

The Geopolitical Orientation of Ordinary Belarusians: Survey Evidence from Early 2020

John O'Loughlin

University of Colorado-Boulder

johnno@colorado.edu

Gerard Toal

Virginia Tech

toalg@vt.edu

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Abstract

This paper analyzes responses to geopolitical orientation questions in a survey of Belarus residents in early 2020, just months before the political crises that erupted later in the year. We adopt a critical geopolitical perspective that highlights geopolitical cultures as fields of contestation and debate over a state's identity, orientation and enduring interests. In a representative national survey, we examine support among 1210 Belarusians to four foreign policy options for the country – neutrality as the best foreign policy, joining the European Union, staying in the Eurasian Economic Union, or developing close relations with both these organizations. We also examine the reasons behind responses to where Belarus should be on an 11-point scale from aligned with the West to aligned with Russia. In early 2020, Belarusians indicated divided geopolitical preferences in the same way as majorities in other post-Communist societies along demographic, ideological and attitudinal cleavages. Alexander Lukashenka's quarter-century dictatorship left Belarus in a condition of nascent (geo)political polarization. The 2020 electoral crisis alone did not make Belarus polarized in ways seen in other post-Soviet countries. It already was a divided polity.

The year 2020 was Belarus's "year of living dangerously". Disease met dictatorship and a long brewing legitimacy crisis came to a crisis in the aftermath of brazenly rigged Presidential election results. Approaching twenty-six years in power, President Alexander Lukashenka's initial response to the global pandemic of SARS Covid-2 was to ignore it, and then pronounce the illness it caused as curable by folk remedies like drinking vodka and taking a sauna. But it was Lukashenka's determination to cling to power that plunged Belarusian society into a perilous and unprecedented crisis. Miscalculating that opposition to his rule was splintered and would never unite around an accidental female candidate, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the protests that followed the manifestly fraudulent presidential election results gained surprising strength and momentum across Belarus in the weeks after the August 9, 2020 poll. With support from President Vladimir Putin of Russia, however, Lukashenka's regime slowly recovered from the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of Belarusians against his rule. Through the application of brutal force, imprisonment and suppression, Lukashenka rebuilt the foundations of his rule around Russian subsidies for a coercive police state that was both more intensive in its operation and extensive in its ambition of control (Benedek 2020; Marin 2021). The year 2020 left Lukashenka's Belarus not as Europe's remaining dictatorship but as Europe's newest renewed dictatorship. It also left its state apparatus, society and economy in crisis, and more dependent upon Russia than ever.

This paper contributes to understanding views of ordinary people at a time of significant domestic change and external orientations in Belarus by providing timely data and analysis. We do so through the presentation of survey research findings on geopolitical attitudes among ordinary Belarusians *before* the electoral crisis that began in August 2020. Our findings are particularly valuable because of the timing of our nationwide representative survey at the start of 2020. Not only do they provide a baseline against which future research results on beliefs and attitudes within Belarus can be measured; just as importantly, they help shed light on the question of the relative significance of long term structural and demographic trends in Belarusian geopolitical culture and society, the backdrop that even a dictatorial regime must monitor.

BELARUS IN 2020

As Belarus was convulsed by multiple crises and generated front page news across Europe and the United States in mid to late 2020, two questions preoccupied the Euro-Atlantic strategic community, the epistemic community that interprets events in Belarus for policymakers in the West. The first concerned the evolving geopolitical position of Belarus between Russia, its longstanding patron, and Euro-Atlantic institutions (the European Union and NATO) interested in drawing the country westward. Lukashenka had distanced himself from Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014 and did not recognize the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia. He stressed Belarus's 'multidirectionality' in foreign policy. This Lukashenka positionings led many within the Euro-Atlantic strategic community to favor a policy of shoring up Belarus's sovereignty, notwithstanding the dictatorial nature of the regime. This prospect of geopolitical gain at the expense of Russia saw several US officials and Washington think-tank figures travel to Minsk for talks from 2016 onward. After a decade without ambassadors, the US and Belarus agreed to re-establish full diplomatic relations in January 2019 (Congressional Research Service 2019).

Along with Western outreach to Lukashenka, 2019 also saw increased tensions with Russia (Ioffe 2020). Many, though not all, US and EU sanctions against past repressive measures in Belarus were lifted. On August 29, 2019, US National Security Adviser John Bolton met with Lukashenka in Minsk to discuss improving relations. In February 2020, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo traveled to Minsk to meet with Lukashenka, the most senior US government official to visit the country in more than two decades. Belarus's relations with Russia were especially strained at the time, with Russia suspending oil sales to Minsk which purchased oil from Norway for delivery through Lithuania (Belta 2020). Making his geopolitical gambit clear, Pompeo declared that the United States was willing and able to provide Belarus with 100% of its oil and gas needs (Shotter 2020). A 'moment of truth' meeting between Putin and Lukashenka after Pompeo's visit yielded little apparent change in their strained relationship

(Higgins 2020). Further, just before the August 2020 election, Belarus arrested a group of Russian mercenaries in the country. Lukashenka suggested they were part of a dark conspiracy against him, without naming Russia as the organizer (Lukashenka 2020). Going into the Presidential election, Euro-Atlantic/Belarus relations seemed on an upward trajectory whereas Russia-Belarus relations seemed in a downward spiral. The August election crisis changed these trends dramatically and forced Lukashenka into a public performance of fealty to Putin to obtain financing for his repressive state apparatus (Czerny 2020). With the strategy of engaging Lukashenka for geopolitical gain no longer viable, the US and EU quickly imposed new sanctions on the Minsk regime while condemning Lukashenka's brutal response to election protests. Lukashenka, for his part, returned to a conspiracist discourse that located all protests against his regime as colored revolution plots against Belarus hatched by scheming enemies in the West (Ioffe 2021a).

The second issue in early 2020 was whether Belarusian society was on a trajectory to becoming the 'next Ukraine' (Mankoff 2020). In 2014, protestors across Ukraine managed to overthrow the democratically elected government of President Viktor Yanukovich in Ukraine, a ruler generally friendly to the Kremlin. The consequences are well known. Russia invaded Crimea and annexed the peninsula while it helped pro-Russian separatists in southeast Ukraine revolt against the new government in Kyiv. The dénouement was war in the Donbas, with Russian troops intervening to prevent a defeat of the separatists. Thousands have died from this conflict, which has left Ukraine polarized and socially divided (Toal, O'Loughlin and Bakke 2020a). With Lukashenka's hold on power weakening, and Russia moving to shore up his unpopular dictatorship, the consequences of the instability, polarization and division on Belarus's society remain deeply uncertain. Is societal fracture, pitting Lukashenka loyalists against regime opponents, probable? Could the legitimacy crisis in Belarus, the re-entrenchment of autocracy in a society evidently aspiring for change, have ripple effects on the geopolitical attitudes of ordinary Belarussians? Might Belarus be on a path to becoming a geopolitically torn and divided country?

Expounding on preliminary data (Toal, O’Loughlin and Bakke 2020b), the results we present here are a time capsule of a Belarus before the ‘shock’ of the 2020 electoral crisis and subsequent state repression. While social science is drawn to dramatic events like mass protests as critical junctures, it must also be mindful of the significance of slower processes like economic precarity and demographic transition in accounting for shifting attitudes and practices. Our survey findings help researchers balance the structural and the conjunctural, the attitudinal results of slow long-term processes, during Lukashenka’s quarter-century dictatorship, before the advent of spectacular public scenes, including protests and their violent repression.

GEOPOLITICAL CULTURE AND SURVEY RESEARCH

In conducting research on the geopolitical attitudes of ordinary people in former Soviet states and territories, including our findings on Belarus, we can contextualize this research within the critical geopolitics literature. We do so here briefly through discussion of two critical geopolitical concepts -- geopolitical culture and geopolitical field – which together shape the prevailing geopolitical orientation of a country’s governing elite and its population. Since geopolitical culture, more specifically the geopolitical orientations of ordinary people, is the focus of this article, the positionality of Belarus in a regional geopolitical field defined by Russia’s strategic imperatives and overwhelming economic and cultural power is not something we consider in depth here (Buranelli 2017). We also briefly note the Political Science debate over the structure of belief in public opinion research since it tackles the crucial question of the relative consistency and coherence of the attitudes of ordinary people.

Deepening the implicit constructivism in classical geopolitics that argues that geography is partly what states make of it, critical geopolitical scholars have developed the concept that state societies have geopolitical cultures, prevailing ways of seeing and situating themselves in a world of other states (Dijkink 1996; Ó Tuathail 2003). Geopolitical cultures are fields of contestation and debate over a state’s identity and the friends, enemies and enduring interests

that characterize its foreign policy (O'Loughlin, Toal and Kolossov 2005). They feature different traditions of argument about the state's role in the world and about what orientation the state should have, given its relative location next to the distribution (horizontal space) and hierarchy (vertical space) of state power across the world political map (Toal 2017). Critical geopolitics has been extended further into the domain of everyday life and social reproduction by feminist geopolitics (Dowler and Sharp 2001). For example, research has traced the impact of the 'global war on terror' on the quotidian life experiences of minority groups (Pain and Smith 2008). Other research has highlighted how cartographic images, border practices and refugee policies produce contentious lived everyday geopolitics (Culcasi 2016; Slesinger 2016; Toal and Merabishvili 2019; Gökariksel and Secor 2020).

Public opinion surveys have long been used to chart the foreign policy attitudes of ordinary people. Because foreign policy attitudes rather than geopolitical cultures are a privileged object of research in Political Science, there has been little discussion of public opinion survey as a tool to systematically measure geopolitical cultures, most especially in smaller states. Ostensibly, this would seem to be what public opinion survey research already does when it reports findings on attitudes toward neighboring and competitor states, alliance systems, international institutions, and topical world issues. It provides a sense of how ordinary people process foreign policy questions and challenges. Three difficulties, however, quickly present themselves. First, it is not clear how asking people in a survey about their attitudes toward certain foreign policy questions of the day necessarily pinpoints the underlying geopolitical culture within which they operate. Foreign policy attitude research faces this dilemma too as it probes for consistent structures of belief. This difficulty can be ameliorated by designing survey questions that are designed to systematically measure certain defining features of geopolitical cultures. We can, for example, examine how citizens position their state within the world by asking them about which countries are friends, enemies, close or far, or stand as exemplary models for their states (O'Loughlin and Talbot 2005). We can measure the geopolitical orientations that people hold by asking them to locate their state on a spectrum between two competing poles of power, like Russia and the West. To a certain extent, this exercise has an

artificial quality to it in that the research is imposing a choice along a binary scale upon respondents. Yet, at the same time, this binary is not an invention of the research but a reflection of the prevailing binaries within a society and the larger international system. The results, in other words, help measure a discursive distinction that already exists and provide evidence of the degree to which people align with one pole or another or choose a more non-aligned option.

The second difficulty arises from the challenge of asking ordinary people about geopolitics. People in many states appear uninterested in geopolitics and foreign policy (Bennett et al, 1996; Holsti, 2009). It is seen as an elite activity, a speech act confined to experts, something far from everyday life. Yet, this is not true in all places, most especially in conflict zones and in the de facto states that have emerged from separatist struggles. There tends to be a greater interest in geopolitics here; because it is in the weave of everyday life, high politics is a salient issue such as whether the de facto state will achieve recognition by the international community (O'Loughlin, Kolossov and Toal 2014). In regions and states where great power competition actively structures political life, geopolitics is seen and felt to be pervasive. Irrespective of whether people are interested in geopolitics or not, and whether it is salient in the political life of their community or not, geopolitics inevitably shapes their lives. The relative location of their state within the international system, and the prevailing culture within their state about that position, conditions their life chances and everyday experiences. Survey research measures the expressed interest that people have in questions of politics and international affairs. But whether people are highly interested or not, the results reveal important insights about geopolitical cultures.

A third difficulty is that people have variable levels of knowledge about geopolitics. Few are well informed and even fewer have full command of the complexities of 'high geopolitics'. Furthermore, people may have attitudes that are logically inconsistent and at cross-purposes. We cannot assume that respondents will have views that cohere into a consistent geopolitical worldview. Various dilemmas in the study of structures of belief in public opinion were outlined

by Converse (1964) decades ago. Populations vary greatly by their capacity to conceptualize issues, to recognize and to consistently apply binary sorting abstractions. They do not necessarily organize their attitudes in ways similar to elites so that domestic and foreign political attitudes show general consistency. Cognitive shortcuts, like group identity, political partisanship, gender, ideology, and loyalty/aversion to public figures, do not necessarily produce clear geopolitical orientations. Beyond giving us clues into the potential for inconsistencies in geopolitical orientation when disaggregated into a series of different measures, our research underscores how we should not assume that there is any necessary or logical connection between opposition to Lukashenka and a particular geopolitical orientation. We might expect that those viewing the collapse of the Soviet Union as a wrong step are more likely to be Lukashenka loyalists and to be favorably disposed to Putin and to Russia. However, attitudes on these separate questions may not be symmetrical. Lukashenka, after all, is a leader with a tendency to tilt sharply in one geopolitical direction or its opposite depending upon his immediate political needs. Those opposed to Lukashenka therefore may be strongly pro-Russia or strongly pro-Western, trustful or distrustful of Putin. Our Belarusian work extends survey research, a comparatively rare approach, about general geopolitical orientations and perceptions in individual states (O'Loughlin, Ó Tuathail and Kolossov, 2005, 2006).

BELARUS'S GEOPOLITICAL FIELD POSITION

In studying the geopolitical orientations of ordinary people, we are studying only one expression of a geopolitical culture, a dimension that is often passive and demobilized in authoritarian states. The practice of geopolitics is normally an elite activity conducted by a few, but it is practice undertaken within fields of power that are beyond the control of individual states.

All states are shaped by their relative location within the international system of states. Neorealists tend to conceptualize this as a position within a hierarchy of states or a balance of

power, two metaphors that tend to marginalize consideration of the spatial location of states relative to the earth's geography and state power centers. Political geographers generally, and some political scientists (Gleditsch and Ward, 2001; Starr 2013; Kelly 2016) underscore the significance of spatial location in the international system. It matters less which are the most powerful states in the world than how powerful one's neighboring states are and how territorial proximity is mediated by the affordances of physical geography and all that is built upon it. A geopolitical field is the relative power geometry of international relations, the socially produced space, players and rules of the practice of statecraft across the uneven surface of the planet (Toal 2017).

In respect of geopolitics, Belarus is an interesting case study of a state conditioned by multiple spatial field relations. First, it is a territory that is of vital strategic interest to the Russian state, irrespective of who is in power in the Kremlin. In organizing Russia's territorial defense, the geographical location and flat terrain of Belarus are such that Russian military planners are compelled to treat Belarus as a vital buffer state against invasion from the West. Besides guarding the approaches to Moscow, Belarus is also a vital transit route to the Russian exclave territory of Kaliningrad. From the outset, post-Soviet Belarus's relation to Russia was shaped by this geo-strategic reality. Only six months after the dissolution of the USSR, Russia and Belarus signed a set of military agreements that coordinated their defense activities and approved the stationing of Russian strategic forces on Belarusian territory (Deyermond 2004). Though it was not an original signatory, Belarus joined the Collective Security Treaty Organization CSTO in 1993. Subsequent agreements, especially concerning air defense, effectively integrated Belarus as a territorial unit into Russian techno-military defensive space. Regular joint combined force military exercises, including the large Zapad-21 in Autumn 2021, reaffirm this integration. With the surrounding Baltic States and Poland in NATO, and Ukraine aspiring to join, the strategic and symbolic significance of Belarus as an integral part of Russia's defensive space has only grown over the last three decades.

Second, Belarus is a territory with a long history of entanglement with state systems centered in Russia. Russia, Belarus and Ukraine are imagined as three branches of the same Slavic people by pan-Slavic nationalists (Wilson 2001). Belarus is the closest of the post-Soviet states to Russia in formal administrative terms. As is well known, both states drew up a Union Treaty in 1997 (Deyermond 2004). This project was moribund for some time but it is now on the agenda again as a consequence of Lukashenka's extreme dependence upon Russia (Belta 2021). More broadly, the idea of a Russian world (*Russkii Mir*) serves as a geopolitical imaginary for visions of the Russian state as an anchor of a separate civilizational realm in Europe and Eurasia (Laruelle 2015).

Third, despite its well-documented dependence on Russia, Belarus has established itself institutionally as an independent sovereign state over the last three decades. Its status as such is internationally recognized. Despite its obvious democratic shortcomings, the Lukashenka regime created a legitimization system for the state and a variable mythology to consolidate its distinctive place in the world. Lukashenka's regime privileged Belarus's Soviet history and experience. His regime, however, has also stressed Belarus's historical ties to earlier state systems not centered in Russia, like the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Wilson 2018). But his efforts at consolidating Belarus's independence have symbolically tied the country to its Soviet past, an orientation underscored by the adoption of a national flag in 1995 that closely resembled that used by Soviet Belarus. Those opposed to his rule have long rejected this flag in favor of one associated with the briefly independent Belarusian People's Republic after World War I (Marples 2014). The ubiquity of the red and white colors of this flag among protestors visually displayed a desire for a different form of independence for Belarus than that presented by Lukashenka.

Fourth, Belarus is part of a group of "in-between states" -- Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine -- that are locations of competition and rivalry between Russia and Euro-Atlantic institutions (White, Biletskaya and McAllister 2016; Charap et al 2018; Dembinska and Smith 2021). All six states are nominally part of the European Union's Eastern

Partnership program which aspires to deepen and strengthen relations between the European Union EU, its member states and these eastern neighboring states. Along with Armenia, Belarus was generally considered the most pro-Russia of the six by the transatlantic strategic community (Charap et al 2019), with Azerbaijan and Moldova ostensibly neutral, and Georgia and Ukraine seeking to pursue a path of greater Euro-Atlantic integration (Charap et al 2018). Russian influence in the region, from energy exports to media to civil society networks, tends to be viewed as a security threat by NATO and many Western states that compromises the independence of these in-between states. All six states are typically subject to zero-sum calculations of power and influence by Russian and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

These four field positionalities of Belarus significantly shape its geopolitical culture. Its strategic location creates relations of strategic necessity, its geo-cultural location relations of friendship and connection, its independence relations of differentiation, and its in-betweenness relations of competition, suspicion, and zero-sum logics. Before 2020, the transatlantic strategic community consensus on the geopolitical culture of Belarus was that it was overdetermined by its strategic location and dependence on Russia (Ioffe 2020b). Belarus thus was the 'nearest' of Russia's 'near abroad' countries, a point reflected in recent comparative survey data of former Soviet republics (Breuning and Ishiyama, 2021). The only question was the degree to which the Lukashenka regime could leverage Belarus's nominal independence of action in order to extract better terms of dependency with Russia for the regime. Some form of distancing was always to be expected and was necessary for the legitimation of Belarus as a state. But there are limits to how far any leader in Belarus can expect to shift the country from Russia's orbit. In expelling the Russian ambassador in 2019, seeking oil overseas, hosting the US Secretary of State, and publicly denouncing Russia, Lukashenka was testing those limits in early 2020. It was at this moment – prior to the Covid-19 and the August 2020 election crises -- that we conducted our survey.

EXPECTATIONS OF CHANGE IN BELARUS

Given the paucity of reliable survey data on Belarus (Belsat, 2020; Ioffe 2021d) and the significant shifts in the geopolitical positioning of the Lukashenka regime prior to August 2020, we adopt a broadly interpretative approach. Our expectations at the outset of our research about the geopolitical orientation of ordinary Belarusians are based on extant work on Belarusian domestic politics and the regional post-Maidan context of Putin foreign policies (Torres Adan 2021). These expectations can be grouped into three different categories and can be checked for empirical support in the answers to a series of questions in our survey about neutrality, about what international institutions Belarus should join or reject, and where Belarus should position itself on a Western-Russia scale.

1. Expectations about Neutrality

Because Belarus is ostensibly an in-between state in post-Soviet space, we expected to see evidence of aspirations toward neutrality as well as for good relations with both Russia and the West. Certainly, this is the bi-directional vector that Lukashenka was pushing before the crises of 2020. While we were unsure whether it was possible to characterize ‘in-betweenness’ as matched with shared geopolitical attitudes among the survey respondents, we were interested in this possibility. A desire to “get along with everyone”, for example, could be a factor explaining why there is a substantial portion of the public in in-between states, such as Belarus, who express the preference for their country in both the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union, effectively rejecting a zero-sum choice. We expected that younger and more educated respondents as well as people in urban areas would be more likely to support neutrality. Conversely, we expected people who trust Vladimir Putin and who think that the end of the Soviet Union was a wrong step to oppose neutrality since it counters close relations with Russia.

2. Expectations about Trade Bloc Alignment Preference

Based on our research elsewhere in the post-Soviet space (O’Loughlin, Kolossov and Toal 2014), we expected that poorer and older respondents would be more oriented toward Russia. We also expected that those more trusting of government policies and of the national media would

be more supportive of Russia and thus, more supportive of the Eurasian Economic Union given the crucial role of Russian subsidies and market access in the success of Belarusian enterprises. Conversely, we expected better educated and wealthier respondents, and people living in the west of the country (Grodno and Brest oblasts) as well as in the Minsk agglomeration to show higher levels of support for European Union membership. Belarus has been denoted as a “highly distinctive model of semi-peripheral capitalism ... in which economic and political power does not, fundamentally, lie with private capital but with a bureaucratic-paternalist state apparatus (Buzgalin and Kolgonov, 2021, 443), an emphasis also in Frear (2019). Because of this unusual political-economic structure, we expected that the usual cleavages along class-income and ideological lines would somewhat blurred when compared to other Central-Eastern European countries or even some post-Soviet states such as Georgia and Ukraine. The Lukashenka model began to fray as a younger generation started to chafe at the lack of economic and political reforms in the face of economic stagnation and accompanying social welfare pressures (Douglas 2020).

3. Expectations about Geopolitical Orientation

Because of the long history of connection of Belarus to Russia in cross-cutting cultural, geopolitical and economic spaces, we expected to see a strong pro-Russia geopolitical orientation for many respondents. Within the sample, we anticipated finding consistent geopolitical attitudes aligning with either Russia or the West across a range of measures related to the demographic, ideological and social characteristics. People who share a higher trust level for President Vladimir Putin were also projected to show preferences for the Russian end of the geopolitical scale. We believed that Soviet nostalgia and conservative social views would be associated with a pro-Russia orientation as Soviet memory also has a central legitimization role for the Putin regime. Conversely, those more critical of the Soviet legacy and more supportive of post-Soviet developments would be expected to have a weaker Russia orientation. In the same vein, we anticipated that age would be a crucial divide within Belarus’s geopolitical attitudes; younger generations would be more open to membership in Western economic and security institutions and be attuned to powerful modernization influences through social media

and the internet. People with more liberal social views as well as those less inclined to conspiracist views would be expected to be more Western-oriented. Preliminary data that suggest these correlations can be found in surveys conducted by the Belarusian sociologist, Andrei Vardamatski, before the 2020 crises (Belsat, 2020).

DATA

Our survey is designed to provide a portrait of the geopolitical orientations of ordinary Belarussians in late 2019-early 2020. In this paper, we report results of five questions that display the range of geopolitical preferences in Belarus and identify the predictors associated with each through the answers on key demographic (nine variables), political (four variables), media preferences (four variables), social views (three variables) and conspiracy beliefs (two measures). We are not testing specific hypotheses but identifying the nature (for or against) and the strength of the relationship of each predictor to the geopolitical preference, while controlling for other factors in a regression approach.

The data were collected in face-to-face interviews across Belarus between December 10, 2019 and January 17, 2020, that is, about 8 months before the electoral crisis erupted. The total sample is 1210 adults and is designed to be representative of the national population distributions. Almost all respondents (97%) answered the survey in Russian, though only 64% reported it as their native language with 25% as Belarusian and 10% as *Trasyanka* (mixture of Russian and Belarusian). Almost one-quarter (22.1%) were from Minsk city and another 15% from the Minsk oblast, with proportionate numbers from the other oblasts of the country. Sampling was designed in a multi-stratified way (oblast, rayon, primary sampling units) and households were randomly sample. The survey was implemented by an independent national poll company under the supervision of the Caucasus Resources Research Center (CRRC), Tbilisi. The modeling results use weighted data for the sample to reflect population proportions.

The five specific outcome variables are a) support for a neutral Belarus between the West and Russia, b) preference for European Union EU membership, c) preference for staying in the

Eurasian Economic Union EAEU, d) preference for being close to both institutions, in effect an aspirational positioning of 'in-betweenness', and e) a preferred location for Belarus on an eleven-point scale from 0 (West) to 10 (Russia). This last measure is a useful summary of a respondent's wishes for the placement of Belarus on a range that is conventionally downscaled to a pro-Russia or pro-Western scale, but the other four measures allow us to look beyond preferences on this bi-directional scale in order to understand the support for the different dimensions of foreign policies.

Though the models have many predictors, the collinearity between them is modest. We computed stepwise models that identified the key significant predictors, but we report only the models with all variables in the model for purposes of comparison. We discuss only the significant predictors (at the .05 level). Previewing some key results for social attitudes, we do find consistent correlations between geopolitical aspirations and demographic/ideological views. The political cleavages that Kitschelt (1992) identified in post-Communist societies in the decade after the 1989-1991 transformations are also visible in contemporary Belarus in a survey with a geopolitical focus. The kind of dramatic societal upheavals that occurred in Central-Eastern Europe in the 1990s were not experienced in Lukashenka's Belarus where economic, political and social reforms were closed-off by the regime. A growing polarization of attitudes and beliefs that sometimes lean towards Russia but in other dimensions, lean to the West was becoming visible in early 2020.

The distribution of answers (unweighted) for all outcome and predictor variables are shown in Table 1. The geopolitical options show strong support for an affirmative answer at 73% to the prompt that "neutrality between the West and Russia is the best foreign policy option for Belarus." This vague aspiration, however, is countered by answers to the other geopolitical questions which asked specifically about policies on joining international institutions. The strong endorsement of neutrality, though, shows a general aspiration for an unaligned status at a time when relations between Russia and the West were deteriorating significantly after the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, the change in government in Kyiv, the annexation by Russia of

the Crimean Peninsula, and the war in the Donbas. When the results on neutrality are compared to the distribution of responses on the 11 point scale of West (0) to Russia (10), there is no distinct bunching of preferences in the middle of the range (points 4 to 6). Similarly, when faced with the three options of membership in an international grouping, either continued EAEU membership, joining the EU or close to both organizations, the latter option gets less than majority support, at 36%. (“Join no Union” got 9%). Preference for joining the EU is only about one-third the ratio of the preference for staying in the EAEU (Table 1).

President Lukashenka had a very low trust rating at the time of the survey, at 26% from our calculation via a list experiment that randomly assigning respondent to two groups. (The control group were asked how many of four groups/institutions respondents trusted - people who live locally, religious leaders, police and people of the respondent’s ethnic group. The treatment added Lukashenka to this list). It should be remembered that this low score was calculated before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic that was badly handled by the government and before the election crisis that erupted in August 2020. The low 26% trust for Lukashenka is in line with the 22% of respondents who indicate that Belarus was “heading in the right direction” (O’Loughlin, Toal and Bakke, 2020).

Our modeling includes key demographic measures such as age (median 45), education, family material status, religion and a regional distribution of respondents that matches recent population data (Table 1). On a key attitudinal measure, Belarus is similar to other post-Soviet states with only 29% of respondents thinking that the end of the Soviet Union was a ‘right step.’ Nearly half the sample say that they are ‘not interested’ in politics. While television is still the primary source of news, people have relatively little trust in the Belarusian media. President Vladimir Putin of Russia had significant levels of trust (higher than Lukashenka) in Belarus with 36% of respondents giving him ‘a little’ and 39% ‘a lot’ of trust.

Belarusians remain quite conservative in their social attitudes with 95% agreeing that “marriage should only be between a man and a woman”; only 29% disagree with the proposition that

“husbands only should make the important decisions in a marriage”; and about 30% believe that a “secret group controls events and rules the world together” with another 30% neither agreeing or disagreeing. Only 21% disagree with the statement that “NGOs are foreign agents”, a particularly sensitive term in the post-Soviet space. The collinearity among the conspiracy and cultural beliefs prompts are weak, however. The correlation between the ‘secret group control’ and ‘foreign agents’ conspiracies is $-.129$ and that for ‘only men and women should marry’ and ‘husband making important decisions’ is $+.014$. The negative relationship between the conspiracies could be because those who have ‘secret groups’ in mind are thinking of Russian operatives in Belarus and while those who believe the ‘foreign agents’ conspiracy had Western NGOs in mind. While we have no expectations regarding the geopolitical preferences that derive from conspiratorial beliefs, there is little doubt that such views, often promoted by government agencies, are of growing importance in the post-Soviet space (Radnitz, 2021).

Asked about the best political system, the answers are very splintered, with the Soviet system and the Western democratic system each receiving about 32% support, while the Belarusian one tied with the Russian one at about 14% each. This split also mirrors a similar one for preference in movies with about one-third of the sample each preferring contemporary Russian or Soviet-era films, and about one-quarter of respondents opting for Western movies (Hollywood or European).

Belarusians display mixed and somewhat contradictory views regarding the nature of their country’s relations with Russia on the one side and Western powers on the other. A strong and consistent majority across a number of questions want to maintain good relations with both power centers. This can be seen in the 64% of Belarusians who agreed that their country should establish ‘full diplomatic relations’ with the United States, a highly salient issue in 2019-20. But when asked about a model country for Belarus, no Western country got more than 5%, with Russia clearly the leader in this open question at 28%. Just over 18% could not name any positive model. Concerns about Russia’s historically pre-eminent role in Belarus appears to be low with only 22% agreeing that Russia “controls many politicians in our country”.

GEOPOLITICAL ORIENTATIONS IN BELARUS

We examine expectations of how Belarusians express their geopolitical preferences via four logistic models (with accompanying robustness checks via linear models) and one linear regression model. In the logistic models, the binary outcome by an approach that defined agreement with a score of 1 and all other options as 0. To minimize the number of cases dropped from the analysis, most predictors are also recoded as binary variables. For example, the end of the Soviet Union predictor is recoded as 1 for 'right step' 1 and as 0 for 'wrong step', 'don't know' and 'refuse'. Age, education, mood and family material status are not recoded in this binary manner.

In binary logistic models, a useful measure of model fit is the ability of the model to predict the answers of the respondents on the basis of their characteristics and attitudes. The default cutoff for such predictions is a 50-50 break so that, for example, a 55% probability of choosing an outcome would be classified as a correct prediction. In our models below in Table 2, we raised the threshold to a 67%-33% break to reduce the chances of a false positive. This more conservative approach means that we have a higher level of confidence in the models and their predictive qualities. The relationships for the logit models are presented as odds ratios, so that (e.g.) a value greater than 1 (say, 1.36) for women (compared to men) can be interpreted as a 36% greater likelihood of women agreeing with the question's prompt (posed as a statement or geopolitical choice) and a value less than 1 (say 0.72) can be interpreted as a lesser (28%) likelihood of women supporting the statement compared to men. All estimates take into account the effects of the other variables in the models.

"Neutrality is best for Belarus" models

Almost three-quarters of respondents in our survey supported neutrality for Belarus. The overall model fit is good with 68.4% of the binary outcomes correctly classified by the model (with the 67%-33% threshold for a positive classification) and a Nagelkerke R^2 value of 0.317

(Table 2). Given the timing of the survey when Lukashenka was pushing an in-between model for the country which implies a more independent policy with respect to Russia, we expected general support across many demographic groups and ideologies. Respondents who are Orthodox (1.45), those who say that television is their main news source (1.73 - thus likely more exposed to the Lukashenka policy), and those who hold traditional values “husbands should make the important decisions” (1.48) are significantly more likely to support neutrality than their counterparts. Among the significant negative predictors, those who think that “democracy is the best political system” (0.66), those who trust Vladimir Putin a lot (0.60), and traditionalists who think that “marriage should be between a man and a woman” (0.74) do not support neutrality as the best policy. Those who trust Vladimir Putin share doubts about neutrality for Belarus, presumably because they want closer relations to Russia, and those who think that “democracy is the best political system” are expressing an opposite view, a clear preference for Western political systems. For both groups of respondents, neutrality is not a preferred option given their different orientations. A rejection of the neutrality option is visible for those who prefer closer integration with Russia as well as those who want a more pro-Western policy for Belarus.

Best foreign policy option for Belarus – Join the EU, Stay in the EAEU or Close to Both.

Surveys around foreign policy decisions tend to concentrate on support or opposition to specific governmental actions – such as joining a military alliance or economic bloc, reversing a long-standing position towards a particular country, or engaging in military actions. (Hurwitz and Peffley, 1987). We recognize that non-specific geopolitical views can be malleable, unstable and often ill-informed and therefore, we included a question in the Belarus survey that directly posed a policy choice among four options: a) stay in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) dominated by Russia and in which Belarus was a founding member in 2014; b) join the European Union like neighbors Poland, Latvia and Lithuania; and c) remain close to both the EAEU and EU, which can be seen as a restatement of an unaligned neutral position. We do not examine the fourth option here – that of staying out of all Unions chosen by 9% of respondents.

By focusing separately on support for three options of international membership, we can identify the characteristics of respondents supporting or opposing each one (Table 2).

The values (odds ratios) for the predictors can be compared within each model or they can be compared more generally across the three models. Thus, if an odds ratio was large for a demographic group for the model of EU membership, one would expect an opposite value for that group for remaining in the EAEU. A quick glance across the rows for individual predictors shows that this expectation mostly holds, further evidence of the growing polarity of opinion about direct foreign policy choices for Belarus. But some inconsistencies are evident in the table as well.

Strong consistent results in line with expectations of foreign policy preferences among Belarusians are visible in the odds ratios in the model for remaining in the EAEU (Table 2). The fit of the model is good with a R^2 of .331 and a ratio of correctly classified responses of 69.0%. Support for staying in the EAEU is more in line with expectations with high positive odds ratios for those who have a lot of trust for Putin (2.11), Russians (1.56), Orthodox (1.56), residents of the East (1.38) and those who think that NGO's are 'foreign agents' (1.64). As expected, not staying in the EAEU is supported by respondents with higher educational attainment (0.80 odds ratio), by those who think "democracy is the best political system" (0.39), and by those who think that "the end of the Soviet Union was a right step" (0.60).

Joining the EU as one of the foreign policy options has only small minority support (12%) in Belarus. Respondents whose preferences generally lean West would be expected to support this move. The model fit is very good with a R^2 of 0.538 and a correctly classified score of 81.7%. The education predictor at 1.26 (those with a higher education more likely to support EU membership) fits this expectation. Other high odds ratios supporting EU membership, all in line to expectations, are seen for those thinking that those who think that "the end of the Soviet Union was a right step" (1.79), older respondents (1.02) and those who think that "democracy is the best political system" (1.75). Among those not supporting EU membership

are an expected set of respondents – those trusting the Belarusian media (0.51), better off families (0.75), those who think that “marriage should only be between a man and a woman” (0.71), those who trust the Belarusian media (0.51) and those who think that NGOs are ‘foreign agents’ (0.60). The modeling for EU membership shows the clearest cleavages among the Belarusian sample in their preferences for which international institutions the country should enter (or remain in). It also implies a more divided population than the other foreign policy choices.

Because opting for a policy that is “close to both the EU and the EAEU” is an expression of neutrality or at least, a preference for a unaligned position for Belarus, we would expect some similarity to the values (size and direction) for the neutrality model. The overall model fit is good with a R^2 of .191 and a percentage correctly classified at 65.1%. Expected positive relationships for this ‘in-between’ position are seen for those who think that “the end of the Soviet Union was a right step” (1.39) and for those with more education (1.20) and those who think that “democracy is the best political system” (1.44). Opposition to this position of remaining close to both organizations would be expected for those inclined to support Belarusian for EU membership as well as for those who think that the country should stay in the EAEU. Values for Belarusians that generally disagree with government positions and are more Western oriented– those who think the country is going in the wrong direction (0.70) and that they that NGOs are ‘foreign agents’ (.64) as well as those who prefer Western movies (0.60). Like other models, the fit is good and the significant relationships reflect a society where stable geopolitical preferences were becoming evident at the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020.

Where do Belarusians want to be? Geopolitical orientation preferences.

Our most general question about the geopolitical orientations of Belarusians asked where, on an eleven-point scale from 0 (West) to 10 (Russia), they believed their country should be placed. All points on the scale got some support with both a greater concentration in the center – again reflecting the preferences of about one-quarter to one-third of the sample to sit between the two poles – but also greater leaning toward Russia than toward the West near the

ends of the scale. We understand that the bi-directional prompt does not completely capture the possible wider range of choices but with the options arrayed on a scale in this way, respondents who wished to avoid a West versus Russia choice could hypothetically place their preferences in the center. About 9% of respondents could not decide and 1% refused to answer this question. It is unknown if the one-tenth of the sample who answered in this manner are opting out of the hypothetical geopolitical choices for reasons of disinterest or disenchantment with the Western and Russian options. Since the outcome variable in this instance is an interval scale, we opted to use a linear regression model with the same predictors as the logit models of policy choices for the analysis. The results are presented in Table 3.

We present both the unstandardized and standardized coefficients so that the effect in terms of changes on the West-Russia scale as well as the relative size effect of each predictor can be seen. Positive values show the factors that move the preferences towards Russia while negative values show the opposite effect towards the West.

The biggest pro-Russia effects moving the scale in that direction is seen for women (3.2 points), residents of the East of the country and Minsk (3.5 points each) and respondents who say that social media/internet provides their main news sources (3.0 points each) as well as those who get most of their information from television (4.4 points). This gender effect is clearly related to age as women are disproportionately older in the sample and the joint effect can be seen in the standardized coefficient column where age is the second largest effect (.231) after those who say that they have a strong interest in political matters (.247). This socialization of the Soviet generation is still reflected in the pro-Russian position.

The biggest factors that move the needle towards the West are for those who say that “democracy is the best political system” (3.8 points more likely to aspire to the West than those who prefer other political systems) and for those who believe that Belarus is going in the wrong direction (a 3.8 points Western shift). The effect for those who think that “the end of the Soviet Union was a right step” is sizable (2.7 points) and significant at the .06 level. But individuals

who believe in conspiracies (“a secret group controls global affairs”) also shift preferences to the West, probably a result of the widespread perception of Russian involvement in domestic Belarusian affairs and media manipulation.

Since the units for the predictors of the West-Russia orientation are measured on very different scales, the standardized coefficients in Table 3 shows their comparative importance. Here the demographic characteristics (women and older age groups) are important push factors in promoting aspiration to Russia as well as those with a strong interest in politics. The nature of the information source is also important for the pro-Russia view for viewers of television (for more on the role of Belarusian media in the contemporary protests, see the articles by Wijemars and Lokot, 2021 and Mateo 2021). But believing that “Belarus is moving in the wrong direction”, that “democracy is the best political system”, that “the end of the Soviet Union was a right step” all moved the scale significantly to the West. Conspiracists (“secret group in control”) are correlated with pro-West positionality.

The contradictory results for the social conservatives and believers in conspiracies are not easily explainable. Social conservatism in our Belarusian sample is not related to age, education or political system preferences as we determined from crosstabulations with age groups, educational levels and those who preferred democracy. Similar equal distributions across these dimensions are seen for both social attitudinal variables – ‘marriage should only be between a man and a woman’ and ‘husbands should make the important decisions in a marriage’. Gender differences are large for the latter belief with men twice as likely as women (51% to 25.4%) to agree with the proposition. The “secret groups in control” distribution is similarly uncorrelated with age, education and political system preference.

As a robustness check on the logistic model results, we also calculated OLS effects for the same predictors and outcomes. The results (Appendix 1) generally support the results in Table 2. Variables are consistent in their relative levels of significance and in their direction (positive and negative). The only differences are evident for the age factor. In the linear models, age

becomes a significant predictor for all four outcomes of ‘neutrality is best’, for joining the EU, for remaining in the EAEU, and for remaining close to both the EU and the EAEU. For both the EU membership and stay in the EAEU, age is positively related (older people preferring both contradictory options) and significant, with the in-between options of ‘neutrality best’ and close to both EU and EAEU showing opposite coefficients (negative and significant).

It is evident from these regressions of both foreign policy options and more latent preferences for Belarus’ orientation on a West-Russia scale that Belarusians are cementing their preferences in the same way as majorities in other post-Soviet societies along demographic, ideological and attitudinal cleavages. We identified many expected correlates that reflect the evolving social and economic conditions that began to coalesce in Belarus over the past five years. Whether these changes will eventually become more concrete in (geo)political preferences that match expected placements as is the case in other post-Soviet states (Breuning and Ishiyama, 2021) is still an open question.

“GEOGRAPHY WILL NOT CHANGE”

It is a conventional among strategic analysts to declare that Belarus’s fate is determined by its location next to the Russian Federation and that its geography will not change (Higgins 2020). This commonplace comment, however, is deeply misleading. Geography is not solely a matter of absolute location on a map. It is always also a matter of relative location, in Belarus’s case to shifting power centers and geo-economic blocs. Further, it is a matter of perceived location, the prevailing cultural sense among a population of a region or state as to who they are and where they see themselves in the world. This is geopolitical culture, it is never static and is particularly so when a country is led by a wily dictator like Alexander Lukashenka who has proven extremely resourceful in tacking his geopolitical rhetoric to maneuver against whatever headwinds facing him.

This paper presents the results of a nationally representative survey in Belarus conducted at the outset of 2020. A global pandemic and the largest anti-government protests in Belarus's history followed later in the year before the repressive state apparatus imposed itself upon those aspiring for domestic political change in Belarus. In its acute moment of crisis, the Lukashenka dictatorship was rescued by Russian advisers, equipment and, most of all, massive financial support. The price for this support is unfolding. Belarus is currently being consolidated anew into a Russian sphere of influence. Economic integration is advancing apace while Belarusians abroad are being pressured to return to their homeland, or persecuted. An existing geopolitical divide between the European Union and Belarus has only hardened in the last year, with high profile airspace and land border conflicts (Dixon 2021, Katz, Olson et al. 2021). On the one-year anniversary of the 2020 election, Lukashenka raged against the West (Nechepurenko and Hopkins 2021). But Belarus looks a lot less sovereign as a state today than it did in 2019, with a potential Union state with Russia once again in advanced planning (Kremlin 2021). On the other hand, no one is as practiced as Lukashenka in maneuvering against any Russian assimilation. The evolving social and economic conditions that began to coalesce in Belarus over the past five years and the crises and resulting repression of 2020 continue to generate (geo)political polarization as seen in other post-Soviet countries. The survey findings balance the structural and the conjunctural as seen in the outcomes of long-term processes during Alexander Lukashenka's quarter-century dictatorship.

The question that remains is whether Russia has paid a reputational price for its rescue of Lukashenka among those ordinary Belarusians who aspired to see him depart. Other papers in this special issue take up that question and it will undoubtedly be a focus of future research efforts. What the results of our survey at the outset of Belarus's "year of living dangerously" underscore is that there was considerable fluidity and incoherence in the geopolitical attitudes of ordinary Belarusians. The consolidated anti-Russian and pro-West orientation that we see in other post-Soviet states, like Ukraine and Georgia, did not exist in Belarus to anything near the same extent. Unlike those other two states, which experienced invasions by the Russian

military and the loss of sovereignty over certain parts of their state territory, Belarus did not have a salient negative event involving Russia. Is Russia's rescue of Lukashenka now such an event, a rupture that will generate a clear geopolitical divide that reaches deep into society? Or is this a question that reflects our own preoccupations and biases and not the concerns of ordinary Belarusians? This is a matter that requires research open to the empirical complexities of Belarus that we have identified. Belarus today under Lukashenka is an active frontline player in the confrontation between Euro-Atlantic institutions and the Russian Federation. We identified aspirations for 'unalignment'/neutrality and 'multidirectionality' in foreign policy but these are now less salient than personal survival. Confrontation lines have spread further across European post-Soviet space and there is little prospect of them easing any time soon.

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Variable	
"Neutrality is best for Belarus"	Yes 78.8%; No 18.0%; DK/refuse 3.2%
Best option for Belarus	EU 14.5%; Stay in EAEU 29.8%; Close relations with both 40.3%; Not join any Union 9.1%; DK/refuse 6.3%
Where Belarus should be (scale)	0(West)1.1%; 1 3.4%; 2 4.0%; 3 7.3%; 4 6.3%; 5 16.1%; 6 6.6%; 7 14.5%; 8 12.3%; 9 11.5%; 10 (Russia) 5.8%; DK/refuse 11.1%
Gender	Men 45.0%; Women 55.0%
Age	Mean Age 45; Age 18-30 20.3% Age 31-45 28.3%; Age 46-60 25.3%; Over 60 26.1%
Education	Below secondary 26.3%; Secondary 38.4%; Post secondary 36.3%
Nationality	Belarusian 87.5%; Russian 8.9%; Other 3.6%
Mood	Wonderful 18.8%; Average 66.6%; Stressful 12.6%; Fearful 2.0%
Family Material Status	Not enough for food 5.9%; Enough for food 22.1%; Enough for food/clothes 57.4%; Can buy some expensive goods 13.2%; Can buy anything 0.6%; DK/refuse 0.8%
Religion	Non-believer 31.4%; Orthodox 56.8%; Catholic 6.0%; Other/refuse 5.2%
Regional distribution	Minsk 21.7%; East 35.1%; West 28.0%; Center 15.2%
Interest in Politics	Very interested 6.7%; Sometimes 45.2%; Not interested 47.4%; DK/refuse 0.7%
Information Main Source	Television 51.3%; Social media/internet 43.3%; Other 4.0%; DK/refuse 0.2%
Trust Belarusian media	No trust 23.7%; A little 59.9%; A lot 13.5%; DK/refuse 2.8%
Trust Vladimir Putin	No trust 18.3%; A little 36.3%; A lot 39.3%; DK/refuse 6.1%
Preference in Movies	Western 26.6%; Russian 32.5%; Soviet 34.8%; Other 3.8%; DK/refuse 2.0%
Best Political System	Soviet 31.9%; Current Belarus 14.5%; Democratic 31.8%; Russian 13.9% DK/refuse 7.9%
Direction of Belarus	Right direction 21.6%; Wrong direction 51.8%; DK/refuse 19.6%
"NGOs are foreign agents"	Agree 18.5%; Neither agree nor disagree 29.6%; Disagree 21.4%; Dk/refuse 30.5%
"Secret group running the world"	Agree 29.5%; Neither agree nor disagree 30.0%; Disagree 21.9%; DK/refuse 18.6%
"Marriage should be only a man and woman"	Agree 94.5%; Neither agree nor disagree 2.8%; Disagree 2.4%; DK/refuse 0.3%
"Husbands should make the important decisions"	Agree 34.5%; Neither agree nor disagree 35.1%; Disagree 28.8% DK/refuse 1.5%
End of USSR -right or wrong step?	Right step 29.1%; Wrong step 56.7%; DK/refuse 14.2%

Table 1- Distributions (unweighted) of the 1210 Responses in Belarus - Outcomes and Predictors

Predictor	Neutrality best	Stay in EAEU	Join EU	Close to both
Trust in Vladimir Putin	0.603 (.003)	2.111 (.000)	1.222 (.273)	0.851 (.266)
End of SU Right Step	0.963 (.818)	0.604 (.004)	1.793 (.001)	1.391 (.029)
Social Media Main Source	1.541 (.098)	0.609 (.068)	0.775 (.392)	1.389 (.209)
TV Main Source	1.732 (.032)	0.817 (.435)	0.596 (.079)	1.021 (.634)
Prefer Western Movies	0.947 (.761)	1.252 (.240)	1.224 (.327)	0.595 (.002)
Trust Belarus Media	1.117 (.481)	0.838 (.276)	0.510 (.000)	1.237 (.156)
Belarus in Wrong Direction	0.969 (.828)	0.873 (.352)	0.882 (.474)	0.701 (.010)
“Secret group in control”	1.120 (.445)	1.117 (.455)	1.053 (.766)	0.928 (.588)
“Marriage only between Men & Women”	0.740 (.001)	1.185 (.095)	0.712 (.006)	0.700 (.000)
“Husband should make important decisions”	1.480 (.000)	1.022 (.806)	0.985 (.882)	1.085 (.318)
“NGOs are foreign agents”	0.822 (.243)	1.641 (.003)	0.600 (.022)	0.644 (.010)
Interest in Politics	0.990 (.917)	0.858 (.140)	0.757 (.016)	1.021 (.829)
Democracy is Best System	0.655 (.014)	0.394 (.000)	1.024 (.000)	1.439 (.023)
Russian Nationality	1.054 (.821)	1.555 (.049)	0.288 (.001)	0.735 (.177)
Age	0.992 (.103)	1.008 (.089)	1.024 (.000)	0.993 (.122)
Women	1.132 (.408)	0.724 (.034)	0.928 (.673)	1.299 (.067)
Education	1.001 (.991)	0.804 (.029)	1.255 (.050)	1.131 (.187)
Family Economic Situation	1.161 (.111)	0.934 (.473)	0.752 (.004)	0.910 (.291)
Mood	1.165 (.201)	0.925 (.444)	0.804 (.066)	1.031 (.752)
Orthodox religion	1.454 (.008)	1.557 (.002)	0.723 (.049)	0.781 (.063)
Minsk resident	0.897 (.555)	1.285 (.166)	1.107 (.618)	0.801 (.183)
East resident	0.865 (.355)	1.386 (.042)	1.138 (.493)	0.824 (.196)
% correctly classified (cut .667)	68.4	69.0	81.7	65.1
Nagelkerke R ²	.317	.331	.538	.191

Table 2: Odds ratios and significance levels for models of preferences for international institutions. Percent correctly classified is based on a threshold value of 0.667. Number of respondents in Belarus = 1210

Predictor	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	t (significance)
Trust in Vladimir Putin	-1.064	-.026	-0.774 (.439)
End of SU Right Step	-2.743	-.061	-1.867 (.062)
Social Media Main Source	2.975	.080	1.214 (.225)
TV Main Source	4.392	.130	1.828 (.068)
Prefer Western Movies	-1.745	-.038	-1.084 (.279)
Trust Belarus Media	-0.660	-.023	-0.464 (.643)
Belarus in Wrong Direction	-3.784	-.110	-2.891 (.004)
“Secret group in control”	-3.171	-.074	-2.402 (.016)
“Marriage only between Man & Woman”	-1.309	-.087	-1.493 (.136)
“Husband should make important decisions”	0.519	.045	.669 (.504)
“NGOs are foreign agents”	-2.234	-.042	-1.456 (.146)
Interest in Politics	2.375	.247	2.582 (.010)
Democracy is Best System	-3.808	.089	-2.453 (.014)
Russian Nationality	-1.702	-.022	-.822 (.411)
Age	0.113	.231	2.531 (.011)
Women	3.165	.100	2.330 (.020)
Education	0.349	.033	0.393 (.694)
Family Economic Situation	-0.240	-.029	-.284 (.776)
Mood	0.351	.031	.388 (.698)
Orthodox religion	-1.212	-.038	-.952 (.341)
Minsk resident	3.545	.068	2.206 (.028)
East resident	3.534	.091	2.487 (.013)
R = .529 R ² = .280. Adjusted R ² = .266. Standard error of the estimate 20.64			

Table 3: Results of the OLS model of “where Belarus should be on the West-Russia scale”.

Predictor	Neutrality best	Stay in EAEU	Join EU	Close to both
Trust in Vladimir Putin	-.100	.149	.020	-.047
End of SU Right Move	-.010	-.047	.093	.059
Social Media Main Source	.076	-.022	-.023	.079
TV Main Source	.108	-.007	-.073	.053
Prefer Western Movies	-.035	.051	.040	-.127
Trust Belarus Media	.031	-.022	-.082	.047
Belarus in Wrong Direction	-.057	.011	-.055	-.079
“Secret group in control”	-.009	.037	.041	-.038
“Marriage only between Man & Woman”	-.105	.055	-.092	.084
“Husband should make important decisions”	.059	.064	-.016	.013
“NGOs are foreign agents”	-.023	-.047	.073	.028
Interest in Politics	-.031	.029	-.086	-.023
Democracy is Best System	-.036	-.158	.062	.097
Russian Nationality	.023	.051	-.098	-.022
Age	-.088	.171	.138	-.098
Female	.038	-.083	.010	.073
Education	-.017	-.045	.073	.037
Family Economic Situation	.011	.043	-.083	-.036
Mood	.049	.007	-.056	-.010
Orthodox religion	.061	.086	-.051	-.052
Minsk resident	-.053	.050	-.006	-.025
East resident	-.061	.071	.020	-.031

Appendix 1: Standardized linear regression coefficients for preference for international institutions. 1210 respondents in Belarus.

