CRRC-Georgia

HOW TO TELL AN EFFECTIVE STORY

Foreign Policy Options, Motivated Reasoning,
and the Limits of Persuasion

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INTRODUCTION

Public opinion on Georgia's foreign policy is often described as strongly pro-Western. Survey data consistently shows solid support for EU membership and broad recognition of Russia as the country's main adversary.[1] At the same time, this apparent consensus is less stable than it seems at first glance. When foreign relations choices are framed differently—for example, by introducing the alternative of maintaining good relations with Russia or choosing neutrality—public support for a pro-Western orientation decreases noticeably.[2] This variability suggests that attitudes toward foreign policy are shaped not only by firm values but also by how the relationship choices are described.

The flexibility of public opinion creates fertile ground for information manipulation. In Georgia's media environment, anti-Western narratives have become increasingly visible in recent years. These narratives do not tell outright lies. Instead, they selectively choose certain facts and appeal to existing public concerns—particularly fears that Western integration threatens national identity, traditional values, and security.[3]

Against this backdrop, understanding what determines the effectiveness of stories about foreign policy becomes critically important. If public opinion can shift depending on how a story is framed, then identifying which story factors matter has direct implications both for information manipulation and for efforts to counter it. Accordingly, this study aims to answer two main research questions. First, which factors most strongly determine the effectiveness of a story

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[1] Caucasus Research Resource Centers, "Caucasus Barometer," 2004, accessed February 1, 2026, http://caucasusbarometer.org.

[2] Support for the EU falls to 66% when it is contrasted with improving relations with Russia. Caucasus Research Resource Centers, "Public Attitudes in Georgia," 2003, accessed February 1, 2026, http://caucasusbarometer.org. When neutrality is offered as an alternative, 48% say Georgia would be better protected by remaining neutral, while only 27% believe closer relations with the West would provide greater security. Caucasus Research Resource Centers, "Guardian Surveys," 2025, unpublished dataset.

[3] Mariam Kobaladze and Salome Dolidze, "Anti-Western Rhetoric on Facebook: From November 29, 2024 to November 29, 2025." - anti-western-rhetoric-on-facebook_sida-report-3_eng.pdf. Surveys show that 34% believe that the European Union promotes LGBT propaganda, 31% consider it incompatible with Georgia's traditions, and 20% believe it is drawing the country into the war - Lia Chkhetiani and Koba Turmanidze, "Conspiracy Theories and Anti-Western Attitudes in Georgia," 2025, accessed January 12, 2026, ned-report-25.02-final.pdf.

about foreign relations? Second, can story framing significantly change established attitudes in society toward desired and undesired foreign partners?

To answer the research questions, we conducted two experimental studies on foreign relations. To reduce the influence of emotional cues frequently used by anti-Western propaganda, we deliberately selected foreign trade for the laboratory experiment—a topic that rarely serves as the main focus of anti-Western messaging. For the nationally representative survey experiment, we focused on a general theme: deepening relations with foreign partners. However, the areas of cooperation used in this experiment include topics that have frequently been targeted by anti-Western propaganda.

Within a vignette-based factorial design, we composed stories about foreign relations. The factors include the partner's identity, the story's author (or disseminator), the story's tone, the type of cooperation, the precondition for cooperation, and social media support. During the experiment, we systematically varied the components of each factor and observed what effect these changes had on story evaluations and credibility, as well as on behavioral dynamics toward the foreign partner.

This approach allowed us to study the relative importance of different story factors for story effectiveness and to assess the extent to which story framing can shape public opinion and behavior.

METHODS

Public opinion on foreign relations does not form in a neutral information environment. It is shaped by established perceptions of foreign partners and by the specific factors and components of the stories used to describe these relationships. To assess what makes stories about foreign policy effective, we used experimental methods that establish causality between story factors and outcomes.

We conducted two complementary experiments: a laboratory experiment (N = 322) and a survey

experiment embedded in a nationally representative survey (N = 2,479). In both cases, participants received short hypothetical stories (vignettes) describing Georgia's foreign relations. The use of vignette-based factorial design is useful for systematically varying key factors and establishing the independent effect of each factor.[4]

In the experimental studies, we used several key factors to construct stories about foreign policy. The laboratory experiment describes trade-related stories and includes factors such as the trade partner, the type of trade, the trade precondition, and the political affiliation of the story's author. The survey experiment expands the scope by including additional partners, as well as introducing the story's tone, the substantive area of cooperation, the type of media disseminating the story, and the level of social media support.

In each story, we varied the components of the relationship factors according to predetermined rules and observed corresponding changes in participants' attitudes. This approach allows us to answer the main research question: what determines story effectiveness—what the story is about, who the story is about, who tells the story, or how the story is told? The factors and components are summarized in Table 1.

To operationalize story effectiveness, we selected several indicators that reflect both the declared attitudes and behavioral responses of experiment participants. In both experiments, participants evaluate each vignette along dimensions such as personal approval, perceived benefit to the country, subjective credibility, and general credibility. In the survey experiment, participants additionally indicate whether they would "like" the story on Facebook.

[4] Jens Hainmueller, Daniel J. Hopkins, and Teppei Yamamoto, "Causal Inference in Conjoint Analysis: Understanding Multidimensional Choices via Stated Preference Experiments," *Political Analysis* 22, no. 1 (2014): 1–30, https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpt024.

Peter M. Steiner, Christiane Atzmüller, and Dan Su, "Designing Valid and Reliable Vignette Experiments for Survey Research: A Case Study on the Fair Gender Income Gap," *Journal of Methods and Measurement in the Social Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2016): 52–94, https://doi.org/10.2458/v7i2.20321.

Osman Sabri Kiratli and Sabri Arhan Ertan, "When to Not Respond in Kind? Individuals' Expectations of the Future and Their Support for Reciprocity in Foreign Policy," *Political Behavior* 46, no. 2 (2024): 1013–1035, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-023-09857-y.

Table 1. Factors and components of foreign policy stories (vignettes)

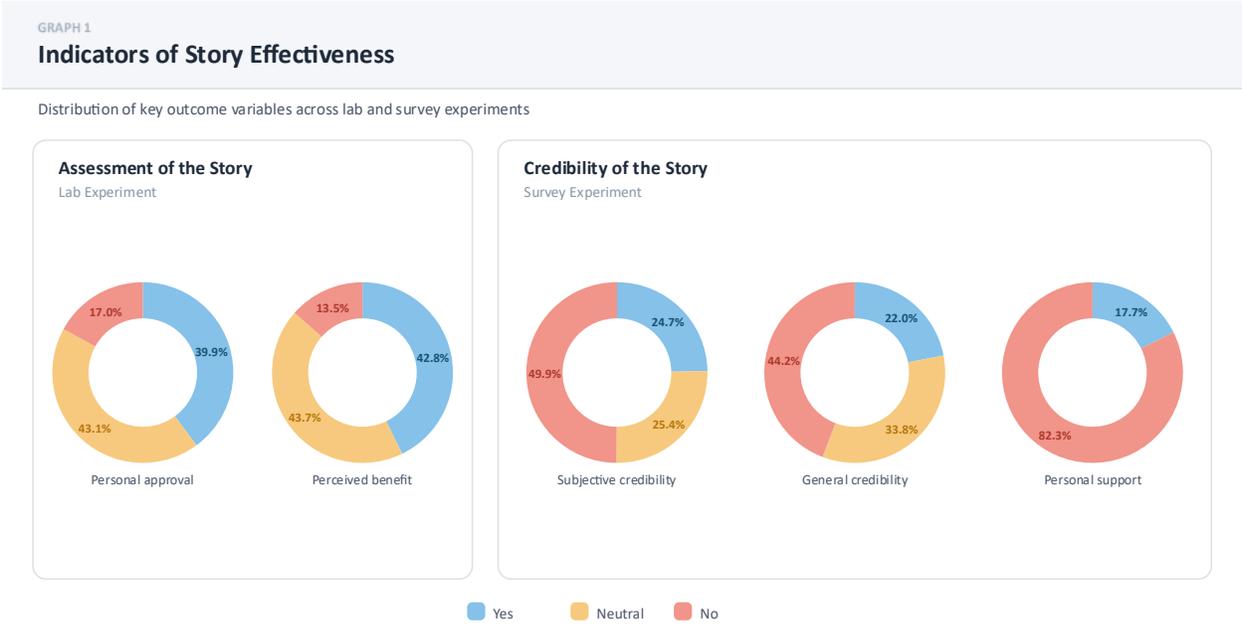|	
Laboratory Experiment	
Factors	**Components**
Story Author	(1) Government representative, (2) Opposition representative, (3) Independent expert
Trade Partner	(1) European Union, (2) Russia
Type of Trade	(1) Import, (2) Export, (3) Free trade
Trade Conditionality	(1) Product quality control, (2) Domestic legislative alignment, (3) Support at the international level
Survey Experiment	
Factors	**Components**
Story Disseminator	(1) Government media, (2) Opposition media, (3) International media
Tone of the Story	(1) Positive, (2) Negative
Partner Identity	(1) EU, (2) Russia, (3) USA, (4) China
Domain of Cooperation	(1) Independence, (2) Product prices, (3) Family values, (4) Migration
Social Media Engagement	(1) High likes (500–999), (2) Low likes (0–50)

Overall, respondents were more positively disposed toward stories when asked about personal approval and perceived benefit (approximately 40%). People are relatively cautious when evaluating the credibility of foreign policy stories across different areas of cooperation (approximately one in four). Respondents were even more cautious in answering the question about hypothetical support for the story on social media—only 18%. Graph 1 summarizes the distribution of key outcome variables in both experiments.

To ensure that research findings were not limited to declared attitudes alone, we introduced a modified version of the behavioral trust game in the laboratory experiment.[5] The essence of this interactive game is that a participant expresses their attitude toward the foreign partner described in the story by transferring symbolic coins to them. In the first stage, the number of

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[5] Joyce Berg, John Dickhaut, and Kevin McCabe, "Trust, Reciprocity, and Social History," *Games and Economic Behavior* 10, no. 1 (1995): 122–42, https://doi.org/10.1006/game.1995.1027.
Gökhan Altunaya and Vittorio Pelligra, "The Trust Game Does Not (Only) Measure Trust: The Risk-Trust Confound Revisited," *Journal of Socio-Economics* 87 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2020.101520.

coins transferred by the participant indicates their baseline attitude (trust) toward partners. In subsequent stages, the participant responds to the partner's behavior by returning a desired number of coins. This design allows us to observe not only baseline trust toward trade partners but also to determine how participants change their behavior in response to positive or negative feedback from the partner, especially when such feedback contradicts their prior expectations.

GRAPH 1

Indicators of Story Effectiveness

Distribution of key outcome variables across lab and survey experiments

Assessment of the Story
Lab Experiment

Personal approval: 17.0% No, 43.1% Neutral, 39.9% Yes

Perceived benefit: 13.5% No, 43.7% Neutral, 42.8% Yes

Credibility of the Story
Survey Experiment

Subjective credibility: 49.9% No, 25.4% Neutral, 24.7% Yes

General credibility: 44.2% No, 33.8% Neutral, 22.0% Yes

Personal support: 82.3% No, 17.7% Yes

● Yes   ● Neutral   ● No

In the following subsections, we examine which factors shape the effectiveness of stories about foreign policy. The findings are based on marginal effects and predicted probabilities from linear and logistic regression models, which indicate the magnitude and direction of each factor's influence while holding other variables constant. The analysis also accounts for the clustered nature of the data: since each respondent evaluates multiple stories, high correlation between these evaluations is expected.

In general, both the effect size and its statistical significance are equally important for research findings. However, in this study, we pay more attention to statistical significance. The reason is the nature of the object of observation—story effectiveness: no matter how small the effect of a particular factor may be, its practical implementation requires only changing words in a story,

which involves no costs. Therefore, this study considers even small statistically significant effects relevant for increasing story effectiveness

The essence of the multi-stage game is to express attitudes toward the foreign partner described in the story by allocating symbolic coins to it: while in the first stage the participant indicates their initial attitude (trust) toward the partners, at later stages the participant reciprocates the partner's behavior (return of coins). This design allows us to observe not only baseline trust toward the two trade partners, but also how participants adjust their behavior in response to positive or negative feedback from the partner, particularly when such feedback contradicts prior expectations.

In the following sections, we examine which factors shape the effectiveness of foreign policy stories. The findings draw on marginal effects and predicted probabilities from linear and logistic regression models, which indicate the size and direction of each factor's influence while holding other variables constant. The analysis also accounts for clustered observations, since each respondent evaluates multiple stories.

While effect size and statistical significance are both important for the findings, in this study, greater importance is given to statistical significance. The reason is the nature of the key outcome—effectiveness of the story: however small the effect of a particular factor might be, its implementation simply requires changes in wording and hence, is virtually costless. Therefore, this paper considers even small statistically significant effects as relevant for potential actions.

PARTNER EFFECT

In both experimental settings, the identity of the foreign partner emerged as the dominant factor determining story effectiveness. Stories featuring Western partners are rated as more credible, more beneficial for the country, and receive more support than otherwise identical stories involving non-Western partners. This result points to an important condition of story effectiveness: who the story is about matters more than how the story is told.

Even stories containing unfavorable information or framed negatively are perceived as more credible and beneficial when associated with a preferred partner. For example, all other conditions being equal, trade with the EU is valued on average about one point more on a five-point scale than trade with Russia—a difference equivalent to one-fifth of the entire scale (Graph 2, left panel). The magnitude of this difference far exceeds the effects associated with trade type, preconditions, or the story's author.

In the survey experiment, expanding the circle of foreign partners to include the United States and China further clarifies the nature of the partner effect. The EU remains the most preferred partner, with a credibility score of 2.7 on a five-point scale. The United States' ratings are similar to those of the EU, while China's indicators approach those of Russia (Graph 2, right panel). Although the differences are statistically significant, they are substantively small. However, this finding confirms that responses are influenced more by established predispositions toward Western and non-Western actors than by the story's content.

GRAPH 2
Effects of the Partner

Pro-Western outlook predicts perceptions of story effectiveness

Assessment of the Story
Lab Experiment

Personal approval

EU — 3.79
Russia — 2.80

Perceived benefit

EU — 3.79
Russia — 2.91

Credibility of the Story
Survey Experiment

Subjective credibility: 2.69, 2.50, 2.57, 2.33
General credibility: 2.74, 2.56, 2.66, 2.44

● EU   ● Russia   ● USA   ● China
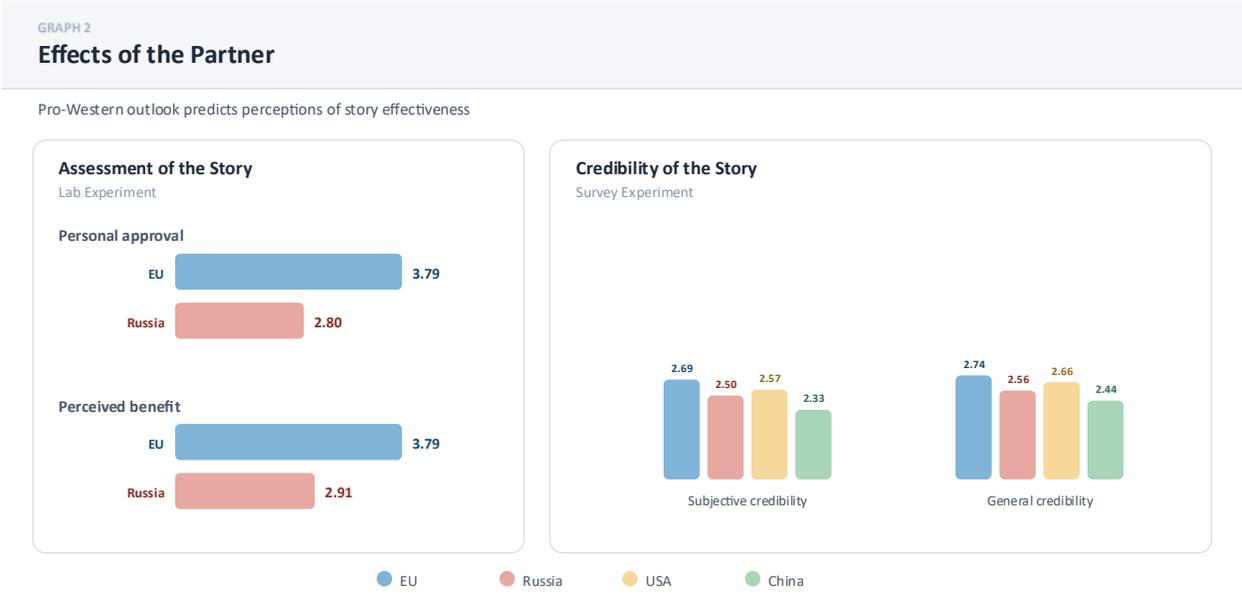
The results clearly show that pro-Western orientation is deeply rooted in the population. It influences the interpretation of stories before the specific factors of story framing are even

processed. In sum, these findings demonstrate that the partner's identity serves as a kind of cognitive anchor for story effectiveness. Instead of story content changing attitudes toward foreign partners, people filter story interpretation through the prism of their existing beliefs about partners. As a result, story effectiveness changes within clear boundaries: framing can strengthen or slightly weaken effectiveness but cannot overcome established perceptions associated with undesired foreign actors.

THE POWER OF FRAMING

While the foreign partner's identity is the main factor determining story effectiveness, story framing still plays an important, though secondary, role. The tone of stories affects perceptions of credibility, but its effect is quite modest compared to partner identity. In the survey experiment, stories told with a positive tone were, on average, more credible than negative-toned stories. A positive tone also increases the likelihood that people would express support in a hypothetical situation: the probability of "liking" a story on Facebook increases by seven percentage points.

The positive effects of a positive tone do not mean that tone can outweigh established attitudes. On the contrary, a positive tone appears to act as an amplifier: it adds effectiveness to stories that align with existing expectations and, conversely, weakens those that do not. This observation points to interaction effects between factors, which we will discuss in the Motivated Reasoning subsection: a positive tone enhances credibility in the case of Western partners but produces the opposite effect for non-Western actors.

Story effectiveness is also affected by the substantive area of cooperation. Stories concerning symbolic issues, such as increasing the degree of independence and preserving family values, are generally rated as more credible than narrowly material outcome-focused topics, such as food prices (Graph 3, right panel).

In trade-related stories, framing effects are also visible: when the story is about export, it is perceived as more beneficial for the country than stories focused on import or free trade. This suggests that people respond more positively to stories focused on national-level benefits (Graph 3, left panel).

Effects of the Cooperation Type

Story effectiveness varies across cooperation types

| Assessment of the Story | Credibility of the Story |
| Lab Experiment | Survey Experiment |

Personal approval: Import 3.14, Export 3.34, Free trade 3.27
Perceived benefit: Import 3.20, Export 3.46, Free trade 3.35

Subjective credibility: Independence 2.54, Food prices 2.42, Family values 2.55, Migration 2.57
General credibility: Independence 2.60, Food prices 2.54, Family values 2.61, Migration 2.65

● Import ● Export ● Free trade

● Independence ● Food prices ● Family values ● Migration

Regarding trade preconditions, technical preconditions such as product quality standards enjoy higher support than stories that imply legislative changes or international-level support as preconditions for trade. These findings suggest that the audience is sensitive to the perceived "cost" of cooperation. Stories that emphasize tangible benefits are more effective, especially when they do not contradict pre-formed dispositions about the trade partner.

Overall, the results show that story framing matters, but not in a vacuum. Tone, content, and preconditions can slightly strengthen or reduce approval, credibility, and support. However, their influence is significantly constrained by existing predispositions toward foreign partners. Thus, the power of story framing lies not so much in independently persuading the audience but rather in calibrating stories so that the content does not conflict with existing cognitive frameworks.

MOTIVATED REASONING

The findings presented so far show a consistent pattern: the audience does not evaluate foreign policy stories neutrally or solely through information processing. Instead, attitudes toward a story are shaped by motivated reasoning, which causes individuals to interpret information in a way that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs about foreign partners.[6] The survey experiment provides direct evidence of motivated reasoning through interaction effects between story tone and partner identity.

Although positive-toned stories are, on average, more credible than negatively told stories, the direction of this tone's influence critically depends on the foreign partner. In the case of Western partners (EU and USA), a positive tone significantly increases the perception of story credibility. In contrast, when a positive-toned story is about non-Western partners (Russia and China), story credibility decreases (Graph 4). The reversal of the positive tone's influence depending on the partner follows the logic of motivated reasoning. Respondents apparently have positive expectations toward Western partners and negative expectations toward non-Western actors. When a story aligns with these expectations—such as increased independence resulting from cooperation with the EU—it is perceived as credible and trustworthy. When a story contradicts expectations—such as reduced migration resulting from relations with Russia—it is met with skepticism.

Motivated reasoning also manifests in the substantive areas of cooperation. Stories framed positively about symbolic issues, such as independence or family values, tend to increase credibility. In contrast, the influence of tone is more inconsistent for material issues. For example, positively told stories about food prices increase credibility, while a positive story about migration is, conversely, less credible (Graph 4).

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[6] Nicholas Epley and Thomas Gilovich, "The Mechanics of Motivated Reasoning," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30, no. 3 (2016): 133–40, https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.30.3.133.

S. Bai, "Motivated Reasoning and Its Applications to Life," *Psychology* 14, no. 12 (2023): 1827–1833, https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2023.1412107.

GRAPH 4
Motivated Reasoning

Framing shapes effectiveness of the story

Effects of story tone by cooperation type		Effects of story tone by partner	
Independence	+0.14	EU	+0.40
Food prices	+0.12	Russia	-0.23
Family values	+0.43	USA	+0.22
Migration	-0.35	China	-0.05

The described observations strengthen the study's main argument: story framing passes through the filter of existing cognitive biases and does not act as an independent driver of story effectiveness. Instead of updating established attitudes in response to new information, the audience selectively accepts or rejects stories based on how well they correspond to pre-existing beliefs about foreign partners and areas of cooperation. In this way, motivated reasoning explains why the influence of framing on story effectiveness is conditional and asymmetrical.

THE EFFECT OF MESSENGER AND PUBLIC APPROVAL

It is often assumed that the messenger's identity (the story's author or disseminator) plays an important role in shaping story credibility and support. To assess this, we introduced random variation in the messenger's identity in both experiments, while the story's content otherwise remained unchanged. In the survey experiment, story dissemination was attributed to pro-government, pro-opposition, or international media. In the laboratory experiment, it was attributed to pro-government, pro-opposition, or independent experts.

Another potentially important factor in story effectiveness is public support. It is expected that the more people support a story, the more credible it will be for the audience. For this purpose, we introduced two randomly varied components of public support into foreign policy stories:

many "likes" on Facebook (500 to 999) and few "likes" (0 to 50).

In both experimental settings, messenger identity has only a limited influence on story effectiveness. In the laboratory experiment, the messenger's political affiliation has no statistically significant effect on story evaluations. In the survey experiment, stories attributed to opposition media are perceived as slightly less credible than those disseminated by government or international sources. As for public support, people proved indifferent to whether the story has many or few "likes": this factor neither changes story credibility nor affects people's decisions to "like" the story themselves if they encounter it on Facebook.

The research findings indicate that the author or disseminator of a foreign policy story matters far less than who the story is about and how it relates to existing beliefs. Once information passes through the filter of motivated reasoning, messenger identity provides only a weak additional cue.

LIMITS OF RECIPROCITY

The game included in the experimental study allows us to observe participants' behavioral responses dynamically. In this study, the laboratory experiment includes a three-round trust game to examine whether reciprocal behavior from a foreign partner can significantly change trust toward preferred and non-preferred partners, especially when such behavior contradicts established attitudes and expectations.

At the start of the behavioral game, we asked participants to express their attitude toward the partner mentioned in the story by sending symbolic coins. The partner's identity varied randomly (EU or Russia). As expected, baseline trust was consistent with the strong predispositions revealed earlier in the experiments: in the first round, participants sent significantly more coins to the EU (11 out of a possible 20) than to Russia (7 out of a possible 20).

While the behavioral confirmation of declared attitudes is one of the game's objectives, the more important goal is to observe reciprocal behavioral responses to partners' actions. To this end, in

the second round, the partner "responds" to the participant by returning a certain number of coins, which allows participants to experience both positive and negative reciprocity from both the EU and Russia. In the third round, participants again send coins to partners, allowing us to observe changes between baseline and reciprocal behaviors.

At the final stage of the game, the EU still maintains its advantage over Russia: it receives an average of 21 coins out of a possible 40, while Russia receives only 13. Although the difference between the two partners is predictable, the game's main question is how participants respond to partners' behavior and whether reciprocity varies depending on partner identity.[7]

We assessed participants' behavior using two models. First, how the number of coins sent to each partner changes after reciprocity from the partner. Second, how the number of coins changes between the initial and final rounds depending on how many more or fewer coins the partner returned.

The analysis shows that repeated interaction increases trust toward both partners. Participants send more coins in subsequent rounds regardless of whether the partner is the EU or Russia. Furthermore, the magnitude of behavioral adjustment in response to reciprocity is modest and largely symmetrical between partners. In response to returned coins, the EU additionally receives 0.15 coins, while Russia receives 0.11 coins. These values are placed on a 0-to-1 scale, where 0 represents the minimum return and 1 represents the maximum return (Graph 5, left panel).

Reciprocity limitations become even more apparent when observing changes in the number of coins between the initial and final rounds relative to the difference between coins returned by the partner and coins initially sent. In this case, reciprocity has an even smaller influence on updated trust toward the partner: 0.12 points for the EU and 0.07 points for Russia (Graph 5, right panel).

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[7] The participant in the experiment did not know that the number of coins "received" from the partner was generated randomly (from 0 to 40 inclusive). The purpose of randomly generating the number of coins "received" from the partner was to separate prior dispositions toward the partner from the partner's positive or negative reciprocal response expressed through the coins.

GRAPH 5
Limits of Reciprocity

Reciprocity signals are processed differently depending on partner identity
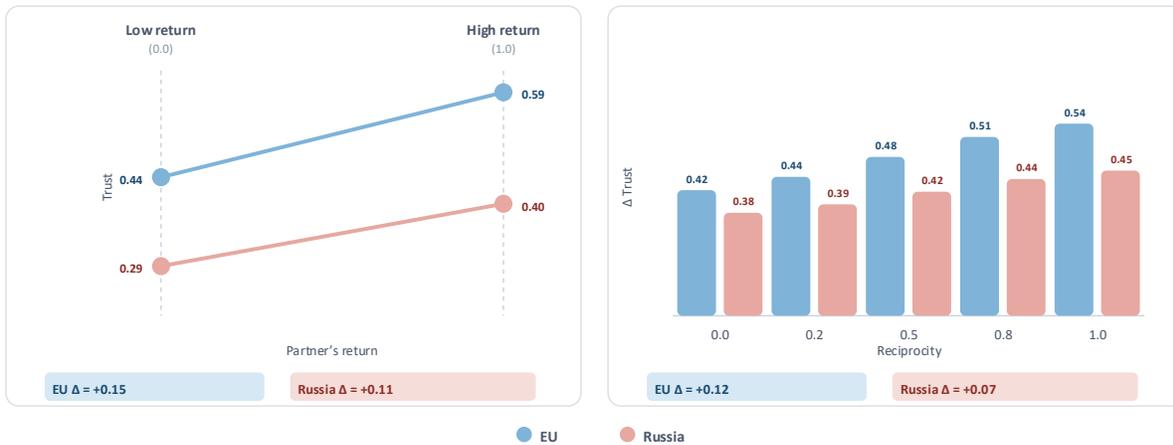
For the purposes of this study, it is critically important that unexpected feedback from the partner does not affect trust. Participants essentially do not change their behavior when the EU returns less than expected or when Russia returns more generously. As a result, participants respond proportionally to reciprocity signals and maintain a stable relative advantage for the preferred partner.

The described findings underscore the clear limitations of reciprocity for changing deeply rooted attitudes. Although reciprocal behavior can gradually improve trust toward both partners through repeated interaction, it does not have the power to change established preferences associated with foreign partners. Overall, behavioral findings align with and reinforce the study's general argument: even when individuals receive behavioral feedback that contradicts their expectations, the mechanism of motivated reasoning continues to operate and channels reciprocal behavior into the pattern of established perceptions.

CONCLUSION

This study examines what makes stories about foreign policy effective in the context of established predispositions toward foreign partners. Using two complementary experiments, we systematically varied factor components in stories, which allowed us to assess the relative influence of partner identity, cooperation tone and type, relationship preconditions, messenger, social media, and reciprocity.

The analysis yielded the following specific findings:

Pro-Western Predisposition Advantage: Partner identity functions as a cognitive anchor that shapes story effectiveness. Stories involving preferred partners—especially the EU but also the United States—are perceived as more credible, more beneficial, and more worthy of support than otherwise identical stories involving less preferred partners, especially Russia.

Benefit-Cost Ratio: Story framing matters, but only conditionally. A positive tone, emphasis on national-level benefits (such as exports), and technical trade preconditions strengthen story credibility and support, especially when they align with predispositions toward the partner.

Symbolic Issues and Identity: Stories related to symbolic issues of cooperation, such as national independence and family values, are generally perceived as more credible than stories focused on narrow material outcomes.

Limited Role of the Messenger: Messenger identity plays a limited role in terms of story effectiveness. Once stories pass through the filter of motivated reasoning, partisan signals provide only a weak additional orientation.

Motivated Reasoning: A positive tone strengthens story effectiveness in relation to preferred partners, while it reduces effectiveness for undesired partners. The processing and interpretation of new information occurs on the basis of compatibility with existing attitudes and expectations.

The Limits of Reciprocity: Behavioral results from the trust game show that reciprocity can slightly increase trust toward a partner through repeated interaction. A positive gesture from a partner is rewarded, but it cannot outweigh predispositions.

METHODS APPENDIX

The aim of this study is to examine the factors determining the effectiveness of stories about foreign relations. To this end, the study employs a vignette-based factorial experiment design and a modification of the behavioral trust game.

Data Collection

Survey experiment: A vignette-based factorial experiment was embedded in a nationally representative face-to-face survey conducted by CRRC-Georgia in December 2025 (N = 2,479; response rate 31%). The survey was conducted in Georgian (87%), Azerbaijani (9%), and Armenian (4%) languages.

Each respondent evaluated eight variants (vignettes) describing stories about foreign cooperation. The stories covered four areas of cooperation, one of which was told with a positive tone and the other with a negative tone. Each respondent received two vignettes for each type of cooperation, one positive and one negative in tone. The remaining factors in the vignettes varied randomly. The order of vignettes was also randomly determined. A total of 18,832 vignette evaluations were collected.

Laboratory experiment: A vignette-based factorial experiment was conducted in the CRRC-Georgia laboratory in November 2025 (N = 322). Participants sat in individual booths and were provided with tablet computers. Sessions were conducted in groups of approximately 10 people, with quotas reflecting the population composition by age, gender, and education.

After informed consent, each participant evaluated four vignettes, two of which concerned trade relations with the EU and two with Russia. The remaining factors in the vignettes varied randomly. The order of vignettes was also randomly determined. A total of 1,288 vignette evaluations were collected.

In the laboratory experiment, after evaluating each vignette, participants played a modified trust game. The game's objective was to measure trust toward the trade partner named in the

vignette. The game was played in three rounds: 1) the participant chose how many symbolic coins to send to the trade partner (from 0 to 20); 2) the partner returned a randomly generated number of symbolic coins to the participant (from 0 to 40); 3) after seeing the returned symbolic coins, the participant resent coins to the trade partner (from 0 to 40).

Statistical Analysis

The marginal effects, predicted probabilities, and interpretation of results used in this study are based on linear mixed-effects models estimated using Restricted Maximum Likelihood (REML). The models account for the fact that multiple vignette evaluations by the same individual are not independent of each other and that high correlation between them is expected. All models were also estimated using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression, with standard errors clustered at the respondent level. The results were essentially identical. Story effectiveness indicators (dependent variables) are described in Table 2.

Table 2. Indicators of story effectiveness

Variable	Description	Measurement
Survey Experiment: Opinion Outcomes		
Subjective credibility	How credible is this information for you?	5-point scale
General credibility	How credible will this information be for the majority of the population?	5-point scale
Personal support	If you encountered this information on Facebook, would you like it or not?	Binary (yes/no)
Lab Experiment: Opinion Outcomes		
Personal approval	How much do you like the described trade partnership?	5-point scale
Perceived benefit	How useful is the described trade partnership for Georgia?	5-point scale
Lab Experiment: Behavioral Outcomes		
Trust	Number of coins sent to the trade partner at the final stage of the game	0–40, rescaled to 0–1
Updated trust	Increase in the number of coins sent between the initial and final stage	−20 to 40, rescaled to 0–1

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