**Identity Matters: Exploring the Role of Shared Identities in Foreign Policy Dispositions within Small States towards Great Powers**

**Abstract**

Small states have become objects of competition between great powers and their integration projects in the post-Cold War era, due to their limited capabilities and preoccupation with survival and security, forcing them to adopt cautious policies towards great powers. The competition between great powers over small states has had various consequences for ordinary citizens, who have periodically influenced foreign policy choices in small states. While much has been written about great power competition over small states, there is a little understanding of what shapes individual foreign policy preferences towards great powers in small states. This study argues that foreign policy dispositions in small states towards great powers are primarily driven by shared identities. Those who perceive a collective identity with the West are more likely to support closer ties with the United States and disapprove of alignment with Russia. This shared identity makes the United States less threatening and generates trust and positive feelings towards it. In contrast, people who share a collective identity with the West tend to view Russia as an out-group and, therefore, develop unfavorable opinions about it. Using machine learning algorithms, this study finds that shared *identity-based models* have higher predictive power than *instrumental rationality* and *materialist factors* in forecasting foreign policy dispositions in small states. This suggests that foreign policy choices in small states are not just driven by instrumental rationality but also by shared identities, which have significant implications for understanding the dynamics of great power competition in small states as well as international and regional security.

**Introduction**

Caught in between great powers, small states have “become objects of the competition between great powers and their integration projects” during the post-cold period (Pedi 2020, 168). Fewer capabilities and great preoccupation with survival and security have forced small states to follow cautious policies toward great powers, which have periodically competed for geopolitical influence over small states. Great power competition over small states has had many political, security, economic, and social consequences for ordinary people who have periodically influenced foreign policy choices in small states. The empirical evidence from Ukraine demonstrates that the disconnection between individual foreign policy dispositions and foreign policy choices leads to confrontation and crisis. The Maidan movement started as the pro-Russian Ukrainian government attempted to pursue closer ties with Russia while public opinion preferred integration with the European Union. The study of individual foreign policy dispositions in small states caught in great power competition is therefore of utmost importance.

While much has been written about great power competition over small states, we know little about what shapes individual foreign policy preferences toward great powers in small states. This study explores foreign policy preferences in small states caught in great power rivalry and asks why some individuals support closer ties with the United States and disapprove of alignment with Russia. It argues that foreign policy dispositions in small states toward great powers are driven by shared identities: Those who believe that they share a collective identity with the West along with democracy and language dimensions tend to support closer ties with the United States and oppose alignment with Russia. First, shared identity mitigates the perception of threats from great powers (Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero 2007). Individuals who have a shared identity with the West perceive the United States as less threatening. Second, shared identity generates individual trust toward the United States. Trust engenders cooperative attitudes (Tyler and Blader 2000). Third, shared identity engenders relationality and warmer feelings (Hopkins et al. 2016, 22). Those who share a collective identity with the West germinate favorable opinions and warm feelings toward the United States. These mechanisms lead to individual preferences for closer political and economic ties with the United States. Shared identity makes individuals believe that the United States can best support their country. Meanwhile, shared identity leads to social comparison, a process by which people socially compare their in-group to an out-group after they place themselves and others into social categories (Tajfel et al. 1971). Individuals who share a collective identity with the West tend to view Russia as the out-group and therefore develop an unfavorable opinion about it. This social comparison leads those who identify with the West to attach negative images to out-group Russia and view it as the locus of authoritarianism. Instrumental rationality and materialist factors fall short to explain public opinion on foreign policy in small states when collective shared identities are driving force behind individual foreign policy dispositions.

Individuals develop a shared identity with the West along with two dimensions: *democracy* and *language*. However, these are not an exhaustive list of identities. Individuals usually have a greater number of identities in their repertoires based on different identity dimensions (Rousseau 2006). We argue that these two identity dimensions become salient over time and prevail in the foreign policy domain shaping foreign policy preferences in small states caught in geopolitical competition between Russia and the United States. These dimensions are strongly influenced, shaped, or incorporated by identity conceptions within great powers that small states are surrounded by. Entrepreneurs promote these identity conceptions by using mass communication and social networks to develop their own narratives along with identity dimensions (Brass 1997). Pro-Western actors have been developing a narrative that democratization and future development of Georgia depends on closer ties with the United States since the country belongs to the West. However, some far-right groups and the Georgian Orthodox Church have spread a narrative that integration into the West threatens Georgian traditions and that the United States is pushing Georgia toward moral decay (Gabritchidze 2022). These political entrepreneurs have successfully made certain latent identity dimensions salient as they speak from authority. Georgians who believe that Georgia belongs to the West have tended to favor closer ties with the United States and oppose alignment with Russia.

We test these conjectures against the EU Surveys 2017, 2019, and 2021 and the NDI 2022 March survey from Georgia and finds empirical support consistent with the argument. We also use artificial neural networks and find that models based on a shared identity theoretical framework have a better predictive power to forecast foreign policy dispositions. Ideas, identity, and symbols played “a powerful role” in the post-Soviet small countries where institutional fragilities and ideological fluctuations “made ideas and ideologies singularly visible and important.” Political culture became “a meta-explanation for almost everything from ethnic conflict to the flimsiness of post-Soviet democracy and economic failure” as newly independent states sought new identities and engaged in state-building after the fall of the Soviet Union (Jones 2003, 85).

Recent political events including massive protests in Georgia in support of Euro-Atlantic integration, the Euromaidan movement in Ukraine, the Russian occupation of Ukraine, and anti-Russian protests in Armenia demonstrated the importance of studying foreign policy dispositions in small states. President Yanukovych’s refusal to recognize public opposition to closer ties with Russia led to the Euromaidan movement, which ousted him from power. Strong anti-Russian sentiments in Ukraine resulted in vigorous resistance to the Russian occupation and convinced Western democracies to support pro-Western Ukrainian government. Likewise, massive protests in Georgia forced the Georgian government to resign (Nechepurenko 2018). Public opinion has played a key role in shaping Georgia's pro-Western foreign policy orientation. Shame Movement organized rallies of more than 150,000 people to force Georgian government to comply with necessary preconditions required for Georgia’s EU candidacy status (JAMnews 2022). Armenians have been demanding their country to withdraw from Russian-led CSTO (Euronews 2022). These political events demonstrated that the study of foreign policy dispositions in small states located in Russia’s “near abroad” matters as foreign policy dispositions have many security consequences, at least, at a regional level.

Our contributions are threefold. First, we contribute to the literature on foreign policy dispositions in small states by developing an identity-based explanation for foreign policy preferences toward great powers. Our findings demonstrate that shared identities have better explanatory power than instrumental rationality to account for foreign policy dispositions. Second, this study contributes to security studies. It demonstrates that collective shared identities largely shape threat perception and foreign policy choices for security and survival. The disconnection between shared identities and foreign policy decisions threatens peace and security. Our final contribution is policy oriented. It is critical to anticipate political crises and take preventive measures. Machine learning algorithms demonstrates that shared-identity based models have more predictive power to forecast individual foreign policy dispositions. Our findings suggest that Western democracies should work closely with those who share a collective identity with the West and adopt policies to reinforce and strengthen these identities to build mutual trust and buttress their social base in post-Soviet small countries, eliminating pro-Russian forces that threaten regional security with potential impact on international security.

**Study of Foreign Policy Dispositions**

Previous research has mainly studied individual foreign policy preferences in major powers based on instrumental rationality and material factors. The study of mass opinion on foreign policy decisions in major powers proliferated after scholars later found that Americans were well-informed about US involvement in Vietnam (Verba et al. 1967, 319–20; Verba and Brody, 1970). In contrast to the Almond-Lippmann view, which contended that foreign policy preferences at the individual level are incoherent and shapeless (Almond 1950; Lippmann 1955; Converse 1964), new findings demonstrated that ordinary people could form a systemic and coherent opinion about foreign policy choices.

These findings inspired a new line of research, which examines factors shaping foreign policy preferences (Caspary 1970; Mueller 1973; Shapiro and Page 1988). Primary factors that received extensive scholarly scrutiny are religiosity (Baumgartner, Francia, and Morris 2008; Jelen 1994), social and economic status (Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky 2002; Kucia 1999; Caplanova, Orviska, and Hudson 2004), beliefs about the use of force (Bartels 1994), and partisanship (Hooghe and Marks 2005; Hellstrom 2008; Markowski and Tucker 2010). Studies, for instance, contend that religious people prefer a nationalist and hawkish foreign policy (Guth 2004; Jacobson 2005). Others demonstrate that individuals’ fundamental beliefs about the use of force in international arena determine their opinion about defense expenses and national military budgets (Bartels 1994; Eichenberg and Stoll 2015).

Previous research demonstrated that ordinary people have general preferences for certain foreign policy orientations that “inform their beliefs toward more specific issues in international relations.” For instance, Everts and Isernia (2015) find that those who prefer to dovish or hawkish foreign policy orientation are more likely to support American military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, it is less understood what explains preferences for orientations in the first place.

Furthermore, these studies have primarily focused on explaining foreign policy dispositions in major or great powers. Less explored is foreign policy preferences in small states over which great powers have competed geopolitically. Small state scholarship demonstrates that public opinion plays an important role in shaping small state foreign policy, leading to important implications for regional security (Ulrichsen 2012). In particular, the end of the bipolar balance of power opened a wide range of foreign policy options for small states, increasing their maneuvering capabilities during the post-cold war period (Cooper and Momani 2011). Against the conventional wisdom that “changes in small state foreign policies are considered isomorphic to fluctuations in the structure of the international system” (Elman 1995, 173), research demonstrated that domestic-level factors such as political parties and public opposition can shape small state foreign policy. While previous research and current political events in small states emphasize the importance of public opinion in shaping small state foreign policy behavior with essential regional security implications, we know little about what explains individual foreign policy preferences toward great powers. In short, the existing literature lacks the incorporation of systematic public opinion data from small states.

This study uses systematic public opinion data to examine individual foreign policy dispositions toward the United States and Russia. It gauges why some individuals prefer closer ties with the United States and oppose alignment with Russia. Caught in between great powers, post-Soviet small states have “become objects of the competition between great powers and their integration projects” during the post-cold period (Pedi 2020, 168). Different great powers or their blocs have either forced or attracted small states to participate in their integration projects. Meanwhile, small states have attempted to establish different foreign policy stances such as a shelter alliance policy (Bailes, Thayer, and Thorhallson 2016), a pro-Western policy (Gvalia et al. 2013), a balanced orientation (Strakes 2013), or a multi-vector policy (Nitoiu 2018). Small states in post-Soviet area have geopolitically been sandwiched between great powers and have been viewed as “entredeux” (Cadier 2014), “contested neighborhood” (Ademmer, Delcour, and Wolczuk, 2016), and “in-between” (Torbakov 2013).

Meanwhile, empirical evidence demonstrates public opinion has played a central role in shaping the direction of foreign policy orientations in post-Soviet small states. Ukrainian President Yanukovych refused to sign the Association Agreement with the EU and attempted to pursue closer ties with Russia. His disregard for Ukrainian public opinion, which largely favored integration with the West, propelled Euromaidan movement that ousted him from power. Strong anti-Russian sentiments in Ukraine produced massive resistance against the Russian occupation of Ukraine. This strong resistance also encouraged western democracies to provide military aid to Ukraine. Georgian public played a central role in establishing Georgia’s pro-Western foreign policy. Former President Saakashvili received large-scale public support for his pro-Western foreign policy orientation. Massive protests in Georgia forced several Georgian governments to resign in different years (Nechepurenko 2018). Frustrated by the rejection of Georgia's application for the EU candidacy status, Georgian civil society organizations organized several massive rallies in late June-early July 2022 to demand the Prime Minister resign and form a new government that will implement the EU’s 12-point recommendations, which are required for the acceptance of Georgia’s EU candidacy status (JAMnews 2022). The Armenian public has been active in expressing opinion over Armenia’s foreign policy choices after massive protests forced President Sargsyan to resign in April 2018 (MacFarquhar, Pérez-Peña, and Nechepurenko 2018). These political events demonstrated the rising effect of public opinion on foreign policy choices in the “near abroad” of Russia. Since public opinion has played a central role in shaping political confrontation over these small states nudged in between great powers, this study examines individual foreign policy preferences toward Russia and the United States.

**Shared Identities and Foreign Policy Dispositions**

Why do some individuals in small states prefer closer ties with one great power, while disapproving of alignment with another? This research argues that individual foreign policy dispositions in small states are driven by shared identities. Individuals construct identities for themselves and others and evaluate if they have a shared identity with others based on certain identity dimensions that gain salience within mainstream society. There are a variety of latent identity dimensions in small states caught in great power rivalry. Since small powers have fewer capabilities and therefore greater preoccupation with survival and security, relations with great powers tend to be an important part of public discourse in small states. While elites might make purely strategic foreign policy decisions vis-à-vis great powers, salient identity dimensions become primary criteria for ordinary individuals to develop a sense of shared identities with great powers.

Perceived shared identity is formed in the context of social identification and categorization. Identity has multiple layers (Brewer and Gardner 1996). In the core lies *personal identity*, which constitutes interests, self-awareness, recognition of self-potential and qualities, self-regulation, and other personal characteristics (Leaper 2011, 363). Next comes social identity, which is shaped by social categorization and social identification by which individuals categorize themselves and others into groups (Tajfel et al. 1971). While personal identity comes into play during personal interactions like close friendships, social identity shapes the in-group level attitudes towards the out-group (Leaper 2011, 363).

Social categorization helps people to socially identify with a group and evaluate the degree of the shared identity with another group. It involves a cognitive process through which individuals construct identities for themselves, their community, and outsiders. The cognitive process, which is iterative, goes through three steps: the construction of “self”, construction of the “other”, and the assessment of a shared identity. Individuals in small states germinate their collective identity(“self”) for their state, construct identities of great powers(“other”) and assess to what extent their collective identity has in common with perceived identities of great powers. Individuals use social categorization to identify similarities and differences between their in-group with the out-group (Gries 2005, 237).

Salient identity dimensions are used to assess the degree of perceived shared identity between the in-group and out-group. Having fewer capabilities leaves small states with a “smaller margin of error” in their foreign policies and hence forces them to have “greater preoccupation with survival” (Handel 1981, 3). Great power rivalry over small states nurtures domestic public discourses within small states regarding their foreign policy choices and decisions. What kinds of relationships their states should establish with larger powers becomes a central part of public discourses in small states. Although policymakers might make purely strategic foreign policy decisions vis-à-vis great powers, ordinary individuals use a variety of salient identity dimensions to evaluate if they have a shared identity with great powers.

Identity dimensions gain salience through public discourses and discussions. First, personal interactions such as debates or discussions with friends or family members increase the salience of a certain identity dimension. Second, media have an essential role in making certain identity dimensions salient. For instance, studies demonstrate that media investigations and consistent reporting that a certain country is a threat or enemy prime individuals to attach negative images to the country. Third, entrepreneurs play an essential role in identity formation as they attempt to mold important values across society, legitime social orders, and mobilize social groups around specific identities (Brass 1997). Domestic social orders influence foreign relations (Skidmore 1997). Political entrepreneurs promote societal preferences for certain social orders based on identity dimensions which might include regime type, democratic values, or conservative religious values.

Opinion leaders and intellectuals play a critical role in the diffusion of ideas and identities within a population (Lustick and Miodownik 2000). They establish new interpretations and meanings of various identities (Adler 1991). Religious leaders are no different. Their moral authority enables them to advocate for preference for social orders built upon conservative and traditional values (Grzymala-Busse 2016). For instance, Churches advocate for the construction of national identity based on Christian values and the assessment of shared identities based on whether a given country is a Christian nation or not. Once becomes salient, this Christian versus non-Christian identity dimension leads individuals with Christian values to access shared identity with great powers and demonstrate their foreign policy preferences toward these great powers based on the degree of a shared identity. Authoritative power and greater access to resources make entrepreneurs more effective and persuasive in shaping and transmitting social discourses over different identities (Rousseau 2006, 73).

Domestic actors compete to achieve the hegemony of their identity conceptions (Finnemore 1996, 11). Financial resources, human capital, and institutional capabilities play a key role in the competition over the hegemony of certain ideas and identity conceptions. Under competition, some ideas and identity dimensions achieve a threshold level of acceptance within the mainstream society, and they become an essential part of collective identity (Adler 1991). Competition for hegemony produces victorious identity dimensions and ideas, which are diffused within mainstream society (Hopt 2002). After an identity dimension becomes dominant, it can obtain a tipping point and be firmly established in broader society (Laitin 1998).

This study identifies two primary identity dimensions in small states caught in great power competition between the United States and Russia: *democracy* and *language*. These identity dimensions gain salience in small states as different competing domestic forces promote them. These identity dimensions become salient for the assessment of shared identities. First, those whose collective identity constitutes democratic ideals tend to develop a shared identity with the West as they view it as a locus of democracy and believe that Western democracies are primarily built upon democratic values. Those for whom democratic values lie at the core of their collective social identity are more likely to have a shared identity with the West. Second, language also becomes a salient identity dimension determining the level of shared identity with great power. Those for whom the English language is an essential means of communication are more likely to develop a sense of a shared identity with the West.

Shared identity leads to a preference for a certain great power alignment through three causal pathways. First, a shared identity makes individuals perceive a great power as less threatening. A threat is conceptualized as “a situation in which one agent or group has either the capability or intention to inflict a negative consequence on another agent or group” (Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero 2007, 745). The threat could be military, economic, and cultural. Ordinary people in small states are less likely to perceive military aggression or economic and cultural threats from a great power with which they have a perceived shared identity. Threats become an essential part of domestic discourses of small states caught in great power rivalries as great powers compete for strategic influence over these states (Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero 2007). A shared identity makes the United States look less threatening to individuals in small states. The democracy identity dimension specifically leads individuals to view the United States as peace-loving.

Second, a shared identity generates trust toward great powers. Individuals view others as part of a common “us” as they share a collective identity with them. The common in-group perception spouts trust among group members. Trust stimulates cooperative attitudes (Tyler and Blader 2000; Tyler and Blader 2001). Those who believe they have a shared identity with the West are inclined to trust and therefore support closer political and economic ties with the United States.

Third, a shared identity brings about relationality. Relationality is a sense of connection, warmth, and intimacy in social relationships (Hopkins et al. 2016, 22). It produces a positive experience in collective settings (Neville and Reicher 2011) and is a basis for effective group co-action (Drury and Reicher 2020). Individuals germinate favorable opinions and warm feelings toward great powers they believe they have a shared identity. Experimental studies demonstrate that a “shared identity scenario produces much warmer feelings toward the other” (Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero 2007, 756). Thus, shared identity tackles the perception of threat and generates trust and warmer feelings.

H1: *The greater sense of shared identity with the West, the more likely individuals will prefer closer ties with the United States.*

Shared identity with one great power also makes differences with another great power more pronounced and revealed in the great power rivalry environment. Previous studies demonstrate that individuals view their in-group in positive terms while assigning negative images to the out-group (Turner et al., 1987). This is an inevitable outcome in the great power rivalry situation where a sense of shared identity with one side advances into an unfavorable opinion toward the other side, particularly, when these two sides reside in an ideological confrontation.

Individuals place themselves and others into social categories as they naturally take a social categorization approach and perceive a shared identity with some groups. Next comes social comparison by which individuals socially compare their collective shared identity with the out-group. Experimental studies demonstrate that social comparison produces a negative attachment to outsiders. Once individuals grow a shared identity with the West, they tend to socially compare their in-group to the out-group of Russia. While individuals perceive a collective shared identity with the West based on certain salient identity dimensions, they also attempt to distance themselves from Russia which becomes an out-group and is discerned as a locus of authoritarianism. Figure 1 illustrates how shared identity with the West leads to preferences for closer ties with the United States and opposition to alignment with Russia. Thus, while a shared identity makes individuals more likely to support closer ties with the United States, it also engenders unfavorable opinions and negative views of Russia making individuals less likely to prefer closer ties with Russia.

H2: *The greater sense of shared identity with the West, the less likely individuals will prefer closer ties with Russia.*

**Figure 1: Shared Identity, Preference for the USA, and Opposition to Russia**

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**Data and Methods**

***Data:*** This study uses the last three surveys gathered by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) as part of its “*Knowledge of and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia*” project based on nationally representative random sampling. These surveys are the *EU Survey* 2017, 2019, and 2021. One more survey, “*NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia March 2022*” is also used to empirically assess causal pathways. The surveys provide data about individual beliefs and attitudes about political and socio-economic issues in Georgia. Each survey has around 2000 observations. The analysis of the 2021 and the 2022 March data is given within the text and that of others is relegated to Appendix. We use four surveys gathered in different years to alleviate the endogeneity issues associated with observational data, bypass a possible impact of certain timely political events on individual preferences, and consequently evaluate if our identity-based theory is consistent over time or shaped by various political events. For instance, the Forty-Day War in 2020, or the Russian occupation of Ukraine in February 2022 might potentially influence individual foreign policy preferences. Previous research has demonstrated that people might favor security integration over economic integration when war breaks out (Spina 2020).

***Variables***. We use six dependent variables. Four of these variables measure whether individuals support political or economic cooperation with the United States or Russia: Each variable measures one cooperation area with one great power. The last two variables measure if individuals think whether Russia or the United States can best support Georgia. All dependent variables are binary. Figure 2 describes the frequencies of dependent variables based on the 2021 data.

**Figure 2:** **Preference for Closer Ties with Russia and the United States**

*Shared identity* is measured by whether individuals agree with the following statement “I am Georgian, and therefore I am European”. While it uses the word “European”, it also demonstrates Georgian identification with the West overall as Georgians mainly view Europe as a part of the West. Self-identification, an alternative measure of the independent variable is also used for a robustness check: it is measured by a binary variable which denotes whether respondents believe that they belong to both their ethnicity and European identity.

The *language dimension* is measured by English language skills. Alternatively, it is also measured by whether individuals believe that the English language (relative to any other foreign languages) should be mandatory in Georgian public schools. This measure captures the level of importance the respondents attach to the English language. There are many Georgians with both English and Russian language skills and therefore speaking English might not demonstrate a shared identity along with the language dimension.

*The democracy dimension* is measured by three survey questions. While scholars have come up with several scales for the measure of pro-democracy attitudes (McClosky and Zaller 1984; Inglehart 2003), a valid operationalization of mass support for democracy has been challenging because of “uncertainty about the equivalence of standard items across cultural contexts” (Heath et al. 2005, 329). These standard survey items have used the word “democracy” to measure pro-democracy attitudes (Schedler and Sarsfield 2017). However, this direct and abstract measure of democracy has given rise to several validity problems as it falls flat to “explicate the concrete ideas and ideals respondents associate with democracy” (Schedler and Sarsfield 2017, 637) and may open onto “an illusionary appearance of comparability” across countries (Heath et al.2005, 321). The first validity issue is driven by interviewer effects by which respondents are likely to feel pressured to give a “right” answer when they are asked if they support democracy (Seligson 2004). The second issue is *vacuous conceptions of democracy* under which individuals are likely to express rhetorical support for democracy without comprehending its major attributes. The third issue stems from *competing conceptions of democracy* which may lead respondents to “flirt with authoritarian alternatives, entertain vague ideas of democracy” (Schedler and Sarsfield 2017, 639). This is more likely in new democracies like Georgia where democracy is an “essentially contested concept” (Gallie 1956). The final issue is the presence of *conflicting values* as individuals attach different meanings and values to democracy. To avoid these potential validity problems, this study uses indirect and contextual measures. Three variables are used: belief in the importance of being critical of the government, belief in the superiority of human rights over state interests, and a preference for the government as an employee over a paternalistic form of government. The first variable is an indirect measure of democracy identity dimension measure as it refrains from using the word “democracy”. The last two variables are the contextual measures of the democracy dimension as they force respondents to choose between human rights and state interests or viewing the government as an employee and a paternalistic form of the government. *Potential confounders* such as religiosity, Russian language skills, economic status, trust in government, gender, age, education, and income are controlled for as well. Appendix A describes all survey questions used to measure all variables.

***Models.*** Logistic regression is the ideal method to estimate the impact of shared identity on foreign policy preferences, given that the dependent variables are binary. To avoid chasing error terms in the data, this study utilizes two machine learning algorithms - Artificial Neural Networks (ANN) and logistic regression - to assess the predictive power of models. As shown in recent research (Hill and Jones 2014), machine learning algorithms can be valuable in assessing diverse theoretical explanations. In this study, machine learning algorithms are utilized to evaluate alternative explanations based on model accuracy metrics. There are two major reasons why machine learning algorithms are crucial. First, some variables that are statistically significant in a model may not improve the model’s ability to forecast the outcome (Ward, Greenhill, and Bakke, 2010). Second, statistical significance tests utilize all data to fit the model, providing no opportunity to establish whether the findings are unique to the data or can be generalized. Many results in the literature may be due to overfitting rather than significant relationships (Hill and Jones 2014, 662). Machine learning algorithms help to distinguish meaningful outcomes from noise and evaluate alternative explanations (Beck, King, and Zeng 2000).

**Results and Discussion**

This section introduces and discusses regression results with a 95 percent confidence interval. The results from all models suggest that those who share identity with the West tend to support closer ties with the United States and oppose political and economic cooperation with Russia. The results also demonstrate that individuals who have a collective shared identity with the West tend to believe that the United States can best support Georgia and that Russia is less likely to be Georgia’s supporter.

Models 1-2 in Table 1 based on the analysis of the EU Survey 2021 demonstrate that individuals develop a shared identity with the West along both language and democracy dimensions: those who believe that it is important to be critical of the government and who have better English language skills tend to share a collective identity with the West. The alternative measures of democracy and language dimensions in Models 3-4 also suggest that democracy and language dimensions shape a shared identity: those who believe that human rights are of supreme value and more important than state interests and who think that the English language should be a compulsory foreign language at Georgian schools are more likely to share collective identity with the West. Models 5-8 indicate that those who share identity with the West tend to support closer political and economic ties with the United States. Models 9-10 show that those who share a collective identity with the West tend to believe that the United States can best support Georgia. The analysis of the EU Survey 2017 and 2019 in Appendix B and C respectively also provide similar results.

**Table 1: Factors Shaping Shared Identity and Preferences for Closer Political and Economic Ties with The United States**

Table

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Note: This table presents the results of logistic regression models based on the analysis of the EU survey 2021. Models 1-4 demonstrate factors shaping shared identity with the West. Models 5-10 illustrate the causes of individual preferences for closer ties with the United States. p<0.1; p<0.05; p<0.01.

Table 2 illustrates the factors influencing individual opposition to closer political and economic ties with Russia based on the analysis of the EU Survey 2021. It also demonstrates one more alternative measure of the democracy dimension in Models 1-2, which shows that individuals who have contextual support for democracy are more likely to germinate a shared identity with the West: Those who are against a paternalistic form of the government and believe that the government should rather be like an employee are more likely to possess a shared identity with the West. Models 3-8 show that those who share a collective identity with the West tend to oppose closer political and economic ties with Russia and believe that Russia is less likely to best support Georgia. The analysis of the EU Survey 2017 and 2019 in Appendix D and E respectively provide similar results.

**Table 2: Factors Shaping Shared Identity and Opposition to Closer Political and Economic Ties with Russia**

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Note: This table presents the results of logistic regression models based on the analysis of the EU survey 2021. Models 1-2 demonstrate an additional measure of democracy dimension shaping shared identity with the West. Models 3-8 illustrate the reasons why individuals oppose closer ties with Russia. p<0.1; p<0.05; p<0.01.

Next, we present predicted probabilities of preference for the United States and opposition to Russia in Figures 3 and 4 respectively. Figure 3 illustrates the probabilities of individual preferences for the United States given the absence and presence of shared identity. The left plot shows that the probability of preference for closer political ties with the United States rises by 32 percent when we move from the absence of shared identity to the presence of shared identity. The middle and right plots illustrate that the identical probability jumps for preferences for closer economic ties with the United States and the belief that the United States can best support Georgia are respectively 27 and 13 percent.

**Figure 3: Probabilities of Preference for USA Given Shared Identity**

Chart

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Figure 4 illustrates the probabilities of opposition to closer ties with Russia given the absence and presence of shared identity. The left plot shows that the probability of the belief that Russia can best support Georgia falls by 23 percent when we move from the absence of shared identity to the presence of shared identity. The middle and right plots demonstrate that the identical probability decreases of preferences for closer political and economic ties with Russia are respectively 27 and 13 percent. Thus, the probabilities of preference for closer ties with the United States and opposition to political and economic alignment with Russia increase substantially for those who share a collective identity with the West.

**Figure 4: Probabilities of Opposition to Russia Given Shared Identity**

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To empirically evaluate causal pathways, we conduct further tests and present results in Table 3 based on the analysis of the EU Survey 2021 and NDI March 2022. First, we examine if a shared identity makes the United States less threatening based on a survey question about whether the EU threatens Georgian traditions. This measure is a proxy for cultural threat perception from the West. However, we believe it sheds a light on a portion of causal pathways for two reasons. First, many Georgians perceive the EU and the United States as part of the West. Second and relatedly, empirical evidence demonstrates that cultural threats from the West have been among the primary concerns why some Georgians opposed Georgian integration into the West. Homosexuality has primarily been a concern for conservative circles of Georgian society who do not share a collective identity with the West. Compared to pro-Western actors, these conservative groups have viewed both the EU and the United States as cultural threats to Georgia developing narratives that “the US Embassy in Georgia is standing behind Tbilisi Pride Week” and “the European Union is attacking the Georgian Orthodox Church and traditional values” (Gigitashvili 2021). Models 1 and 2 in Table 3 demonstrate that those who share a collective identity with the West are less likely to believe that the EU threatens Georgian traditions. Models 3-8 show that those who are less likely to believe the EU threatens Georgian traditions tend to support closer ties with the United States. The results of the EU Survey 2017 and 2019 analysis in Appendix F and G respectively also provide similar results for cultural threats.

Second, based on the analysis of the NDI March 2022 data, models 9 and 10 in Table 3 suggest that individuals who prefer closer ties with the United States are more likely to have an unfavorable view of the Russian government. While individuals develop a collective shared identity with the West along several identity dimensions, their identification with the West makes their differences with Russia more pronounced. Once individuals grow a shared identity with and consider the West as the in-group, they also tend to socially compare their in-group to the out-group of Russia. This is the process of social comparison by which individuals view their own group positively while attaching negative images to the outgroup. Thus, while shared identity makes individuals more likely to support closer ties with the United States, it also engenders unfavorable opinions and negative views of Russia making individuals less likely to prefer closer ties with Russia.

**Table 3. Causal Pathways Connecting Shared Identity and Foreign Policy Preferences: Cultural Threats and Social Comparison**

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Note: Models 1-8 are based on the analysis of the EU Survey 2021. Models 9-12 demonstrate results from the NDI 2022 March survey. Controls are added based on survey question availability. Models 1 and 2 show that shared identity mitigates the perception of cultural threats. Models 3-8 illustrate that mitigation of cultural threats leads to preferences for closer ties with the United States. Models 9 and 10 demonstrate social comparison by which those who identify with the West and prefer closer ties with the United States tend to have an unfavorable view of the Russian government. Models 11 and 12 present the results for alternative explanations regarding security and economic concerns.

***Robustness Checks***

We also conducted several robustness checks. First, we used an alternative measure (whether individuals believe that they belong to both their ethnicity and European identity) of shared identity, our primary explanatory variable, and presented the results of the EU Survey 2021 in Table 4. The alternative measure of the independent variable yields similar results. Models 1-6 demonstrate that shared identity leads to a preference for closer ties with the United States. Likewise, Models 7-12 illustrate that individuals who share a collective identity with the West are disposed to disapprove of political and economic ties with Russia. The analysis of the EU Survey 2017 and 2019 also gives similar results in Appendix H and I respectively. The predicted probabilities of preferences for closer ties with the United States and opposition to alignment with Russia given the absence and presence of shared identity measured alternatively are given in Appendix J, which demonstrates significant changes in these probabilities.

**Table 4: Factors Shaping Closer Ties with USA and Opposition to Russia**

Table

Description automatically generatedNote: This table presents the results of logistic regression models based on an alternative measure of shared identity from the EU survey 2021. Models 1-6 demonstrate factors influencing individual preferences for closer ties with the United States. Models 7-12 illustrate the reasons why individuals oppose closer ties with Russia. p<0.1; p<0.05; p<0.01.

Second, we also use an alternative measure of preference for the United States, the third dependent variable. The survey question used to measure this variable is whether the EU, USA or Russia can currently best support Georgia. The USA is coded as 1 otherwise 0. For robustness checks, we collapse the USA and the EU as the West (coded 1 otherwise 0). Models 1-4 in Table 5 demonstrate that shared identity drives preferences toward the West. Models 5 and 6 in Table 5 demonstrate evidence for a causal pathway: those who believe that the West does not threaten Georgian traditions tend to believe that the West can best support Georgia. Figure 5 illustrates the predicted probabilities of preference for the West given the absence and presence of *shared identity*. It illustrates that shared *identity* has a much larger effect on the West than on the United States although the effect for both is significant. This result suggests individuals are likely to perceive the United States and the EU as part of the West. Models 7-12 in Table 5 also demonstrate those who think that the West threatens Georgian traditions tend to support closer ties with Russia. We discuss these results in the next subsection.

**Table 5: Factors Shaping Closer Ties with USA and Opposition to Russia**

Graphical user interface, table, Excel

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**Figure 5: Probabilities of Preference for The West given Shared Identity**

Chart, scatter chart

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Third, we use artificial neural networks to evaluate predictive improvements of models when shared identity, our primary explanatory variable is added over controls. Using the EU Survey 2021, we run models without and with the shared identity variable using in-sample and out-sample data and present the model accuracy metrics in Figures 6 and 7. All missing observations are multiply imputed to prevent data loss. Figure 6 demonstrates the accuracy of models for closer ties with and preference for the United States across epochs. Plots at the top of Figure 6 illustrate model accuracy with only control variables. Plots at the bottom of Figure 6 show model accuracy with the addition of shared identity. Plots overall suggest that the accuracy of closer political and economic ties with the United States models increases significantly when *the shared identity* variable is added to these models. However, there is no significant increase in the accuracy of the preference for the USA model when we add the shared identity variable.

**Figure 6: In-Sample and Out-Sample Model Accuracy of Ties with the USA**

**Graphical user interface

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Figure 7 demonstrates the accuracy of models for opposition to closer ties with and preference for Russia across epochs. Plots at the top of Figure 7 illustrate model accuracy with only control variables. Plots at the bottom of Figure 7 show model accuracy with the addition of shared identity. Plots overall suggest that the accuracy of opposition to closer political and economic ties with Russia models increases significantly when *the shared identity* variable is added to these models. However, there is no significant increase in the model accuracy of opposition to the preference for Russia when we add the shared identity variable.

**Figure 7: In-Sample and Out-Sample Model Accuracy of Ties with Russia**

**Chart

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**Alternative Explanations**

In this section, we discuss alternative explanations and then adopt a machine learning approach to evaluate these explanations in comparison to shared identity-based models. Results demonstrate that those who trust the government are less likely to share a collective identity with the West and prefer closer ties with the United States and are more likely to favor political and economic cooperation with Russia. However, these results are not consistent. While a considerable segment of the Georgian public has continued preferring integration into the West, the government has attempted to normalize Georgia’s relations with Russia. The government has expressed frustration with Euro-Atlantic integration (Crisis Group 2020). Some experts believe this is a “sign that the country has gone from staunch Western ally to antagonistic pro-Kremlin regime” and they “place the blame for Georgia’s hard turn toward Russia with billionaire oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili”, a former chair of the ruling party Georgian Dream (Cathcart 2022). Although Ivanishvili officially left office, some Western officials have contended that “his pro-Russian, Putin-style, anti-democratic actions and his governance through an informal network of unaccountable individuals have confirmed that Ivanishvili is the informal ruler of Georgia and a Russian ally” (cited in Cathcart 2022). These criticisms of American and European officials have been publicized by pro-government media and therefore it is likely that individuals who trust the government might therefore prefer closer ties with Russia and oppose alignment with the West (Gigitashvili 2021). Studies demonstrate that those who trust the government tend to believe governmental narratives about threats (Chatagnier 2012).

Religiosity has also an effect on foreign policy dispositions in Georgia. The analysis of the 2017 data demonstrates that individuals who attend religious services frequently, are likely to share a collective identity with the West and support closer political and economic ties with the United States. The analysis of the same data also suggests that those who attend religious services tend to oppose closer ties with Russia. Historically, Georgia's European identity has been tightly linked to its Christian identity. Its “early adoption of Christianity” has been “the most potent element” of its connection to Europe and its European identity as some Georgians believed that their “historic identity is European” and they “have always fought for Christian values” (Lomsadze 2022). Given this historical understanding, individuals who attend religious services might hold Christian values, share identity with the West along the Christianity religion dimension, support closer ties with the United States, and oppose closer ties with Russia. However, the effect of religiosity on foreign policy dispositions is starting to take an opposite direction in the following years. This is linked to rising polarization in Georgia. Pro-Russian circles and media have generated a narrative that Western values are not compatible with Georgian traditional values (Gigitashvili 2021). Church leaders have participated in anti-queer rallies organized by the pro-Russian Alt-Into group (Hauer.2021). Indeed, the Georgian Orthodox Church has previously opposed LGBTQ+ rights. However, a homophobic environment has taken a new direction in Georgia as political polarization has divided the country (Gegeshidze and De Waal 2021). Given the rise of narratives that the West is promoting homosexuality in Georgia, individuals who attend religious services are likely to oppose closer ties with the West and support cooperation with Russia. The evidence suggests that the role of religiosity in driving foreign policy preferences in Georgia has evolved over time. While some religious individuals preferred closer ties with the West because they believed Georgia shares a collective identity with Europe along with Christian values, they have been unwilling to accept LGTBTQ+ rights. The recent statements of the US embassy in support of LGBTQ+ rights in Georgia have discouraged religious individuals from supporting integration into the West (Gigitashvili 2021). In the meantime, Georgia “had adopted an additional argument for its European identity: democracy.” While the role of Christianity in Georgia’s European identity has been controversial, the country’s shared identity with the West along with the democracy dimension has gained new momentum (Lomsadze 2022).

Some of the results also demonstrate that individuals with good Russian language skills tend to support closer ties with Russia. Language skills allow individuals have access to political information. Russian media have been actively promoting a narrative that Western values are incompatible with Georgia’s traditional values. Pro-Russian media outlets have attempted to sow distrust between the West and Georgia by pushing for a narrative that “liberal democracy is impossible to have" and that “multicultural Western countries look weak and therefore less attractive partners for Georgia” (Jackson 2020). Individuals with good Russian skills are more likely to be exposed to this narrative and might be convinced at several periods that closer ties with Russia are the right path for Georgia.

Results also demonstrate that better-educated individuals tend to share a collective identity with the West and consequently favor closer ties with the United States and oppose alignment with Russia. Individuals with a higher education level are less likely to have a favorable view of Russia. Previous research has also shown that educated individuals tend to support integration into the West (Torres-Adán 2021). Individuals learn more information about the United States and Euro-Atlantic integration when they continue their education at higher schools. Previous research demonstrated that higher education also allows individuals to connect to social networks (Asadzade 2022). University students join social networks of pro-Western groups and civil society organizations. They also participate in many human rights and democratization training programs which mainly accept educated applicants.

Age also drives individual foreign policy dispositions in Georgia although it is not consistent. The results demonstrate that seniors are less likely to prefer closer ties with the West and oppose alignment with Russia except for two cases. The analysis of EU Survey 2017 and 2019 demonstrates that older people are more likely to believe that the United States can best support Georgia. However, the robustness checks in Table 5 illustrate that older individuals are less likely to believe that the West (coded as both the USA and EU) can best support Georgia. These results suggest that younger people are less likely to believe that the United States can best support Georgia relative to the European Union. However, younger people tend to prefer closer ties with the West relative to Russia. This might be associated with Soviet nostalgia.

Some studies have contended that instrumental rationality based on security and economic incentives can better account for foreign policy preferences in post-Soviet countries. While this conjecture has potential explanatory power to account for foreign policy preferences, we believe that a bigger picture of preferences for closer ties with the United States is shaped by shared identities. We use the NDI 2022 March survey to explore economic and security incentives as only this dataset has survey questions about future security and economic concerns. We present results regarding security and economic incentives in Table 3 where we illustrate some of the causal mechanisms given survey question availability. The 2022 data demonstrate that economic incentives are not likely to drive preferences for closer ties with the United States: those who believe that economic decline is likely next year do not necessarily want to pursue political or economic cooperation with the United States. However, we find partial evidence for security incentives: those who believe that Russian aggression against Georgia is likely next year tend to support closer economic ties with the United States. However, this result disappears when it comes to closer political ties with the United States. Security concerns and threat perception has taken a new page in driving individual foreign policy preferences in post-Soviet countries. Support for EU membership increased dramatically in Ukraine after the Russian occupation of the country in February 2022. Alarmed by the Russian occupation of Ukraine, Sweden and Finland have also pursued membership in NATO (Morcos 2022). The literature suggests that military aggression also influences shared identities. It is up to future research to explore deeply how/if the Russian occupation of Ukraine is shaping individual foreign policy dispositions in small post-Soviet countries.

Next, we take a machine learning approach to evaluate the predictive power of shared identity and alternative explanations. Previous literature has shown that significant variables do not always increase the predictive ability of models (Ward et al. 2010). While statistical significance tests keep their important value, the model assessment against out-of-sample offers an additional way of evaluating different explanations (Beck et al. 2000). To explore the accuracy of different explanations, we run randomly divide the EU Survey 2021 into train and test data, run models based on train data, and evaluate how these models can predict out-of-sample individual foreign policy preferences. Based on previous practice (Hill and Jones 2014), we first determine a base model with gender, education, and age variables since these are primary features included in most of the models. Then every time we add one variable and check how the addition of this variable improves out-of-sample model accuracy. Model accuracy is given a 95 percent confidence interval with lower and upper bounds. Figure 8 illustrates these bounds for the base model and then the base model plus a variable. The dotted-dash line is set to the upper bound of the accuracy of the base model. An added variable improves model prediction significantly when the lower bound of the model accuracy with the added variable is greater than the upper bound of the base model. The plots in Figure 8 suggest the addition of shared identity to the base model improves the accuracy of models of closer political and economic ties with the United States and opposition to political ties with Russia. These results have significant policy implications as they suggest that we could expect that the benefits of economic cooperation with Russia might overrule shared identity. Reports demonstrate that remittances from Russia have recently increased substantially. Georgian economic dependence on Russia is increasing. This is a risky situation for Georgia (Georgia Today 2022) as studies demonstrate that great powers acquire a great advantage in pressuring small states as asymmetric trade relations between them render the larger “coercive power over the smaller because an interruption of the relationship would cause much greater distress” for the smaller (Hirschman 1945; Abdelal and Kirshner 1999, 120).

**Figure 8: Accuracy of Models of Foreign Policy Dispositions in Georgia**

**Calendar

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**Discussion**

Georgian society has been polarized, posing “a serious obstacle to the country’s stated ambitions to build democratic institutions and to forge closer ties with the European Union and the United States.” While some political forces have called for the protection of traditional values and been cautious about Georgia’s integration into the West because of cultural threats, others have fought for immediate democratic reforms in line with the EU standards that could intensify the country’s integration into the West (Gegeshidze and De Waal 2021). On one hand, Georgian Orthodox Church has expressed concerns about the erosion of Georgian traditional values and advocated for the protection of these values. Clerics have been influential actors in transmitting narratives about the erosion of traditional values and beliefs to large audiences as they speak from moral authority. On the other hand, political entrepreneurs such as Mikheil Saakashvili have consistently called for democratic reforms and intensification of Georgia’s integration into the West. These political entrepreneurs played a key role in the diffusion of ideas across Georgian society. Pro-Western figures have popularized the notion that Georgia’s pro-Western stance is not a new direction, but rather a return to its European roots. They believe that Georgia’s European identity is deeply embedded in its national identity and history and therefore integration into the West is a confirmation of Georgia's European identity (Gvalia et.al 2013, 116).

The polarization along with identity dimensions has recently taken a new direction in Georgia. Pro-Western movements such as “Home, to Europe” and “Shame” have attempted to mobilize Georgian society along its shared identity with the West and press the Georgian government to comply with Western democratic values and standards to integrate the country into the West. Anti-government protests have been major means of pressing the government. Collective shared identities along with democratic values are the central justification behind the calls for Georgia's integration into the West (Heil 2022). The “Shame” movement organized the “Home, to Europe” rally, one of the most crowded anti-government protests in Georgia demanding the government to step down and form a new government that would comply with the EU preconditions for Georgia’s EU candidacy in a short period. Independent sources estimate that around 160,000 people participated in rallies where protesters chanted pro-Western slogans emphasizing Georgia’s shared with the West. Protesters believed that the “anti-Western rhetoric of the government” triggered the EU Commission to be unwilling to recommend Georgia for the candidacy status (Jamnews 2022).

Meanwhile, Alt-info, an anti-Western right-wing group has expanded its presence in Georgia opening dozens of offices around the country. The group has adopted an illiberal position “drawn from religious conservative ideas” and advocated for traditional values and closer ties with Russia (Gabritchidze 2022). Alt-info has also been active in organizing anti-queer rallies against Georgia’s pro-LGBTQ+ March for Dignity. The homophobic groups including Alf-Info have circulated a narrative that the US embassy is behind March for Dignity. Anti-American media outlets asserted that the United States has taken a policy of a “moral occupation” of Georgia by imposing “absolute liberalism”, which clashes with Georgian traditional values. Georgian Orthodox Church has also signaled that the US embassy in Tbilisi has abused its power by interfering internal affairs of Georgia by promoting gay rights. Far rights actors have also claimed that Georgia’s Christian values are incompatible with the moral values of the Western world and that Georgians have been propagandized about the “great advantages of Western civilization” (cited in Gigitashvili 2021). The far-right groups launched Conservative Movement, the new political party in Georgia. They have called for the normalization of Georgia's relations with Russia (Gabritchidze 2022). Empirical evidence demonstrates that those who believe that the EU threatens Georgian traditions have tended to support closer ties with Russia where LGBTQ+ people face many legal challenges and are frequently persecuted. The desire of those who are concerned about cultural threats from the West is linked to the Russian propaganda about the erosion of “traditional values” by the Western “import” of homosexuality (Human Rights Watch 2018).

Thus, polarization has been growing in Georgia. Conservative actors have propagandized a narrative that Western values are incompatible with Georgian values and that the West threatens traditional values. Conservative circles have consistently gesticulated about the erosion of traditional values and Western cultural threats. By contrast, various political entrepreneurs have engaged in the diffusion of ideas that the future of democratic, developed, and modernized Georgia lies in the West. Georgian political entrepreneurs have been playing a central role in identity formation and salience of certain identity dimensions within mainstream society as they have access to social networks and authority to mobilize various layers of society around certain identities for political purposes (Brass 1974). Their collective shared identity with the West along with democracy and language dimensions have convinced Georgians to pursue closer ties with the United States.

**Conclusion and Implications**

What explains individual foreign policy dispositions toward great powers in small states is an important question of interest for both scholars and policymakers. Most studies have explored mass opinion about foreign policy choices in great powers while little is known about what accounts for individual preferences for these great powers in small states. Political and economic ties with great powers have been essential to both foreign and domestic politics in small states. Their smaller margin of foreign policy error and preoccupation with security and survival has coerced small states to pursue cautious policies toward great powers. Meanwhile, masses in small states have developed coherent opinions and are deeply involved in public debates and discourse about the foreign policy choices of their counties as these choices have shaped the direction of political, economic, and social developments and strongly influenced their life. The recent developments in Ukraine demonstrated that public opinion is highly important for great power choices which shape the future direction of political and economic developments in small states. The pro-Russian president’s defiant disregard for pro-Western mass opinion in Ukraine sprouted violence in the country and caused a chain of destruction and political crisis. Strong anti-Russian sentiments in Ukraine also played a key role in resisting the Russian occupation and attracting military aid from Western powers.

This study relied on empirical evidence from Georgia to argue that shared identities are essential to an understanding of foreign policy dispositions in small states which have “become objects of the competition between great powers and their integration projects” after the fall of the Soviet Union (Pedi 2020, 168). While closer ties with Western powers have been viewed as a necessary direction for Georgia's democratization, modernization, and development, an alignment with Russia is perceived as the pursuit of authoritarianism and technological decline and deterioration. Individuals who believe they share a collective identity with the West tend to support closer ties with the United States and oppose alignment with Russia. Shared identity engenders a perception of harmlessness, trust, and warmer feelings.

While the identity-based theory of foreign policy preferences developed in this study is only tested against the data from Georgia, it could be extended to explain individual foreign policy preferences in other small states caught in great power rivalry. Several identity dimensions such as the Russian language or culture have been crucial in leading individuals in Azerbaijan and Armenia to prefer closer ties with Russia as these dimensions have generated a collective shared identity. Different Russian ethnic minorities have supported pro-Russian foreign policy orientations in their respective countries. Meanwhile, Russia has mostly used its military power to prevent possible political changes against its interests in its “near aboard” and militarily intervening in small states. However, its demonstration of military strength has made matters worse for Russian interests. Pundits have warned about the “real chance that we could see the rise of anti-Russian sentiment in Kazakhstan, along the lines of Ukraine or Georgia” in response to Russia’s demonstration of military strength and brazen aggression against the sovereignty of these countries (Light 2022). The Russian military threats to neighboring countries have caused the erosion of shared identity as many have attempted to distance themselves from Russia. The research into foreign policy dispositions in post-Soviet area is critical to anticipate political crises and take preventive measures. Future research should explore how Russian military threats and aggression toward neighboring countries reshape and reinforce collective identities.

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## **Appendix A: Survey Questions**

## ***Knowledge of and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia, 2017, 2019, 2021***

Closer Political Ties with the United States: *Which of the following countries and unions should, in your opinion, Georgia have the closest political cooperation with? Please choose up to three - The United States.*

* Mentioned
* Not mentioned
* DK/RA

Closer Economic Ties with the United States: *Which of the following countries and unions should Georgia have the closest economic cooperation with? Please choose up to three - The United States.* Re-coded “1” (mentioned) and “0” (otherwise).

* Mentioned
* Not mentioned
* DK/RA

Closer Economic Ties with Russia: *Which of the following countries and unions should, in your opinion, Georgia have the closest political cooperation with? Please choose up to three – Russia.* Re-coded “1” (mentioned) and “0” (otherwise).

* Mentioned
* Not mentioned
* DK/RA

Closer Economic Ties with Russia: *Which of the following countries and unions should Georgia have the closest economic cooperation with? Please choose up to three – Russia.* Re-coded “1” (mentioned) and “0” (otherwise).

* Mentioned
* Not mentioned
* DK/RA

Preference for the USA, Russia, or the West*: Who can currently give best support to Georgia – the EU, USA, or Russia?* Re-coded in the following ways. Preference for the USA: “1” (USA) and “0” (otherwise), Preference for the West: “1” (USA or EU) and “0” (otherwise), Preference for Russia: “1” (Russia) and “0” (otherwise).

* The EU
* USA
* Russia
* Other
* Neither
* DK/RA

Shared Identity*: Do agree or disagree with the statement made by a Georgian politician in the Council of Europe: “I am Georgian, and therefore I am European?”*

* Agree
* Disagree
* DK/RA

Alternative Measure of Shared Identity*: Would you say you belong to …*

* Only [respondent's ethnicity]
* [Respondent's ethnicity] and European
* Only Caucasian
* [Respondent's ethnicity] and Caucasian
* Other
* DK/RA

Government as Parent vs Employee*: Please indicate which of the following statements you agree with and to what level: 1. People are like children, the government should take care of them like a parent 2. The government is like an employee, the people should be the bosses who control the government*

* Government as a parent - Strongly agree
* Government as a parent - Agree
* Government as an employee - Agree
* Government as an employee - Strongly agree
* Agreement with neither.
* DK/RA

Being Critical of Government*: In your opinion, how important or unimportant is it for a good citizen to be critical towards the government?*

* Not important at all
* Rather not important than important
* Rather important than not important
* Very important
* DK
* RA

Human Rights vs State Interests*: Please tell me, which code corresponds best to your opinion? 0: State interests should always be above human rights. 10: Human rights are a supreme value and should be protected above all.*

* State interests should always be above human rights
* 2
* 3
* 4
* 5
* 6
* 7
* 8
* 9
* Human rights are a supreme value and should be protected above all
* DK/RA

English language Dimension*: In your opinion, which foreign language should be mandatory in Georgian public schools?* Re-coded as “1” (English), “0”(otherwise)

* No foreign language should be mandatory
* English
* Russian
* Other
* DK/RA

Cultural Threats*: I will now read you some statements on the EU. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each statement? - The EU threatens Georgian traditions.*

* Fully disagree
* Rather disagree than agree
* Rather agree than disagree
* Fully agree
* DK/RA

Religiosity*: Please tell me, except for special rituals such as weddings or funerals, how often do you attend religious services?*

*Note:* The question was asked only to the respondents, who identified themselves with any religion or denomination

* Once a week or more often
* Once a month
* Only on special religious holidays
* Less often
* Never
* DK/RA

Russian Language Skills*: Using this CARD, please tell me, which of these levels best describes your ability in the following: Russian*

* No basic knowledge
* Beginner
* Intermediate
* Advanced
* RA

English Language Skills: *Using this CARD, please tell me, which of these levels best describes your ability in the following: English*

* No basic knowledge
* Beginner
* Intermediate
* Advanced
* RA

Trust in Government*: I will now name a number of social institutions and political unions. Please assess your trust toward each of these using this CARD. Please tell me how much you trust or distrust the Prime Minister of Georgia.*

* Fully distrust
* Distrust
* Neutral
* Trust
* Fully trust
* DK
* RA

Income: *Household income is the sum of all monetary income of all household members. Based on the monetary income of all your household members last month, in which of the following groups does your household belong?*

* More than 1600 GEL
* 1201 - 1600 GEL
* 801 - 1200 GEL
* 501 - 800 GEL
* 301- 500 GEL
* 181 - 300 GEL
* Up to 180 GEL
* 0
* DK
* RA

Economic Status*: Let's imagine there is a 10-step ladder reflecting the economic standing of all households in Georgia today. The first rung of this ladder corresponds to the lowest possible economic position in society, while the 10th rung corresponds to the highest possible position. Which rung of this ladder do you think your household stands on currently?*

* Lowest economic position in society
* 2
* 3
* 4
* 5
* 6
* 7
* 8
* 9
* Highest economic position in society
* DK/RA

Education: *What is the highest level of education that you have completed?*

* Primary education
* Incomplete secondary education
* Completed Secondary
* Incomplete higher education
* Bachelor's degree
* Master's degree
* Doctoral Degree

Gender: *Gender of the respondent-* Male *or* Female

## ***NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, March 2022***

Favorable View of Russian Government*: What is your overall opinion of the government of Russia?*

* Very unfavorable
* Unfavorable
* Favorable
* Very favorable
* DK/RA

Closer Political Ties with the USA*: Which countries and unions should Georgia have the closest political cooperation with? Please name up to three. – the USA.* Re-coded as “1” (USA) and “0” (otherwise).

Note: Respondents were allowed to name up to 3 answers

* Mentioned
* Not mentioned
* DK/RA

Closer Economic Ties with the USA*: Which countries and unions should Georgia have the closest economic cooperation with? Please name up to three. – the USA.* Re-coded as “1” (USA) and “0” (otherwise).

Note: Respondents were allowed to name up to 3 answers

* Mentioned
* Not mentioned
* DK/RA

Russian Aggression*: Considering the current situation, please tell me how likely or unlikely it is that the following scenarios will unfold in Georgia during the next year. - Russian military aggression against Georgia.*

* Not Likely
* Less likely
* Likely
* DK/RA

Economic Decline*: Considering the current situation, please tell me how likely or unlikely it is that the following scenarios will unfold in Georgia during the next year. - Economic decline/hardship.*

* Not Likely
* Less likely
* Likely
* DK/RA

Trust in Government*: Please tell me, how would you rate the current government's performance?*

* Very bad
* Bad
* Good
* Very good
* DK/RA

Education*: What is the highest level of education you have achieved to date?*

* Did not obtain a nine-year diploma
* Nine-year diploma
* High school diploma (11 or 12 years)
* Secondary or lower
* Vocational/technical degree
* Secondary technical
* Bachelor's degree/5 years diploma
* Any degree above bachelor's
* Higher than secondary

Gender*: Respondent's sex-* Male or Female

**Appendix B: Factors Shaping Shared Identity and Preferences for Closer Political and Economic Ties with The United States, EU Survey 2017**

Table

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Note: This table presents the results of logistic regression models based on the analysis of the EU survey 2017. Models 1-4 demonstrate factors shaping shared identity with the West. Models 5-10 illustrate the causes of individual preferences for closer ties with the United States. p<0.1; p<0.05; p<0.01.

**Appendix C: Factors Shaping Shared Identity and Preferences for Closer Political and Economic Ties with The United States, EU Survey 2019**

Graphical user interface, table

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Note: This table presents the results of logistic regression models based on the analysis of the EU survey 2019. Models 1-4 demonstrate factors shaping shared identity with the West. Models 5-10 illustrate the causes of individual preferences for closer ties with the United States. p<0.1; p<0.05; p<0.01.

**Appendix D: Factors Shaping Opposition to Closer Political and Economic Ties with Russia, EU Survey 2017**

Table

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Note: This table presents the results of logistic regression models based on the analysis of the EU survey 2017. Models 1-2 demonstrate an additional measure of democracy dimension shaping shared identity with the West. Models 3-8 illustrate the reasons why individuals oppose closer ties with Russia. p<0.1; p<0.05; p<0.01.

**Appendix E: Factors Shaping Opposition to Closer Political and Economic Ties with Russia, EU Survey 2019**

Table

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Note: This table presents the results of logistic regression models based on the analysis of the EU survey 2019. Models 1-2 demonstrate an additional measure of democracy dimension shaping shared identity with the West. Models 3-8 illustrate the reasons why individuals oppose closer ties with Russia. p<0.1; p<0.05; p<0.01.

**Appendix F: Factors Shaping Closer Ties with USA and Opposition to Russia** Table

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Note: This table presents the results of logistic regression models based on an alternative measure of shared identity from the EU survey 2017. Models 1-6 demonstrate factors influencing individual preferences for closer ties with the United States. Models 7-12 illustrate the reasons why individuals oppose closer ties with Russia. p<0.1; p<0.05; p<0.01.

**Appendix G: Factors Shaping Closer Ties with USA and Opposition to Russia**

Table

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Note: This table presents the results of logistic regression models based on an alternative measure of shared identity from the EU survey 2019. Models 1-6 demonstrate factors influencing individual preferences for closer ties with the United States. Models 7-12 illustrate the reasons why individuals oppose closer ties with Russia. p<0.1; p<0.05; p<0.01.

**Appendix H. Causal Pathways Connecting Shared Identity and Foreign Policy Preferences: Cultural Threats**

Table

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Note: Models 1-8 are based on the analysis of the EU Survey 2017. Models 1 and 2 show that shared identity mitigates the perception of cultural threats. Models 3-8 illustrate that mitigation of cultural threats leads to preferences for closer ties with the United States.

**Appendix I. Causal Pathways Connecting Shared Identity and Foreign Policy Preferences: Cultural Threats**

Table

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Note: Models 1-8 are based on the analysis of the EU Survey 2019. Models 1 and 2 show that shared identity mitigates the perception of cultural threats. Models 3-8 illustrate that mitigation of cultural threats leads to preferences for closer ties with the United States.

**Appendix J: Probabilities of Preferences for the United States and Opposition to Russia Given Alternative Measure of Shared Identity**

Diagram, schematic

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