10	24	-	21	-	+11	

[1] 1960: Putnam (2000: 140)

[2] 1959: Hall (1999: 432)

[3] Cannot be found in the integrated file version 2006; cited from Svendsen and Svendsen (2006: 88)

[4] 1979: Taken from Danish Political Value survey

Source: World Value Studies. 1981 to 2004 based on 'integrated file' version 2006; 2005–2008 based on 'wvs2005b/a_20081015'. 'Don't know' is excluded. Data not weighted.

The first point to make resulting from the figures shown is that Esping-Andersen's (1990, 2000) 'liberal' and 'social democratic' welfare regimes seem to share a common point of departure in a 'golden age'. Within comparative welfare state research the term 'golden age' is used to describe the period from the end of the Second World War until the mid-1970s. In the results from the first wave of WVS, the liberal and social democratic welfare regimes emerged with relatively high trust levels. In the early 1980s, 61 per cent of Norwegians, 58 per cent of Swedes, 57 per cent of Finns, and 53 per cent of Danes answered that most people could be trusted. In Denmark, we also have a national survey from 1979, where 47 per cent indicated trust. After these Nordic countries come Esping-Andersen's liberal welfare regimes. In the early 1980s, 49 per cent in Canada, 48 per cent in Australia, 44 per cent in Northern Ireland, 43 per cent in Great Britain, 41 per cent in the USA, and 41 per cent in Ireland answered that most people could be trusted. Furthermore, for the US and UK it is actually possible to supplement the WVS with earlier observations. In 1960, 55 per cent of Americans, and in 1959 56 per cent of Britons, answered that most people could be trusted. We know now that this is a high level of trust. Besides Esping-Andersen's liberal and social democratic welfare regimes, the WVS has measured trust levels exceeding 50 per cent in only two out of 86 countries.[1] The 'normal' worldwide level is 25 to 35 per cent of respondents. Thus, the previously very high level of social trust in the US and UK constitutes a precondition for Putnam's and Hall's studies of social erosion in the US and UK.

In contrast, the continental European countries, which Esping-Andersen calls 'conservative' welfare regimes, have always had—as far as we can measure—low levels of social trust. From the 30 observations of conservative welfare regimes shown in Table 1.1, the average share answering that most people can be trusted is a low 32 per cent. This supports the argument that trust is difficult to establish in stratified societies. Seligman (1997: 36) even argues that trust cannot take root in a hierarchical culture (see also Putnam 1993: 88, 174). Among the conservative regimes, only the Netherlands has experienced trust levels above 50 per cent (in the second and fourth wave of WVS). But in terms of the structure of the welfare state, the Netherlands has more in common with the Nordic countries than the other continental European countries. Therefore Esping-Andersen describes the Netherlands as a hybrid type—sharing conservative and social democratic regime features. Thus, before we can answer why social trust has decreased in the US and UK and increased in Sweden and Denmark, we also need to explain why these

[1] These are China and Indonesia (Svendsen and Svendsen 2006: 88), and the validity of this measure can be questioned (Lolle and Torpe 2011).

countries started out with high trust levels. The theoretical answer to this question is given in Chapter 4.

The second point to be made from the WVS figures is that, from what could be perceived as a common point of departure, the Nordic and Anglo-Saxon countries developed in distinct directions. The Nordic countries went from being 'high-trust' to 'extremely high-trust' countries. The Anglo-Saxon countries—or at least the US and UK—went from being 'high-trust' to 'average-level-trust' countries.

The WVS figures reflect this social erosion in the Anglo-American countries. As already mentioned, 55 per cent of Americans answered in 1960 that most people could be trusted. This level declined to 41 per cent in the 1980s, when a majority answered that 'one cannot be too careful'. The low point came in the mid-1990s when only 36 per cent answered that most could be trusted. There is a 15 percentage-point decrease if one subtracts the share answering that most people can be trusted in the latest wave of the WVS (40 per cent) from the earliest observation from the golden age (55 per cent) (see Table 1.1). Inglehart (1999: 95), Putnam (2000: 134), and Uslaner (2002) have all confirmed this negative American trend by means of more detailed national data. In Figure 1.1, the US time-trend is illustrated by means of the General Social Survey (GSS). Thus there is no doubt that the country that comes closest to Esping-Andersen's ideal-type liberal regime actually experienced an erosion of horizontal trust.

The same decline in trust level can be found in the UK. In 1959, 56 per cent of British respondents answered that most people could be trusted. This level declined to 43 per cent and 44 per cent when measured in the early 1980s and early 1990s respectively, and dropped to 30 per cent when observed from the mid-1990s onward. As already mentioned, Peter Hall reported these figures in an influential 1999 article which fuelled academic debates in UK. The issue of whether the reported level of trust was too high in 1959 was discussed because Hall had excluded the category 'depends', which is not included in the WVS. Furthermore, it has been argued that the WVS may show too low a trust level inasmuch as respondents, prior to this question, answer questions about various minority groups. However, survey experiments have shown that these factors do not disturb the comparison over time (Sturgis, Allum, Patulny and Smith 2007). Thus the overall conclusion is that the decline in horizontal trust in Britain is not a methodological artifact. The British time-trend is also shown in Figure 1.1.

In the other liberal regimes the evidence is more scattered. The WVS also indicates a decline in horizontal trust in Canada from the first wave (49 per cent) to the fourth wave (37 per cent). The same seems to be the case in Ireland: from 41 per cent in the first wave to 36 per cent in the fourth wave.

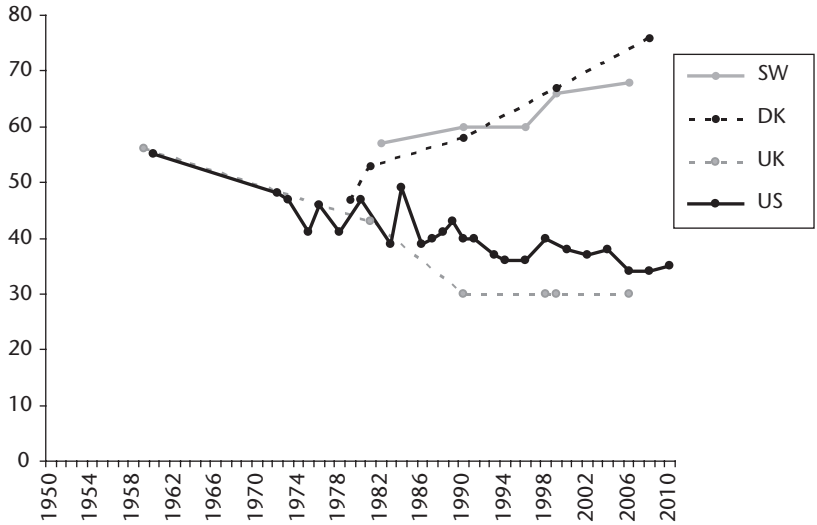


Figure 1.1. Respondent share answering 'most people can be trusted' in Sweden, Denmark, UK, and US

Note: The responses 'Don't know' and 'depends' are excluded.

Source: UK, Sweden, and Denmark 1981–2008, World Value Surveys; UK 1959, Hall (1999:432); US 1960, Putnam (2000:140); US 1972–2010, General Social Survey. DK 1979: Danish political value survey.

Finally, the level of horizontal trust seems to be more stable in Australia and New Zealand. In the early 1980s, 48 per cent of Australians answered that most people could be trusted. This declined to 40 per cent in the third wave but went back up to 48 per cent in the latest wave. In New Zealand the WVS only provided a narrow time span. The scattered evidence from these countries (and the natural limitations of a single research project) have therefore limited my book to its focus on the US and UK only.

The WVS figures also reflect the increased social cohesion in the Nordic countries. In these social democratic welfare regimes, the level of trust was already high in the early 1980s. However, in 1979, the Danish trust level – 47 percent answered that most people could be trusted – was actually below the level measured in US and UK around 1960 (see Table 1.1). But the striking thing is that horizontal trust continues to increase in Sweden and Denmark. Thus in the fifth wave of the WVS, 76 per cent of Danes answered that most people could be trusted. This is a 29 percentage point increase from first measurement in 1979 WVS and thereby Denmark has become the world champion in horizontal trust; a result that has been confirmed by other comparative studies (e.g. G. T. Svendsen and G. L. H. Svendsen 2006). In the fifth wave of the WVS, 68 per cent of Swedes answered that most

people could be trusted, which is a 10 percentage point increase from the measurement in the early 1980s. In Esping-Andersen's famous work, Sweden is the country closest to the ideal type of a social democratic welfare regime. The trends in Swedish and Danish trust levels are also plotted in Figure 1.1. According to WVS data, Norway and Finland also maintained very high levels of horizontal trust. However, the focus in this book will be on Sweden and Denmark.

1.4 The theoretical ambition

Previous research on social trust has not been very successful in locating the mechanisms that create and destroy social cohesion. The studies that have focused on the extreme trust levels in the Nordic countries often emphasize economic equality and the universal structure of the welfare programs (e.g. Kumlin and Rothstein 2005; Rothstein and Uslaner 2005; Larsen 2007). There is definitely something to these arguments, but they often lead to very static explanations such as 'more economic equality will lead to more trust'. Further, the mechanisms by which economic equality actually influences trust are often not theorized and almost never analysed. This is also true for the broader cross-national trust studies which typically assume linear relationships and base their inferences on cross-national differences in social trust (typically using multilevel regression models on cross-cut data). These studies succeed in describing correlations between different variables but often fail to understand the dynamic of change.

Rothstein and Uslaner (e.g. 2005) are among those who have done the most to theorize the very strong relationship between economic inequality and trust, to which we shall return in Chapter 4. In a joint article they also contest the assumption about linear relationships which guide much empirical research. They contribute a contrasting theory about why some countries are caught in low-end equilibrium (especially developing countries) and why some are caught in high-end equilibrium (especially the Nordic countries). However despite this more sophisticated (multiple equilibrium) model, they basically end up with a theory that can explain stability. Thus it remains unclear why the Nordic countries have moved to high-end equilibrium and countries such as the US and UK display a move towards low-end equilibrium.

Putnam's study of decline in American trust levels (2000) is naturally an important exception to the argument that most studies refrain from trying to explain trends in trust levels. However the causal logic in Putnam's explanation of the decline in trust in the US has been heavily criticized (e.g. Levi 1996; Newton 1999; Stolle and Rochon 1999; Uslaner 1999; Stolle

2001). The critics question whether decline in face-to-face interactions in civil society is really the main driver behind the decline in trust in the US. I am also sceptical about explaining the decline in trust levels in the US by the increased tendency to 'bowl alone' (see Chapter 4). Furthermore, the increase in social trust in Sweden and Denmark cannot be explained by an increase in civic engagement. Nevertheless—as will be argued in Chapter 11—I do believe that face-to-face interaction in civil society matters for trust levels. But rather than its being the main driver of trust, I argue that face-to-face interaction might be an important way to modify the social erosion caused by social inequality.

Putnam himself is open to the idea that economic inequality might be an important explanation for the decline in trust in the US. In 'Bowling Alone' he observed that

> …social capital and economic inequality moved in tandem through most of the twentieth century. In terms of the distribution of wealth and income, America in the 1950s and 1960s was more egalitarian than it had been in more than a century…Record highs in equality and in social capital coincided. In both cases circumstantial evidence points to the World War II epoch as key.…Conversely, the last third of the twentieth century was a time of growing inequality and eroding social capital…The timing of the two trends is striking: somewhere around 1965–70 America reversed course and started becoming both less just economically and less well connected socially and politically. (Putnam 2000: 359)

However, inequality and poverty have no prominent place in Putnam's writings. Though I believe in effects from social inequality, I find it fair and understandable that Putnam and other scholars have hesitated to explain decline in trust with increased inequality. The problem is that—despite strong correlations between these trends—we are in need of a convincing micro-level theory that creates the theoretical link between the two variables. The aim of Chapter 4 is to establish such a theoretical link.

Finally, my book will also provide an alternative to the recent literature that links ethnic heterogeneity and trust (e.g. Alsina and Ferrara 2002, Putnam 2007). While I do believe that ethnic heterogeneity in the short run often lowers trust and is a severe challenge for Western societies, I do not believe that trends in ethnic heterogeneity have the ability to explain the trends described above. By comparative standards the US has always been ethnically heterogeneous, as has the UK from the second half of the 20th century, and both Sweden and Denmark have experienced a tremendous increase in ethnic heterogeneity within the last three decades. In Denmark immigrants and their children (with both parents foreign born) made up only 3.1 per cent of the population in 1980, and the majority of these groups came from neighbouring countries like Germany, Sweden,

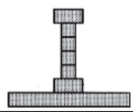
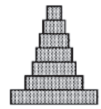
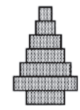
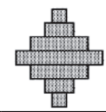
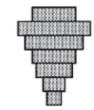
and Norway. The only sizeable non-Western minority were the Turkish, who were welcomed as guest workers in the economic boom of the 1960s. By 2009, adult immigrants and their children made up 10.6 per cent of the Danish population, with non-Westerners accounting for 67 per cent of all immigrants in the country. This great increase was largely caused by refugees seeking asylum, and family reunifications. This development has been even more dramatic in Sweden: in 1960, 4 per cent of Swedes were foreign born, but by 1980 the share was 7.5 per cent, and in 2008 it had increased to 13.8 per cent (Statistics Sweden). If one includes immigrants' children, then the share increases to 16.7 per cent of the Swedish population in 2006 (Djuve and Kavli 2007: 16). As in Denmark, the increase is primarily due to refugees and family unification. Thus, while in the US and the UK decline in trust might go together with increased ethnic heterogeneity, the opposite seems to be the case in Sweden and Denmark. So if there is a link between ethnic heterogeneity and trust, developments in these countries seem to indicate that it is a contingent relationship.

1.5 The historical similarities and the logic of comparison

This book will use the four cases—US, UK, Sweden, and Denmark—to locate the mechanisms which have the capacity to change the level of social cohesion. The comparative design helps to falsify some explanations such as the impact of ethnic diversity, and to verify other explanations. The premise of this design is that the same mechanisms operate (though in different directions) in the four countries. This premise could be questioned if the US, UK, Sweden, and Denmark were believed to constitute fundamentally different worlds. However, in this section it will be argued that Esping-Andersen's social democratic and liberal welfare regimes are not mutual opposites. On the contrary, they have a great deal in common.

Historically these institutional configurations originate from a common point of departure and, ideologically, they continued to be based on a dream about creating an egalitarian, middle-class society. That can be illustrated by looking at contemporary citizens' perceptions of what makes an ideal society. This is done by means of survey data from the US for 2010 (GSS) and from the UK (BSA), Sweden (ISSP), and Denmark (ISSP) for 2009 (see data introduction below). In all four countries the respondents were shown an illustration (including a small text, see Table 1.2) of different types of societies and then asked 'What do you think the UK (respectively: US, Sweden, Denmark) ought to be like—which would you prefer?' The distribution of responses is shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2. Public perceptions of an ideal society: US 2010, UK, Sweden, and Denmark 2009

	 Type A A small elite at the top, very few people in the middle and the great mass of people at the bottom	 Type B A society like a pyramid with a small elite at the top, more people in the middle, and most at the bottom	 Type C A pyramid except that just a few people are at the bottom	 Type D A society with most people in the middle.	 Type E Many people near the top, and only a few near the bottom.	N (100%)
Ideal society:						
US	3	9	13	49	26	1143
UK	1	7	17	60	15	1825
SE	1	3	12	52	32	1053
DK	0	2	8	60	30	1410

Note: 'Don't know' answers excluded.

Source: USA GSS 2000, UK BSA 2009, DK ISSP 2009, SW ISSP 2009.

The striking finding is that Britons, Swedes, Danes, and even Americans had very similar perceptions of how their society ought to be. In all four countries, the most common answer was the type-D-shaped society accompanied by the text 'a society with most people in the middle': 49 per cent of Americans, 60 per cent of Britons, 52 per cent of Swedes, and 60 per cent of Danes preferred this society. The same preference can be found in most other countries which conducted the survey. Furthermore, most of those who did not choose the middle-class society pointed to the type-E society, which was accompanied by the text 'many people near the top, and only a few near the bottom': 26 per cent of Americans, 15 per cent of Britons, 32 per cent of Swedes, and 30 per cent of Danes chose this society. Actually it is quite telling that more respondents picked type D, the middle-class society, than type E, which one could call an 'everybody-a-winner' society. The middle-class society still seems to be the utopian ideal in all four countries—the US included. The same is also found by Norton and Ariely (2011) who in surveys asked Americans to construct the optimal income distribution. It turned out that the (average) constructed desired distribution came very close to actual income distribution in Sweden.

As for the rest of the respondents (those who did not pick type D or E), most picked type C society with the text 'a pyramid with just a few people at the bottom': 13 per cent used this category in the US, 17 per cent in UK, 12 per cent in Sweden, and 8 per cent in Denmark. The classic 'conservative' type-B

society (with the text 'a society like a pyramid with a small elite at the top, more people in the middle, and most at the bottom') gained even less support. Finally, almost nobody was attracted by the type-A society with the text 'a small elite at the top, very few people in the middle, and the great mass of people at the bottom'. The American dream was not at all about establishing the classically polarized, 'early-capitalist' type-A society, but rather the type-D, middle-class society—as in Britain, Sweden, and Denmark.

That Americans, Britons, Swedes, and Danes had and still have the same hopes and dreams for their society increases the relevance of a comparative study. If one believes that Americans and Britons simply have a passion for inequality, and Swedes and Danes a passion for equality, this similarity in perceptions of the ideal society might come as a surprise. However, seen in a historical perspective these four countries are not as different as often imagined. In fact they have a lot in common, and the similarities ease the search for the factors that might explain why they end up with such different outcome in terms of horizontal trust and public support for anti-poverty policies; it brings the study closer to a 'most-similar design'.

To start with, they have Protestantism in common, whereby historically almost all Americans, Britons, Swedes, and Danes came to believe that religion was a relationship between the individual and God—without the involvement of hierarchical religious institutions. It is well known that these religious perceptions heavily influenced the broader thinking of society. Protestantism promotes the idea of enlightened, free individuals who are able to make their own decisions and should not be suppressed in this behaviour. This made a strong argument for individualism, equality, and democracy.[2] The strong emphasis on equality traced back to Protestantism can easily be found in the four countries. Citizens are believed to be born equal and not as members of certain strata. And if members are in fact born into certain strata (as in all societies), it is perceived to be a problem. This deep appreciation of equality is shared by liberalism and socialism, both of which developed in opposition to conservative rulers.

This profound similarity in basic egalitarian values is often overlooked because of different views on the equality of outcome: social democratic thinking favors redistribution; liberal thinking does not. However, in both cases the attitude towards redistribution is rooted in the basic value of equality of

[2] Protestantism also fits very nicely with capitalism—according to Weber the former was the very foundation of the latter. Thus it was the uncertainty about whether one would end up in heaven or hell that made Protestants look for earthly signs such as wealth, and made them live a puritanical life that allowed the accumulation of capital. This impact of Protestantism is very well described for the case of America, where it became very sectarian and most people still believe in God. However, despite the fact that most Britons, Swedes, and Danes state that they do not believe in any God, it is clear that Protestantism has had a big impact. If one takes Weber's old measure of the work ethic it is telling that, as measured by the ISSP survey of 1997, the world record in 'non-financial work commitment' is held by the Danes—not the Americans (Larsen 2003).

opportunity. Thus in social democratic welfare regimes redistribution is typically advocated because people do not have the same opportunities to start out with. And there is a lack of redistribution in liberal welfare regimes because the market—it is thought—provides equal opportunities. Furthermore, even if we measure public perceptions of just wage differences (probably the most valid equality of outcome measure we have), it has been shown that wage differences between the liberal welfare regimes and social democratic welfare regimes are not as large as widely believed; actually it is the median voters in conservative welfare regimes who accept the greatest wage differences. The (median) French stated, for example, in the ISSP 1999 survey that high professions ought to earn a little above four times as much as a skilled factory worker. The British and the Americans believed that the difference should be a little above three times as much. The Danes answered two and half times as much and finally the Swedes answered twice as much (see Larsen 2006: 40).

In terms of policy, the shared value of equality of opportunity can be seen, for example, in the efforts all four countries have made to open the educational system to all citizens. Even the Americans, often believed to be reluctant to build big government, long ago established free public primary, secondary, and high schools. Furthermore the large number of US scholarships are believed to open the university system to all. Sweden and Denmark took this even further and established free public universities and even introduced a generous universal student allowance. The basic idea—or at least the basic legitimation for these policies—is that everybody should have equal opportunities from the start. The liberal touch in Scandinavian welfare policies is actually well documented. Though Esping-Andersen labelled these countries social democratic regimes, it is a fact that in many cases the liberal agrarian parties implemented the characteristically Scandinavian universal benefit schemes (Baldwin 1990).

Historically the US, UK, Denmark, and Sweden shared the same point of departure: tax-financed benefits targeted at the (deserving) poor. Furthermore, the dimensions of the 'golden-age' welfare state were smaller than often imagined. In 1960, total public expenditures were 27 per cent of GDP in the US, 32 per cent in the UK, 31 per cent in Sweden, and 25 per cent in Denmark (Andersen 1998: 116). This is naturally a very rough measure, and the high US military expenses to some extent hide its position as a welfare laggard. But in size, the British, Swedish, and Danish welfare states at least were not very different from each other.[3]

The absence of any successful (real) socialist parties is another thing that the US, UK, Sweden, and Denmark have in common. This absence might be

[3] Social expenditures are naturally a better measure, but they cannot be calculated very far back in history. Even the subtraction of military expenses makes it difficult to trace the real social expenditures in the old national accounts, which are the basis of the OECD figures.

caused by the absence of real conservatism, at least if one is to believe the work of Lipset (1997),[4] who argues that it is experience with feudal structures that generates class awareness and potential for socialism. He uses this line of reasoning to explain the absence of socialism in the US, and to explain why real socialism only succeeds in societies with a history of feudalism. The social democratic parties in the UK, Denmark, and Sweden were naturally heavily inspired by socialist thinking and based on the mobilization of workers. But in contrast to the socialist parties of continental Europe, they changed rather early from being workers' parties (fighting for the narrow interests of their members) to 'catch-all' parties which strove to find a national compromise between labour and capital. The result is not a fundamental absence of class awareness, as is noticeable at times in the US. But it is a fact that successful social democratism tends to crowd out the radical class awareness necessary for real socialism. It was actually the core of Marshall's idea of full citizenship that the civil, political, and social rights provided by the state could ease the conflicts connected with capitalism (Marshall 1950). And it is a classic line of reasoning within socialist theory that the nation state (and especially the welfare state) was a way to stabilize capitalism and prevent revolution.

The essential point is that, when it comes to fundamental values and the historical point of departure after the Second World War, these four countries actually have a lot in common. It is only within the last three or four decades that these countries have grown apart. Therefore it may not be so surprising that both the liberal and social democratic welfare regimes had similarly high levels of trust during the 'golden age'. It is a classic empirical finding that Protestantism is linked to higher levels of trust (e.g. Inglehart 1999). But more importantly for my theoretical argument, the (perceived) level of economic equality was fairly equal in the four countries studied (see Chapters 3 and 4). The 'American melting pot' is most often associated with the famous idea (or dream) that even the poorest immigrant people from whatever cultural background can turn into well-off middle-class Americans through hard work (e.g. Glazer and Moynihan 1963). In the 1950s this dream seemed to have been largely fulfilled. Lipset (1997) argues that Americans in the 1950s and 1960s came to believe that they had established the egalitarian society promised by socialism. The UK also had its idea of a melting pot where poor people, including immigrants from other Commonwealth countries, could be successfully integrated into the middle classes of the 'mother country'.

[4] The US, Sweden, and Denmark have never had strong forces that opposed the process of modernization. In the American case, it was quite obviously a matter of the absence of feudal structures. In the Swedes' and Danes' case, it was a matter of weak feudal structure due in part to a strong king. Thus, in many aspects the small independent farmers in Scandinavia created a point of departure that had much in common with that of a settler society. British conservatism was stronger, but it never resembled the conservatism found in continental Europe.

Sweden also prospered from the 1950s onwards, while the economic boom came a little later in Denmark (see Chapter 2). However, to ordinary people the most important symbol of a new, all-encompassing middle-class society was probably the capability of working-class people to establish nuclear families in suburban areas. This was the symbol of the realization of the dream.

It was naturally contested whether the economic boom by itself could deliver a middle-class society with equality; the strong belief in the power of the market to do this is probably an American peculiarity. However, in case the market should fail to do this, one can find in all four countries progressive political projects that helped facilitate the coming of the new encompassing middle-class society; even in the American case. Kennedy entered office with idea of a 'New Frontier', which marked a coming fight against poverty. The Johnson administration followed the rhetoric and declared 'war on poverty' in 1964 in order to build the 'Great Society'. Steensland (2008) describes how plans to introduce a guaranteed income in the US actually received broad bipartisan support in the 1960s (though it ultimately failed). In the other three countries, it was the social democrats who formulated the political projects aimed at fulfilling the hopes for a middle-class society. In Sweden the social democrats labelled the project the 'people's home'; in Denmark, the social democrats proclaimed 'Denmark for the people', and in the UK the social democrats aimed to implement the famous 'Beveridge plan', which had become (and still is) a national symbol expressing British dreams of an all-encompassing society. Why the prospect of a prosperous middle-class society is believed to be of great importance for trust in fellow citizens will be further theorized in Chapter 4.

1.6 The data material behind this book

It is not an easy task to cover a 60-year period in four countries. If the research standard is to provide solid empirical evidence on the context, trust levels, and public attitudes in each country, it is in fact an impossible task. Still, the intended contribution of this book is to at least provide a theoretical answer to research questions about trends in trust and public support for 'integrative policies'. This theoretical argument will then be illustrated by means of empirical data. Sometimes this will be in the form of general country descriptions. These descriptions are possible because international organizations have compiled historical data on poverty, inequality, crime, family break-up, and other factors in the four countries. Most of these descriptions of the 'real' reality are based on figures from the OECD (oecd.stat.org) and the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS). Both organizations try to make US figures compatible with European figures. On other issues the theoretical points will be illustrated by empirical evidence which has been exclusively collected for this book. This includes survey questions posed in the

UK, Sweden, and Denmark, and a media-content study. Both data collections try to measure the 'social constructions' that can be found in each of the four countries. I will briefly introduce both these unique data sources.

1.6.1 Measuring public opinion by means of unique survey material

The American General Social Survey (GSS) is the most widely-used data source for analysing the trust levels and public attitudes towards anti-poverty policy in the US. First conducted in 1972, many of the items have been repeated in following years. Of special relevance is the GSS 2000, as it included the ISSP module on social inequality, and a module labelled 'Multi-ethnic United States'. The GSS 2010 is also of special relevance because it included the newest ISSP module on social inequality. Findings from these surveys have already been used above. The GSS is conducted as a face-to-face survey, but the ISSP items are in an attached self-completion section. The answers given in this large representative sample of the adult US population serve as a baseline for many of the analyses that will be conducted in this book. The question about social trust has been replicated in British, Swedish, and Danish surveys, but unfortunately the vast majority of other central GSS items cannot be found in European countries. This constitutes a fundamental research barrier if one wants to compare American and European public attitudes.

To overcome this barrier, this book is based on a unique data set in which a number of the most central GSS items have been replicated in the UK, Sweden, and Denmark. In the UK the relevant GSS items were included in the BSA 2009. The BSA is the most comprehensive British survey and provides a representative sample of the adult British population. As in the GSS, BSA data was collected in a face-to-face survey with a self-completion section that included the ISSP and a number of other items. In Denmark and Sweden the GSS items were included in the ISSP 2009 survey which in both countries was conducted as an independent postal survey of a representative sample of adults (the response rate was 59 per cent in Sweden and 56 per cent in Denmark; see the ISSP archive for details). In all four countries the survey institutes reported that no severe bias was found in the samples. Thereby I have tried to establish a truly comparative dataset, which is a unique tool for beginning to answer the research questions I have posed above. Finally, I should mention that this book also makes use of other national public opinion surveys.

1.6.2 Measuring stereotypes by means of media pictures

It will be argued in this book that both our trust in fellow citizens and our willingness to support anti-poverty policies is dependent on our perception

of the persons at the 'bottom' of society. In Chapters 2 and 6, I argue that these perceptions are likely to be influenced by stereotypes, and that, though such 'pictures in our heads' are difficult to study, the pictures of the bottom in magazines and newspapers are an excellent way to describe the stereotypes present in different societies. The idea behind this design and the data collection that followed were strongly inspired by Martin Gilens's work on the American case (Gilens 1996b, 2000). He has studied how the bottom was portrayed in pictures in US news magazines during the period 1950–1992 (2000), with special emphasis on the five-year period 1988–1992. Weekly news magazines not being as common in Europe as in the US, I replicated Gilens's work by analysing pictures in five nation-wide newspapers in the UK, Sweden, and Denmark. For each of the three countries, I and a research assistant sampled 1,750 newspapers. The pictures of the bottom and the accompanying stories found in these newspapers were coded and analysed (see Chapter 7 for details). The media content was gathered from the five-year period prior to the survey described above. I thereby had a unique opportunity to study the link between stereotypes, media content and public attitudes (see Chapter 6 for further introduction).

Just to give the reader a feeling for the collected media content, one of the articles from the sample is shown below (see Figure 1.2). The story and the attached pictures are from *The Sunday Telegraph* (18 February 2007). The large picture on the left-hand side is of 15-year-old Billy Cox, who was gunned down in his bedroom in South London. The picture is followed by the text 'Target Tributes to Billy Cox, murdered in south London last week. Apparently he was not a member of a gang, which may have left him exposed'. The large picture on the right-hand side is an anonymous gunman for whom no name or age is stated. The picture is followed by the text 'Gun menace behind the high-profile murders. Life on the south London estates is a matter-of-fact story of daily violence and injury'. The unique stories in this media content are naturally of interest and provide a context for this book. However, like most other social scientists, I am not interested in peculiarities. The main ambition of the media study is to infer how the bottom in general is presented to 'the majority'. This can be done by quantitative means: for each country it can be investigated how many stories are about crime, how many about pensioner poverty, and so on; how many times non-whites, and how many times whites are depicted. This can also be done by qualitative means. Thus, the person in a given picture can be seen as a representation of a stereotype. In Chapter 6 it will be argued that pictures such as those appearing in *The Sunday Telegraph* are not simply random snap-shots of reality. In fact, they are social constructions, which both reflect and influence our understanding of 'the bottom'. The two pictures in Figure 1.2, below were selected by the newspaper from a large pool of pictures and the way the story is 'framed' is

Figure 1.2. Example of collected media content

Source: *The Sunday Telegraph*, 18 February 2007 © Telegraph Media Group Limited 2007

also chosen. In this case, the right-hand picture was probably staged by the photographer. It is highly unlikely that the journalist and the photographer during their visit in Fenwick Estate in South London passed a person who pointed a gun into their camera (had that happened, it would surely have been described in the article). Thus, most likely the photographer found or created a person that fit his or her (and the supposed readers') image of what the killer of Billy Cox may have looked like. This person has been equipped with a gun, shirt, balaclava, and—with an attitude. These processes of the selection and sometimes even creation of media pictures contain valuable information, which this book will try to exploit.

1.6.3 Experimental data

Finally, this book is based on experimental data collected in 2009 and 2010. The experiment exposed the participant to different 'treatments' which tried to 'load' stereotypes. Afterwards the participants were asked about their level of trust, their support for anti-poverty policies, etc. The data is used in Chapter 11 in a discussion of the possibility of deconstructing out-group perceptions. The setup of the experiment is also introduced in Chapter 11.

1.7 Outline of the book

This book is divided into four parts. The main structure of this book and overall line of reasoning are outlined in Figure 1.3. Part 1, 'The Rise and Fall of Middle-Class Society', describes how a number of changes in socio-economic structures challenged people's perception of living in a middle-class society. The focus will be on deindustrialization, the break-up of family structures and immigration (Chapter 2). Part I will also describe how these socio-economic changes had very different consequences for the US and UK on the one hand, and for Sweden and Denmark on the other. This is a classic story about how the transition from an industrial to post-industrial economy was contingent upon political power resources and institutional legacies.

Part II of this book, 'The Importance of Perceptions', describes how our perceptions of the structures of our society influence our assessment of the trustworthiness of fellow citizens. Our perceptions of society are influenced by the actual structures of society. But this part of the book will demonstrate that this is not a simple one-to-one relationship. There are clear examples of a severe mismatch between 'reality' and perceptions. This leads to Part III, 'The Construction of Perceptions: The Case of "the bottom"', which—by means of media content—describes how 'the poor' are constructed in the four countries. The idea is that the mass media are the crucial link between the real

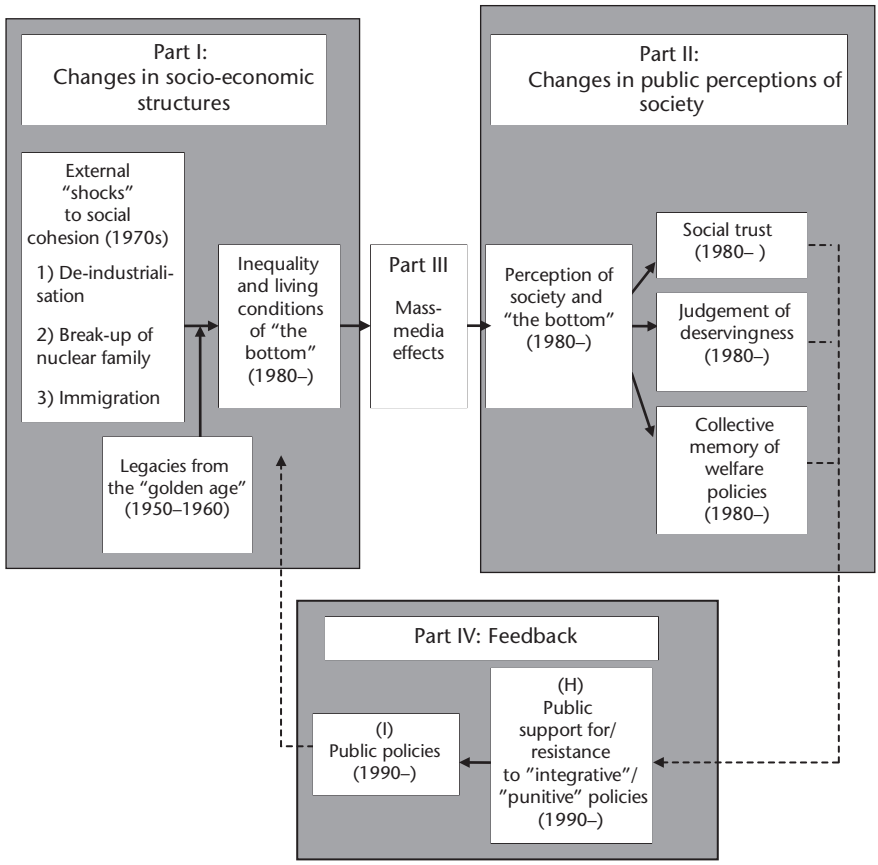


Figure 1.3. The main line of causal reasoning explaining decreased trust levels in the US and UK and increased trust levels in Sweden and Denmark

socio-economic structures and our perceptions of society. The mass media constructions are surely influenced by real socio-economic conditions. But it will be shown that this is again not a one-to-one relationship. In some areas there is a very clear deviance between 'reality' and the constructions of the mass media. These three parts of the book try to provide the answer as to why social cohesion declined in the US and UK and increased in Sweden and Denmark. In the last part of the book, Part IV, 'The Contemporary Challenges: Vicious and Virtuous Feedback Circles', I discuss whether the US and UK are caught in a stable, low-trust equilibrium, and Sweden and Denmark, in a stable, high-trust equilibrium. In making these assessments, this book discusses the importance of public opinion, the impact of increased ethnic diversity, and the countries' ability to dismantle negative out-group perceptions.