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# Migration and Public Trust in the Commonwealth of Independent States

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## Abstract

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet space has seen regional integration in the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The CIS while moribund, has affected migration in the post-Soviet space. Despite its persistence and effect on migration, few studies have sought to explore public perceptions towards the CIS. We address this limitation by developing several arguments, anchored on literature on public opinion and European integration, to explain how perceptions towards migrants and employment status affect public trust in the CIS. Our analyses make use of the sixth wave of the World Values Survey that includes seven CIS member-states and finds strong support for our hypotheses. Our contribution lies in the investigation of public attitudes in a non-EU setting while applying arguments from EU literature and the wide coverage of our study compared to extant literature on the CIS and public opinion.

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## **Introduction**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet space has seen political, social and economic integration in the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Originally established to both manage the dissolution of the Soviet Union and more importantly promote peaceful coexistence and political, economic, and social cooperation of the post-Soviet states (Kubicek 2009, Sakwa & Webber 1999), the CIS has been moribund in promoting regional economic integration directly. However, observers argue that the CIS has contributed to more recent cooperation efforts in the region by laying an important foundation and enabling the creation of meaningful sub-regional arrangements such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) (Libman & Vinokurov 2012). The CIS has also been influential in facilitating easy movement of persons within the post-Soviet space (Tarasyev et al 2016).

Despite its continued existence and effect on migration in the post-Soviet space, surprisingly few studies have sought to explore public perceptions towards the CIS and regional integration in Eurasia more generally. The few studies exploring public perceptions on regional cooperation in the post-Soviet space have used data from the Eurasian Development Bank Integration Barometer. However, these studies use the publicly available summary statistics that do not allow for a deeper exploration of what motivates individual perceptions towards regional integration arrangements such as the CIS (Kudaibergenova 2016). Others exploring public attitudes towards the CIS have focused on respondents in only a few individual member-states (Rose and Munro 2008).

The purpose of this article is to address these shortcomings by drawing on insights from a broader literature on regional integration and analyzing survey data from many CIS countries. Specifically, we analyze the effect of migration and perceptions towards migrants on public trust in the CIS across seven CIS countries (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan) that were included in the sixth wave of the World Values Survey (WVS). We view this as a first step towards a more general understanding of public attitudes towards regional integration in other parts of the former Soviet Union, including the recently launched Eurasian Economic Union. Our study also contributes to the vast

literature on public opinion and regional integration by ascertaining the extent to which previous findings from European Union studies are applicable to other regional settings. While the CIS is not a typical regional integration arrangement when compared to the EU, its unique history and institutional design provide us with an opportunity to examine some of the key arguments proposed in the literature.

We develop several related arguments on how perceptions towards migrants affect public trust in the CIS. Migration is one of the few areas in which the CIS has had a profound effect on its member-states directly and indirectly. Thus, we argue that the public evaluates and forms attitudes toward the CIS based on how they perceive migration across the CIS. This theoretical approach leads to three sets of testable hypotheses. First, we contend that negative perceptions towards migrants are more likely to reduce trust in the CIS given that this is a body that facilitates migration, especially from other CIS countries. Second, we argue that this effect of perceptions towards migrants on trust in CIS is mediated by the country's level of ethnic diversity: migrants in homogeneous CIS countries are more likely to stand out compared to migrants in more diverse countries. Thus, the effect of perceptions towards migrants on trust in CIS decreases as a country becomes more ethnically diverse. Third, we hypothesize that distrust in CIS is acuter among low-skilled workers and those unemployed owing to economic fears that migrants from other CIS countries are competing with them in the job market. Using the sixth wave of the World Values Survey, we find strong support for our hypotheses.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows: the next section provides an overview of the literature on the CIS, highlighting explanations on the evolution and function of the CIS and the dearth of public opinion research on CIS. In this section, we also review the success of the CIS in facilitating migration. We then develop our argument linking attitudes towards migration and trust in the CIS. We test this argument using the WVS data, offer a discussion of our findings, and include several robustness checks. We conclude with implications for future research on public opinion on Eurasian integration processes.

## **Integration in the CIS**

The literature on the CIS has concentrated on the formation, evolution, and function of this regional organization. An overarching conclusion of this literature is the moribund status of the CIS that initially promised to promote deep regional integration but has stagnated and been surpassed by sub-regional ventures such as the recently established Eurasian Economic Union. This review serves two purposes. First, we summarize this literature in order to provide the reader with the context of the focus of this study. Second, we note one prominent sphere of cooperation that the CIS seems to have had some effect directly and indirectly – migration policy of member-states. This second purpose helps to clarify the need to study public opinion on a moribund regional organization.

The CIS was primarily established to midwife the breakup of the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Its aims included ensuring that the collapse of the Soviet Union did not negatively affect the historical economic, political, and security ties that existed among former Soviet states and facilitating the development of beneficial cooperation among these new states (Kubicek, 2009; Sakwa and Webber, 1999). Beneficial cooperation in the CIS was to be delivered through various economic agreements between the member-states on trade and economic liberalization (Libman and Vinokurov, 2012). Despite these lofty goals of deeper economic integration, these agreements were never fully implemented leading to a moribund CIS.<sup>4</sup> For others, however, the CIS motivated the creation of new sub-regional integration arrangements in Eurasia including the Eurasian Economic Community/Eurasian Economic Union (Libman and Vinokurov, 2012).

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<sup>3</sup> Not all former Soviet Union states are members. For example, all the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania focused their efforts on joining the European Union. CIS members have included Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Georgia has left the CIS in 2009 following its dispute with Russia.

<sup>4</sup> Several explanations have been offered to better understand the lackluster performance of the CIS. One explanation focuses on divergent policies member-states pursued following the demise of the Soviet Union and as they sought to establish themselves as independent states (Gleason 2001; Hansen, 2015; Kuzio, 2000; Libman and Vinokurov 2012; Sakwa and Webber, 1999). Others argue member-states' reluctance to commit to an organization dominated by Russia as another reason for the CIS' poor performance (Kramer, 2008; Vinokurov, 2007). Kobrinskaya (2007: 20) argues "Moscow traditionally understands only a paternalist type of integration, which presupposes preferential treatment in exchange for following Moscow's policy." Such an approach has influenced some of the other CIS members to be reluctant about enhancing regional integration within CIS (Hansen, 2015, Kramer 2008).

The persistence of the CIS despite its poor integration record is puzzling. Wirninghaus (2012) addresses this puzzle by arguing that the dismal record of the CIS has much to do with its original purpose to manage the end of the Soviet Union. Once this purpose was achieved, the CIS was deemed irrelevant. A related explanation that Willerton, Goertz, and Slobodchiko (2015) offer examines how the institutional design of the CIS was meant to address power asymmetry and mistrust among the former Soviet states. Willerton et al. (2015) argue that states in the CIS intentionally designed a flexible institution to facilitate bilateral engagements between member-states without compromising the overall CIS structure. Thus, any assessment of the CIS should take into consideration the fact that it serves as an umbrella organization that enables former Soviet states to cooperate at varying levels and in multiple issue-areas inside and outside of the CIS structure.

Our study takes this latter assessment of the CIS in crafting an argument to explain public perceptions towards this regional organization. One area that the CIS continues to have an impact on is the easy movement of citizens of CIS members. Mal'gin (2002: 51) writes “[p]aradoxical as it may seem, one of the few achievements that in some way brings the CIS closer to being an integrative union is the relatively free movement of the workforce, a spontaneous human component.” Others including Libman and Obydenkova (2013) and Vinokurov (2007) also concur that the relative ease of movement of persons through the visa-free agreements of the CIS is one of the areas that the CIS has enabled continued cooperation. The Bishkek Agreement of 1992 ushered the visa-free regime of the CIS. Although most member-states had withdrawn from this agreement by 2000, these same states had concluded similar visa-free agreements bilaterally or through the Eurasian Economic Community (Ivakhnyuk, 2009).

Additionally, CIS states bilaterally and through the CIS have also concluded agreements on labour migration that add further credence on migration as an area where the CIS has made progress. The Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Labour Migration and Social Protection of Migrant Workers was signed in 1994, the Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers and their Families, adopted by CIS Member States was concluded in 2008, and the Protocol on Amendments to the Agreement on Cooperation

in the field of Labour Migration and Social Protection for Migrant Workers was signed in 2005. These CIS agreements have been complemented by several bilateral agreements that have further influenced the emergence of a CIS migration regime (Ryazantsev and Korneev, 2014). Chudinovskikh (2012) and Chudinovskikh and Denissenko (2014) outline several of these bilateral arrangements between CIS states that cover such areas as social security and welfare benefits, labor rights, mutual recognition of expertise, experience, and academic credentials, and information sharing on migration. The existence and development of this regime provide a plausible basis for evaluating public perceptions towards the CIS given the potential direct and indirect impact of this CIS-influenced migration regime on the public's welfare.

The importance of labor migration to CIS integration has been discussed in the extant literature. The CIS secretariat identifies cooperation in labor migration as one of its important areas of cooperation. Davletgildeev (2014) who documents the various legal mechanisms established within the CIS framework to coordinate labour migration policies of member-states argues that coordination of labor migration policy remains one of the key tasks of CIS' integration process. Tarasyev et al (2016) acknowledge "Labour migration across countries in the CIS has been playing a key role in the process of regional economic integration and is expected to become even more important in the near future." Concurring with this view, Libman and Vinokurov (2012) observe the extent to which integration in labour migration has intensified compared to trade among former Soviet states that are members of the CIS. To further demonstrate the extent of this integration, we plot the number of immigrants in the CIS between 2010 and 2015 in Figure 1 (CIS Statistics 2017). First, immigration within the CIS has increased from 253,000 to 577,000 between 2010 and 2015, slightly doubling. Second, a notable observation is the extent to which migrants originate from other CIS countries compared to those from other parts of the world and the exponential increase in CIS migrants since 2010. We contend that any evaluation of public attitudes towards the CIS needs to consider the effect of the area of cooperation in which it has had some notable effect, migration.

[Figure 1]

Our study is not the first at examining public perceptions towards the CIS and regional integration in the post-Soviet space. Several studies have made use of the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) Integration Barometer data. However, these data are not amenable to evaluating individual perceptions as the EDB's surveys ask only a few basic socio-demographic questions.<sup>5</sup> Others have explored public perceptions towards integration in the post-Soviet space using individual-level data. In one contribution, Rose and Munro (2008) explore attitudes of Russians towards the CIS and Western Europe. They find that Russians with a strong sense of national and Soviet identity are more likely to perceive Russia's future in the CIS whereas those with a more cosmopolitan, European identity are less likely to have positive perceptions towards the CIS. Additionally, those who see the United States as a threat along with older respondents are more likely to see Russia's future in the CIS. The identity and age findings are similar to those reported in White, McAllister and Feklyunina (2010) who investigate public perceptions in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine towards the CIS. Like Rose and Munro, they observe that in all three former Soviet states, but particularly in Russia, public support for the CIS is very strong. Their tests revealed that older respondents, perhaps nostalgic towards the Soviet Union, are more likely to have positive perceptions towards the CIS, whereas more educated respondents and those with a good living standard are less likely.

While these studies contribute to our understanding of what drives public opinion on post-Soviet international relations, they remain inconclusive as their empirical analyses only cover a small fraction of former Soviet states. Another shortcoming of these studies is that they do not draw on or relate their findings to a larger body of research on regional cooperation. Thus, it remains unclear whether their evidence is unique to the CIS, or the findings support general patterns in a broader context. Our study moves a step further by first drawing on the literature on the EU literature and proposing a set of arguments that consider how immigration, the area the CIS is known for, has affected public confidence in this regional

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<sup>5</sup> One study by Kudaibergenova (2016) uses these descriptive statistics to evaluate public attitudes towards the Eurasian Economic Union in her explanation of motivations of elites in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to seek regional integration. Another study making use of the EDB data is that of Karabchuk, Moiseeva and Garkina (2015) who also examine summary statistics of these data on variations of perceptions towards integration.



organization. Second, our study evaluates the hypotheses we develop in the next section using data from the World Values Survey that includes respondents from seven CIS member-states.

### **Migration and Public Trust in the CIS**

We anchor our argument to research on how attitudes towards immigrants affect public support for the European Union. This literature has noted how immigrants can be deemed a cultural and economic threat that can then influence public distrust towards the European Union. Given its role in facilitating immigration, we argue similarly that perceptions towards immigrants have influenced levels of public trust in the CIS. Our cultural argument considers the effects of immigration on nation-building processes in CIS states following the demise of the Soviet Union. Our second mechanism considers the labor competition that immigrants enhance as a result of the easy movement of persons within the CIS.

European integration has resulted in the shift of competencies away from nation-states that have traditionally acted as symbols of nationhood and sovereignty (Carey 2002; McLaren 2002). Simultaneously, European integration has enabled free movement of persons from other member-states. Free movement of persons that the EU facilitates has been argued to expose citizens to foreign cultures. Such exposure that immigration engenders, for some, is deemed a threat to their national identity, and in the process adversely affects public support for the EU (De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005, Boomgaarden et al. 2011). Additionally, free movement of persons has heightened competition in the labour market in EU member-states. Immigrants can be perceived as posing a threat to employment opportunities and high wages (Sides and Citrin 2007). In turn, those citizens in economically vulnerable occupations are unlikely to hold favorable views of the EU given that this body facilitates the movement of their economic competitors (Garry and Tilley 2009; Klingeren, Boomgaarden & De Vreese 2013).

We argue that the cultural argument is applicable in the CIS context. The post-Soviet states have, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, aimed to construct national identities. These identities have built on

the titular ethnoterritorial identities that the Soviet nationality policy promoted as a way of binding a multinational state (Beissinger 2002). Indeed, several studies have noted how this nationality policy influenced the breakup of the Soviet Union to the extent that it promoted titular ethnoterritorial identities in each Soviet republic that resulted in the creation of alternative power centers that facilitated nationalist mobilization and the weakening of allegiance to the Soviet Union (Beissinger 2002; Roeder 1991; Suny 1993). In the post-Soviet period, these titular identities have persisted in their salience and in their use in constructing national identities in opposition to the Soviet past (Blakkisrud and Nozimova 2010; Kuzio 2002; 2005). Brubaker's (2011) analysis of nationalizing processes in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and the Baltic, non-CIS states of Estonia and Latvia illustrates this post-Soviet construction of national identities. While Brubaker observes variations in strategy between these states, a common thread appears to be the promotion the interests of the "titular nation."

In contexts such as those of post-Soviet CIS states constructing national identities, the presence of immigrants can be deemed a threat to the titular "core nation." Immigrants constitute a foreign "other" that does not fit into the narrative of the new nation promoted by state authorities. In some cases, these "others" can inspire negative perceptions from those belonging to the core nation especially if the outsiders are ethnically, linguistically, or culturally different from the core group. In her analysis of Russia's implementation of a restrictive migration policy despite its demographic challenges, Schenk (2010) argues that part of the reason the state embarked on this policy was in response to increasing xenophobia in Russia as a result of the presence of a large number of labour migrants. Given that the CIS has contributed to the flow of such migrants in Russia along with other CIS states, both directly and indirectly, we argue the negative perceptions towards migrants similar to those reported in the case of Russia can help explain public confidence in the CIS. In such circumstances, the CIS becomes the target of mistrust given that it facilitates the flow of the "other" that for some are deemed as threatening national heritage and culture. Thus,

H1. Those holding negative perceptions towards immigrants are less likely to trust the CIS.

Despite the nation-building processes in CIS states, these states vary in their level of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heterogeneity. Ethnic fractionalization indices of CIS states reveal this variation: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are the most ethnically diverse whereas Armenia, Russia, and Belarus are the least ethnically heterogeneous (Alesina, et al 2003). We contend that such heterogeneity mediates the effect that perceptions towards migrants have on public confidence in the CIS. Immigrants in more diverse settings are less likely to stand out compared to immigrants in more homogeneous countries. In addition, citizens in more diverse settings have been shown to be more trusting of persons beyond their co-ethnics (Kasara 2013) and exhibit solidarity with immigrants in European welfare states (van Ooschot 2008).

Following this logic, we have the following two expectations. First, we expect citizens in more diverse CIS states to more likely have positive perceptions towards the CIS. For these citizens, the CIS facilitating immigration is unlikely to be viewed as a cultural threat compared to the situation in more homogeneous CIS countries. Second, we expect the effect of perceptions towards immigrants on public confidence in CIS to be smaller in more diverse CIS states. In such diverse settings, immigrants are less likely to be perceived negatively and as such the institution facilitating their movement is also less likely to be viewed skeptically. Thus,

H2a. Citizens of ethnically diverse CIS member-states are more likely to trust the CIS.

H2b. The effect of perceptions towards immigrants on public trust in the CIS is weaker in more ethnically diverse CIS member-states.

Along with the cultural argument, we also expect the economic argument on immigrants to be relevant for the CIS. As an arrangement that facilitates the flow of migrants, we expect labour migrants to have more trust in the CIS. Immigrants, particularly labor immigrants, are attracted to destinations that offer them various economic benefits including employment. This attraction can explain why the top destinations for immigrants from Central Asian CIS countries are Russia and Kazakhstan, economies in the CIS that are performing relatively well and offer employment opportunities and wages that are better than those of the

immigrants' home countries (Laruelle 2008; Vinokurov and Pereboyev 2013). Migrants' trust in the CIS, therefore, is hinged on the economic benefits they derive from the easy movement that the CIS facilitates.

However, although economic benefits such as employment can generate more confidence in the CIS among immigrants, for citizens of receiving countries, migrants can generate low trust in the CIS given the perceptions of these citizens on the economic threat migrants pose. We argue that labor migrants arriving in CIS may be perceived as taking jobs from locals thus inspiring both negative attitudes towards migrants, and for the purposes of our study, less trust in the body facilitating these economic competitors. Several studies report negative perceptions labor migrants have generated in some CIS countries that help to clarify our causal logic. In Russia, for example, Sevortian (2009) observes that labor migrants are blamed for taking jobs away from citizens. Bahry (2016), concurs with this assessment, empirically showing how Russian citizens most vulnerable to competition for jobs from immigrants, tend to have negative attitudes towards immigrants, in our case, a process that the CIS facilitates. Thus, we expect

H3a. Migrants in CIS countries are more likely to trust the CIS.

H3b. Citizens of CIS countries 1) employed in economically vulnerable positions or 2) unemployed are less likely to trust the CIS.

## **Data and Measurement**

To test our hypotheses, we use data from the World Value Survey (WVS) (World Values Association, 2015).<sup>6</sup> We rely on the WVS as it is, to the best of our knowledge, the only survey project conducted across many CIS countries. Specifically, our data are taken from the sixth wave (2010-2014), covering seven CIS countries, including Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For more information, visit: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp>.

<sup>7</sup> Azerbaijan, a member-state of the CIS, is included in Wave 6 but dropped from our analysis because the question about the CIS was not asked in the country.

We are interested in explaining the variation in public attitudes toward the CIS. The WVS asks respondents how much they trust regional organizations including the CIS.<sup>8</sup> We regard public trust in the CIS as the primary indicator of the respondents' underlying perceptions about the regional organization. Using answers to this question about trust in the CIS, we code two dependent variables: one dummy variable, *Trust CIS*, and one ordinal, *Trust Levels CIS*. The variable, *Trust CIS*, takes a value of 1 if the respondent has a great deal or quite a lot of trust in the CIS, and 0 otherwise. For our main analysis, we treat “No answer”, “Don't know”, and “Missing” as missing data. In our sample, 59 percent of the respondents trust the CIS while 41 percent do not. The second dependent variable, *Trust Levels CIS*, is coded 3 if the respondent has a great deal of trust in the CIS, 2 if she had quite a lot of trust, 1 if she did not have very much trust, and 0 if she did not trust the CIS at all.

To test our hypotheses, we prepare the following four independent variables. First, H1 suggests that negative perceptions toward immigrants reduce trust in the CIS. To measure people's perceptions toward immigrants, we rely on a question that asks respondents how they feel about having immigrants/foreign workers as neighbors. We construct an indicator variable, *Xenophobia*, that takes a value of 1 when the respondent would not like to have immigrants as neighbors, and 0 otherwise. In our sample, about 26 percent would not want immigrants as their neighbors.<sup>9</sup>

Second, H2a and H2b argue that ethnic diversity of the CIS member-state in which respondents live is an important determinant of public trust in the CIS. We borrowed data on the ethno-linguistic fractionalization from Alesina et al (2003). *Ethnic Diversity* is a variable that codes the probability that if two citizens are randomly chosen from the population, they would be from different ethnic groups within the country. Thus, the variable ranges from 0 to 1 with higher values indicating more diversity.

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<sup>8</sup> The exact wording of the question is the following: “I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them? Is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?” It is important to point out that the English version of the WVS uses the word confidence instead of trust. However, доверие is the word used in the Russian version of the WVS, which is closer to trust in English.

<sup>9</sup> We also treat all the “Don't know”, “No answer”, and “Missing” as missing values for our independent variables.

Third, according to H3a, immigrants, as beneficiaries of relatively free movement of labor, have positive attitudes toward the CIS. The WVS asks respondents whether they are immigrants in the country they live in.<sup>10</sup> *Immigrant* is coded 1 if the respondent is an immigrant, and 0 otherwise. Approximately 6 percent of the sample are immigrants.

Finally, H3b suggests that those who are vulnerable to competition for jobs with foreign workers have negative attitudes toward the CIS. As most immigrants tend to be low-skilled workers, we argue that those employed in manual labor occupations and those without jobs may feel particularly vulnerable to such competition. A question in the WVS asks respondents to evaluate the extent to which their work is manual compared to intellectual on the scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being “mostly manual tasks” and 10 being “mostly intellectual tasks.” We code *Manual Worker* as 1 if the respondent answered 3 or lower on the 10-point scale and 0 otherwise.<sup>11</sup> We also code *Unemployed* as 1 if the respondent says she or he is unemployed and 0 otherwise. In our sample, about 34 percent are manual workers, and 8 percent are unemployed.

We include several other covariates that potentially have an impact on public trust in the CIS. These covariates are partially drawn from prior research by White et al. (2010) who examined public attitudes toward the CIS in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. They found that respondents’ gender, education levels, and living standards are among the important predictors of support for the CIS. For White et al. (2010) older respondents tend to have positive attitudes towards the CIS whereas highly educated and male respondents are less likely to have such positive perceptions. Thus, we include the following demographic factors: *Gender*, *Age*, and education levels attained by the respondent. The variable *College Educated* is coded 1 if the respondent has attained a college degree and 0 otherwise.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Exact question wording for this question is: “Were you born in this country or are you an immigrant?”

<sup>11</sup> The question is worded as follows: “Are the tasks you do at work mostly manual or mostly intellectual? If you do not work currently, characterize your major work in the past. Use this scale where 1 means ‘mostly manual tasks’ and 10 means ‘mostly intellectual tasks’.”

<sup>12</sup> We have also tried different measures of education levels (e.g. primary education) but the results for our key independent variables remain substantively the same.

We also control for respondents' social class and economic standing. White et al. (2010) report that respondents with a good standard of living tend to be less sympathetic towards the CIS. The sixth WVS wave asks survey-takers which social class (the lower, working, lower-middle, upper-middle, or upper classes) they belong to. *Upper Class* variable is recorded as 1 if the respondent considers herself part of the upper. Additionally, economic factors are important to control for in studies on public attitudes. Studies on public attitudes towards the EU report that personal and national economic prospects increase the likelihood of public support for the EU (Hooghe and Marks 2005). The variable *Personal Financial Situation* is based on the WVS question asking respondents to evaluate the extent to which they are satisfied with the financial situation of their households on a 10-point scale (1 = completely dissatisfied, 10 = completely satisfied). Finally, we consider the country's level of economic development using the country's GDP per capita that we obtain from the World Development Indicators. We provide summary statistics of these variables in Table 1 below.

[Table 1]

When analyzing the dummy *Trust CIS* variable, we use a logistic model with random intercepts by country. For our second ordinal dependent variable, *Trust levels CIS*, we use an ordered logistic model with random intercepts by country. The multilevel nature of our models enables us to account for the effects of both individual- and country-level factors on public trust in the CIS. We present and discuss our results in the next section.

## **Results**

We present our results in Table 2. Models (1), (2), and (3) are logistic models with random intercepts by country in which the dependent variable is *Trust CIS*. Model (2) includes the interaction between *Xenophobia* and *Ethnic Diversity* to test H2b. Model (3) includes all control variables in addition to the key

independent variables and the interaction. Model (4) is an ordered logistic model with random intercepts by country in which the dependent variable is *Trust Levels CIS*.

[Table 2]

Are those with negative perceptions towards immigrants less likely to trust the CIS? The answer is a conditional one. In Model (1), the estimated coefficient on *Xenophobia* is negative but does not achieve statistical significance. This finding is not surprising as we expect the effect of *Xenophobia* to depend on the extent of ethnic diversity of the country which the respondent lives in. The interaction between *Xenophobia* and *Ethnic Diversity* is included in Model (2) to examine this conditional relationship. The estimated coefficient is positive, suggesting that the effect of having negative perceptions towards immigrants is less pronounced (i.e. less negative) when the country is more ethnically diverse.

To show this complex relationship between *Xenophobia*, *Ethnic Diversity*, and trust in the CIS more visually, we calculate the marginal effects of *Xenophobia* at different values of *Ethnic Diversity* while marginalizing out the other covariates. We do this using the results from Model (3). In Figure 2, we plot the average marginal effects on the y-axis while the x-axis depicts different values of *Ethnic Diversity*. The dots represent the means while the vertical lines depict the respective 95% confidence intervals. In Figure 2, when the country is not ethnically diverse (e.g. *Ethnic Diversity* = 0.2), the effect of *Xenophobia* on public confidence in the CIS is negative and statistically significant. However, as the member-state becomes more diverse, the marginal effect of *Xenophobia* on public confidence in the CIS is smaller and loses its statistical significance when *Ethnic Diversity* reaches approximately 0.4. This suggests that at higher levels of *Ethnic Diversity*, *Xenophobia's* negative impact on public confidence in the CIS is smaller. Together, these findings provide strong support for H1 and H2b and show that negative perceptions toward immigrants reduce trust in the CIS, but only in ethnically homogenous member states.

[Figure 2]



Next, we consider the effect of *Ethnic Diversity* on trust in the CIS. H2a suggests that respondents living in a more ethnically diverse CIS member-state are more likely to trust the CIS. Across the models, the coefficient estimates on *Ethnic Diversity* and those on the interactions between *Ethnic Diversity* and *Xenophobia* are positive and statistically significant. Thus, those in more ethnic diverse member-states are more likely to trust the CIS or give higher levels of trust, which is clearly consistent with H2b.

Our third pair of hypotheses consider immigrant and employment status as factors influencing confidence in the CIS. In H3a, we expected immigrants to be more likely to trust the CIS because this body facilitates free labor movement. The estimates for *Immigrant* in all four models in Table 2 are positive and statistically significant suggesting that immigrants are more likely to have confidence in the CIS compared to non-immigrants. Additionally, H3b proposes that those who are manual workers or unemployed should be less likely to trust the CIS as they are vulnerable to the competition for jobs with migrant workers. However, our results do not provide support for these predictions. First, the effect of *Manual Worker* does not achieve statistical significance across the models. We have also tried a few more different measures for *Manual Worker*, but the results remain categorically the same.<sup>13</sup> Second, the estimated coefficient on *Unemployed* is negative across all the models, suggesting that those who are unemployed have less trust in the CIS. However, the estimates are only marginally significant in Models (1) and (2) and are not significant when we include additional socio-demographic variables. These three sets of results provide partial support for our economic argument with only H3a robustly supported.

The results for the other covariates provide more insight. These findings are largely consistent with the existing findings reported in Rose and Munro (2008) and White, McAllister and Feklyunina (2010). First, female respondents seem to trust the CIS more than males. Second, our results on the *Age* variable are also consistent with findings from previous studies that older citizens tend to view the CIS more favorably (Rose and Munro 2008, White, McAllister and Feklyunina 2010). Third, those in higher social

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<sup>13</sup> First, we applied a more restrictive definition and used 1, instead of 3, as a threshold. Second, we also coded the variable using the original 10-point scale.

class positions are less likely to trust the CIS. Finally, those in wealthier countries tend to trust the CIS less than those in poorer member-states.

In sum, we find strong support for several hypotheses derived from the cultural and economic arguments on immigrants along the lines that extant, and especially EU, literature would expect. First, consistent with the cultural argument that views immigrants as a threat to the titular “core nation”, we find that those with negative perceptions towards immigrants have lower levels of trust in the CIS and that this effect is more pronounced in CIS member-states that are less ethnically diverse. Second, our results also suggest that immigrants have higher levels of trust in the CIS, which is consistent with the economic argument on immigrants. Together, our findings demonstrate that our migration-based perspective is useful in explaining public attitudes towards the CIS.

## **Conclusion**

Recent years have seen critical progress in regional integration in the post-Soviet space with the emergence and extension of the Eurasian Economic Union. At the same time, certain political events in the region, including Russian aggression in Ukraine, raise important questions about the future of regional cooperation in the post-Soviet space. Our study contributes to our understanding of regional integration in the former Soviet space by examining public attitudes toward the Commonwealth of Independent States. Given the relative success of the CIS in facilitating immigration from its member-states, our arguments place immigration front and center. We argue that people’s trust in the CIS depends on whether they view immigrants as threats to their cultures and whether they benefit from freer labor movement across the CIS member-states. Using the WVS data, we provide evidence supporting these cultural and economic arguments that relate immigration to public opinion on the CIS.

Our study also contributes to a broader literature on regional integration, which is dominated by studies on European integration. While regional integration in Europe and the former Soviet Union space

differ from one another in many ways, our study focuses on one area that integration processes in European and former Soviet regions have in common. People view both EU and the CIS as regional organizations that facilitate immigration or easy movement of persons. As a result, citizens' attitudes toward these regional organizations are influenced by their views on immigrants and whether they are immigrants themselves. We believe that these findings can be a first step toward a broader understanding of public perceptions towards regional integration beyond Europe.

Our study has several limitations that we believe can be addressed through a focus on the Eurasian Economic Union. First, our focus on the CIS may be criticized given that this is an organization that appears moribund. However, as we noted in our introduction and literature sections, the CIS remains a relevant organization that helped to ignite regional integration efforts in the post-Soviet space. We do however note that an examination of public attitudes towards the EEU, an organization that explicitly seeks deeper economic integration, would further help to extend and elucidate on the arguments we have identified in this paper.

Second, the choice of our dependent variable is far from ideal. Studies on public attitudes towards regional integration processes in Europe and elsewhere rely on questions that are specific on whether the respondent supports or opposes regional integration. While some studies have used the question we used on public trust/confidence, we believe future research should endeavor to make use of support/opposition questions, depending on data availability, in order to offer findings and conclusions that can be comparable to other studies on regional integration.

Finally, our study did not consider the extent to which public attitudes towards such phenomena as an economically rising China, the European Union, or the United States influence public level of trust in the CIS. We expect such perceptions to be influential and suggest that future research exploring the EEU also pay attention to these external factors as pushing individuals to form opinions and support for regional integration processes such as the Eurasian Economic Union.

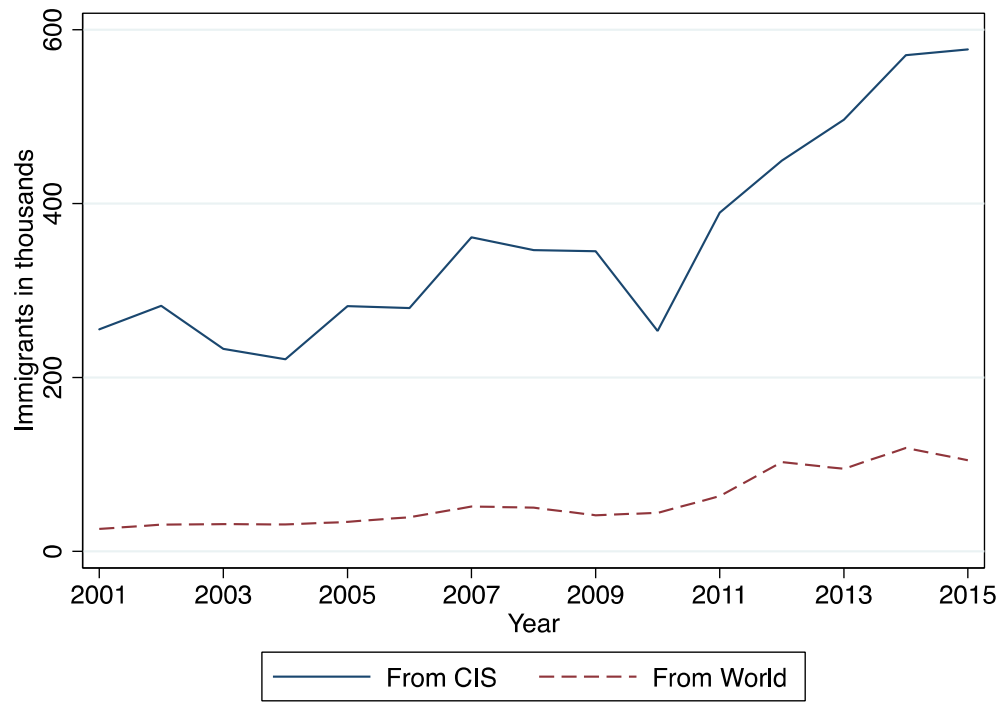
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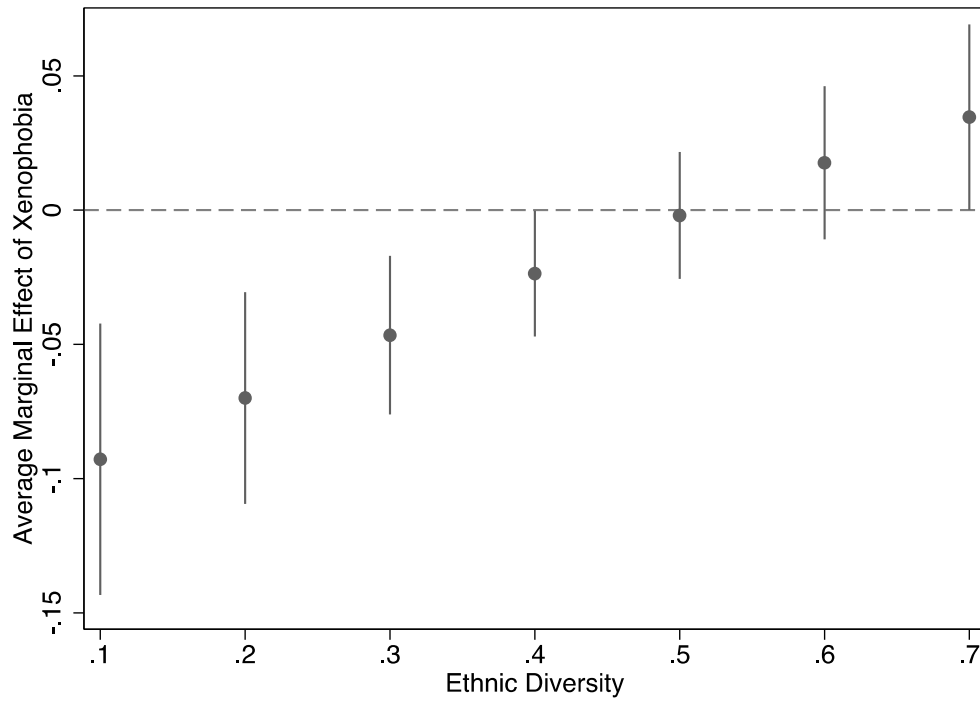
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**Figure 1. Immigration in the CIS. Source CIS Statistics**





**Figure 2. Marginal Effects of Xenophobia Conditional on Ethnic Diversity:** The y-axis represents the average marginal effects of xenophobia conditional on ethnic diversity; the x-axis the ethnic diversity variable. Dots represent the means; vertical lines the 95% confidence intervals. The quantities are calculated based on Model (3) in Table 2 and values on other covariates are marginalized over the sample.

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	Obs.	Mean	S.D	Min.	Max.
Trust CIS	10023	0.59	0.49	0.00	1.00
Trust Levels CIS	10023	1.62	0.91	0.00	3.00
Xenophobia	11128	0.26	0.44	0.00	1.00
Immigrant	11106	0.06	0.24	0.00	1.00
Manual Worker	10313	0.34	0.47	0.00	1.00
Unemployed	11102	0.07	0.26	0.00	1.00
Gender (Male = 1)	11135	0.42	0.49	0.00	1.00
Age (Year)	11135	43.34	16.90	18.00	91.00
College Educated	11119	0.26	0.44	0.00	1.00
Upper Class	10819	0.03	0.16	0.00	1.00
Personal Financial Situation	11095	5.01	2.45	1.00	10.00
Ethnic Diversity	11135	0.41	0.18	0.13	0.68
Ln(GDPpc)	11135	8.26	0.90	6.78	9.28

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Table 1: **Summary Statistics**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Xenophobia	-0.064 (0.049)	-0.424*** (0.130)	-0.451*** (0.131)	-0.551*** (0.118)
Immigrant	0.245*** (0.088)	0.246*** (0.088)	0.150* (0.090)	0.183** (0.080)
Manual Worker	0.058 (0.047)	0.059 (0.047)	0.040 (0.050)	-0.000 (0.043)
Unemployed	-0.167* (0.089)	-0.174* (0.089)	-0.013 (0.092)	-0.011 (0.079)
Gender (Male = 1)			-0.101** (0.045)	-0.113*** (0.040)
Age (Year)			0.009*** (0.001)	0.008*** (0.001)
College Educated			0.015 (0.051)	-0.037 (0.045)
Upper Class			-0.302** (0.132)	-0.264** (0.120)
Personal Financial Situation			0.046*** (0.010)	0.009 (0.008)
Ethnic Diversity	1.603*** (0.124)	1.370*** (0.147)	1.194*** (0.162)	1.213*** (0.148)
Xenophobia×Ethnic Diversity		0.839*** (0.279)	0.959*** (0.281)	1.031*** (0.253)
Ln(GDPpc)			-0.160*** (0.029)	-0.180*** (0.026)
Intercept	-0.349*** (0.062)	-0.249*** (0.071)	0.678** (0.288)	-2.632*** (0.257)
Cut point 1				-1.036*** (0.256)
Cut point 2				1.276*** (0.256)
Var: Intercept	0.201*** (0.017)	0.198*** (0.017)	0.193*** (0.018)	0.559*** (0.037)
<i>N</i>	9345	9345	9184	9184

Table 2: **Determinants of public trust in the CIS:** Models (1), (2), and (3) are logit models with random intercepts by country in which the dependent variable is a dummy indicating confidence in the CIS. Model (1) includes only the key independent variables without the interaction between Xenophobia and Ethnic Diversity. Model (2) includes the interaction between Xenophobia and Ethnic Diversity. Model (3) includes various control variables. Model (4) is an ordered logit model with random intercepts by country in which the dependent variable are the four-levels indicating confidence in the CIS. Standard errors are presented in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

