

# In defence of the nation: Why do churches receive public trust as high as their secular counterparts?

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## Abstract

Secularisation theory contends that religiosity and trust in religious organisations tend to decline when trust in their secular counterparts increases. However, it is puzzling why religious organisations receive public trust as high as their secular counterparts in countries where religiosity is low. If religious organisations are deemed to be doomed as trust in secular counterparts rises, why do people still trust them? We argue that a high level of trust in religious organisations is associated with their importance in nation-building and national identity construction: Individuals with a strong *national identity* are more likely to trust religious organisations. Using both qualitative and quantitative data about public trust in the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) and Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), this study finds that the historical role of religious organisations in strengthening national cohesion and building national identity during times of instability leads ordinary citizens to place both generational and strategic trust in these religious organisations.

## KEY WORDS

Armenia, Armenian Apostolic Church, Georgia, Georgian Orthodox Church, nationalism, nation-building, South Caucasus, trust in religious organisations

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Secularisation theory predicted that reliance on religious organisations will decline as secular ones gain prominence in modern society. Yet, empirical evidence demonstrates that some modern societies, despite increased trust in

secular organisations and low religiosity among the population, still tend to trust religious institutions as much as their secular counterparts. It is puzzling what explains this high level of trust in religious organisations in countries where religiosity is at low levels. This study explores this puzzle and asks why some individuals have a high level of trust in religious organisations in countries with a low level of religiosity. It argues that a high level of trust in religious institutions is connected to an important historical role of these institutions in nation-building, national identity construction and maintaining national cohesion.

Proponents of secularisation theory have particularly focused on Western Europe to demonstrate parallels between growing trends of secularisation and declining levels of religiosity and trust in religious institutions (Chaves, 1994; Sommerville, 1998; Wilson, 1982). However, a lower level of religiosity and a higher level of trust in religious organisations in several countries pose an empirical challenge to the theory of secularisation.

This study addresses this empirical puzzle and contends that to understand a high level of trust in religious organisations, it is necessary to move beyond a religiosity factor and look at the role of these organisations in domestic politics and nation-building at times of instability. It argues that the study of the role of religious institutions in national politics is paramount to the understanding of individual trust in these institutions: A higher level of trust in religious institutions is associated with a central role of these institutions in nation-building and national identity construction. Citizens who have a strong attachment to their national identity are therefore more likely to trust religious organisations that have played an essential role in nation-building.

Based on this framework, this study advances two major hypotheses. First, individuals who see themselves as part of their nation are more likely to have a higher level of trust in religious organisations that have played a key role in nation-building and national identity construction. Second, individuals who are proud of their national identity are more likely to have a higher level of trust in religious organisations that have played an important role in nation-building and nationalism. Controlling for other determinants of trust in religious institutions, the study tests the applicability of these hypotheses against the World Values Surveys (WVS) Georgia 2014 and WVS Armenia 2021. The research finds statistically significant results consistent with both hypotheses. Relying on both qualitative and quantitative evidence, the research concludes that the essential role of religious institutions in nation-building, and national identity construction is important for understanding public trust in these institutions.

These findings should be taken with caution though. While results suggest that public trust in churches in Armenia and Georgia is associated with their historically vital role in nation-building during times of instability, we should not draw generalisations that churches always have had a historically vital role in nation-building. Empirical evidence suggests that some churches fail to 'lay claim to a historical defence of nation', leaving them with low moral authority (Grzymala-Busse, 2016, p. 3). The findings from this study presume that the absence of churches in national identity construction could be one reason why they have received low public support. However, this presumption also should be taken with caution while generalising it to other cases around the world. Both Georgia and Armenia are deviant cases where religiosity is low while there is a high level of trust in religious organisations.

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature on the role of churches in the construction of nationalism and national identity. Previous research has shown that churches have gained significant moral authority, which has given them institutional access when religious and national identities are intertwined (Gryzmala-Busse, 2015; Grzymala-Busse, 2016). Instead, some researchers contend that religious institutions' positioning in politics depends on the strategic decisions of ruling elites. When their interests are accommodated by the ruling elite, churches tend to restrict their activities to the sacred domain. Conversely, when their interests are threatened, they become more involved in daily politics. The competition between churches over organisational interests leads them to evoke the support of nationalism (Metreveli, 2020).

The first line of research has primarily focused on explaining why some churches have been successful in influencing public policies, such as drafting constitutions, restricting abortion and controlling education, while others have had a weaker impact. The second line of research has examined church-state interactions. In contrast, this study draws on individual-level data to explain the high level of public support for churches in countries with low religiosity measured in terms of fasting and praying. It specifically highlights the historical role of churches in

protecting the nation and establishing national identity during times of instability, which has led to strong public trust in churches. Although previous studies have mentioned the role of churches in defending the nation, how this role translates into high moral and strategic trust in churches has remained understudied.

Building on previous research, this study shows that religious institutions can maintain their level of public support equivalent to secular institutions if they play a significant role in unifying the nation during times of instability. This role translates into both moral and strategic trust. Hence, this study contributes to previous studies, unpacking how churches obtain public trust, an essential element of moral authority. The findings of this research can be useful for policy-makers and religious leaders who seek to understand the relationship between religion, politics and public trust.

The study of public trust in the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) is essential for two interrelated reasons. First, a high level of trust in these religious institutions in countries with a lower level of religiosity poses an empirical puzzle for the secularisation theory, which postulates that the authority of religious organisations declines, and religion loses its importance as secular institutions gain prominence. Both GOC and AAC are deviant cases based on the predictions of secularisation theory: While the theory would expect a lower level of confidence in these religious organisations, they have received strong public support. Second and relatedly, most of the public opinion surveys from Georgia and Armenia indicate that GOC and AAC have been among the most trusted institutions. Except for Caucasus Barometer 2019, all surveys demonstrate that public trust in GOC is even higher than trust in the Georgian army, the most trusted secular institution in Georgia. Similarly, nine Caucasus Barometer surveys demonstrate that the AAC is one of the most trusted institutions in Armenia. Both reasons suggest that there are some interesting insights about the role of these organisations in national politics, and therefore, the study of it has the potential to make contributions to the literature on religiosity and secularisation theory.

Concerning scope conditions, this study neither examines the reasons for the religiosity level in Georgia and Armenia nor compares the trust in religious organisations of Western Europe and to trust in those of Georgia and Armenia. With broader implications for the countries with a high level of trust in a religious organisation and a low level of religiosity measured as fasting, praying and attending religious services, the study examines public trust in religious organisations in Georgia and Armenia, which are located in the same security environment and where religious organisations played an important historical role in uniting nation and building national identity during times of instability and foreign invasions.

The rest of the study proceeds through four sections. The first section reviews the literature on trust in religious organisations. The second part presents the argument and major hypotheses. The third section shortly analyses the historical roles of GOC and AAC in nation-building and national identity construction. The third section describes the data and method. The fourth section discusses the results.

## 2 | THE STUDY OF TRUST IN RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS

Previous research has demonstrated that trust in institutions is an essential component of interactions between individuals, groups and institutions and therefore deserves scholarly attention (Tyler, 2006; Wong et al., 2011). Societies with a high level of trust are more likely to involve in volunteering and charity activities, demonstrate tolerance and approve governmental policies to redistribute resources from the wealthy to the poor (Uslaner, 2002).

However, conceptualising and measuring trust has been a daunting task for scholars. The lack of scholarly consensus has resulted in different definitions of trust across disciplines. Cultural differences and linguistic variations have made the task more challenging. Some studies have treated trust as a measure of confidence (Rousseau et al., 1998), whereas others have contended that trust and confidence are separate concepts (Zmerli et al., 2007).

Nevertheless, studies have generally viewed trust as risk reduction (Keating & Ruzicka, 2014), a voluntary state of vulnerability (Möllering, 2006), and calculative (Rousseau et al., 1998). This study attempts to account for a higher

level of trust in religious institutions in countries with rising secularisation and conceptualise *trust in institutions* as the extent of congruence between individual expectations from these institutions and what individuals believe that they are doing in actuality (Hetherington, 2005). Public trust in religious organisations is linked to the popular perception of their moral and generational legitimacy as trust becomes an important part of perceived legitimacy (Tyler, 2006).

Studies differentiate between moral trust and strategic trust in institutions. Whereas the former is determined by a general trust in others, the latter is ‘particularistic and based upon observed demonstrations of trustworthiness ... [and] beliefs about whether an individual (or institution) can be trusted to do a particular thing’ (Chatagnier, 2012, p. 633). While moral trust is generational, strategic trust is changeable and contingent upon the trustworthiness of relevant institutions.

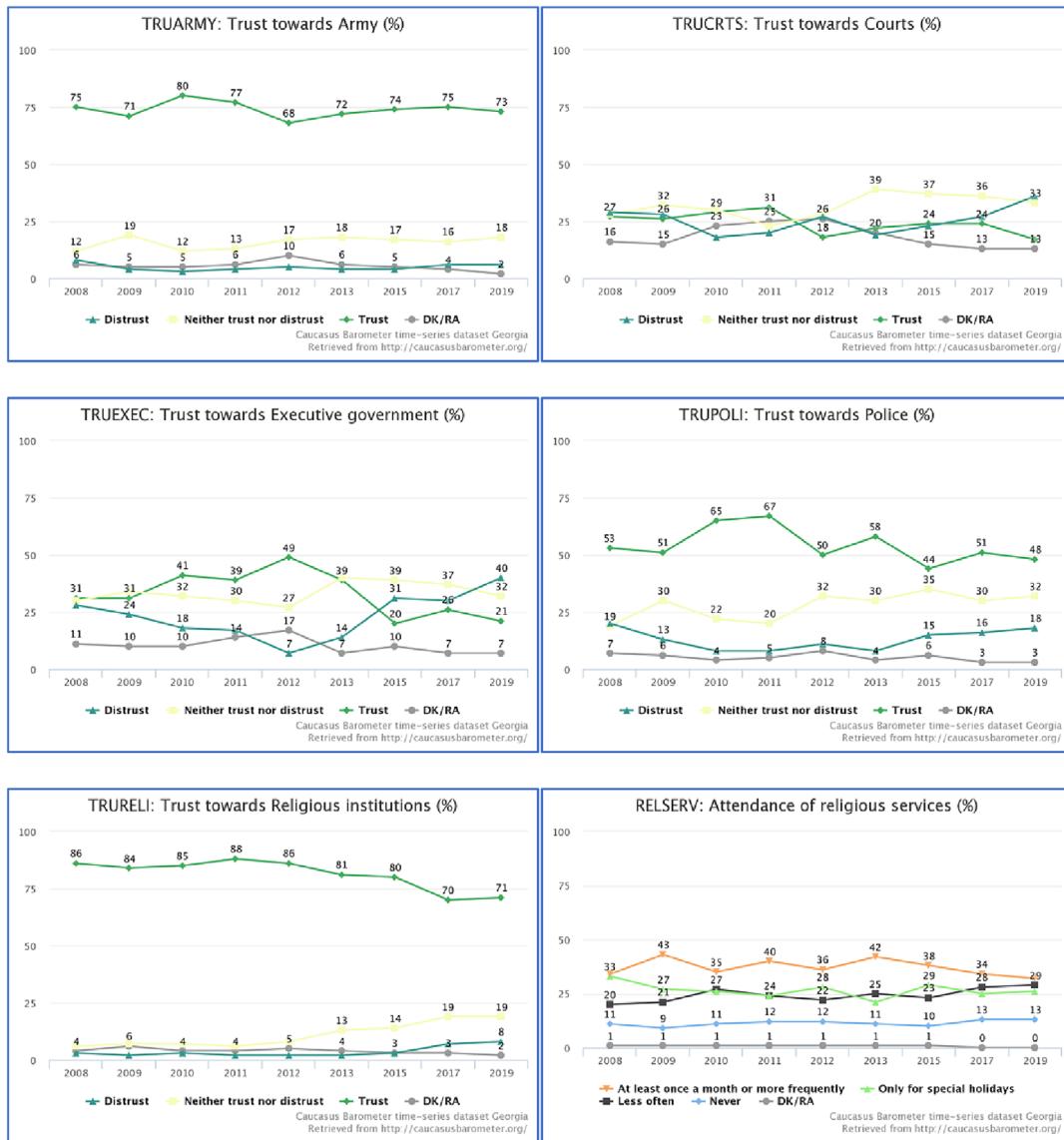
Public trust in religious institutions also has moral and strategic elements. Moral trust in religious organisations is an attitude that involves optimism and positive feelings towards these organisations. Individuals place moral trust in religious organisations without having direct personal experience and interactions with them. Instead, the moral trust passes through generations as people learn it from their parents (Uslaner, 2002). Moral trust in religious organisations is generational as moral values are persistent through generations. Moral trust in religious organisations involves a historical public perception of the trustworthiness that progressed through generations germinating a recognition that these organisations have historically and genuinely been involved in resolving community challenges.

By contrast, strategic trust in religious institutions is the extent the public accepts them as credible, competent and responsible towards citizens (Devos et al., 2002). It involves a public perception that religious organisations are responsive to societal needs and an expectation that they will act to address societal challenges should mainstream society face difficulties or any kind of threats during times of instability and chaos. Overall, public trust in religious organisations constitutes a belief that the values, preferences and actions of these organisations will reflect both moral and generational values, align with public interests and address societal needs and challenges should mainstream society go through difficult times. Standard survey questions are usually used to capture trust in institutions (Uslaner, 2007).

Public trust in GOC and AAC has both generational and strategic components. Since these churches have had a special historical and spiritual role during insecure times, trust in these religious organisations is generational. Moral trust in AAC and GOC reflects positive feelings, optimism and a sense of social solidarity regarding the role of these religious organisations in Armenian and Georgian mainstream societies passed through generations.

While the current public trust in religious organisations has historical roots in Georgia and Armenia, it has taken a strategic direction in recent years in both countries. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate public support in GOC and AAC, respectively, during the period from 2008 to 2019. Both figures suggest that there are some fluctuations in the level of trust in churches across different years, although the trust is still high. While a high level of trust in religious organisations is associated with their historical importance in national identity building, the small fluctuations in the level of trust could be linked to the performance of these organisations. Those who value their national identity are more likely to place trust in religious institutions if they believe these institutions provide mainstream society with the desired outcomes, which are national unity, preservation of national identity and national cohesion and order, specifically, during times of instability. Overall, public trust in AAC and GOC involves a perception that they are capable and determined to lead Armenian and Georgian societies, respectively, during challenging times including domestic instability and chaos and that they are reliable and responsive to societal needs.

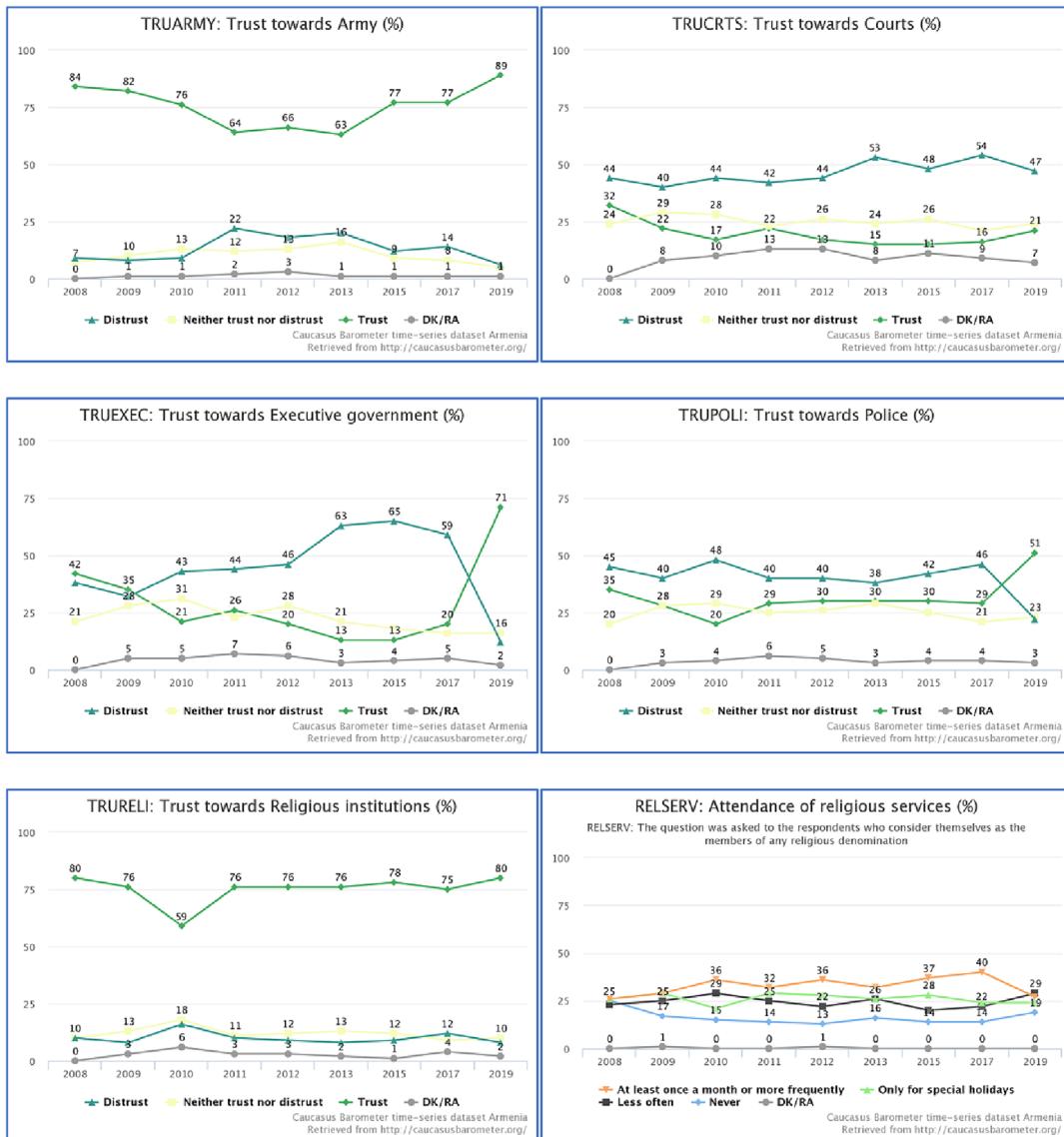
Secularisation theory has argued that trust in religious organisations and religiosity decline as modern societies embrace secular values. The formulated theory of secularisation has conceptualised religiosity levels as the authority of religious organisations and contended that societies are secularised and become less religious when religious institutions lose their authority. One proponent of secularisation theory assumed that ‘by the 21st century religious believers will only remain in small sects, united against the secular culture of the world’ (Quoted in Sulkhanishvili, 2012, pp. 139–140).



**FIGURE 1** Religiosity levels and trust in various institutions in Georgia. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Formulated secularisation theory measures the authority of religious organisations in terms of public trust: Religious organisations lose their authority, and societies are secularised as people lose their trust in religious organisations and place more confidence in secular counterparts (Chaves, 1994; Sommerville, 1998; Wilson, 1982). Therefore, per the formulated theory of secularisation, a lower level of trust in religious institutions is associated with a higher level of trust in secular organisations such as police, court and government.

Other studies challenge formulated theory of secularisation by asserting that the decline of the authority of religious organisations does not necessarily mean the decline of religiosity. For instance, Charles (2010) uses a specific variable to exemplify a different dimension of religiosity, which the author calls ‘subjective importance of religion’. The variable measures religiosity levels by the extent individuals believe that religion is important in their life



**FIGURE 2** Religiosity levels and trust in various institutions in Armenia. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

decisions. The author finds that the importance of religion in individuals' life is an essential indicator of their trust in religious institutions.

Studies also contend that the level of public trust in different institutions depends on interpersonal trust. This culture-based theory posits that those individuals who trust others generally tend to trust institutions as well. Based on this theory and using the New Democracies Barometer dataset for 10 post-communist countries, Mishler and Rose (2001) found that individuals who trust other people are more likely to trust institutions. Others also found evidence consistent with the culture-based theory of trust in institutions. (Almond & Verba, 1963; Charles, 2010; Inglehart, 1997; Lane, 1969; Putnam, 2000).

Socio-economic factors such as age and education are also found to affect public trust in institutions (Cole, 1973; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Norris, 1999). However, studies found conflictual findings on the effect of age on trust in religious institutions. The older generation is usually anticipated to participate in religious services more often and have a higher level of trust in religious institutions than the younger generation. However, this anticipation is not met within the post-Soviet area where the older generation is less likely to have trust in religious institutions because of experience with Soviet atheism. Norris and Inglehart (2004) argued that the individuals who experienced effective Soviet atheist policies are more likely to demonstrate a lower level of religiosity than pre-communist and post-communist generations. By contrast, Need and Evans (2001) conducted a comparative study of religiosity in 10 post-communist countries and found that urbanisation and higher education level had led a post-communist younger generation to demonstrate less religiosity compared to the older generation.

Although these studies provide credible explanations to account for public trust in religious institutions, how the role of religious institutions in nation-building, national cohesion and national identity construction during insecure times influences public trust in these institutions remains understudied. Studies have generally looked at the decline of religiosity levels to emphasise the rise of secularisation, particularly, in Western Europe. However, the lower level of religiosity and a higher level of trust in religious institutions in Georgia and Armenia pose a challenge to this common scholarly understanding.

Whereas Charles (2010) addresses this question in her study of trust in religious institutions in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, her models omit the role of religious organisations in national politics and nation-building. Instead, the author examines trust in religious organisations as the function of her new religiosity measure. The author uses the formulated secularisation theory's measure of religiosity as a dependent variable and her religiosity indicator as an independent variable. This sounds more tautological and raises the endogeneity issue since one measure of religiosity is regressed on another measure. The author also does not clearly explain how measuring religiosity as the subjective importance of religion in one's life matches religiosity as seen from the perspective of Armenian and Georgian theological traditions and why and how the subjective importance of religion in one's life translates into trust in religious organisations. In the next part, this study unpacks how the important role of religious organisations in nation-building and national identity construction translates into higher individual trust in these organisations.

### 3 | RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS AND NATION-BUILDING

If religion and religious organisations are deemed to be doomed, why do people still trust them? To understand high individual trust in religious institutions, this study argues that we need to move beyond their role in religious rituals like weddings and funerals and wider spiritual guidance and examine the popular perception of their important role in historical nation-building and national identity construction, as some religious institutions are 'no longer limited to theology or to ritual' (Grzymala-Busse, 2016, p. 3). Religious organisations have provided moral support and national cohesion for people during times of instability by contributing to nation-building and constructing national identity, and therefore, people are likely to naturally hold onto these organisations.

#### 3.1 | National-building and national identity construction

A *nation* is viewed as an imagined collective group that has several necessary components including culture, language and territory (Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 1983). *National identity* is 'a body of people who feel that they are a nation' (Emerson, 1960). It is 'a negotiation among forces both internal and external to the nation in question' (Rusciano, 2003, p. 361) and involves a sense of belonging to 'a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language' (Lexico powered by Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). It also includes both affect and self-

categorisation. Self-categorisation occurs when they identify with a nation and believe that they are a member of this nation. Affect means emotions individuals get when they identify with the nation. Affect leads individuals to get emotionally attached to their nation and develop a strong sense of belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

*National identity construction* is a process of moulding people into a common national identity. The construction of national identity is driven by the evolutionary interaction process between a nation's *Selbstbild* and *Fremdbild*. The nation's *Selbstbild* is its national consciousness, which reflects how ordinary people view their country. A nation's *Fremdbild* refers to the perception of the international image of the nation (Rusciano, 2003).

National identity construction is an essential means of *nation-building*, which is 'the process through which ... majorities are constructed' (Mylonas, 2013, p. 17), and people are unified under some commonalities including history, national symbols, language and culture. Different from state-building that refers to building state institutions, national identity is central to nation-building. Both AAC and GOC have played a central role in unifying people living in Armenia and Georgia moulding them into a common national identity and building Armenian and Georgian nations, respectively, by commonalities including common history, language, religion and culture.

Studies demonstrate that religious organisations have played an important role in national politics and national identity construction. Churches have employed religion as a criterium to identify who is 'us' and who is 'others' (Lursmanashvili, 2019, p. 18). Religion has been a significant factor for the rise of nationalism, 'the most powerful political force in the world' that resurged after the demise of socialism in Eastern Europe and the fall of the Soviet Union (Lukacs, 1993).

The positive popular perception of the essential role of churches in nationalism and the protection of national interest allows them to have direct institutional access to governmental policy-making. The moral authority of churches 'backed and reinforced by the fusion of national and religious identities, a specific and historically grounded religious nationalism' gives them 'the ability to propose and vet policy directly through joint church-parliamentary commissions, informal legislative proposals, extensive parliamentary and ministerial consultation, the vetting of state officials' (Grzymala-Busse, 2016, pp. 2–3). The churches have higher moral authority when there is a popular perception of their important role in a historical defence of a nation. Higher trust in churches and their historical importance in wider society is a primary indicator of their moral authority.

Empirical evidence also demonstrates that religious organisations have contributed to nation-building in several countries, mainly, where 'nation, state, religious community, and ecclesiastical organization are supposed to be congruent' (Lincoln, 2003, p. 71). For instance, Himka (1984) examined the role of the church in nation-building among Ukrainians in Austrian Galicia. The Greek Catholic church played an important role in determining the national identity of Galicia Ukrainians. The Church promoted the rise of the nationalist age among Ukrainians of Galicia and encouraged them to differentiate themselves from Poles. The author argues that the rite promoted by the Church 'remained a persistent and unequivocal marker of national identity' of Ukrainians in Austrian Galicia (Himka, 1984, p. 435).

Similarly, Martínez-Fernández (1995, p. 70) contents that 'the Catholic Church remained a bastion of Dominican nationality'. Since the Church strongly supported the anti-Haitian liberation movement and independence of the Dominican Republic, it played an important role in nation-building. Catholicism became an inspiration for many Dominicans' participation in the anti-Haitian independence movement.

Likewise, scholars have studied the significant role of religion and religious organisations in nation-building when communism was on the brink of collapse in Eastern Europe. This is the time when 'religious identity became, both on the private and public levels, an auxiliary source of ethnic and national consolidation' (Agadjanian, 2001, p. 477). During the period of falling communism and the establishment of newly independent states, religious organisations use their moral and spiritual authority as a glue to keep a nation together. Hann (1993) comparatively studied the role of the Church in national movements in Ukraine and Romania. Hann (1998, p. 842) stressed that the Roman Catholic Church promoted 'the nation as the basic principle of cultural ordering' in Poland. The Romanian Orthodox Church became 'the foundation of Romanian identity' and was 'deeply embedded in the nationalist thought' during the Romanian fight against communism (p. 13). Religious organisations largely

contributed to nation-building in the Balkans when Serbo-Croat fell apart. The emergence of the Bosnian nation is deeply linked to Islam.

Some studies have argued that nationalism replaces religion by uniting a nation through national lines rather than religious ones (Gellner, 1983). This argument is most likely to hold in countries with the history of the Enlightenment period which pitted rational thinking against religious ideas. Towards the end of the mediaeval ages, the Enlightenment ideas spread around Europe making religion obsolete in some Western countries. In parallel, the authority of religious organisations started to decline and therefore received less popular trust. By contrast, in some post-Soviet and East European countries where Enlightenment ideals did not suppress the authority of religion, the Orthodox churches largely contributed to national identity construction and nation-building (Guroian, 1994).

Individuals tend to place confidence in religious organisations because they believe that these organisations have sustained nationhood during insecure times and that they have produced and are capable of producing desired outcomes. Individuals with a strong national identity tend to place generational trust in religious organisations that had a special historical role in holding nationhood in unity in times of instability and foreign intrusions. Ordinary citizens also tend to be less supportive of policy goals by some organisations if they do not have confidence that these organisations are 'capable of bringing about desired outcomes' (Hetherington, 2005). Individuals with a strong national identity tend to develop both generational and performance-based trust in religious organisations when these organisations play a special historical role in protecting nationhood generating the desired outcome such as national identity construction, protection of national values and national cohesion, particularly, during insecure times.

The strategic trust in religious organisations is linked to their performance. The *theory of performance* demonstrates that individual trust level in institutions is determined by individuals' beliefs about the performance of institutions. Per the performance-based theory, individuals are more likely to trust institutions when they believe that these institutions demonstrate good economic and political performance (Mishler & Rose, 2001). Individuals who value their national identity very highly tend to evaluate religious organisations based on their performance in promoting nation-building and protecting national values. The good performance of religious organisations in bringing up these desired outcomes leads individuals who are proud of their national identity and see themselves as part of the nation, to place confidence in these organisations.

**H1.** Individuals who are proud of their nationality are more likely to have a higher level of trust in religious organisations that have played a key role in nation-building and nationality than individuals who are not.

**H2.** Individuals who see themselves as part of their nation are more likely to have a higher level of trust in religious organisations that have played a key role in nation-building and nationality than individuals who do not.

#### 4 | CASE SELECTION: GEORGIA AND ARMENIA

Armenia and Georgia are deviant cases of countries where there is a high level of trust in religious organisations and a low level of religiosity measured as fasting, praying and attending religious services. The primary goal of the study is to explain individual trust in religious organisations cross-sectionally within cases of Georgia and Armenia (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Both cases are deviant cases based on the relationship between public confidence in religious and secular organisations. The theory of formulated secularisation 'is taken to represent the available knowledge about the relationship in question' (Seawright, 2016, p. 500). Both cases are far off the line of the relationship predicted by secularisation. The trust levels in both GOC and AAC are much higher than predicted by secularisation theory. In some years, religious organisations in these countries received higher public confidence than

their secular counterparts such as police, government and court. Other cases include countries such as Moldova and Romania. Compared to Western Europe where both trust in religious organisations and religiosity level have declined, the situation in these is different: While religiosity level is low, there is still a high level of trust in religious institutions like popular secular organisations.

#### 4.1 | GOC

GOC has historically been a unifying force for Georgian national identity. Different from Western Europe where secularisation swept religion out of the public domain, the Georgian Church ‘successfully incorporated nationalist ideology in its agenda and became a catalyst in the process of nation-building’ (Sulkhanishvili, 2012, p. 139).

The Georgian nation emerged and coalesced at the end of antiquity when the Georgian people converted into Christianity. The Georgians’ evangelisation process happened around the capital city of Mtskheta during the fourth century, and the adoption of a written language and an alphabet during the fifth century reinforced this process. The Georgian language became a primary medium for the transmission of Holy Scripture and sacralising part of Georgian national culture (Crego, 1994).

While Georgian people enjoyed freedom during the 11th and 12th centuries, the Georgian nation had to coexist under the influence of different Islamic empires and states such as the Arab Caliphate, Seljuk Turks, Safavid empire and Ottoman Turks. The overlordship of these empires over Georgian people strengthened Georgians’ Orthodox Christianity identity, as religion became a criterium to identify who is ‘us’ and who is ‘others’ (Lursmanashvili, 2019, p. 18). Its Christian identity helped the Georgian nation to survive as a separate entity defined vis-à-vis Islam. In addition to Islam, the uniqueness of the Armenian Church and its rejection of Chalcedon also strengthened the Georgian identity perceived as ‘the only truly Orthodox Christian nation of Transcaucasia’ (Crego, 1994, p. 2).

Although socialism had some effects on Georgian nationalism during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, some Georgian intellectuals linked Georgian national identity to Christianity. This was evident from influential Georgian poet Ilia Chavchavadze’s statements that ‘Christianity ... means among us the entire Georgian territory; it means k’art’veloba [Georgian-ness]. Today, as well, in all of Transcaucasia, Georgian and Christian mean one and the same thing. To convert to Christianity - is to become Georgian.’ (Quoted in Crego, 1994, p. 3). This concept was an inspiration for Georgian nationalists during the 1970s and 1980s under Soviet rule. In congruence with Georgian nationalists, GOC honoured Ilia Chavchavadze as St. Ilia the Just, his icon was placed in Tbilisi cathedral and his statements about the connection between Christianity and Georgian national identity appeared in a religious journal.

When the Soviet Union was about to collapse, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first president of post-Soviet Georgia, intensified his fight for Georgian nationalism with different writings and speeches, which demonstrated ‘a mix of religion and nationalism which draws upon Georgian antiquity and the development of Georgian national identity to include Orthodox Christianity’ (Crego, 1994, p. 3).

The role of GOC in constructing Georgian national identity was prevalent after the fall of the Soviet Union as well. The Georgian leaders were challenged in unifying the Georgian nation as separatism became the primary challenge in post-Soviet Georgia. Georgian leaders allowed GOC to play an important role in national politics. GOC made necessary efforts to unify the Georgian nation under Georgian nationality when the state was on the brink of collapse because of intensive separatism.

GOC ‘was critical to the formation of the country’s identity and restoration of lost statehood in the 1990s’ (Gegeshidze & Mirziashvili, 2021). The religious renaissance in post-Soviet Georgia appeared more vital and stronger compared to other regional countries such as Azerbaijan (Charles, 2010). GOC joined other actors to propagate a nationalist narrative about the survival of Georgian nationhood. Studies have found that ‘the Orthodox Church has been strengthening its influence on society and contributing much to the construction of national identity since Georgia regained independence in 1991’ (Merbaghishvili et al., 2012, p. 1). The fall of the Soviet Union and

communism allowed the Church to successfully fill ‘the political and social vacuum left behind the old ideology’, and it became ‘a spiritual and cultural leader of the nation’ (Sulkhanishvili, 2012, pp. 138, 148).

The Church was involved in promoting national unity and raising awareness about the Christian roots of Georgians including different groups in Georgia. For example, in 2000, when Georgians celebrated their conversion to Christianity, the Church actively engaged with Ajarians promoting the idea of Christian roots of Ajaria, where Georgians are believed to encounter Christianity for the first time (Pelkmans, 2002).

Although there has been some opposition against the authority of GOC and several Georgian politicians such as President Saakashvili have clashed with the Church on several political issues like Georgian-Russian relations, it has still managed to keep its strong influence within Georgian society. Figure 1 describes individual trust in religious and secular organisations in Georgia. Eight of nine Caucasus Barometer datasets collected in Georgia from 2008 to 2019 indicate that GOC is the most trusted institution in the country on average. Except for Caucasus Barometer 2019, all surveys demonstrate that public trust in GOC is even higher than trust in the Georgian army, the most trusted secular institution in Georgia. The good reputation of GOC is linked to ‘the exceptional historical role it played in the formation of Georgian statehood’ (Gegeshidze & Mirziashvili, 2021).

Meanwhile, the data also provide some parallels between trust in the army and in religious institutions: Individuals who trust the army also tend to trust religious organisations. This is due to the role of the third factor: attachment to national identity: Individuals who have a strong national identity are likely to trust both institutions since both play a role in protecting nationhood. To avoid endogeneity issues regarding model specification, trust in the army is excluded from all models, since it is part of the explanation.

In a country that experienced modernisation, higher trust in a religious organisation than in all secular organisations implies there is something interesting about the role of GOC in broader Georgian society that makes it the most trusted institution in the country. Since GOC has been a paramount institution in the formulation of Georgian nationality, I expect that the individuals who are proud of their Georgian nationality will tend to have higher trust in GOC.

One religious scholar explained the link between national identity and the popularity of GOC in the following way: ‘Usually when you ask an average Georgian what it means to be Georgian, what he or she means is to be ethnically Georgian, to speak the language, and to be Orthodox. So, if you lack any of those three qualities, you’re not a real Georgian. That’s the kind of thing that is contributing to the popularity of the church.’ (quoted in Gegeshidze & Mirziashvili, 2021). This is because the Church has historically been involved in the construction of Georgian national identity. GOC’s central role in the construction of Georgian national identity is associated with ‘the historical legacy and the role of Orthodox Christianity in the Georgians’ self-identification as a nation’ (cited in Chelidze, 2014, p. 15). Since GOC has an essential role in the Georgians’ self-identification as a nation, we expect that the individuals who see themselves as part of the Georgian nation will tend to have a higher level of trust in GOC.

## 4.2 | AAC

Like GOC, AAC also historically played an essential part in coalescing of Armenian nation and identity. It is considered one of the oldest Oriental Orthodox churches, and the Armenian clergy believes that Armenia is the first country in the world to officially accept Christianity in 301 AD (BBC, 2017). Conversion to Christianity is considered one key pillar of Armenian identity (Panossian, 2002, p. 126). The Church is ‘closely connected with Armenian nationality and Armenian states’ (Matsuzato & Danielyan, 2013, p. 18).

Armenian Church had been playing a significant role in holding the Armenian nation in unity since the dissolution of the Armenian state during late antiquity. When the Armenians lacked statehood and later lived under the control of Islamic states and empires such as Persia and the Ottoman, the Church became a defining part of Armenian identity against Islamic culture. The uniqueness of the Armenian Church ‘save[ed] the Armenian ethnicity and cultural

identity' and allowed the Armenians to culturally separate themselves from the followers of Zoroastrianism and Islam (Antonyan, 2014, p. 35).

In Islamic empires where Muslims were considered 'millet' or 'ummahs', Armenians were referred to as a religious community of 'Christian Armenians' rather than just Armenians. Non-Chalcedonian Christianity became an important element of Armenian identity as the Armenian Church united non-Chalcedonian Armenians, who viewed Chalcedonian Armenians as 'Georgians' or 'Greeks'. Non-Chalcedonian Christianity became a defining part of Armenian identity, and therefore, those converted to Islam were viewed as losing their Armenian identity. For the Armenian Church, the major meaning of Christian Armenians' public life was preserving the Armenian nation's existence during Middle Ages (Danielyan, 2015, p. 29).

In August 1990, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev appealed to Catholicos of All Armenians to use his authority and influence to work for the immediate termination of ethnic violence in Transcaucasia. This appeal demonstrated 'the deep historical and cultural relationship of the Armenian Church to the Armenian nation' and reflected 'the role of the Armenian Church as the self-described soul of the nation' (Guroian, 1992, p. 31).

In post-Soviet Armenia, the Church started a debate about the criterium for being Armenian. The clergy claimed that the 'Armenian Apostolic Church is the base of national unity of Armenians' (Quoted in Danielyan, 2015, p. 31). While the Armenian Constitution rules that the church and the state are separate, it 'recognizes the Armenian Apostolic Church as a national church with an exclusive mission in the spiritual life of the nation, in the development of national culture and preservation of national identity' (The Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, Chapter 1, Article 8.1). Thus, 'for centuries without having statehood, the church has led ... [Armenian]nation to the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (Quoted in Danielyan, 2015, p. 31). This led Armenians to place confidence in AAC.

Like the role of GOC in Georgian society, AAC has also managed to keep its strong influence within Armenia society, even though there has been some opposition against its authority. Figure 2 illustrates individual trust in secular and religious organisations in Armenia. Caucasus Barometer datasets collected in Armenia from 2008 to 2019 indicate that AAC and Army are the most trusted organisations in the country on average. In some years, individual trust in the Church is higher than trust in the Armenian army.

High trust in AAC suggests that there should be something interesting about the role of the Church in broader Armenian society that makes it one of the most trusted institutions in the country. Because AAC has historically played an important role in constructing Armenian identity, we expect that individuals who are proud of their Armenian nationality will tend to have higher trust in AAC.

## 5 | DATA AND METHODS

### 5.1 | Data and models

To measure the effect of having a strong *national identity* on trust in GOC, the study utilises six surveys: WVS Georgia 2009, WVS Georgia 2014, World Values Survey/European Values Survey (WVS/EVS) Georgia 2018, WVS Armenia 2011, WVS/EVS 2018 and WVS Armenia 2021. All datasets are collected through nationally representative mass opinion surveys conducted in Georgia and Armenia. Since dependent variables are not continuous but ordinal, ordered logistic regression is used to estimate the effect of *attachment to national identity* on *trust in religious organisations*.

### 5.2 | Variables

Dependent variables are the *trust in religious organisations*, which are infrastructure entities that provide some religious services and perform religious activities. These organisations include churches, mosques, temples or

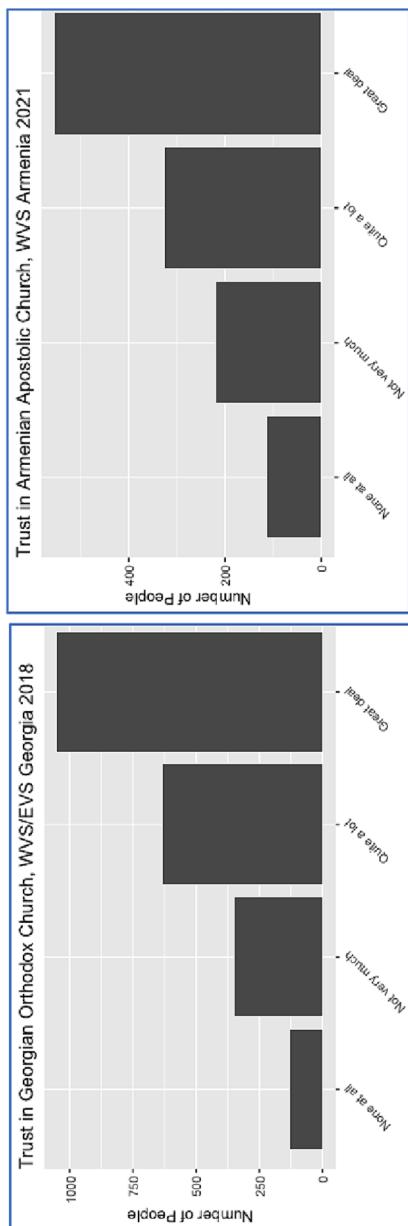


FIGURE 3 Trust in religious institutions in Georgia and Armenia. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

synagogues and exclude governmental committees that are established to regulate religious affairs. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of the dependent variables based on the latest data from Georgia and Armenia. Independent variables are *being proud of national identity* and *being part of the nation*. These variables capture the degree of a sense of national identity. We also control for interpersonal trust, religiosity, trust in secular organisations (government, court and police) and socio-economic factors including education, income, age and gender as they have been found to influence trust in religious organisations (Charles, 2010). All survey questions used to measure these variables are given in Appendix A.

### 5.3 | Religiosity

Defining and operationalising religiosity has been a compelling task for sociologists and psychologists because of linguistic variations, colloquial definitions and cultural differences. Studies demonstrate that religiosity has multiple dimensions (Pearce et al., 2017). Three major dimensions are theoretical, sociological and cultic (Wach, 1944). To make the replication of prior measurement and operationalisation easier, major surveys have typically included a small set of survey questions that were employed by prior surveys. These questions usually ask respondents about their religious affiliation, attendance in religious services, religious practices and the importance of religion in their life. Based on these questions, scholars have divided religiosity into intrinsic religiousness and extrinsic religiousness. While the former is 'characterized as a religion that is an end in itself, a master motive', the latter refers to 'religion that primarily serves other more ultimate ends rather than central religious beliefs per se' (Masters, 2013).

Both AAC and GOC have taken a special mission in promoting both intrinsic and extrinsic religion by emphasising the importance of religious values themselves as well as their critical role in strengthening national identity and unity. Both churches have used religious services to promote religious and traditional values. Attendance in these services has been an important dimension of religiosity. Previous research, also, has measured religiosity in these countries in terms of attendance at religious services (Siroky et al., 2017). Relying on previous studies, this study uses an identical measure of religiosity in Armenia and Georgia.

## 6 | RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section introduces the results of ordered logistic models with a 95% confidence interval. Table 1 illustrates the results of the analysis of the WVS Georgia 2009 (Models 1–4), WVS Georgia 2014 (Models 5–8) and WVS-EVS Georgia 2018 (9–10). Table 2 presents the results of the analysis of the WVS Armenia 2011 (Models 1–4), WVS EVS 2018 (Models 5–6) and WVS Armenia 2021 (Models 7–8).

Table 1 illustrates that those who are proud of their Georgian nationality and who consider themselves part of the Georgian nation are more likely trust GOC. Table 1 also shows that religiosity measured as attendance in religious services is an important driver of individual trust in GOC, which has been a strong protector of conservative religious values and strongly opposed homosexuality and progressive ideas (Mackinnon, 2021). Religious services have been an essential means of stressing the importance of traditional family values. Since individuals who attend religious services are more likely to hold conservative values, they are more likely to express support for GOC. Table 1 also shows that individuals who trust the government are more likely to trust religious organisations. This finding challenges the idea that as trust in secular institutions increases, the authority of religious organisations declines (Sommerville, 1998). By contrast, the urbanites are less likely to trust the Georgian Church. This result might be associated with a rising difference between urban and rural places. As urban places become more industrialised, the importance of the Church and religion declines.

Table 2 shows that Armenians who are proud of their Armenian nationality tend to trust AAC more than those who are not. Table 2 also demonstrates that those for whom religion is important for life decisions are more likely to

TABLE 1 Factors influencing trust in GOC, 2009, 2014, 2018.

	Dependent variable									
	Trust in Georgian Orthodox Church									
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Being proud of nation	0.561*** (0.109)	0.598*** (0.124)	0.494*** (0.134)	0.576*** (0.157)	0.607*** (0.101)	0.850*** (0.137)	0.422*** (0.112)	0.511*** (0.066)	0.511*** (0.066)	0.481*** (0.073)
Religiosity			0.185*** (0.046)	0.178*** (0.046)			0.219*** (0.040)	0.246*** (0.040)		0.197*** (0.021)
Interpersonal trust			0.057** (0.027)	0.069** (0.027)		-0.041 (0.026)	-0.039 (0.026)			0.096 (0.059)
Trust in police				-0.032 (0.108)	-0.022 (0.107)	0.134 (0.115)	0.103 (0.115)			0.199*** (0.147)
Trust in court			-0.124 (0.107)	-0.086 (0.106)		-0.096 (0.104)	-0.038 (0.104)			0.106* (0.060)
Trust in government					0.176 (0.119)	0.174 (0.118)		0.377*** (0.124)	0.383*** (0.124)	0.84* (0.059)
Income			-0.088** (0.038)	-0.073* (0.038)		0.039 (0.039)	0.046 (0.040)			-0.051*** (0.019)
Education			0.037 (0.040)	0.040 (0.040)		-0.035 (0.042)	-0.046 (0.042)			-0.111*** (0.025)
Male (baseline: female)			0.092 (0.133)	0.062 (0.132)		0.179 (0.133)	0.184 (0.133)			-0.181* (0.097)
Age					-0.008* (0.004)	-0.007* (0.004)				-0.066** (0.003)
Urban (baseline: rural)										-0.084*** (0.004)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Trust in Georgian Orthodox Church										
Dependent variable										
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
1  2	-2.265*** (0.460)	-2.461*** (0.556)	-1.324* (0.703)	-1.104 (0.817)	-0.813** (0.384)	-0.676* (0.395)	-0.383 (0.612)	0.411 (0.638)	-0.975*** (0.245)	-0.985** (0.393)
2  3	-0.751* (0.411)	-0.918* (0.518)	0.134 (0.668)	0.378 (0.788)	0.229 (0.374)	0.373 (0.385)	0.724 (0.607)	1.533** (0.635)	0.558** (0.238)	0.694* (0.389)
3  4	1.346*** (0.406)	1.139** (0.513)	2.287*** (0.666)	2.506*** (0.787)	1.646*** (0.377)	1.778*** (0.387)	2.151*** (0.611)	2.960*** (0.640)	1.905*** (0.241)	2.139*** (0.392)
Observations	1376	1374	1075	1074	1188	1190	1022	1024	2138	1815
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2209.220	2228.009	1707.586	1721.887	2251.134	2252.558	1929.959	1920.493	4956.898	3982.184
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	2230.128	2248.911	1772.327	1786.616	2271.454	2272.885	1998.973	1989.533	4979.569	4059.238

Note: Models 1–4 and 5–8 present the results from the analysis of the 2009 and 2014 WVS Georgia. Models 9 and 10 illustrate the results of the analysis of the WVS/EVS Joint 2018 Georgia.

\* $p < .1$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

TABLE 2 Factors influencing trust in AAC, 2011, 2018, 2021.

	Dependent variable							
	Trust in Armenian Apostolic Church							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Being proud of nationality	0.355*** (0.107)		0.263** (0.115)		0.463*** (0.053)	0.306*** (0.108)	0.396*** (0.097)	0.328 (0.108)
Being part of nation		0.445*** (0.116)		0.381*** (0.124)		0.187*** (0.026)		0.233*** (0.033)
Religiosity			0.211*** (0.038)	0.213*** (0.038)				
Interpersonal trust				0.240 (0.216)	0.272 (0.210)	0.129 (0.216)		0.095 (0.215)
Trust in police					0.288** (0.116)	0.298*** (0.115)	0.038 (0.075)	0.044 (0.075)
Trust in government						0.044 (0.086)	-0.030 (0.067)	0.002 (0.066)
Trust in court						-0.109 (0.124)	0.264*** (0.076)	0.255*** (0.076)
Income						-0.043 (0.036)	-0.037 (0.035)	-0.017 (0.030)
Education						-0.133*** (0.037)	-0.136*** (0.036)	-0.148*** (0.036)
Male (baseline: female)						0.267** (0.131)	0.280** (0.129)	0.328*** (0.125)
Age						-0.001 (0.004)	0.006* (0.004)	-0.208*** (0.004)
Urban (baseline: rural)							-0.086*** (0.004)	-0.437*** (0.004)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Dependent variable								
Trust in Armenian Apostolic Church								
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1  2	-1.435*** (0.409)	-1.073** (0.441)	-1.555** (0.625)	-1.045* (0.631)	-0.772*** (0.193)	-0.621 (0.559)	-0.803** (0.373)	-0.152 (0.553)
2  3	-0.192 (0.402)	0.141 (0.434)	-0.273 (0.621)	0.213 (0.627)	0.695*** (0.189)	0.808 (0.557)	0.511 (0.370)	1.256** (0.553)
3  4	1.499*** (0.404)	1.847*** (0.438)	1.517** (0.622)	2.024*** (0.631)	2.250*** (0.194)	2.076*** (0.560)	1.683*** (0.373)	2.507*** (0.557)
Observations	1050	1078	948	974	2669	1066	1191	1066
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2416.214	2476.464	2143.070	2194.025	6684.888	2540.590	2940.219	2558.355
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	2436.040	2496.396	2211.031	2262.364	6708.446	2610.194	2960.549	2627.958

Note: Models 1–4 and 7–8 present the results from the analysis of the 2011 and 2021 WVS Armenia. Models 5–6 illustrate the results of the analysis of the WVS/EVS Joint 2017 Armenia.

\* $p < .1$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

trust the Church. By contrast, urbanites and better-educated Armenians have less trust in AAC. The reason why Armenians for whom religion is important in their life decisions tend to trust AAC could be associated with the role of the Church as the protector of religious values. Sharing the same values with AAC about the importance of religion leads Armenians to support the Church.

Table 2 also shows that individuals who trust the court are more likely to trust AAC. This finding provides some evidence that trust in secular organisations does not necessarily lead to the decline of trust in religious organisations (Sommerville, 1998). Finally, Figure 2 suggests that urbanites are less likely to trust AAC. Like in Georgia, this finding could be linked to the rising difference between urban and rural places. As urban places become more industrialised and modernised, the importance of the Church and religion declines.

Thus, both Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate that *individual trust in religious organisations* is driven by the theorised factor, the *attachment to national identity*. These figures provide statistically significant results for both hypotheses on why individuals trust GOC and AAC. The results indicate that those Georgians who see themselves as part of the Georgian nation and who are proud of their Georgian nationality and those Armenians who are proud of their Armenian nationality are more likely to trust their respective religious organisation.

In both countries, age seems not related to public confidence in religious organisations. This could be associated with the mixture of two major findings on the relationship between age and religiosity in post-communist countries. Norris and Inglehart (2004) found that individuals who had experience with effective Soviet atheist policies tended to show a lower level of religiosity than pre-communist and post-communist generations. By contrast, a comparative study of religiosity in 10 post-communist countries by Need and Evans (2001) demonstrated that urbanisation and higher education level had led a post-communist younger generation to demonstrate less religiosity compared to the older generation. These two opposite findings might cancel each other in the regression analysis and therefore produce a non-significant result for the effect of age. The effect of education on trust in religious organisations is also negative although not significant in Georgia, which could be associated with a high percentage of popular trust in GOC compared to public trust in AAC. The confidence of a high number of individuals in GOC makes education irrelevant in regression analysis.

Additionally, the results suggest that urbanites tend to have less confidence in churches compared to those who are settled in rural areas. However, these results should be taken cautiously. Although overall trust in churches is lower in urban areas compared to rural places, there is no consensus among urbanities when it comes to trusting religious organisations. Qualitative evidence suggests that there is a rising political polarisation combined with divided opinions about the role of religion in Georgia (Gegeshidze & De Waal, 2021). Urban liberal elites confront with those who espouse traditional values. Liberal elites settled in large cities have been pushing for liberal values and supporting integration into the Euro-Atlantic area. To reconcile the discrepancy between traditional religious values and progressive values, the Euro-Atlantic supporters have envisioned the construction of secular national identity and supported LGBTQ+ rights. By contrast, individuals with traditional religious values have promoted the idea of national identity involving traditional ideals.

Cultural clashes between the supporters of traditional values and liberals have exacerbated political polarisation in Georgia and pose a serious threat to 'stated ambitions to build democratic institutions' (Gegeshidze & De Waal, 2021). On one hand, GOC has alerted Georgian society about the erosion of traditional family values and stressed the importance of these values for Georgian national unity. On the other hand, liberal-oriented political entrepreneurs have pushed a narrative that Europe is not a new path for Georgia but its return to its European home. Closer ties with Europe have been seen as 'an external affirmation of Georgia's European identity' (Gvalia et al., 2013, p. 116). However, others have viewed this narrative as rhetorical, manipulative and historically false, stressing Georgia's chronological lack of familiarity with the ideals of enlightenment and secularism, which shaped the roots of modern Europe.

The political polarisation has taken a new direction in Georgia recently. While Shame Movement has advocated for integration into Europe, Alt-info, an anti-Western right-wing group, has taken up an illiberal position, advocating for 'religious conservative ideas' (Gabritchidze, 2022). Alt-info has been criticised for organising anti-

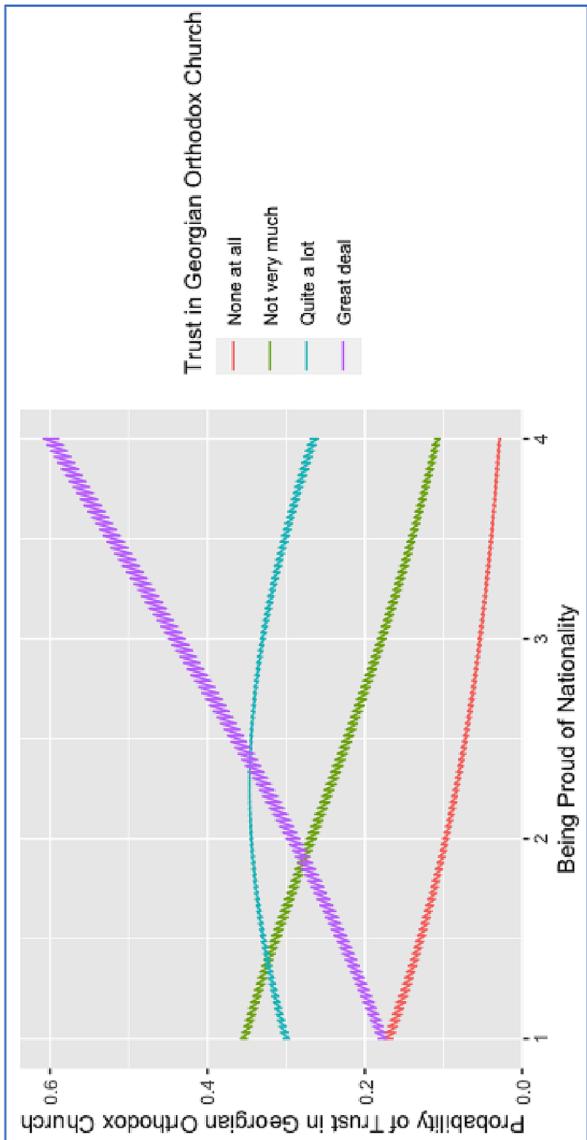


FIGURE 4 Probability of trust in Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) given proud of nationality: European Values Survey/World Values Survey (EVS/WVS) Georgia 2018.  
[Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

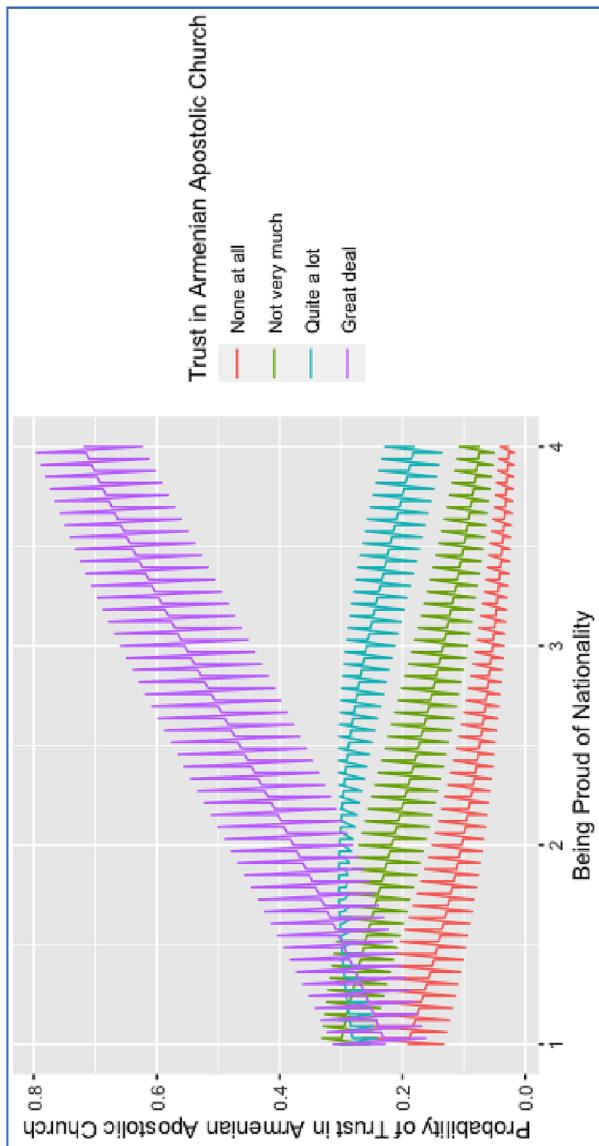


FIGURE 5 Probability of trust in Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) given proud of nationality: The WVS Armenia 2021. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

LGBTQ+ rallies. The Shame Movement, with its neo-colonial and reactionary vision, has been viewed as a pro-neoliberal movement in Georgia's post-socialist transformation. The Gramscian analysis of civil society in Georgia demonstrates that the Movement has been reinforcing a hegemonic neoliberal order in the country (Khelaia & Chivadze, 2022). These controversies have been reflected in the national identity conception. Against the backdrop of the Church's illiberal stances, Georgian liberals have advocated for the secularisation of national identity formation.

Both GOC and AAC remain powerful institutions due to their unique role in preserving, consolidating and unifying Georgian and Armenian nations, respectively, through the centuries against foreign intrusions. AAC played an essential role during the 2020 Second Karabakh War, mobilising Armenians and stressing the importance of protecting holy religious sites with historical national significance.

Next, predicted probabilities for each possible response of two independent variables are plotted with a 95% confidence interval. The analyses of WVS/EVS Georgia 2018 and WVS 2021 Armenia surveys, the latest data from Georgia and Armenia, respectively, are used for the predicted probabilities. The predicted probabilities from the analysis of WVS Georgia 2009, WVS Georgia 2014, WVS Armenia 2011 and WVS/EVS Armenia 2018 surveys are given in Appendix B.

Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the predicted probabilities of trust in religious organisations across values of *being proud of the nation* based on the analysis of the EVS/WVS Georgia 2018 (Model 10 of Table 1) and the WVS Armenia 2021 (Model 8 of Table 2), respectively. They illustrate that moving from the lowest level of self-reported *being proud of the nation* to the highest level of self-reported *being proud of the nation* causes the probabilities of outcomes 1–3 of the dependent variable to decrease. By contrast, individuals who are the proudest to be Georgian/Armenian are more likely to have a great deal of trust in religious organisations.

## 7 | CONCLUSION

Previous literature has demonstrated that trust in religious organisations is related to secularisation, which assumes that both religiosity and trust in religious organisations tend to decline as individual trust in secular organisations rises. However, it is puzzling what explains higher trust levels in religious organisations in countries where religiosity is at lower levels. This research demonstrated that having a strong national identity is an essential indicator of trust in religious institutions: Citizens who have a strong attachment to national identity are more likely to trust religious organisations. Based on this framework, the study hypothesised that the individuals who see themselves as part of their nation and who are proud of their nationality are more likely to have a higher level of trust in religious organisations that have played a key role in nation-building and nationality.

This study finds that the answer to the puzzle lies in the role of religious institutions in nation-building and national identity construction. Using Armenia and Georgia as a deviant case study to secularisation theory and relying on both quantitative and qualitative secondary data, this study finds that the population still places high trust in religious institutions such as GOC and AAC despite the rise of their secular counterparts, when these religious institutions are influential in nation-building and national identity construction. This research concludes that the study of the role of religious institutions in nation-building and national identity construction is important to understanding trust in these institutions.

We should, however, be cautious about drawing generalisations from this study. While this study finds that a high level of trust in churches might be connected to their important historical role in nation-building during times of instability, it does not suggest that they have always had a historically vital role in nation-building. Previous research has shown that certain churches fail to partake in historical defence of nation (Grzymala-Busse, 2016). This study suggests that such failures in nation-building could contribute to lower levels of public support for these churches. However, caution should be exercised when generalising these findings to other regions or contexts. It is important to note that the cases of Georgia and Armenia examined in this study are deviant. By utilising empirical evidence

from these two countries, this study offers an alternative explanation for the high levels of trust in religious organisations.

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## APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS USED TO MEASURE VARIABLES

*Trust in religious organisations* is measured with the following survey question from both datasets: ‘I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all? The churches’. This survey question has four responses: *Great deal* (1), *Quite a lot* (2), *Not very much* (3) and *None at all* (4). The variable is recoded in a reverse way to make interpretation intuitive.

*Being proud of national identity* is measured by the following survey question: ‘How proud are you to be Georgian/Armenian?’ This question has five response options: very proud (1), quite proud (2), not very proud (3), not at all proud (4) and I am not Georgian/Armenian (5). Option 5 was dropped, and then the variable is recoded in a reverse way to make interpretation intuitive.

*Being part of the nation* is measured by the following question: ‘People have different views about themselves and how they relate to the world. Using this card, would you tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about how you see yourself? I see myself as part of the Georgian nation’. This question has three response options in the 2014 data: *strongly agree* (1), *agree* (2) or *disagree* (3). The variable is recoded in a reverse way to make interpretation intuitive. Only the 2014 dataset was used to test the second variable since the 2021 dataset does not have the relevant survey question.

*Interpersonal trust* is measured by: ‘Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair? Please show your response on this card, where 1 means that “people would try to take advantage of you”, and 10 means that “people would try to be fair”. The original coding was kept.

*Trust in secular organisations* is measured by three survey questions. First, *Trust in Police* is measured by using the following survey question: ‘I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all? The Police’. There are four categories of responses to this question: a great deal (1), quite a lot (2), not very much (3) and none at all (4). The variable is recoded in a reverse way to make interpretations intuitive. Second, *Trust in Government* is measured by using the following survey question: ‘I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all? The Government’. There are four categories of

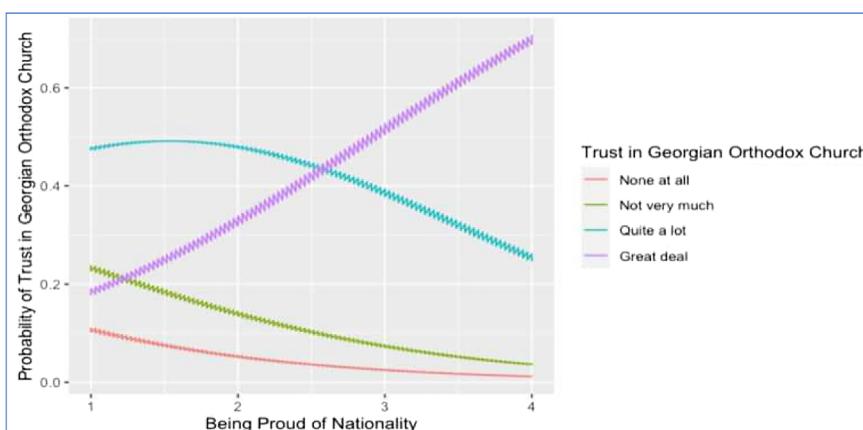
responses to this question: a great deal (1), quite a lot (2), not very much (3) and none at all (4). The variable is recoded in a reverse way to make interpretations intuitive. Third, *Trust in Court* is measured by using the following survey question: 'I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all? The courts'. There are four categories of responses to this question: a great deal (1), quite a lot (2), not very much (3) and none at all (4). The variable is recoded in a reverse way to make interpretations intuitive.

*Religiosity* is measured by: 'Please tell me, how often do you attend religious services?' In line with the previous research, this study uses an identical question to measure religiosity in Armenia and Georgia. There are seven categories of responses to this question: more than once a week (1), once a week (2), once a month (3), only on special holidays (4), once a year (5), less often (6) and never, practically never (7). The variable is recoded in a reverse way to make interpretation intuitive.

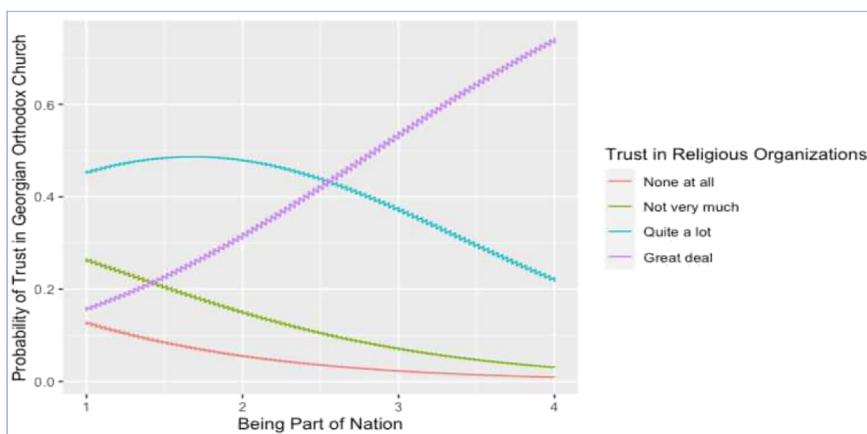
*Socio-economic factors* are measured in the following ways. *Income level* is measured by using the following question: 'On this card is an income scale on which 1 indicates the lowest income group and 10 is the highest income group in your country. We would like to know in what group your household is. Please, specify the appropriate number, counting all wages, salaries, pensions, and other incomes that come in'. The original coding was kept. *Education level* is measured by using the following question: 'What is the highest educational level that you have attained?' This question has eight responses: incomplete primary school (1), complete primary school (2), incomplete secondary school: technical/vocational type (3), complete secondary school: technical/vocational type (4), incomplete secondary school: university-preparatory type (5), complete secondary school: university-preparatory type (6), some university-level education, without a degree (7) and university-level education, with degree (8); the original coding was kept. *Gender* and *age* variables are also included in the models.

## APPENDIX B: PREDICTED PROBABILITIES

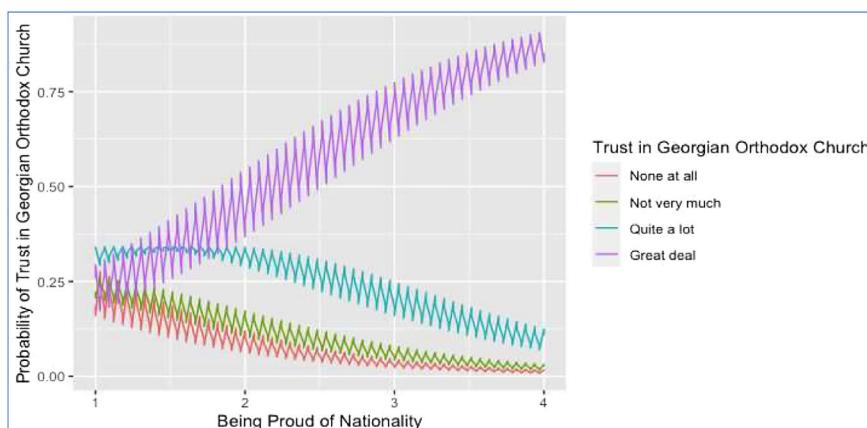
Probability of trust in Georgian Orthodox Church given proud of nationality: WVS Georgia 2009.



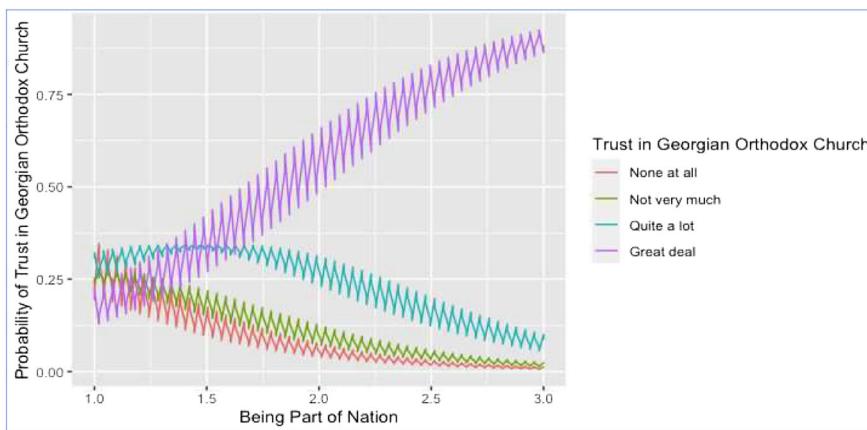
Note: Based on analysis of the WVS Georgia 2009 (Model 3 of Table 1), this figure illustrates the predicted probabilities of trust in religious organisations across values of *being proud of the nation*. Probability of trust in Georgian Orthodox Church given part of nation: WVS Georgia 2009.



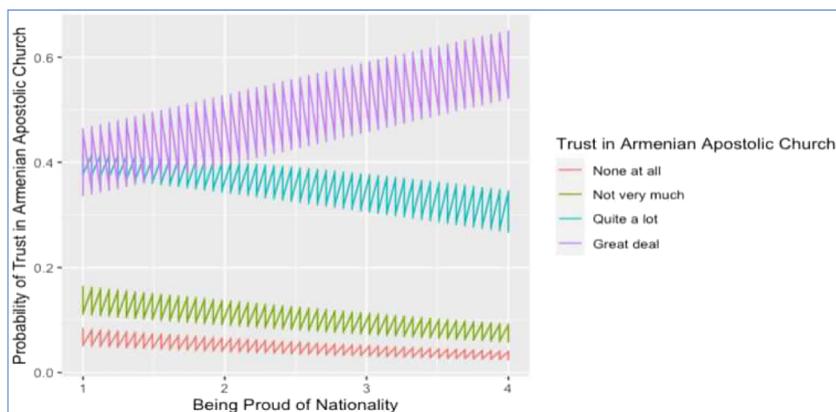
Note: Based on the analysis of the WVS Georgia 2009 (Model 4 of Table 1), this figure illustrates predicted probabilities of trust in religious organisations across the values of *being part of the nation*. Probability of trust in Georgian Orthodox Church given proud of nationality: WVS Georgia 2014.



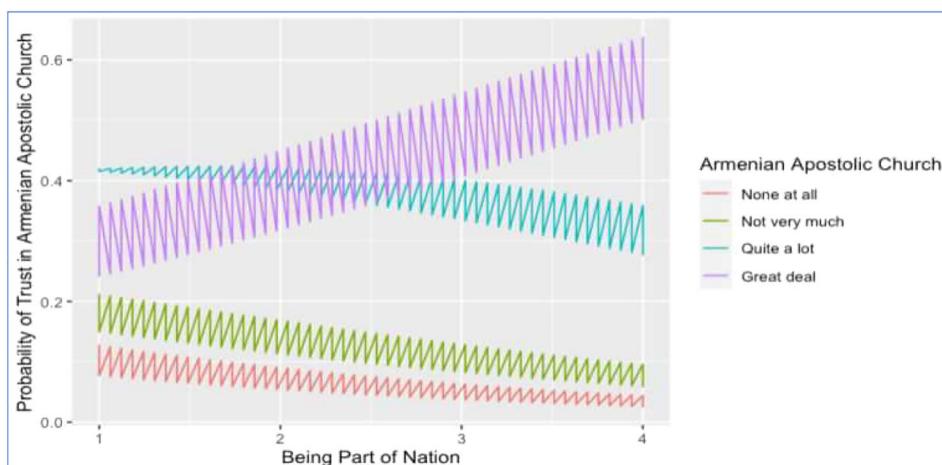
Note: Based on analysis of the WVS Georgia 2014 (Model 7 of Table 1), this figure illustrates the predicted probabilities of trust in religious organisations across values of *being proud of the nation*. Probability of trust in Georgian Orthodox Church given part of nation: WVS Georgia 2014.



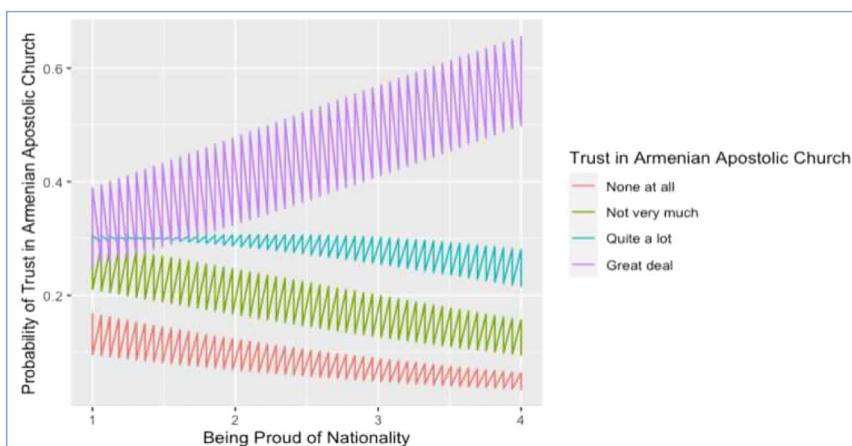
Note: Based on the analysis of the WVS Georgia 2014 (Model 8 of Table 1), this figure illustrates predicted probabilities of trust in religious organisations across the values of *being part of the nation*. Probability of trust in Armenian Apostolic Church given proud of nationality: WVS Armenia 2011.



Note: Based on the analysis of the WVS Armenia 2011 (Model 3 of Table 2), this figure illustrates predicted probabilities of trust in religious organisations across the values of *being proud of the nationality*. Probability of trust in Armenian Apostolic Church given being part of the nation: WVS Armenia 2011.



Note: Based on the analysis of the WVS Armenia 2011 (Model 4 of Table 2), this figure illustrates predicted probabilities of trust in religious organisations across the values of *being part of the nation*. Probability of trust in Armenian Apostolic Church given proud of nationality: WVS/EVS 2018.



Note: Based on the analysis of the WVS/EVS 2018 (Model 6 of Table 2), this figure illustrates predicted probabilities of trust in religious organisations in Armenia across the values of *being part of the nation*.