

# Ethnic Cues and Redistributive Preferences in Post-Soviet Georgia

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## Abstract

How do citizens in weak democracies evaluate claims on government assistance made by other ethnic groups? This paper analyzes data from an original survey experiment in the Republic of Georgia to determine the role of ethnic cues in the formation of redistributive preferences. In the experiment, ethnic Georgian subjects are randomly assigned a mock news article with variation on implied ethnic (Georgian, Azeri, or Armenian) identity and type of redistributive demand, and asked to evaluate the demand. The results show modest but consistent evidence of ethnic bias conditional on both types of variation, along with ethnic stereotypes, even while subjects are highly pro-redistribution in general. This study highlights how subtle biases can shape redistributive policy preferences in ways inimical to democracy in multiethnic societies.

Among the many challenges facing emerging democracies is the ability of the state to provide sufficient public goods to meet the demands of its citizens. Where ethnic differences are salient, an additional challenge is managing an equitable distribution of state resources among competing groups. Politicians promise particularistic benefits in the form of government jobs or investment targeted at co-ethnics, and often attempt to build political coalitions through ethnic appeals (Bates 1974). Voters, seeking patronage, respond to explicit or implicit appeals (Wantchekon 2003; Chandra 2004; Posner 2005b). If citizens reward co-ethnic politicians for helping their own group while shortchanging others, politics can become divisive, resulting in lower levels of public goods, harming the quality of democracy, and increasing the chances of conflict along ethnic lines (Horowitz 1985, Easterly and Levine 1997; Alesina et al. 1999; La Porta et al. 1999).

Yet ethnic particularism in politics is not foreordained. While citizens may be aware of latent ethnic differences, they need not make them central in their determination of policy preferences. Empirically, there is variation across countries and even localities in the degree to which politics revolves around ethnicity as opposed to other identities. In temporal terms, ethnicity may be a relevant—even overriding—influence on political outcomes in some situations, while at other times it lies dormant (Eifert et al. 2010; Conroy-Krutz 2013). The question of when ethnicity is a salient referent in distributive preferences is important in understanding the nature of clientelism and the causes of ethnic inequality in weakly institutionalized democracies.

This paper analyzes an original survey experiment in post-Soviet Georgia, in an effort to identify the conditions under which people discriminate on the basis of ethnicity in formulating preferences toward redistribution. It is designed to gauge the relative support for government

assistance to different groups but does not make “groupness” explicitly manifest. By providing information *implying* the ethnicity of the recipient of redistribution, it allows subjects to take ethnicity into account or to focus on other considerations in their evaluation of a policy.

The experiment involves a fictitious newspaper article that contains two randomly assigned manipulations (1) the nature of a redistributive demand (government jobs vs. humanitarian assistance) and (2) the implied Georgian, Armenian, or Azeri ethnicity of the claimants. Comparison of responses across treatments allows us to infer the conditions under which respondents take ethnic information into account when determining the merits of the claim. The study design builds on the best practices of experimental research on sensitive topics in order to reveal concealed prejudices (e.g., Peffley et al. 1997; Sniderman et al. 2004; Harrison and Dunning 2010).

Questions of redistribution and ethnicity are highly pertinent in Georgia. The two largest minority populations, Azeris and Armenians, have historically experienced antagonistic relations with majority Georgians, and are the object of negative stereotypes typical of multiethnic societies. At the same time, Georgia’s historical experience has bequeathed attitudes that cut across ethnic boundaries: as in other postcommunist countries that once enjoyed encompassing social benefits, people are broadly supportive of redistribution that mainly benefits the poor. People may therefore assess redistributive policies narrowly, in ethnic terms, or broadly, in ways that benefit society at large and cut across ethnic lines.

The results demonstrate that implicit cues can play a significant role in making ethnicity salient and shaping policy preferences, but that ethnic bias is situational and easily concealed. First, the analysis reveals evidence of systematic ethnic favoritism, by which (Georgian)

respondents react more sympathetically to the claims of Georgians than those of either Armenians or Azeris. Second, ethnic bias is more severe when the demand involves the distribution of state patronage to co-ethnics than when it involves an allocation of humanitarian assistance, suggesting that ethnicity is more likely to become salient when redistribution is perceived as a struggle over political representation. Third, there are significant differences in the specific stereotypical traits attributed to the two minorities that are consistent with their historical representations. Last, despite evidence of discrimination, in general respondents are supportive of government assistance regardless of ethnicity, providing evidence of an underlying egalitarian norm that also shapes redistributive preferences. Taken together, these findings highlight the subtle ways that ethnicity insinuates itself into political life and hint at the roots of ethnic inequality that plague multiethnic societies.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I discuss theories of clientelist redistribution and ethnic favoritism, and explain how a cognitive psychological approach can capture latent ethnic bias. I introduce the empirical context of this study, Georgia, and describe the local cleavages that make it a favorable site for experimental research on ethnic favoritism. I then describe the experimental design and develop several hypotheses, which I test in the subsequent section. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the implications of the findings for emerging democracies and the study of ethnic politics.

### **Ethnic Perceptions and Redistributive Preferences**

How do citizens in weak democracies form preferences toward government assistance and redistribution? Research has shown that policy preferences, even in longstanding democracies, often depend on whether the perceived beneficiaries represent one's own group or a different group. Studies of attitudes in the U.S. have demonstrated that white respondents are less likely to support taxes or public spending intended to benefit minorities or to support candidates associated with such policies (Reeves 1997; Mendelberg 1997, 2001; Transue 2007). Likewise, research from the developing world has found lower contributions to the public good when other ethnic groups stand to benefit, although the mechanism for this is disputed (Easterly and Levine 1997; Alesina et al. 1999; Miguel and Gugerty 2005; Habyarimana et al. 2007).

Some scholars have criticized a tendency in the literature on voting and clientelism in low-income countries to overstate the degree to which politics revolves around ethnicity (Eifert et al 2010; Weghorst and Lindberg 2013). A person may be aware of ethnic differences, but may evaluate a politician or policy in terms of characteristics that cross-cut ethnicity, such as class, gender, or religion (Laitin 1986; Posner 2005; Harrison and Dunning 2010). Ethnicity need not become salient in an individual's interpretation of the social and political world at a given moment—it is up to the individual to incorporate or ignore ethnicity as a factor in assessing the policy.

To account for the tendency of people to view policy issues through particular categorical lenses, research on ethnicity and politics considers the effects of structural or institutional factors. For example, ethnic demography or the intersection of ethnicity and wealth disparities can shape the character of intergroup competition (Fearon 2003; Baldwin and Huber 2010; Ichino and Nathan 2013). Colonial or state policies can deliberately or inadvertently encourage identification according to specific categories and the tendency to view policies in ethnic and/or

zero-sum terms (Nobles 2000). Ethnic attributes, in combination with institutional rules, facilitate and encourage the formation of ethnically based minimal winning coalitions as groups compete for resources (Riker 1962; Chandra 2004; Posner 2005).

Most scholarship on ethnic politics begins with the observation that ethnicity is salient and then asks how it contributes to macro-level outcomes such as voting, public goods provision, or conflict. Yet though there may be consistent patterns of ethnic identification and ethnically based collective action in a given setting, there are also grounds to question the extent to which ethnicity is a central consideration in political judgments writ large. A focus on institutional influences alone neglects the contributors to identity that operate at the perceptual level and can cause short-term fluctuations in political attitudes and behavior. Social psychological research has shown that the salience of identity categories is variable and subject to activation in response to various stimuli (Tajfel 1981; Taylor and Fathali 1994). The triggers that activate a particular identity need not be deliberate, instrumental manipulations, but can be “unselfconscious and quasi-automatic” (Brubaker et al. 2004: 51). Cognitive processes enable people to categorize the social world by using ethnicity as a simplifying device and have been shown to play a part in ethnic violence, voting behavior, and attitudes on immigration (Petersen 2002; Sniderman et al. 2004; Eifert et al. 2010). Yet a major insight from cognitive research is that, in a given instance, people may *not* view a political issue through the prism of ethnicity depending on the perceptual cues or policy framing.

Whether redistribution in a given instance is perceived as (illegitimate) clientelism or (justified) assistance to needy citizens is in the eye of the beholder. Certain types of information may lead people to process the world in non-particularist terms, to perceive others as similar to themselves rather than rivals fighting over a fixed endowment of resources. The framing of an

issue to arouse sympathy, whether because of inherent emotional appeal or because it implies shared interests, can cause ethnic differences to remain latent. By contrast, information that suggests competition over limited resources or evokes negative associations between outgroups and stereotypical behavior, can trigger ethnic connotations and lead to zero-sum perceptions.

The attitudes that result from these cues do not occur in a vacuum, but are shaped by historical, cultural, and institutional inheritances. I conceive of macro-level factors as shaping individual choices by imparting ideas about the world that are taken for granted and usually remain unquestioned. These assumptions in turn lay down markers for how people think in a given instance not only about ethnicity, but also about power, justice, and shared group purposes (Abdelal et al. 2006). Thus, while Rwandans, Pakistanis, or Canadians may all exhibit biased thinking when confronted with stimuli that provoke them to think in categorical terms, their specific policy appraisals and the magnitude of the bias will probably reflect distinct national and group-specific experiences.

This study makes two moves toward understanding how ethnicity becomes a relevant criterion in evaluating redistributive claims. First, by providing information in which ethnicity is implied rather than manifest, in ways that resemble the processing of stimuli in daily life, it creates conditions under which ethnic categories may become salient but without presupposing that outcome (Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Hale 2004, Brubaker et al. 2004, 2006). Implied ethnicity permits respondents to “decide” whether to make ethnicity a relevant consideration in their evaluation of a demand for redistribution. Second, it shows how the addition of contextual information can affect how that implied information is assimilated into people’s deliberation on the issue.

This study seeks to overcome the problem, noted by Lieberman and Singh (2012: 261), that it is “extremely difficult to measure the extent to which people think about political issues through an ethnic ‘lens,’” due to the limitations inherent in individual-level surveys. It builds on research from American politics on the influence of implicit racism on policy preferences. Prejudice is hard to detect because public expression of racism is taboo. To get around this, several experimental studies have primed racial attitudes by varying the race of actors in political campaign ads (Valentino et al., 2002; Brader et al. 2008), providing racially suggestive background information on political candidates (Reeves 2007), or cuing national or racial categories (Transue 2007). By and large, these studies find that when race is made explicit, people tend to conceal discriminatory attitudes, whereas incorporating subtle cues can activate latent racial bias.

### **The Ethnic (or Other) Bases for Redistributive Preferences in Georgia**

What factors enter into the determination of the merits of government assistance? The baseline expectation of what the government owes its citizens depends on context-specific factors. In established democracies, views on how the state should intercede range from preferences for laissez-faire individualism to an encompassing safety net and high levels of redistribution. In postcommunist countries, surveys consistently show a high degree of support for the state to have an active role in regulating the economy and providing public services (Corneo and Grüner 2002: 99; Lipsmeyer and Nordstrom 2003). This legacy remains strong decades after the collapse of communism; the disjuncture between citizen expectations of the

state and the disappointing reality of postcommunism helps explain cynicism toward politics, party system instability, and protests against privatizing reforms (Pop-Eleches 2010).

Despite the many divisions in their societies, most postcommunist citizens share a common experience of living through traumatic changes wrought by neoliberal reforms, including loss of income and social welfare. In post-Soviet Georgia, citizens additionally endured state collapse and civil war before politics regained a semblance of normalcy in the mid-1990s, only to endure further hardships of unemployment, poverty, and widespread corruption after the country was stabilized. People may therefore sympathize with the plight of their fellow citizens and support assistance to the downtrodden irrespective of ethnicity.

At the same time, Georgian citizens categorize themselves on the basis of ethnicity (or nationality, in the Soviet vernacular). The Soviet Union institutionalized nationality, producing a strong sense of national identity and claims to “ownership” by titular nationalities of their respective republics (Brubaker 1996: 46).<sup>1</sup> After the Soviet collapse, Georgia was riven by armed conflicts whose origins centered on mobilization around perceived national (that is, ethnic) rights (Zürcher 2007). These conflicts involved the status of autonomous regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are under de facto Russian control. Within Georgia proper, the largest minority ethnic groups are Azeris and Armenians, constituting 6.5% and 5.7% of the population, respectively (“World Factbook” 2014). Both of these latter groups have been actors and objects in the politics of Georgia. In the early 2000s, observers feared that Armenians might seek secession from Georgia’s weak state. Since the 2003 Rose Revolution, the government has advocated policies to facilitate minority inclusion, but there are structural barriers that prevent full integration of minorities into the Georgian state and are a cause of alienation (Cheterian

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<sup>1</sup> On the institutionalization of nationality categories in the Soviet Union, see Slezkine, 1994; Martin, 2002.

2008; George 2009; Wheatley 2009). Ethnic Georgians exhibit levels of tolerance toward minorities typical of low-to-middle-income countries—that is, not very high (Peffley and Rohrschneider 2003: 249); the rising influence of the nationalist Georgian Orthodox Church lends strength to an ethnic nationalist undercurrent in society (Eastwood 2010; Flintoff 2013).<sup>2</sup> As attested by Georgia’s experiences in the early 1990s—the same time as Yugoslavia broke apart—events can conspire to make ethnicity not only salient but highly divisive. With a strong basis for identification on either universalist or particularist grounds, Georgia represents a propitious setting in which to study the salience or non-salience of ethnicity in the consideration of redistributive claims.

### **Experimental Design**

The influence of ethnic perceptions on redistributive preferences is put to the test in an original survey experiment in Georgia. The survey was carried out in November 2012 by the Caucasus Research Resource Center on a nationwide sample of 2,502 people.<sup>3</sup> As part of a longer questionnaire, respondents were randomly assigned a fictitious news article describing one of two scenarios that involve demands for government support, and information implying Georgian, Armenian, or Azeri ethnicity, resulting in a 2x3 fully crossed factorial design. The “article” is introduced by the following prompt, read by the interviewer: “Finally, I would like to share news from a village in Georgia.”

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<sup>2</sup> Georgia also has high religious diversity. Shia Islam predominates among Azeris, Armenians belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, and the western Georgian region of Ajara has a sizeable population of Sunni ethnic Georgians.

<sup>3</sup> Details on sampling can be found in the appendix.

The first vignette describes a village plagued by unemployment and poverty, and offers state employment as a solution:

*Life has been hard in recent years for the people of Marani/Myasnikian/Kirmizkendi village in Samtredia/Akhalkalaki/Marneuli district. Residents of the village have complained about high levels of unemployment and poverty since a nearby factory closed down recently.*

*“We are struggling since our factory closed down,” said resident Alex Turashvili/Anastas Tigranian/Ahmet Talibov, whose son is unemployed. “The government should guarantee opportunities for our young people in the civil administration so that they can help us.” Alex Turashvili/Anastas Tigranian/Ahmet Talibov says that if more people from his village were working in the municipal administration like the police and schools they could help the village.*

The randomly assigned place and personal names are strongly associated with an ethnic group, so that respondents should be able to recognize the ethnicity of the people in the village (in this case Georgian, Armenian, or Azeri, respectively), though they may not be consciously aware of it. The groups were selected on the basis of theoretical considerations. Armenians and Azeris occupy different positions in Georgia’s status hierarchy, a factor that is often associated with ethnic stereotypes and perceived levels of threat posed by those groups (Horowitz 1985; Petersen 2002). Armenians have historically served as an entrepreneurial “middleman minority” (Bonacich 1973). Their emergence as the bourgeoisie of pre-revolutionary Tbilisi made them high-status rivals to ethnic Georgians, who comprised the nobility of Georgia in Imperial Russia (Suny 1994: 116-119; Zürcher 2007: 18-19). Azeris are historically poorer and perceived as culturally less advanced than Georgians (Suny 1994: 191, 223; Zürcher 2007: 19; Elbakidze 2008: 39). Today, Armenians are more likely to mobilize politically in Georgia than are Azeris, adding a contemporary gloss to old stereotypes (International Crisis Group 2006).

The second vignette uses the same personal and place names as the first, but involves a different predicament and proposed solution. It describes the poor health of a village's residents as a result of environmental pollution, and suggests humanitarian assistance as a remedy.

*Life has been hard in recent years for the people of Marani/Myasnikian/Kirmizkendi village in Samtredia/Akhalkalaki/Marneuli district. Residents of the village have complained about high levels of unemployment and poverty because of the poor health of residents. Scientists say this is due to polluted water from a nearby chemical plant.*

*“Our people have suffered greatly and many children are very sick,” said resident Alex Turashvili/Anastas Tigranian/Ahmet Talibov, whose wife recently became ill. “The government should provide more medical care to help us.” Alex Turashvili/Anastas Tigranian/Ahmet Talibov says if the government provided more humanitarian assistance, it would help his village.*

These vignettes both represent predicaments that are typical of citizens in low-income countries, and they reflect the laments and solutions heard in communities in Georgia and elsewhere—but they not valence-neutral. After all, government transfers that help one group necessarily imply shortchanging others, and disagreements over how the state should allocate its limited resources are often contentious.

The demands in the vignettes broadly conform to two types of particularistic policies that entail different connotations for their beneficiaries. The first, which involves a request for public employment for locals who can help their village, represents a classical form of patronage, or the “use of resources and benefits that flow from public office” (Hicken 2011: 295). As in many emerging democracies, government jobs in Georgia are a currency politicians can use to reward their allies, and a source of informal authority, as civil servants can use their access to state resources to provide favors to friends and family (Robinson and Verdier 2002; Remmer 2007). The claim made in the vignette, involving access to state resources and the suggestion of wealth

transfers that would benefit co-villagers, resembles objects of contention in developing economies in Africa (Van de Walle 2007: 51, 54) and postcommunism alike (Grzymala-Busse 2008: 659-62), as people struggle to ensure that they have political allies in the state—or, at a minimum, that they are not excluded from power. As such, when a demand for state patronage is made by representatives of a particular ethnic group, it should elicit a response consistent with the interests of the observer—supportive, if one’s group is the putative beneficiary; hostile, if another group stands to gain.

The *health* vignette, which involves a request for a direct government allocation to remedy health problems, suggests club goods, which are targeted to benefit a geographically defined constituency but do not exclude individuals within geographic boundaries.<sup>4</sup> The vignette differs in two important ways from *jobs*. First, the nature of the problem, involving children’s health, in addition to unemployment and poverty, is more severe and potentially more deserving of empathy than the first vignette. Second, the claim is limited to transfers and does not involve political influence or direct control over state resources.<sup>5</sup> As a result, even though *health* concerns a form of redistribution, it is expected to arouse greater sympathy than *jobs* and should not be assessed on the basis of ethnicity to the same extent (that is, out-group claims should not be devalued as much). Because the claim in the *health* vignette should entail a higher threshold for rejection, it acts as a check on the external validity of *jobs*. If evaluations vary by implied ethnicity in both texts, then this will indicate that ethnic favoritism is a consistent influence on redistributive attitudes.

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<sup>4</sup> Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007: 11) argue that club goods can be allocated according to programmatic or clientelistic principles. A policy would be considered programmatic if it were structured to address general needs that happen to correspond with those of the intended beneficiaries (p.12). Allocations to alleviate environmental and health problems could work according to either logic, and readers of the vignette may interpret the claim either way.

<sup>5</sup> The vignettes were drafted through several revisions in consultation with Georgian and foreign experts. The differing details in the two vignettes were a product of ensuring that each vignette was internally coherent and possessed experimental realism (McDermott 2002: 333).

Following the text, subjects are asked several questions about the vignette: First, “In your opinion, how serious is this problem – (1) not serious at all, (2) somewhat serious, or (3) very serious?” Second, “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the solution the resident of the village proposes?” Respondents reply on a five-point Likert Scale. Third, “In your opinion, which of the following best describes the man quoted in the article?” Respondents are then presented with a list of six stereotypical character traits, from which they can choose one of the following: deceitful, generous, hardworking, lazy, selfish, and trustworthy. Fourth, “In general, do you think the government helps people like the ones mentioned in this text (1) not enough, (2) about the right amount, or (3) too much?” The final question asks respondents to identify the ethnicity of the village in the article. This question acts as a manipulation check, to ascertain whether respondents were able to discern the ethnicity implied by the information in the text.

Overall, 87.6% of the sample self-identified as ethnic Georgians. Because the small number of minority respondents poses challenges to statistical power given the six treatments, this analysis includes only self-identified ethnic Georgians. I develop four hypotheses:

First, for both vignettes, respondents should be more likely to (a) view the situation as serious, (b) agree with the proposed solution, (c) favorably assess the protagonist, (d) and express support for government assistance, when the village is implied to be Georgian than when it is implied to be Armenian or Azeri (H1).

Second, the difference between attitudes toward Georgians and the minority groups should be larger in *jobs* than in *health* (H2). I expect *jobs* to make ethnicity highly salient, so that group difference is the dominant frame through which policies are assessed. For *health*, because of the sympathetic nature of the predicament and limited scale of the solution, the role of ethnicity should be less apparent.

Third, the claims of Armenians, who are perceived as status rivals to Georgians, should be viewed more negatively than Azeris in *jobs* because the scenario involves a demand for political influence that implies direct competition with Georgians. Azeris, who are popularly portrayed as cultural laggards in comparison with Georgians, pose less of a threat as competitors for political power and should not trigger as hostile evaluations (H3).

Fourth, ethnic stereotypes should be reflected in the characteristics attributed to the protagonist in the text. In particular, Armenians should be less likely to be called trustworthy and more likely to be labeled deceitful (Hagendoorn, Linssen, and Tumanov 2001: 149-178), while Azeris, whose low status position makes them susceptible to negative stereotypes comparable to African Americans in the U.S., should be less often called hardworking and more often called lazy (H4) (Sniderman et al. 1991; Peffley et al. 1997).

## **Results**

Before beginning the analysis, it is important to establish that the treatments were actually assigned randomly. To check this I test the null hypothesis that variables that may correlate with the outcome jointly do not significantly improve our ability to predict assignment of treatments. I specify a multinomial logit model, regressing treatment condition on education, age, income, indicators for living in Tbilisi, urban, or rural areas, previous voting behavior, gender, and willingness to marry ethnic minorities. A likelihood ratio test of the full model versus a model with only the intercepts was not significant, indicating that we cannot reject the

null hypothesis that the variables do not jointly predict treatment assignment ( $\chi^2_{(50)}=45.55$ ,  $p=.45$ ).

A second methodological dilemma involves the manipulation check. The proposed mechanism of ethnic bias is assumed to operate when people correctly perceive ethnicity. This is because correct identification is necessary to activate the cognitive schema that shapes perceptions of the claim, and because it serves as verification that respondents were paying sufficient attention to the vignette. However, experimental methodologists note that analyses that consider only those who accept the treatment are likely to be biased because noncompliance may be correlated with the outcome variable (Lee et al. 1991). Additionally, we cannot be certain that people, whose responses indicated they could not identify the correct ethnicity, actually were not aware of it. Besides estimating causal effects for “compliers,” I therefore also analyze the full sample and estimate causal effects regardless of whether subjects correctly identified the ethnicity in the vignette (Freedman 2006). I report results below for the subset that correctly identified ethnicity, which reduces the  $n$  to 1647,<sup>6</sup> but I show both sets of results in the tables and note where the results for the two samples diverge substantially. Tables A1 and A2 of the Appendix show assignment to treatment groups for the full sample and for compliers only.

How did respondents react to the vignettes? Mean scores on the three substantive questions (serious, solution, and government) indicate that respondents were sympathetic to the people in the vignette and favorably disposed toward government support regardless of the treatment.<sup>7</sup> This result is consistent with research showing that the legacy of communism made people favorably disposed to (or dependent on) the state to provide for their welfare (Lipsmeyer

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<sup>6</sup> Correct identifications were made as follows for the three implied groups: Georgian 83.8%, Armenian 68.0%, Azeri 71.8%.

<sup>7</sup> All three variables are scored so that higher numbers indicate greater sympathy or support for the claim.

and Nordstrom 2003; Cook 2007: 41-43). At one extreme, 86% of respondents indicated that the government offers “not enough” help to people like those in the vignette. Even when people were less generous, the mean response was typically favorable to very favorable, indicating that ethnic bias, to the extent that we find it, is manifested in subtle distinctions in the level of sympathy granted to minority versus majority groups, rather than as a categorical rejection of the claims of minorities. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for all response variables.

**[Table 1 about here]**

### *Jobs Vignette*

In assessing the seriousness of the problem in the *jobs* vignette, respondents were most likely to respond positively when the protagonists were Georgians, which scored .12 higher than Armenians ( $p < .05$ , two tailed t-test) and .15 more favorably than Azeris ( $p < .05$ ) on a three-point scale. On the proposed solution of civil service jobs for locals, respondents were also biased toward Georgians. On this question (a five-point scale), the differences were significant only among those who correctly identified the protagonists as Armenians (mean difference .19;  $p < .10$ ) or Azeris (.22,  $p < .05$ ).<sup>8</sup> These findings confirm H1a and H1b. Means for all dependent variables are shown in Table 2.

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<sup>8</sup> For the full sample, the differences in means are .08 and .12, respectively.

**[Table 2 about here]**

When it came to describing the person in the vignette, for all treatments respondents were far more likely to select positive than negative attributes to describe the person in the article: overall 48% selected a positive trait, while only 11% chose a negative one and 41% did not name any characteristic. Respondents were more likely to select a positive characteristic for Georgians than the other groups. Notably, Armenians were less likely to receive a positive attribution than Azeris, with scores significantly different from Georgians ( $p < .01$ ). Azeris also scored lower than Georgians, (barely) missing conventional levels of significance ( $p = .12$ ) among compliers but scoring significantly lower at  $p < .05$  in the full sample. Against expectations, there were no significant differences in the attribution to groups of negative characteristics, so H1c is only partly confirmed. However, we should not necessarily conclude from this that people do not hold negative stereotypes based on ethnicity. Examining the data more closely, we see that the rate of non-response varied systematically by implied ethnicity: when the claimants were Georgians, 37.1% declined to name any attribute, as compared with 47.2% with Armenians and 43% with Azeris. The probability of such differentials occurring by chance is  $p < .000$  ( $\chi^2 = 16.78$ ,  $df = 2$ ) for compliers and  $p < .002$  ( $\chi^2 = 12.18$ ,  $df = 2$ ) for the full sample. Because refusing to answer offers a socially desirable alternative to selecting a negative attribute, it may be inferred that rates of nonresponse reflected reluctance to describe minority protagonists using a negative characteristic in front of the interviewer. If this is the case, the results may understate respondents' true negative sentiments. Figure 1 shows proportions who selected a positive attribute and Figure 2 displays proportions selecting a negative attribute, broken down by treatment.

**[Figures 1 and 2 about here]**

On the question of attitudes toward government help, in no instance is does either minority group score significantly worse than Georgians, contrary to H1d. The highly skewed distribution of responses toward “not enough” help suggests that the question was perceived to emphasize the failure of government responsiveness, rather than the specific demands of the village, leading people to express across-the-board sympathy (or disapproval of the state’s role in addressing citizen needs). This result points to underlying support for an active state, regardless of the ethnicity of its beneficiaries.

Responses to questions about the *jobs* vignette bear out most of the hypotheses. First, Georgian protagonists were seen by and large as more justified in their claims than either Armenians or Azeris (H1). Although one or the other minority group was sometimes viewed more positively, in most instances, they scored closer to each other than they did to Georgians. The exception is the question on government help, which exhibited no gap in preferences by ethnicity. Against expectations, Armenians did not score lower than Azeris on three questions (H3), but did perform worse on positive stereotypes. This result will be explored further below.

### *Health Vignette*

Reactions to the *health* vignette can be used to check whether the forms of ethnic favoritism found in the *jobs* vignette are generalizable to other scenarios. While the implied ethnic groups are the same, the problem and solution in *health* are different, permitting a test of ethnic perceptions under different stylized circumstances. In particular, it is expected that the claim for direct assistance in the form of government transfers should elicit more favorable reactions and fewer differences between majority and minority than requests for state employment (H2).

For the first two questions, the gap between Georgians and both minority groups is in fact narrower than in the first vignette. On “seriousness,” Azeris score significantly lower than Georgians (difference .10,  $p < .05$ ), while Armenians are statistically indistinguishable (.06,  $p = .24$ ). For “solution,” Azeris are also rated significantly lower than Georgians (.16,  $p < .10$ ), but Armenians did not (.14,  $p = .11$ ). Mean scores on both questions show that respondents are more sympathetic to the predicament of the village in *health* than in *jobs*, as evidenced by the higher overall means for seriousness and solution and the smaller differences between Georgians and the other groups. The exception is the question on stereotypes, in which ethnic bias is manifest to a comparable degree as in *jobs*: Georgians are again significantly more likely to receive a positive evaluation than either Armenians (.12,  $p < .01$ ) or Azeris (.09,  $p < .05$ ). As in the previous vignette, negative attributes were rarely selected and did not produce significant differences. Means for each question are shown in Table 3.

**[Table 3 about here]**

Looking at specific attributes, “hardworking” and “trustworthy” are selected most frequently, the former being the most common in *jobs* and the latter in *health*, as shown in Figures 3 and 4. Hardworking may have been more common in the former because a request for employment implies a willingness to work as opposed to seeking transfers. How did implied ethnicity affect the attribute chosen? Pooling across both vignettes, Georgians are seen as significantly more hardworking than both Armenians ( $p < .001$ ) and Azeris ( $p < .001$ ). Azeris are seen as least hardworking, consistent with expectations, though not significantly less than Armenians. Also consistent with H4 is that respondents are least likely to call Armenians “trustworthy” (difference from Georgians  $p < .001$ ), while Azeris are statistically indistinguishable from Georgians. These findings partially confirm H4 on ethnicity and stereotypes for Azeris, while offering strong confirmation for Armenians.

**[Figures 3 and 4 here]**

Overall, compared to jobs, the amount of ethnic favoritism evinced by Georgians was lower, though still evident, in health, consistent with hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c, and H2. As with the first vignette, respondents were highly inclined to favor more government support to all protagonists, with no significant differences by treatment, refuting H1d. H4 on the frequency of specific group stereotypes was partly confirmed: Armenians were viewed as least trustworthy in both vignettes (and more so in *jobs*—H3) while Azeris were seen as least hardworking overall.

## Multivariate Regressions

The analysis to this point has confirmed most hypotheses, most notably revealing the relevance of ethnicity in assessing the merits of redistributive claims. As a further test of the hypotheses, I conduct multivariate regression analysis, which helps to ascertain whether the treatment effects are robust to the inclusion of additional variables that are also likely to affect redistributive preferences.

Several individual-level variables are thought to be associated with attitudes toward clientelism.<sup>9</sup> Low-income and less educated people tend to be more vulnerable and desirous of government assistance. People in rural areas have fewer opportunities to avail themselves of resources than urban populations and have less heterogeneous horizontal ties on which to draw for sustenance, making them more dependent on redistributive allocations. Older people have less marketable skills than young people, and in the postcommunist context are more likely to expect the state to provide generous social services.

For each of the four dependent variables, I pool the two versions of the vignette and make Georgians (*health*) the base category. I add covariates for income, education, sex, and age, and a dummy variable for residence in a rural area, all of which are likely to shape redistributive preferences. I use multinomial logit models for three of the dependent variables (seriousness, solution, and government) since they have ordinal outcomes (that is, they are categorical and ranked) with three or more categories, and a logit model for selection of a positive characteristic,

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<sup>9</sup> For thorough reviews, see Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) and Hicken (2011).

which is a dichotomous variable.<sup>10</sup> Table 4 displays the results. Figure 5 shows simulated proportions for the dependent variables by treatment, holding other variables at their means or modes.

**[Table 4 and Figure 5 about here]**

The results confirm that the effects of the vignettes are robust to the inclusion of other variables. For seriousness, all five treatments scored significantly less favorably than the base category. Simulations show that, holding covariates at their means or modes, whereas 64% of respondents placed Georgians (*health*) in the highest category of seriousness, only 43% did for Armenians (*jobs*) and 38% for Azeris (*jobs*). More than twice as many people assigned the latter two treatments indicated the lowest level of seriousness as those in the base category. The effect of the type of clientelism is also evident among those assigned Georgian ethnicity, as those in the *jobs* condition scored 13% lower than in *health*. For “solution,” 69% of those assigned Georgians (*health*) and 65% Georgians (*jobs*) agreed partly or completely with the quoted protagonist, with the minority groups scoring at modestly but consistently lower levels.

The four minority treatments were significantly less likely than the Georgian treatments to elicit a positive characteristic, with Armenians scoring 10% and 13% lower than Georgians on *health* and *jobs*, respectively. For government help, there are no significant differences between

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<sup>10</sup> A multinomial model estimates the effect of a one-unit change in a predictor variable on the log-odds of moving from one level of the dependent variable to the next highest level. I use the proportional odds variant of the model because there are no theoretical reasons to suspect that changes in score should be non-constant. Thus change in log odds is the same for the transition from any score on the dependent variable to the next highest score

treatments, as each group lies within the range of 82% to 88% for responding that the government provides “not enough” help.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper used a survey experiment to test whether and under what conditions ethnic favoritism shapes attitudes toward redistribution in post-Soviet Georgia. It involved random assignment of implicit ethnic information in order to elicit unconscious ethnic biases. I conceived respondents as having a base level of support for redistribution that would be subject to variation depending on the type of clientelism and ethnic information provided. The results showed that ethnic bias is manifest but subtle; respondents were in no case hostile to the claims of minority groups. On the contrary, most responses indicated a high level of concern for the plight of the protagonists and favorable assessments of their proposed solutions. These results reflect broad empathy for victims of the post-Soviet transition and are consistent with opinion surveys indicating support among postcommunist citizens for a redistributive state (Cook 2007).

However, the results also showed that ethnicity is a relevant factor in the formation of redistributive preferences. The analysis found consistent significant differences in attitudes depending on whether the information in the vignette described Georgians or a minority ethnicity. When Georgians were the protagonists, the problem was seen as more serious, and the solution more credible, than when Armenians or Azeris were indicated. Ethnic bias was more pronounced in the *jobs* vignette, possibly due to the political undercurrent of its demands.

The question on stereotypes also revealed a subtle form of bias. Comparison across groups revealed a tendency to assign positive traits to Armenians and Azeris in lower proportions than to describe Georgians. Yet this finding does not reveal overt prejudice, as respondents were reluctant to ascribe negative attributes to Armenians or Azeris. A large number refrained from naming any attribute, an omission that may suggest concealed prejudice (Berinsky 1999). As has been demonstrated in the U.S. context, ethnic bias may be manifest not in outright discrimination, but rather in the application of a different and more exacting standard to judge minorities than one's own group (Dovidio and Gaertner 2000, 2004). Subjects' responses on personal characteristics lend support to the notion that ethnicity is more likely to become salient when contextual information triggers associations with group stereotypes (Devine 1989). Thus, Armenians scored significantly lower than Georgians on "trustworthy," especially in the *jobs* vignette, as their patronage demand was likely perceived in terms of status competition.

The results offer some tentative insights into the challenges of effective governance in emerging democracies. An awareness of the triggers for ethnic salience can help to elucidate when public opinion is likely to be at odds with normative ideals of equality in ways that vitiate democratic outcomes. When minority representatives make demands that are seen as presumptuous, or when their group demands coincide with existing stereotypes, this can negatively influence majority attitudes toward redistribution in ways that can further disadvantage underrepresented minorities. If ethnic groups are seen as competing for resources in a zero-sum relationship, support for pro-majoritarian redistributive policies can exacerbate horizontal inequality and further entrench the power of the majority (Lijphart 1977; Cohen 1997). Furthermore, when redistributive policy becomes subsumed by ethnically based competition, cross-cutting identities may become increasingly difficult to sustain, to be replaced

by a single cumulative cleavage. More ominously, self-serving elites can use existing ethnic biases to build coalitions by marginalizing minorities; aggrieved elites representing minority interests can play off the resentments of marginalized groups, knowing that any minority claims will only spur further majority mobilization (Fearon and Laitin 2000).

On the other hand, Georgia demonstrates that there is still a strong and pervasive preference for redistribution to benefit the poor, regardless of ethnicity. The results suggest the presence of an identity based on class, which cuts across ethnicity and generates sympathy for those buffeted by the post-Soviet transition. The enduring tendency to perceive society as divided between haves (post-Soviet oligarchs and political elites) and have-nots (the majority of people) provides a strong counterweight to natural tendencies toward—or deliberate efforts to cause—identity-based conflicts over limited resources.

Much recent work on ethnicity and clientelism comes from sub-Saharan Africa, where ethnicity is highly politicized and has been implicated in outcomes such as civil violence and low public goods provision. Africa offers numerous opportunities for studying ethnic politics in weakly institutionalized democracies, yet these findings do not necessarily generalize to other contexts. Africa's history of European colonialism, low income, and highly fractionalized ethnic distributions may result in patterns of behavior that make Africa exceptional (Fearon 2003: 205) and risk distorting the cumulation of knowledge in the broader field of ethnic politics. While Georgia is by no means more “representative”—and its peculiar postsocialist characteristics may limit generalizability—the findings do represent an “out-of-sample” data point in the cumulation of knowledge about ethnic politics. Encouragingly, the results here are broadly consistent with previous findings from weak democracies, but they do remind us of the need to think carefully

about the scope conditions of our analyses, whether they occur in Africa, the Caucasus, or any other region.

This study has highlighted the ways that institutional inheritances shape but do not dictate the cognitive processing of ambiguously ethnic information. Social and political forces inform people's schematic models of "everyday ethnicity" (Brubaker 2006), but it is the interplay of those assumptions with information like that in the vignettes, that determine people's perceptions of group boundaries at a particular moment (Barth 1970; Brubaker et al. 2004). This experiment has shown that a small amount of suggestive information, without recourse to overtly political appeals designed to stoke group-based thinking, can activate schemas that lead respondents to interpret the claim through an ethnic lens.

Or they may not. The interaction of institutional inheritance and short-term stimulus can also give rise to interpretations in which class or another non-ethnic cleavage is the commonsense basis of collective action. This insight has not usually been incorporated into studies of ethnic politics. Insofar as ethnic identification is assumed to be a driver of behavior based on institutional dispensation alone, scholars may be overestimating its frequency or misunderstanding the mechanism by which ethnicity affects political outcomes (Kasara 2007). Data commonly used in ethnic politics research such as government spending or election results are several steps removed from cognitive schemas, which can lead to a misreading of the mechanisms that underlie these outcomes.<sup>11</sup> As more citizens in democratizing states gain a voice in their political system, and their preferences are translated into policies, understanding the sources of these preferences will become ever more important.

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<sup>11</sup> For an overview, see Bratton (2013).

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**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

Question	Scale	Mean (sd)	N	Mean (sd)	N
		Compliers		Full Sample	
In your opinion, how serious is this problem – not serious at all, somewhat serious, or very serious?	1-Not serious at all 2-Somewhat serious 3-Very serious	2.46(.59)	1415	2.47(.59)	1780
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the solution the resident of the village proposes?	1-Strongly disagree 2-Rather disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Rather agree 5-Strongly agree	3.49(.97)	1392	3.50(.95)	1729
In your opinion, which of the following best describes the man quoted in the article?	Deceitful Generous Hardworking Lazy Selfish Trustworthy	Probability of selecting a positive characteristic  .48(.50)	1132	Probability of selecting a positive characteristic  .42(.49)	1379
		Probability of selecting a negative characteristic  .11(.31)		Probability of selecting a negative characteristic  .09(.29)	
In general, do you think the government helps people like the ones mentioned in this text not enough; about the right amount; or too much?	1-Too much 2-About the right Too much amount 3- Not enough  (reversed from original)	2.84 (.41)	997	2.83 (.43)	1222

Note: Only self-identified ethnic Georgians are included in the sample. “Compliers” refers to respondents who correctly identified the ethnicity implied by the information in the vignette.

**Table 2: Means by Implied Ethnicity for *Jobs* Vignette**

Question	Sample	Implied Ethnicity		
		Georgian	Armenian	Azeri
Serious	Compliers	2.47	2.35*	2.32*
	All	2.47	2.37†	2.35*
Solution	Compliers	3.59	3.40*	3.37*
	All	3.54	3.46	3.42
Positive attribute	Compliers	.53	.41**	.46
	All	.50	.38**	.40*
Negative attribute	Compliers	.11	.13	.12
	All	.10	.11	.12
Government help	Compliers	2.85	2.85	2.84
	All	2.84	2.85	2.84

Note: Significance of difference in means from implied Georgian ethnicity in the corresponding treatment indicated by †p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

Figures for positive and negative attributes are proportions of total responses, including NAs.

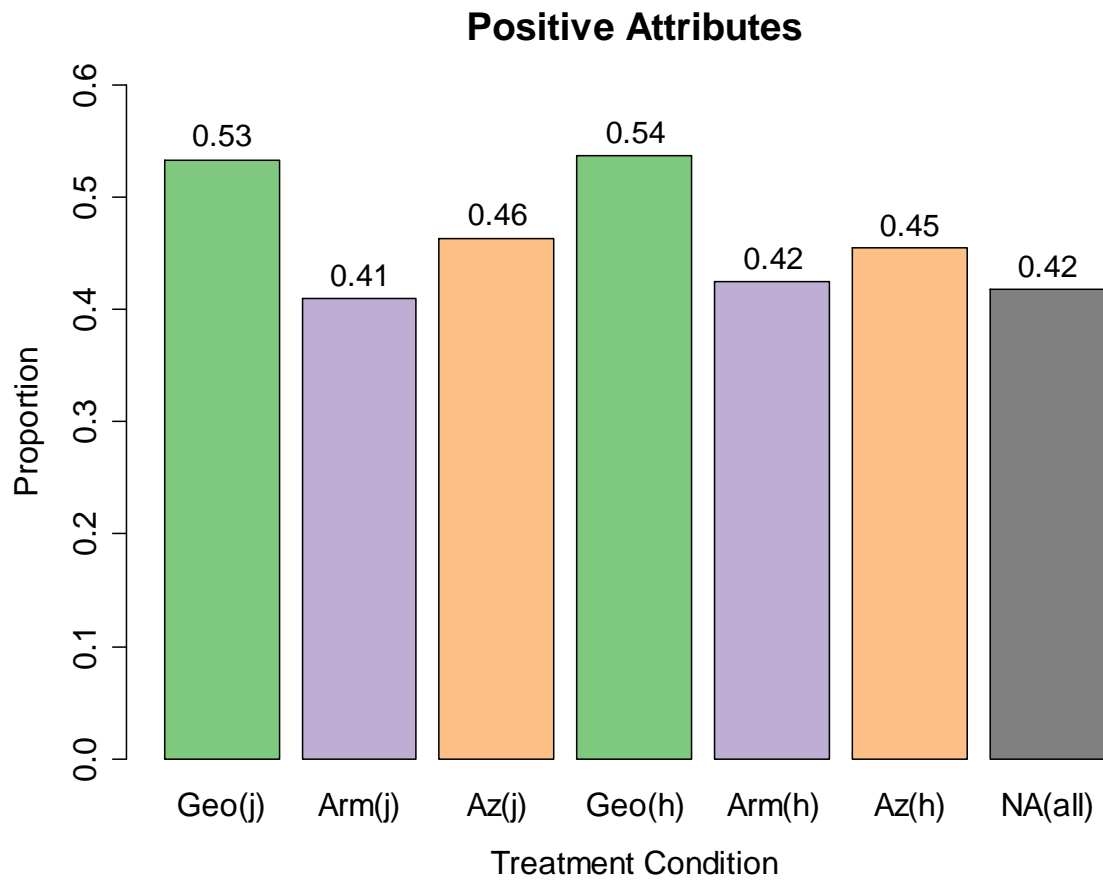
**Table 3: Means by Implied Ethnicity for *Health* Vignette**

Question	Sample	Implied Ethnicity		
		Georgian	Armenian	Azeri
Serious	Compliers	2.57	2.51	2.47*
	All	2.58	2.53	2.47*
Solution	Compliers	3.60	3.46	3.44†
	All	3.59	3.49	3.48†
Positive attribute	Compliers	.54	.42**	.45*
	All	.48	.38**	.42*
Negative attribute	Compliers	.10	.088	.087
	All	.092	.045	.067
Government help	Compliers	2.86	2.83	2.89
	All	2.86	2.82	2.81

Note: Significance of difference in means from implied Georgian ethnicity in the corresponding treatment indicated by †p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

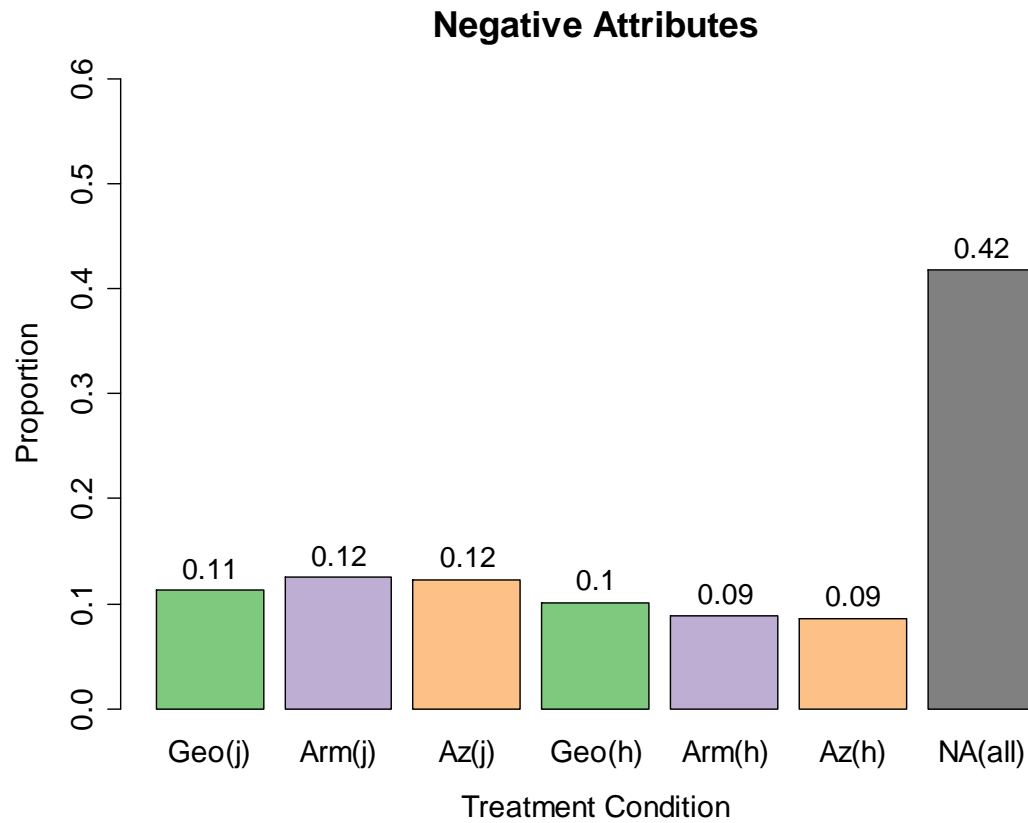
Figures for positive and negative attributes are proportions of total responses, including NAs.

**Figure 1: Proportions Selecting a Positive Attribute  
to Describe Protagonist in Vignette, by Treatment**



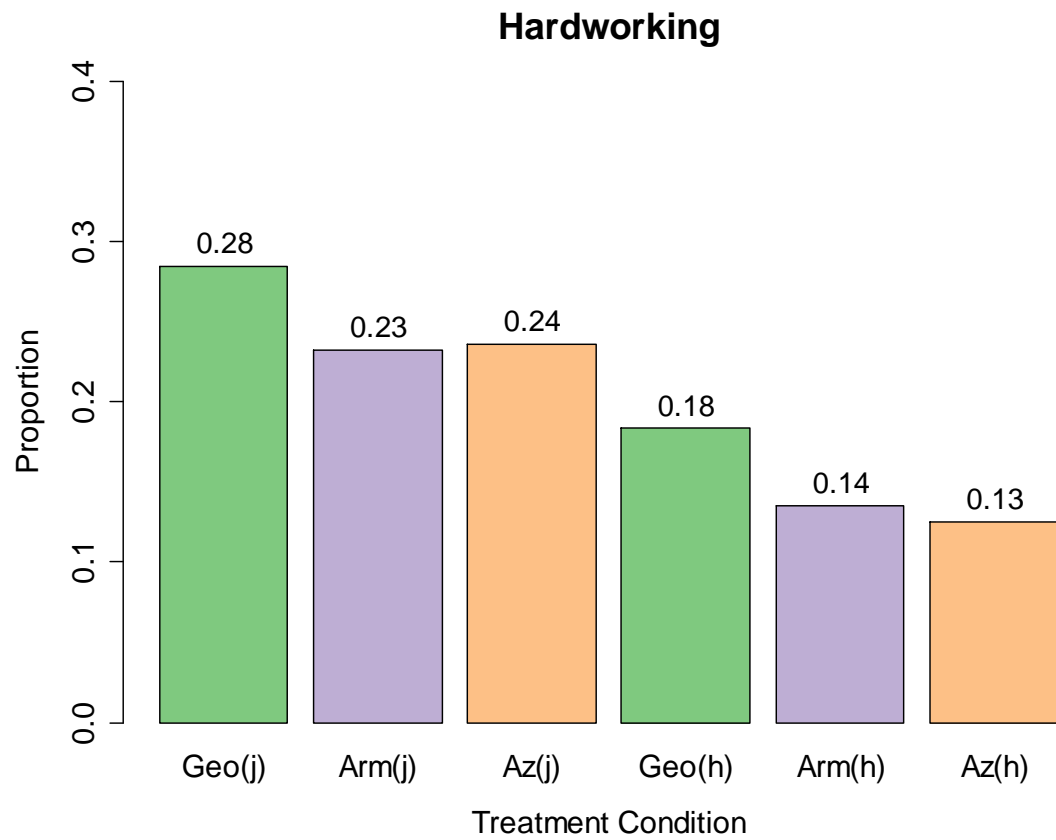
Note: (j) refers to *jobs* vignette, (h) refers to *health* vignette. NA includes “don’t know” and “refuse to answer.”

**Figure 2: Proportions Selecting a Negative Attribute to Describe  
Protagonist in Vignette, by Treatment**

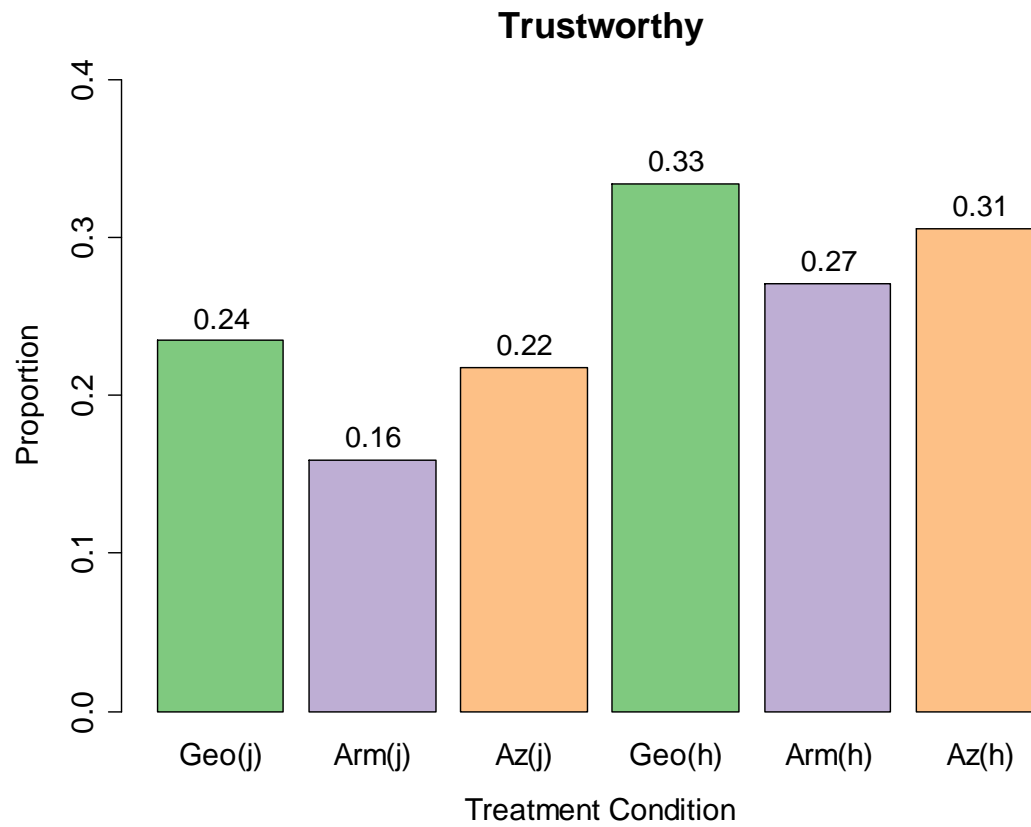


Note: (j) refers to *jobs* vignette, (h) refers to *health* vignette. NA includes “don’t know” and “refuse to answer.”

**Figure 3: Proportions Selecting “Hardworking” to Describe  
Protagonist in Vignette, by Treatment**



**Figure 4: Proportions Selecting “Trustworthy” to Describe  
Protagonist in Vignette, by Treatment**

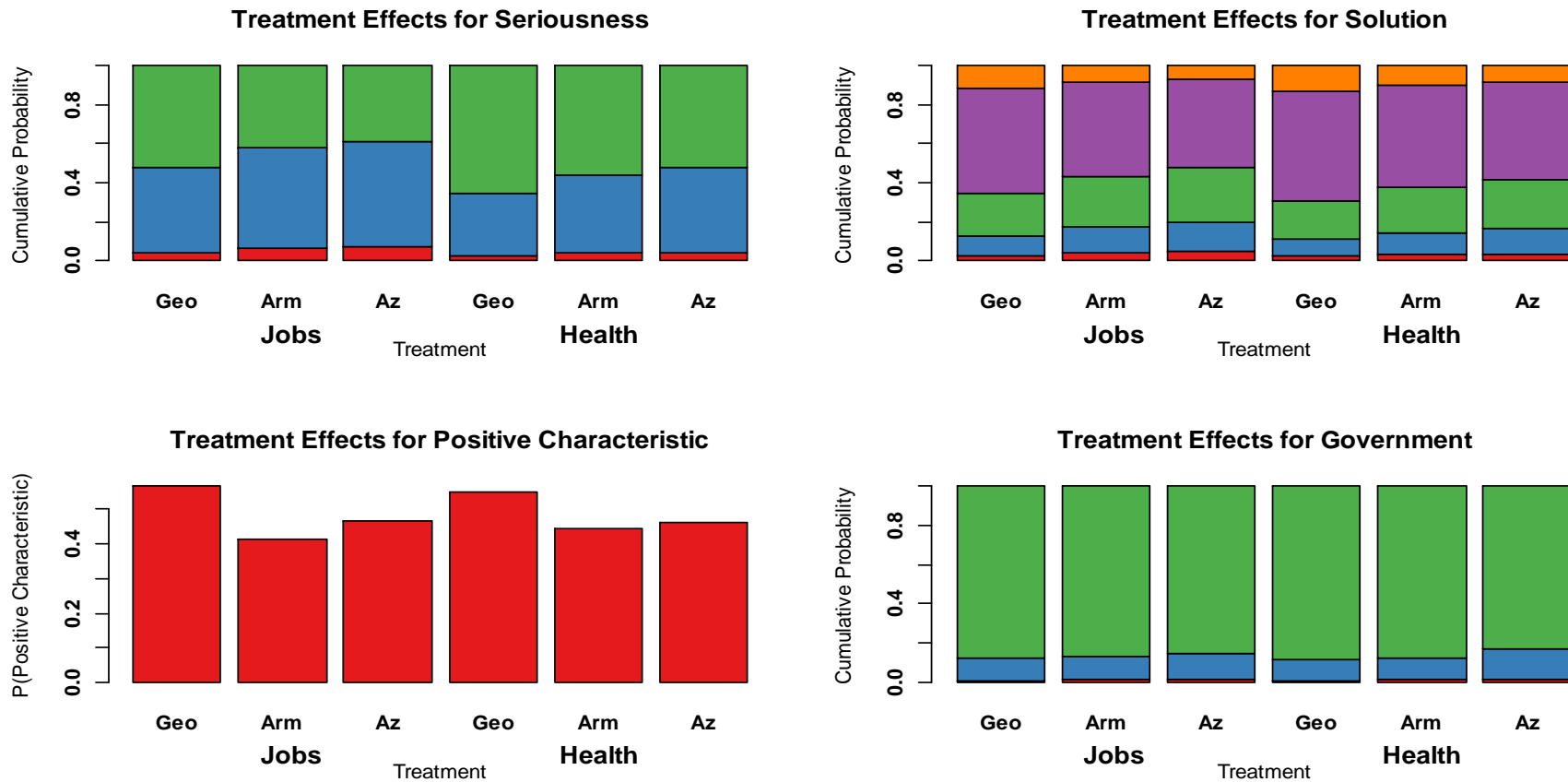


**Table 4: Multivariate Regressions**

	Serious		Solution		Government		Positive	
Edu	0.175***	(0.044)	-0.007	(0.042)	-0.084	(0.075)	0.085*	(0.041)
Income	0.106*	(0.047)	0.164***	(0.045)	-0.079	(0.077)	0.103*	(0.044)
Age	0.012***	(0.003)	0.006	(0.003)	0.003	(0.006)	-0.002	(0.003)
Rural	0.227	(0.124)	0.158	(0.117)	-0.527*	(0.210)	0.134	(0.116)
Sex	0.145	(0.115)	0.324**	(0.109)	-0.024	(0.198)	0.138	(0.108)
Arm (h)	-0.386*	(0.188)	-0.327	(0.177)	-0.037	(0.325)	-0.411*	(0.174)
Az (h)	-0.521**	(0.188)	-0.463**	(0.179)	-0.409	(0.305)	-0.354*	(0.175)
Geo (j)	-0.542**	(0.180)	-0.215	(0.168)	-0.072	(0.311)	0.081	(0.167)
Arm (j)	-0.896***	(0.191)	-0.537**	(0.183)	-0.075	(0.331)	-0.527**	(0.180)
Az (j)	-1.091***	(0.198)	-0.705***	(0.185)	-0.255	(0.343)	-0.309	(0.182)
1 2	-1.389***	(0.414)	-2.432***	(0.405)	-5.452***	(0.762)		
2 3	1.603***	(0.407)	-0.824*	(0.384)	-2.866***	(0.703)		
3 4			0.469	(0.383)				
4 5			3.135***	(0.395)				
(Intercept)							-0.801*	(0.379)
Likelihood-ratio	320.640		445.532		122.894		28.087	
Log-likelihood	-1054.471		-1603.537		-400.246		-1009.488	
N	1286		1262		925		1477	

Note: Base category is Georgians (*health*). Sex is 1 for women. Income is eight categories. Education is eight categories. Rural is residence of the respondent, as indicated by the interviewer. Cutpoints give the log odds of the cumulative probability of being in the higher category vs. the lower category when all other covariates are at zero. Note that the n varies due to the fact that not all subjects responded to all four measures. Significance indicated by \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Figure 5: Simulated Proportions for Responses for All Dependent Variables**



Note: Stacked bar charts represent simulated proportions with all variables besides indicator variable held at their means. Colors represent response categories, with higher categories corresponding to more positive evaluations. For seriousness, responses range from (1) not serious at all (red) to (3) very serious (green). For solution, responses range from (1) strongly disagree (red) to (5) strongly agree (orange). Positive characteristic is the simulated probability of selecting generous, hardworking, or trustworthy. Government ranges from (1) too much (red) to (3) not enough (green). Simulations were run in the Zelig function of R, version 2.15. See Imai et al.

## **Appendix: Survey Methodology**

The survey was conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) according to a multistage cluster sampling design. The country was divided into four rural and four urban strata plus the capital. Within each stratum, electoral precincts, which functioned as primary sampling units (PSUs), were selected in proportion to the population of registered voters. Households were randomly sampled from a sample frame of households in each PSU and a Kish Grid was used to select the respondent.

The vignettes and questions were translated into local languages (Georgian, Russian, Armenian, and Azeri) and back-translated for validity. They were tested in a pilot survey in September 2012, revised, and fielded as part of the Caucasus Barometer (CB) project in November. Interviewers were sociologists trained by CRRC who spoke local languages. The response rate was 75%.

Interviewers adhered to the following randomization protocol:

1. Vignettes will be numbered 1 to 6, with the number visible to the interviewer but not to the respondent. Interviewers will select one card, beginning with #1 for the first interview and note on the questionnaire which card they will be using when filling out basic information immediately prior to commencing the interview.
2. When it is time for this block of questions, interviewers will read and show the card to the respondent. The respondent may look at the card the whole time while answering the questions. The interviewer is not allowed to help or reveal any information about the vignette.

3. Interviewers will proceed through the cards in order, until they have gone through all six versions (to six respondents). Then, with the seventh interview, they begin the cycle again, and continue in this manner until they fulfill their quota of interviews.
4. If a respondent drops out and is not included in the CB, then the card intended for that respondent shall be used on the next respondent.

**Table A1: Assignment to Treatments in Full Sample of Ethnic Georgian Respondents**

		<b>Implied Ethnicity</b>			
<b>Vignette</b>		Georgian	Armenian	Azeri	Total
	<i>Health</i>	N=422	N=391	N=358	N=1171
	<i>Jobs</i>	N=356	N=358	N=307	N=1021
	Total	N=778	N=749	N=665	N=2192

**Table A2: Assignment to Treatments by Correct Identification of Ethnicity**

		<b>Implied Ethnicity</b>			
<b>Vignette</b>		Georgian	Armenian	Azeri	Total
	<i>Health</i>	N=365	N=273	N=255	N=893
	<i>Jobs</i>	N=302	N=232	N=220	N=754
	Total	N=667	N=505	N=475	N=1647