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Confronting Russia

How Do the Citizens of Countries of the Near Abroad Perceive Their State's Role?

ABSTRACT Russia has become increasingly assertive in its foreign relations with surrounding states—especially toward those states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. Although much attention has been paid to the Russian reassertion in the near abroad, very little work has been done on how the citizens of former Soviet states see their state's place in the world, particularly relative to Russia. Although Russia may view the former Soviet states as its potential "clients," there is considerable variation in how the citizens of these states view their role in the world and, by definition, their relationship to Russia. Role theory provides a useful framework for evaluating the reaction of these states to Russia's reassertion of power. These countries represent opportune cases to examine the evolution of national role conceptions in new states, and how these conceptions are affected by these countries' relationships with Russia, China, and the West. This article provides an explanation as to why citizens of some states differ from others in their role conceptions. We offer a novel theoretical explanation that accounts for variation in roles, based on each country's historic relationship with Russia, its emerging relationship with the West and China, and domestic ethnopolitical conditions.

KEYWORDS foreign policy, survey data, role theory, Russia and Near Abroad

INTRODUCTION

On 20 June 2019, Sergei Gavrilov, the chairperson of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO)—an organization that had been set up by the Greek parliament in 1993 to foster relations between Christian Orthodox lawmakers—addressed a group of members of parliament (MPs) from a number of different Orthodox countries. Gavrilov was a member of the Russian Federation's State Duma as a MP from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) (Morrison, 2019). The invitation to Gavrilov to speak to the assembly in the Georgian parliament raised objections from opposition groups.¹ The opposition MPs called for mass protests and thousands turned out in the following week. There were many clashes with police and 240 people were injured in these clashes (Lomsadze, 2019).

1. Apparently the session was supposed to be chaired by the Greek secretary general of the IAO, but for some reason Gavrilov gave his address from the chair's seat. See: Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (2019).

The Georgian opposition groups accused the ruling Georgian Dream party of currying favor with Moscow by inviting the IAO to hold its annual meeting in Tbilisi—especially since the chairmanship of the organization had rotated to Russia and Gavrilov. Although Georgian Dream leaders quickly tried to distance themselves from the event, the Georgia Dream–led government remained committed to the policy of the normalization of relations between Russia and Georgia.

There are many reasons why the current Georgian government has sought to normalize relations with Russia, despite serious differences over the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which had seceded from Georgia and created “de facto” states with Russia’s support. First, Russia is currently the main export market for Georgia, particularly for wines and agricultural products (Kakachia & Lebanidze, 2019). Second, Georgia depends heavily on Russian tourism. According to the Georgian National Tourism Administration, Russian tourists made up 1.4 million out of a total 8.6 million tourists in 2018, the largest proportion by far of an industry that accounts for 8% of Georgia’s GDP—and that number was expected to grow in 2019 (Demytrie, 2019). Third, Georgia is heavily dependent on remittances from Russia, which is the second-largest source after the European Union (Kakachia & Lebanidze, 2019). Finally, the Georgian Orthodox Church maintains close ties with its Russian counterpart (Coalson, 2016).

In sum, Georgia (and Georgians), like many citizens of the countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU), are torn regarding the country’s position vis-à-vis Russia, which essentially amounts to a debate over the country’s role conception relative to its powerful neighbor, Russia.² On the one hand, there is the enmity generated by Russia’s increasing aggression relative to the countries of the near abroad. On the other hand, there is the attraction of Russian markets for exports of goods produced in these countries, as well as the attraction of Russian tourism. Further, there is the cultural gravity exerted by Russia as the de facto leader of the Orthodox Christian world, and the influence it wields as a self-avowed hub of social and cultural conservatism.

These countervailing pressures facing the countries of the near abroad have increased in recent years, especially as Russia has reasserted itself on the world stage. Although there has been a growing literature on the foreign policy of a reassertive Russia and its impact in the post-Soviet space (Averre, 2009; Tolstrup, 2013; Bechev, 2015; Mouritzen, 2017), almost invariably, the work on foreign policy in the post-Soviet space has focused on Russian foreign policy vis-à-vis these states, and not vice-versa (German & Bayramov, 2019).

Similarly, work on foreign policy role conceptions has focused largely on the emergence of Russia’s foreign policy role conception, especially as it emerged in the 1990s (Petersson, 2018; Grossman, 2005; Thibault & Levesque, 1997; Chafetz et al., 1996). What has

2. The 15 independent states that broke away from the Soviet Union after the end of the Cold War are commonly known as former Soviet Union (FSU) countries or “near abroad” in the literature. These designations connect these states to Russia, which is the heir to the Soviet Union. Although some people may object to these designations, their common usage and the subject matter of the article support their usage.

received far less attention are the foreign policy role conceptions of the former Soviet states in relation to Russia. Hence, we know relatively little about how the states of the “near abroad” see their role relative to Russia. Although Russia may wish to define these states as “client” states, we suspect that citizens vary in the degree to which they accept Russia’s expectations regarding their state’s national role conceptions (as illustrated by the Georgian example above). This matters because it affects the kind of foreign policies toward Russia that decision makers of FSU states can justify to their domestic public.

Much of the literature on national role conceptions focuses on the attitudes held by political elites (Thies, 2010; Breuning, 2011, 2017, 2019). This study innovates by focusing attention on *citizens’ perceptions of their state’s role*. There is some work on vertical role contestation—that is, between decision makers and publics (Cantir & Kaarbo 2012, 2016)—but not much attention has been paid to the supportive foundation that broad domestic agreement regarding the state’s role in international affairs provides for foreign policy making. We argue that when a large proportion of the domestic public shares a common perception of the state’s role in international politics, decision makers have greater freedom to pursue foreign policies that are consistent with that role conception. In contrast, when the domestic public is divided regarding the state’s role in international affairs, decision makers must expend more effort to justify their actions and will receive less domestic support for their policies.

Just like the decision makers of established states engage in efforts to socialize new states into the role(s) they expect from them (Thies, 2010, 2013), the decision makers of new states will seek to rally their domestic audience around preferred role conceptions. However, just as new states are not empty vessels that socializing established states can fill, domestic publics in new states do not simply accept their leaders’ preferred national roles. Instead, domestic publics react to a variety of stimuli.

Hence, this article not only investigates the degree to which there is convergence on a specific role conception in the FSU countries, but also probes the factors associated with a preference for one or another national role conception. We employ survey data to probe the perceptions of citizens of the FSU countries regarding their state’s foreign policy role toward Russia. We are particularly interested in the intersection between the assessments of the new states’ capacity to act independently and its orientation toward Russia, and how these evaluations shape citizens’ perceptions of their state’s foreign policy role.

ROLE THEORY AND FOREIGN POLICY BEHAVIOR

According to Cantir and Kaarbo (2012), “national role conceptions say much about a country’s identity, its priorities and policies, and how it relates to other states” (p. 19). Important for our purposes, states do not emerge in the international system with fully formed role

3. We employ the concept of role socialization instead of “role altercasting.” As detailed by Thies (2013), Harnisch (2011), and Stryker and Statham (1985), role altercasting is a subtype of role socialization. We prefer the broader term. One, it better captures the broader process of socialization we are after and encompasses multiple possible socialization strategies. Two, it is more easily understood by a broader range of readers.

conceptions (Le Prestre, 1997a; Thies, 2010, 2013; Harnisch, 2011a). Instead, new states are socialized through their interactions with relevant other states (Thies, 2013).³

Thies (2013, p. 32) conceptualizes new states as starting out with the basic role of “sovereign state,” as well as other roles that are ascribed to them and that express the expectations of other, more established states. New states may adopt these ascribed roles by acting in accordance with them. In doing so, new states turn ascribed roles into achieved roles, that is, roles for which they have established a credible record. However, achieved roles do not derive from ascribed roles alone; they can also originate in a state’s domestically derived initiatives or in its opposition to an ascribed role (Breuning, 2019). In other words, new states engage in a socialization game with other states (Thies, 2001, 2012, 2013). This game consists of moves in a bargaining process that is not unique to new states but continues throughout the history of a state’s interactions with relevant other states.

That said, the initial interactions of new states with more established states convey the role expectations the latter have of the former. This is sometimes called “altercasting,” which is defined as an effort to impose roles on new states by providing cues designed to elicit the expected role behavior (Thies, 2013; Harnisch, 2011). In other words, altercasting describes the process by which established states seek to pressure new states into accepting an ascribed role and behaving in accordance with it. This suggests that new states face the most intense socialization pressures (Thies, 2013; Hudson, 1999; Chafetz, 1996–97; Chafetz et al., 1996).

In essence, altercasting describes a key mechanism of the socialization game: established—and often more powerful—states pressure new states into accepting the role the former ascribes to the latter. However, the socialization game is not limited to altercasting: while facing pressures from established powers, the new state’s decision makers must also pay attention to its domestic public’s expectations. The socialization game operates not only on the international level but also domestically—and can therefore be characterized as a two-level game (Putnam, 1988). The domestic aspect of the socialization game has received scant attention (Cantir & Kaarbo, 2012, 2016; Breuning, 2019).

We contend that the domestic public is subject to the same socialization processes as the new state’s leadership. At the same time that decision makers face pressures from external socializers as they begin to define their state’s role on the international stage, the domestic public also considers their state’s role in international affairs. Given differences in access to information, there is no guarantee that decision makers and the domestic public share a common perception of the state’s role, and the latter may not share a unified role conception. The former is vertical role contestation (Cantir & Kaarbo, 2012, 2016); the latter has not been investigated systematically and is our study’s focus.

We contend that socialization pressures from one or more external actors interact with the emerging state’s search for the scope of roles available to it. Moreover, we contend that the socialization processes affect leaders and domestic publics differently. Unfortunately, there is little previous work that focuses on how socialization processes affect domestic publics. Cantir and Kaarbo (2016) point to historical and sociocultural factors, as well as salient issues. Among the latter, the state of the economy, dependence

on trade with (the) key socializer(s), and the security of the new borders will loom large. Hudson (1999) establishes that citizens do identify roles for their state but does not probe their origins.

Hudson (1999) used an experimental design to investigate whether national role conceptions—she called them “action templates”—are broadly shared within a society. Conducting studies in Japan, Russia, and the United States, she found that there was the broadest agreement in Japan and the least agreement in Russia. Hudson’s study established that the domestic public varies in its convergence around specific national role conceptions. We build on this insight.

In the next section, we first outline two dimensions that we theorize will guide the role conceptions of domestic publics in the FSU. We then develop a set of expectations regarding the factors that explain the prevalence of the four role conceptions derived from the two dimensions among those publics.

THEORIZING CITIZENS’ NATIONAL ROLE CONCEPTIONS IN NEW STATES

To what degree have citizens in the FSU converged around specific national role conceptions? Broad societal agreement about the state’s role in international affairs enables decision makers to pursue foreign policies consistent with that role without having to engage in extensive persuasion and justification with their domestic public. However, the domestic public’s convergence around specific role conceptions depends on their resonance (Hudson, 1999). Cantir and Kaarbo (2016) allude to historical and sociocultural factors, as well as salient issues—such as the state of the economy, trade dependence, and the security of the new state’s borders.

For the states that emerged from the former Soviet Union, Russia—as the successor state to the Soviet Union—continues to loom large as a socializer. Their past as part of Russia sets these states’ relationships with Russia apart. This does not entail that other actors—such as the United States (US), the European Union (EU), or China—do not shape the roles of the FSU states in meaningful ways. However, the socializing roles of these other actors are beyond the scope of this study. Building on Cantir and Kaarbo (2016), we contend that the historical ties to Russia shape the role conceptions that citizens in the FSU consider appropriate for their state, in both positive and negative ways, and to varying extents.

We argue that Russia’s influence is shaped not only by its history of governing these now independent states, but also by a combination of additional factors. Again, building on Cantir and Kaarbo (2016), we expect that sociocultural factors, the state of the economy, trade dependence (on Russia), and the security of the state’s borders affect citizens’ perceptions of the state’s relationship with Russia. In particular, we argue that these various factors influence, one, how citizens define their state’s role in opposition to its main socializer and, two, their assessment of the state’s self-image as an independent actor on the world stage. We explain these two dimensions in the remainder of this section.

TABLE 1. Role Conceptions

	Low national independence orientation	High national independence orientation
High orientation toward Russia's positive role in post-Soviet space	Dependent = 1	Faithful Ally = 2
Low orientation toward Russia's positive role in post-Soviet space	Counter-dependent = 3	Adversarial = 4

The first dimension focuses on citizens' perceptions of their state's role in opposition to relevant socializers. As indicated, we focus specifically on Russia's efforts to shape (or altercast) these states roles. As Russia has increasingly reasserted itself and tried to position itself as a great power, it has tried to ascribe a "client" role to the FSU. In doing so, it has sought to altercast these states as its "protectees" (Holsti 1970, p. 270). Neither the leadership nor the citizens of all FSU states have willingly accepted such a role, but all must reckon with it. We expect that the reaction to Russia's efforts to altercast the FSU into a client or protectee role varies among these states. We further expect that the tendency of FSU citizens to have a positive or negative orientation toward Russia is shaped by the degree to which they view a client role as appropriate for their state. A positive orientation toward Russia suggests acceptance of such a role, whereas a negative orientation suggests resistance to it. This is the first dimension of our role conception framework.

The second dimension consists of FSU citizens' attitudes regarding the state's capabilities as a sovereign and independent actor. We contend that citizens' attitudes regarding their own state also shape national role conceptions. Specifically, we argue that perceptions regarding the importance of national independence and pride in their country affect the kind of role(s) citizens will view as appropriate for their state. Such pride is facilitated by secure borders, positive trends in the economy, and lower trade dependence on the country of which they were formerly a part (Russia). Whereas the first dimension reflects citizens' reactions to ascribed role(s), the second dimension reflects domestically derived roles that are consistent with citizens' conceptions of their state's role in international affairs.

These two dimensions yield four role patterns, as is shown in Table 1. The first role pattern (shown in the top left quadrant of the table) is held by citizens who have a positive orientation toward Russia and a low orientation toward national independence. They see their state as performing the role of a Dependent. Citizens who perceive their state in this way accept Russia's effort to altercast it as a client state, because they do not perceive a well-developed domestically derived role. The Dependent role is understood here as akin to Hey's (1995) notion of compliance. Hey defines the compliant role in the context of the foreign policies of dependent states in the global south. She argues that compliance defines a state's acquiescence to act conforms with the desires of a dominant, more powerful state (1995, pp. 210–211).

The second role pattern combines a positive orientation toward Russia with a high orientation toward national independence. Citizens who hold this combination of views resist the effort to altercast their state as a client (or dependent), but perceive a freely chosen alignment with Russia as a Faithful Ally (Holsti, 1970, p. 267). The difference between this role and the Dependent role is that citizens who see their state as a Faithful Ally understand their state's interests to be aligned with those of the socializer. In other words, these citizens perceive a confluence of interests between their state and Russia, not succumbing to the latter's pressure to altercast their state into a submissive role. In her study of dependent states' foreign policies, Hey (1995) described such an orientation as one of consensus between a dependent state and a dominant state.

The third role pattern combines a low (or negative) orientation toward Russia with a low orientation toward national independence. Citizens who perceive their state in terms of this Counter-dependent role do not wish to succumb to the effort to be altercast as a client state, but also do not have a well-developed and domestically grounded alternative. Hey (1995) describes the Counter-dependent role as an expression of frustration with the state's dependent status. She suggests that Counter-dependence is marked by a desire to "counteract dependence and to achieve greater independence," albeit without a clear sense of direction (Hey, 1995, p. 211). In other words, the Counter-dependent role's defining feature is opposition to the socializer and the role it seeks to ascribe to the state, but without a strong sense of a domestically derived role to take its place.

The fourth and last role is a combination of a negative orientation toward Russia with a high orientation toward national independence. Citizens who perceive their state in this way dislike Russia's attempt to altercast their state into a client role and seek to achieve acceptance of the state's self-defined and domestically driven role conception. This role is akin to Holsti's (1970) "anti-imperialist agent." Although Holsti's label for this role now seems dated, its substance well captures the Adversarial role: independence is prized and encroachment upon it must be resisted. Or, as Holsti (1970) notes, when "imperialism is perceived as a serious threat, many governments . . . see themselves as agents of 'struggle' against this evil" (p. 264). We contend that citizens may perceive their state as appropriately taking an Adversarial role to oppose the encroachment by the more powerful state.

Our empirical analysis will investigate to what degree evidence can be found of these four role conceptions among the citizens of the former Soviet states. In addition, we seek to explain variation in citizens' preferences for one or another of these four roles. We hypothesize that both individual- and country-level variables affect whether citizens perceive their state's role as Dependent, Faithful Ally, Counter-dependent, or Adversarial. These measures allow us to evaluate whether the situation of the state affects individuals' role conceptions, whereas the individual level measures allow us to evaluate factors that influence individual differences in interpretation of the state's most appropriate role vis-à-vis Russia.

At the country level, we expect the following factors to matter: whether an FSU state shares a border with Russia or has experienced a Russia-backed secession (both of which are likely to heighten concern about the security of borders), the proportion of ethnic

Russians among its population (which affects the sociocultural environment), dependency (or when imports and exports to Russia as a percentage of total imports and exports of the country exceeds 20%) on trade with Russia (a crucial economic dependency), and membership or affiliation with the European Union (EU), which indicates that the FSU state is actively seeking economic and trade ties beyond pre-independence connections with Russia. At the individual level, we expect that citizens within each country will vary in their assessment of their state's role, depending on their own situation and characteristics. Specifically, we expect that the individual's assessment of where the country is headed, the state of the economy, social trust, and perception of Russia affects individuals' perceptions of their state's role. In addition, we include measures for gender, age, and education, which may also influence how the individual perceives the country's role.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In order to evaluate what role the citizens of the various FSU states perceive for their state, we employed survey data from the Pew Research Center's (2017) "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe." The data for this project were collected in 2015–16 and asked a variety of questions from more than 30,000 respondents in post-communist Europe and the former Soviet Union. In this study, we use data for eight countries that were part of the Soviet Union and that are now known as part of the near abroad. We include respondents from Armenia, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, and Moldova. Although Ukraine was included in the Pew survey, the questions we employ here were not asked there. Hence, we could not include it. The survey data for the eight countries included in our analyses add to a total of 15,421 individual respondents. We supplement this individual-level data with country-level data that we derived from a variety of sources, as is indicated in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Measures of Independent Variables

Variable	Measure	Source(s)
Individual Level		
Satisfaction with the way things are going in the country	Q1 Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country today? 1 Satisfied 2 Dissatisfied	Pew Research Center (2017) "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe," http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/ (accessed 10 June 2021).

(continued)

TABLE 2. Measures of Independent Variables (*continued*)

Variable	Measure	Source(s)
Condition of the country's economy	Q2 Thinking about our country's economic situation, how would you describe it—is it very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad or very bad? 1 Very good 2 Somewhat good 3 Somewhat bad 4 Very bad	Pew Research Center (2017)
Generally people can be trusted	Q5 Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? 1 Most people can be trusted 2 Can't be too careful	Pew Research Center (2017)
Gender	QGEN (0 = Male, 1 = Female)	Pew Research Center (2017)
Age	QAGE How old were you at your last birthday? [IN YEARS]	Pew Research Center (2017)
Years of education	QEDU2 In total, how many years of schooling or education have you completed? Please include the years you spent in school.	Pew Research Center (2017)
Country Level		
Does the country share a border with Russia?	Shared border with Russia dummy (0 = no border, 1 = shared border)	Authors' estimation
Trade dependence	Imports and exports to Russia as a percentage of total imports and exports of the country. If more than 20%, then country was labeled "trade dependent" on Russia.	World Integrated Trade Solutions (WITS) (2017) at https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/
Country experience Russian-backed secession	Russian-backed separatist action in country (0 = no, 1 = yes)	Authors' estimation
EU member or affiliate member	Is country either an EU member or associated member? (0 = no, 1 = yes)	http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/3cp/h2020-hi-list-ac_en.pdf (accessed March 2019)
Ethnic Russians as percentage of population	Percent of population made up of ethnic Russians	Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_Russians_in_post-Soviet_states (accessed March 2019)

We used several survey questions to create scales for the two dimensions that combine to yield the four role conceptions. These two dimensions identify the individual respondent's orientation toward Russia's positive role in the near abroad and the individual's orientation regarding the importance of the independence of their own country.

The first dimension is measured on the basis of a composite of the following three questions from the Pew survey:

- Q67b. Please tell me if you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with the following statement: b. A strong Russia is necessary to balance the influence of the West.
- Q78b. Please tell me if you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with the following statement: b. Russia has an obligation to protect ethnic Russians outside its borders.
- The above two questions asked respondents to rate their agreement using the following scale: 1. Completely agree; 2. Mostly agree; 3. Mostly disagree; 4. Completely disagree.
- Q79. Which is more important for (SURVEY COUNTRY)—to have strong ties with the European Union or to have strong ties with Russia? 1. European Union; 2. Russia; 3. Both equally important; 4. Neither.

Taken together, all three questions estimate attitudes about the importance (and role) that Russia plays in the near abroad. We recoded the response categories so that the highest score consistently represents the most positive orientation toward Russia's role in the post-Soviet space and the lowest score would be the least positive. For question 67b, the response categories were recoded so that 4 = completely agree that a strong Russia is necessary and 1 = completely disagree. For question 78b, likewise, we recoded the responses so that 4 = completely agree that Russia has an obligation to protect ethnic Russians, and 1 = completely disagree. For question 79, we recoded the response as follows: it is more important to have ties with Russia = 4; both = 3, neither = 2, and the European Union = 1.

We then created an index score ranging from 1 to 4, where the three items were summed and divided by four for every respondent. We performed a Cronbach's alpha test to determine whether the three items formed a scale. The alpha score was .72, which is sufficient to suggest the underlying dimensions loaded together. We recoded the distribution of index scores into two categories. Index scores ranging from 1 to 2.99 reflect a low (or more negative) orientation toward Russia's role in the post-Soviet space, and index scores ranging from 3 to 4 reflect a high (or more positive) orientation toward Russia's role.

The second dimension measures the individual respondent's orientation regarding the importance of the independence of their own country. This dimension is also measured on the basis of a composite of three questions from the Pew survey:

- Q65. How proud are you to be a citizen of (SURVEY COUNTRY)? 1. Very proud; 2. Somewhat proud; 3. Not very proud; 4. Not proud at all.

- Q67d. Please tell me if you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with the following statement: d. There is a conflict between our country's traditional values and those of the West.
- Q67e. Please tell me if you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with the following statement: e. Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others.
- The second and third questions asked respondents to rate their agreement using the following scale: 1. Completely agree; 2. Mostly agree; 3. Mostly disagree; 4. Completely disagree.

As with the first dimension, we recoded the response categories so that the highest score represents the strongest national independence orientation and the lowest score represents the lowest national independence orientation. For question 65, the response categories were recoded so that 4 = very proud of one's country and 1 = not proud at all. For questions 67d and 67e, we recoded the responses so that 4 = completely agree and 1 = completely disagree.

Next, we created an index score ranging from 1 to 4, where the three items were summed and divided by four for every respondent. Again, as with the first dimension, we then performed a Cronbach's alpha test to evaluate whether the three items formed a scale. The alpha score was .70, which is sufficient to suggest the underlying dimensions load together. Subsequently, we divided the distribution of scores into two categories by recoding index scores that ranged from 1 to 2.99 to signify a low national independence orientation and 3 to 4 to indicate a high (or positive) national independence orientation.

The intersection of these two dimensions enables us to evaluate what proportion of respondents holds attitudes consistent with each of the four theorized role conceptions. However, we do not only want to know which of the four role conceptions are most widely held in various FSU states—we also aim to explain the variation in respondents' preferences for the Dependent, Faithful Ally, Counter-dependent, and Adversarial role conceptions in their relationship with Russia. Hence, for the second part of our analysis we collected data on several independent variables at both the individual and state level that we expect will explain both cross-national and individual-level variation in the respondents' conceptions of their state's role vis-à-vis Russia.

Our individual-level measures include attitudinal measures evaluating the general direction of the country, the state of the economy, and the level of social trust. In addition, we include a number of demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, and level of education.

The country-level variables we include are whether the country shares a border with the Russian Federation, the extent to which the country is dependent on fuel imports, whether the country experienced a Russian-backed separatist conflict, whether the country is a European Union member or affiliate member, and the percent of the population that is ethnically Russian. Both the individual- and country-level variables and their sources are presented in Table 2.

ANALYSIS

Our analysis consists of two parts: a descriptive part and a quantitative/correlational part. First, we evaluate whether the scales we created for the two dimensions—the orientation toward Russia’s role in the post-Soviet space and the orientation toward the independent stance of their own country—do indeed help to differentiate between the four role patterns: Dependent, Faithful Ally, Counter-dependent, or Adversarial. Second, we examine an explanatory model designed to evaluate why individuals adopt different conceptions of their state’s role in its relation to Russia.

In Figure 1, we report the relative percentages of the respondents whose attitudes reflected each of the four role conceptions. The four countries that report the highest proportion of Dependents are in Belarus (35.69), Moldova (27.08), and Kazakhstan (24.18). The highest proportion of Faithful Allies are in Armenia (77.89), Kazakhstan (51.36), and Moldova (40.03), closely followed by Georgia (39.91). The reported percentages show that the largest proportions of individuals who are most positively oriented toward Russia are in Armenia and Kazakhstan. However, the respondents in the two countries differ. Although a plurality of respondents in both countries perceives the country as a Faithful Ally, in Kazakhstan a higher percentage of respondents reflects the Dependent role—that is, combines a positive orientation toward Russia with a lower sense of national capacity to act independently—as compared to Armenia. In the latter country, more than three-quarters of the respondents perceived their country as a Faithful Ally, combining a positive orientation toward Russia with a strong sense of national capacity to act independently—and relatively few see the country as Dependent. Turning to the Counter-dependent and Adversarial roles; as is also shown in Figure 1, the Baltic states exhibit the Counter-dependent role most clearly. It is the most prevalent role conception in all three, but it is expressed most strongly in Estonia (63.06), followed by Latvia (49.08) and Lithuania (45.49). The fact that these three countries have joined the EU is consistent with the Counter-dependent role conception. Rather than assert independence, the Baltic states view Russia’s role in the near abroad negatively and seek

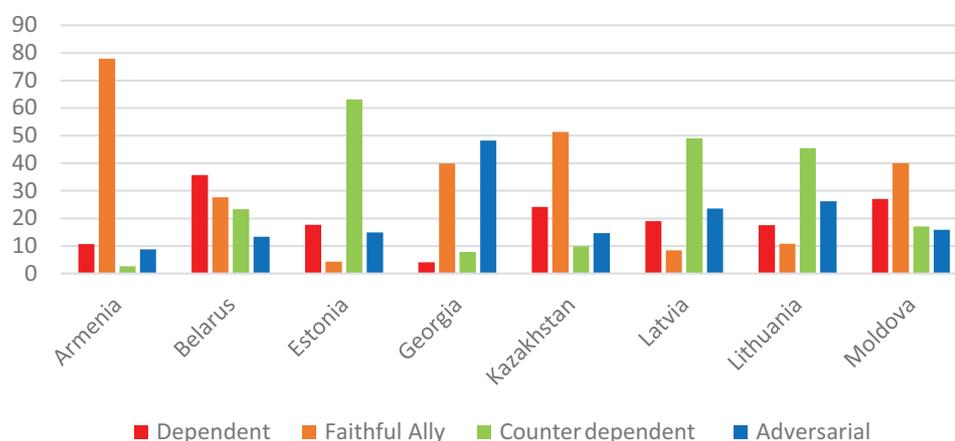


FIGURE 1. Role conceptions (percentage of respondents) by country.

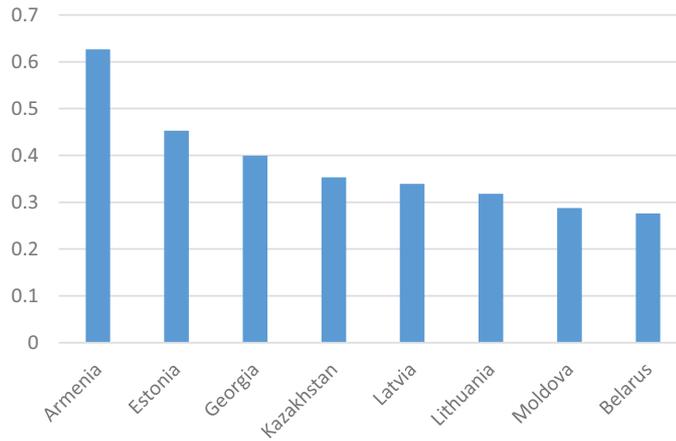


FIGURE 2. Herfindahl-Hirschman Index of concentration score for share of role conceptions.

to counteract their dependence by accepting inclusion in the community of European countries.⁴

The Adversarial role conception is expressed most strongly in Georgia (48.22), followed at some distance by Lithuania (26.14) and Latvia (23.56). Georgia, in particular, exhibits a pattern of polarization: although more respondents view the country as Adversarial, a rather large second proportion of respondents views the country as a Faithful Ally. Both role conceptions indicate a high perception of the capacity to act independently, but there is division regarding the orientation toward Russia. This might explain the particularly polarized political landscape currently in Georgia, dividing the governing and opposition parties.

Figure 1 shows that there is greater convergence around certain role conceptions in some countries (such as in Armenia and Estonia), whereas other countries are either more polarized (Georgia) or display a more even distribution of role conceptions among the respondents (as in Belarus and Moldova). To evaluate these patterns further, we calculated the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index of Concentration score for each country, based on the share of the respondents that perceives their country in each of the four different role conceptions. Figure 2 illustrates the extent to which there is consensus around particular role conceptions. The higher the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index score, the more consensus there is around one or two role conceptions. As Figure 2 shows, the

4. It should be noted that “counter-dependence” does not deny the existence of Baltic and especially Estonian nationalism. The difference when compared to the “adversarial role” is that counter-dependence suggests that Baltic citizens have embraced “Europeanness” as a way to express opposition to Russia. In many ways this reaction is the product of the historical relations between the Baltic states and Europe and Russia. The Baltic states, ever since the era of the Teutonic Knights, have been more oriented toward the West (particularly Germany) than Russia. Further, unlike other states of the former Soviet Union, the Baltic states experienced an extended period of independence, in which they maintained closer relations with Europe than Russia. Thus, counter-dependence rather than a purely adversarial role conception has emerged in the Baltic states. An important caveat, however, is that many ethnic Russians were not included in the Pew study (at least not in large enough numbers to present meaningful statistics). A future study might examine the degree of “polarization” of role conceptions held by the titular and ethnic Russian populations in the Baltic states.

TABLE 3. Role Conception Frequencies

	Low national independence orientation	High national independence orientation	Total
High orientation toward Russia's positive role in post-Soviet space	<i>Dependent</i> 1,696 (19.71%)	<i>Faithful Ally</i> 2,946 (34.24%)	4,642
Low orientation toward Russia's positive role in post-Soviet space	<i>Counter-dependent</i> 2,229 (25.90%)	<i>Adversarial</i> 1,732 (20.13%)	3,961
Total	3,925	4,678	8,603

greatest consensus exists in Armenia, where respondents converge around the Faithful Ally role, and Estonia, where respondents center around the Counter-dependent role. Georgia also exhibits a higher degree of consensus, but it is structured around the two poles of the Adversarial and Faithful Ally roles. The lowest convergence is exhibited by the respondents in Belarus, which also displayed a relatively flat distribution among the four role conceptions in Figure 1. Overall, the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index reported in Figure 2 underscores what is also visible in Figure 1: the respondents in the eight countries differ in terms of the degree to which they share a common conception of their state's role in international affairs – and particularly its role vis-à-vis Russia.

What might explain whether individuals perceive their country in terms of one or another of the four role conception categories? Before turning to this question, we report the relative frequencies for each of the role conceptions for the sample as a whole—that is, combining the respondents for all eight countries—in Table 3. This table shows a relatively even distribution across the four role conceptions, albeit with a small plurality of respondents falling into the Faithful Ally category.

Although we have identified the various role conception patterns among the post-Soviet states, we have not identified the factors that correlate with these role conceptions. The cross-sectional nature of the survey data we use in this article cannot be used to identify causal relationships among the variables, but the data can be used to identify correlates of the role conceptions we have identified above.

In order to evaluate the independent individual- and country-level variables that may predispose a respondent to perceive their country in terms of one or another role conception, we conduct two different types of analyses: at the country level and at the individual level. At the country level, as a first “cut” at identifying the correlates of the role conceptions we have identified above in our descriptive analysis, Table 4 is a comparative truth table that identifies the conditions for two dependent variables. First, we combine the percent in a country that were categorized as either the Dependent or Faithful Ally category and coded a country as a “1” if more than 50% of the respondents fell into these categories. Second, we combine the percentage of respondents in a country

TABLE 4. Truth Table Comparing Eight Country Cases

Country	More than 50% Dependent /Faithful Ally	Share border with Russia	Percent of imports and exports from Russia as percent of total trade more than 20%	Country experience Russian-backed secession	EU member or associate member?	Ethnic Russians more than 10% of population?
Armenia	1	0	1	0	1	0
Belarus	1	1	1	0	0	1
Kazakhstan	1	1	1	0	0	1
Moldova	1	0	0	1	1	1
Estonia	0	1	0	0	1	1
Georgia	0	1	0	1	1	0
Latvia	0	1	0	0	1	1
Lithuania	0	1	0	0	1	0

that held either the Adversarial or Counter-dependent role conceptions and coded a country as “0” if more than 50% of respondents fell into those categories. The remaining columns list the causal conditions.

Based on the truth table (Table 4), the country-level characteristic that appears to be the best predictor of whether a country exceeds 50% of respondents in a country falling in the Dependent/Faithful Ally categories is whether the percent of imports and exports from Russia exceeds 20% of total trade. Of the four countries that registered a majority of respondents who fell into those categories, three were more trade dependent on Russia than the other country cases. Further, all four countries that were majority Adversarial or Counter-dependent were countries that were *not* trade dependent on Russia. At first glance, this makes a good deal of sense. Citizens in countries that are relatively more trade dependent (including, presumably, energy imports) are more likely to view Russia in positive terms than citizens in countries that are less trade dependent on Russia.

However, to further examine the correlates of the role conceptions of the citizens of the FSU, we also examined the factors related to these role conceptions at the individual level. It is important to note that we do not make claims regarding causation in this part of the analysis. Given that the individual Pew data are cross sectional (and not time series), it is not possible to infer causation without some degree of temporal variation. However, this has not generally kept scholars from making inferences based on correlation, so we believe that this is a generally acceptable approach.

Table 5 reports the results of a multinomial logistic regression analysis where the base outcome is set at “2” (i.e., the Faithful Ally role). Further, in order to take into account the nested nature of the data—the fact that individual respondents operate with national contexts—we cluster the robust standard errors by country.

TABLE 5. Multinomial Logit Regression Results

Variable	RRR (Robust standard errors) Base outcome = 2		
	Model 1: Dependent Role	Model 2: Counter-dependent Role	Model 3: Adversarial Role
Individual Level			
Satisfaction with the way things are going in the country	1.147 (.093)	1.035 (.174)	1.138 (.135)
Condition of the country's economy	1.087 (.190)	.976 (.127)	.935 (.083)
Generally people can be trusted	.998 (.001)	.999 (.003)	.998 (.002)
Gender (0 = Male, 1 = Female)	.867 (.081)	.995 (.058)	1.081 (.078)
Age in years	.993 (.003)	.998*** (.004)	.998 (.004)
Years of education	1.022 (.021)	1.089**** (.019)	1.027 (.016)
Country Level			
Does the country share a border with Russia?	1.957 (1.577)	1.883 (1.837)	3.191**** (.904)
Trade dependence on Russia	.187*** (.104)	.429**** (.031)	.154**** (.018)
Country experience Russian-backed secession	.204 (.219)	.066** (.061)	.519 (.193)
N = 7717			
Pseudo R ² = .1903			
Log pseudolikelihood = -8,493.393			

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$; **** $p \leq .0001$.

In Table 5, we report relative risk ratios (RRR) for the multinomial logit procedure.⁵ RRR estimates the probability of choosing one outcome variable over the probability of

5. Again, to avoid problems with multicollinearity, we omitted other factors that may theoretically affect "role conceptions" such as income of individuals, because they were found to be highly collinear with education.

choosing the baseline category. These ratios are interpreted differently than general coefficients. When an RRR is larger than 1, this indicates the percent *increase* in the dependent variable relative to the baseline category; when the RRR is below 1, this indicates the percent *decrease* in the dependent variable relative to the baseline category.

The individual-level variables were not statistically significant across all models. In other words, respondents' satisfaction with the way things are going in their country, their perception of the state of their country's economy, and their social trust did not systematically relate to their conception of their country's role vis-à-vis Russia. Demographic characteristics were also largely unrelated to respondents' role conceptions. However, although age was unrelated to the Dependent and Adversarial role conceptions (meaning that both older and younger individuals could have selected these role conceptions), older individuals were slightly *less* likely to fall into the Counter-dependent role category. Additionally, although education was unrelated to the Dependent and Adversarial roles, more-educated individuals were slightly more likely to perceive their country in Counter-dependent terms.

We now turn to the country-level characteristics.⁶ One complication for this aspect of the analysis was the high degree of collinearity between three of the country-level variables: shared borders, whether the country was an EU member or associate member, and if the country's population was made up of at least 10% ethnic Russians.⁷ Thus, we dropped the latter two variables from the analysis.

At the country level, we find that a country's trade dependence on Russia is most associated with reducing the likelihood that individuals would express Dependent, Counter-dependent, as well as Adversarial role conceptions, compared to the base category of the Faithful Ally role conception. Put differently, this suggests that individuals in countries that are more trade dependent on Russia (Armenia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan) are more likely to express Faithful Ally role conceptions. Hence, individuals in countries that are trade dependent are more likely to perceive their country in terms of the Faithful Ally role conception than any of the other roles.

Individuals in countries that have shared borders with Russia are relatively more likely to express Adversarial role conceptions, but whether the country experienced a Russia-backed separatist military action (i.e., Moldova and Georgia) was not associated with a greater likelihood that individuals would express a particular role conception.

To further illustrate these results, in Figure 3 we illustrate the marginal increases in the probability of expressing each of the four role conceptions by the one variable that was statistically significant across all the models in Table 4 (while holding every other variable at their means): whether the country is trade dependent on Russia.

6. Again, we limit our interpretations of the quantitative data to claims of "association" because of the cross-sectional nature of the Pew data, which prevents making causal claims regarding the relationships.

7. Collinearity becomes a major problem in statistical analysis inasmuch as if the independent variables overlap (i.e., they are collinear) they cause fundamental errors interpretation in assessing the statistical significance of the affected variables. A typical remedy is to drop these variables.

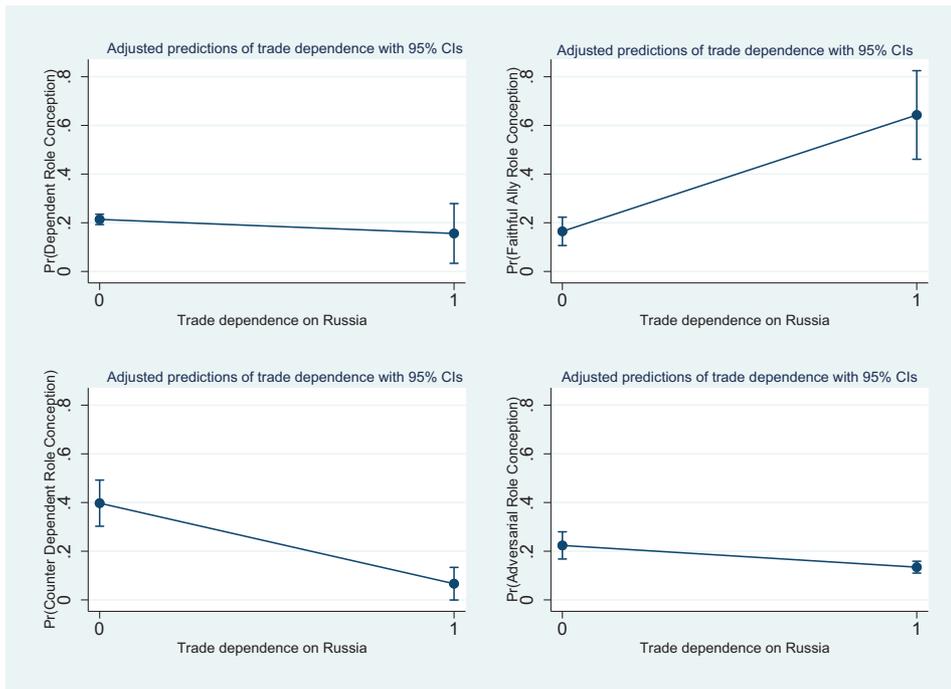


FIGURE 3. Marginal effects on role conceptions and whether one's country was trade dependent on Russia.

Figure 3 reports the marginal effects on individuals' role conceptions as a function of their countries' trade dependence on Russia. As indicated in Figure 3, trade dependence on Russia significantly increases the probability of expressing a Faithful Ally role conception but does not increase the probability of expressing a Dependent role conception. Thus, this would suggest that positive views of Russia are driven to a significant extent by whether the country is dependent economically on Russia. Trade dependence would also include, importantly, imports of energy resources and energy dependence.

In sum, our analyses show that, at the country level, respondents in countries that were more trade dependent were more likely to express Faithful Ally role conceptions than any of the other role conceptions. In other words, individuals in these countries expressed high level of national independence, but also recognized the importance of maintaining good, if not close, relations with Russia.

These findings help illuminate the Georgian vignette with which we opened the article—there are countervailing pressures that shape the role conceptions among the states of the former Soviet Union. In Georgia, a country that is a victim of Russian aggression, these countervailing pressures have directly affected domestic politics. This has resulted in a fundamental divide between those who express an Adversarial role conception (largely driven by anti-Russian sentiment as a result of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian secessions) and a Faithful Ally role conception (largely driven by geopolitical and economic realities). This division defines the current state of Georgian politics and, as our analysis shows, it is also reflected in the opinions of the public. Certainly, these

countervailing pressures have affected politics elsewhere as well, such as in Moldova and Ukraine. In the latter case, these divisions have erupted into conflict.

In many ways, the findings for Georgia may be counterintuitive, especially with respect to the effect of Russian-sponsored separatism in Georgia, compared to the null finding between Russian-sponsored separatism generally, but affecting role conceptions held by the population in Georgia. This has to do with the particular circumstances of the countries in which Russian-backed separatism occurred. In Moldova, Russian separatism, which created the de facto state of Transnistria, is now more than 30 years old, and separatism (or the desire for reunification) plays much less role in the foreign policy attitudes of Moldovan citizens. For instance, in a study of Moldova and Transnistrian public opinion, O’Loughlin, Toal, and Chamberlain-Creangă (2013) found that the separatist action that took place a generation ago has little discernible impact on Moldovans, and has certainly not created an “attitudinal chasm” among Moldovans as it has elsewhere (such as in Georgia). In part this may be due to a generally lower sense of Moldovan nationhood historically (certainly lower than in Georgia and Ukraine), which may be due to how Moldova itself was a created state carved out of Romanian territory annexed by the Soviet Union. Thus, the nationalist sentiment that would object most to Russian-sponsored separatism is not present to the same degree in Moldova as it is in Georgia.

On the other hand, in Georgia, where Russian-sponsored separatism occurred, and more recently in the case of South Ossetia, the effect has been more pronounced. As our results indicate, this has not led to one role conception over the other, but to the emergence of two distinct and contradictory role conceptions that shape domestic Georgian politics, affected by two distinctive pressures: Georgian indignation over Russian-sponsored separatism in the country, but also the economic and cultural pull of Russia over the country. The other state that has suffered Russian-sponsored separatism, Ukraine, although not included in the Pew study, would in all likelihood exhibit very different results, since the most pro-Russian part of the population had effectively seceded from the country. Thus, popular responses would tend toward adversarial role conceptions among Ukrainian citizens (but that is because in Ukraine the pro-Russian part of the population had effectively left the country).

CONCLUSION

The literature on national role conceptions has rarely investigated the role conceptions of the domestic public. This is surprising, because shared role conception between decision makers and the public provides the former with greater latitude—and a stronger foundation—for foreign policy making. This study has sought not only to identify citizens’ role conceptions, but also to explain the relative prevalence of four role conceptions among the domestic publics in the former Soviet states.

We theorized that individuals’ orientation toward Russia and their perception of their own state’s capacity to act independently intersected to form four distinct role conceptions: Dependent, Faithful Ally, Counter-dependent, and Adversarial. We then used composite measures of several survey questions to evaluate the role conceptions of

individual respondents across eight FSU states. We found that the respondents in two countries (Armenia and Estonia) converged most clearly around one role conception, whereas those in a third (Georgia) were split between two. Most of the remaining countries showed evidence that more respondents preferred one specific role over the others. However, in those cases there was less clarity regarding the domestic public's convergence around a single role. This suggests two things: (1) The fragmentation of role conceptions among the public may lower the likelihood of vertical role contestation because the public does not speak with a unified voice. (2) Decision makers lack clear signals regarding the foreign policy role that will garner public support, making it more difficult to commit to a coherent foreign policy strategy vis-à-vis Russia.

Methodologically, our study shows that survey questions can profitably be used to evaluate the role conceptions of citizens in the FSU states. We sought to identify individual- and country-level variables that predispose citizens to perceive their state in terms of particular role conceptions. Our analyses demonstrate that our variables permit a partial explanation for the prevalence of certain role conceptions among the domestic public. At the individual level, whether an individual perceives Russia as a threat explains a predisposition toward roles that are consistent with that perception. At the country level, trade dependence on Russia shaped respondents' predispositions to perceive their state in terms of specific role conceptions. This aspect of our analyses shows that individual- and country-level variables are associated with individuals' conceptions of their state's role in systematic ways. The role conceptions we conceptualized for this study are specific to the relationship between the FSUs and Russia. However, a similar strategy can be used to theorize about the role conceptions held by domestic publics elsewhere regarding key foreign policy relationships.

Although more research is needed to deepen our understanding of the national role conceptions held by citizens within countries, our study shows that survey data can profitably be used to ascertain the degree to which domestic publics converge around specific role conceptions and can offer an initial explanation for the domestic public's preferences. This opens up new avenues to investigate the national role conceptions of domestic publics and vertical role contestation (defined as role contestation between decision makers and domestic publics).

Thus far, role theory has emphasized the national role conceptions of decision makers, and the study of role contestation has focused primarily on horizontal role contestation (defined as role contestation between decision-making elites, such as government and opposition)—in large part because it has been difficult to empirically evaluate vertical role contestation. By showing that survey data can profitably be used to investigate the domestic public's role conceptions, this study underscores that such data might also be used to improve our ability to empirically evaluate vertical role contestation. Better insight into vertical role contestation will lead to better insights into the policy options decision makers can plausibly consider: the more difficult it is to persuade the domestic public, the less likely a policy will be pursued. ■

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