

Considerations of Globalization, Populism, and National Identity



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ABSTRACT: This is a case study that investigates the phenomenon of national identity using a qualitative methodology. The research questions consider the nuances of interpretation and understanding of nationalism and national identity and attempt to identify the influences of globalization and populism on the Armenian national identity. Data is collected from in-depth interviews with community leaders, legislators, party leaders, and academics, as well as focus groups with different age groups. The concept is analyzed using different lenses in an attempt to identify disparities of opinion among people with various backgrounds and in different locales, as well as the assumed triggers and underlying reasons pertaining to those differences. Beyond the pragmatic assessment of the impact of globalization and populism on national identity, the study sheds new light on the importance of and need for reconfiguring the processes concerning the adoption of a shared vision for the preservation of national identity and values.

KEY WORDS: globalization, populism, constructivism, nationalism, national identity

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is a phenomenon that has been debated for long and interpreted or explained in different terms by researchers worldwide. Discussions of globalization have mostly focused on its economic bearing without too much regard to other influences of integration resulting from the continuous interchange of ideas, beliefs, and perspectives. Moreover, the meaning or power of globalization is neither unilateral nor uniform for different countries. It is assumed that national characteristics often shape how globalization is perceived and/or embraced by different people and how it impacts identity. Various factors, such as where a country is in the stage of development, public discernment of national identity, homogeneity of the population, and other factors act as influencers in the construction, as well as interpretation and perception of national identity and, therefore, the extent to which globalization would impact it. These are the key factors that have triggered the current research at a time in the history of Armenia since independence when the country is challenged by complex issues of governance, sovereignty and national identity that merit new attention. Questions of focus in this research are the degree to which changing political alliances driven by multilateral and geopolitical relations are influencing national priorities and shifting the central tenets (and therefore) claims of national identity.

The challenge of addressing how globalization would affect nationalism varies commensurately with differences in scale and impact of development processes affecting the population of a developing country. In this regard, the question is whether globalization leads to modernization (or vice versa) or are these separate and mutually exclusive processes that extend beyond state borders. As one scholar explains, “*Globalization constitutes a puzzling process of contradictory effects on many aspects of politics and society due to its multifaceted nature. It should thus be understood as a process or a set of processes which do not follow linear logic or have equal impact on societies across the world*” (Ariely, 2020: 1). There are varying and even contrasting definitions, applications, and impacts of globalization, which provide a forum for delving into a broader discussion of the topic.

Under examination in this study is the concept that globalization “*refers both to the compression of the world and intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole ... both concrete global interdependence and consciousness of the global whole in the twentieth century*” (Robertson, 1992: 8). But also in review is a slightly earlier definition by Anthony Giddens (1990) that places emphasis on the interactions among people in the process of globalization bound to affect social relations.

“*Globalization can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations, which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanced relations that shape them. Local transformation is as much a part of globalization as the lateral extension of social connections across time and space*” (Giddens, 1990: 64).

Several contradictions and questions stem from such differences in explanation, interpretation, and understanding of globalization, as well as in variations among related terms, such as multiculturalism, homogenization, nationalism, and ethnic identity. As different cultures converge on the same territory gradually acquiring a new shared culture—often referred to as

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multiculturalism—do individual ethnicities fade away under the guise of integration or even efforts directed to becoming a ‘local’? Some scholars argue that the diversity among cultures does not necessarily stand against globalization, instead more diversity results from it (Wolff, 1991; Banerjee and Linstead, 2001). The latter authors argue that “*globalization is a homogenizing process while also being a differentiating process*” (Banerjee and Linstead, 2001: 699). As convoluted as the process may ring, scholars claim that globalization is bound to create homogeneity, harmonization, integration, and unity of nations.

Using a slightly different lens, other scholars hold that globalization is a process that moves nations toward localization, heterogeneity, differentiation, and diversity. “*Focusing solely on the economic aspects of globalization is to take too narrow a perspective of the subject. Globalization is also a political process in the sense that it is constructed by relationships of power, domination, and subordination*” (Banerjee and Linstead, 2001: 689). Thus, globalization takes on a different role in different parts of the world and may have varying weights on different nations (Kloskowska, 1998; Tehranian et al., 1997).

Several scholars claim that globalization has grown exponentially over the years offering options that weak states cannot avoid if they want to be counted in the global challenge. For others, globalization is perceived as a process that brings governments together to interact in regional and international trade, which also may grow investments in different types of business ventures. Whether optional or forced, globalization is integrating more nations today than ever before and is impacting, directly or indirectly, environmental, cultural, and political systems around the world.

Considering the different and often contradicting views about the effects of globalization, struggles for identity continue to appear in different countries of the European Union and the former Soviet space, albeit different in form and scope, and within diverse socio-cultural settings and political systems. As Hall (1996) states “*There has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of ‘identity’*” (Hall, 1996: 1). Identity raises questions that merit focused attention especially for those smaller nations that rose from the fall of the Soviet Union declaring independence in the early nineties—one such nation being Armenia.

Also in focus, is the more recent wave of globalization that has shaped new forms of interaction in commerce together with changing trends of migration especially since the fall of the Soviet Union. “*Large-scale migration has led to unprecedented levels of diversity around the globe, transforming communities in fundamental ways and challenging long and closely held notions of national identity*” (Papademetriou, 2012). Clearly, more recent manifestations of globalization transcend the economic boundaries akin to earlier world arrangements and take on dimensions that span politics, culture, and other components of identity, creating interdependencies that influence traditions, customs, and values and imposing new perceptions of national identity.

“Globalization has been rewriting more than just the rules of economic behavior among nations. It has also created and nurtured the conditions for greater human mobility, with unprecedented levels of diversity transforming communities and challenging closely held notions of national identity” (Papademetriou and Drager, 2012).

More precisely, starting in the last decade of the twentieth century, changing migration trends have resulted in the transformation of communities around the globe, especially in Europe and North America. In some parts of the world, these changes have been catalytic in blurring the identity or ethnic origin of incoming migrants and assimilating people from different parts of the world, creating new global relationships and shared identities (Castles, 2000). Yet in other countries, especially in those that have homogenous populations (with minimal migration inflows of people with different ethnicities), there may be more of a tendency or collective will to uphold national identity along with expanding trade relations, modernizing educational systems, and other forms of beneficial globalization activity. Though the study does not delve deeper into issues related to or resulting from migration inflows and outflows, changing trends may require rethinking that influence in future research.

THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON GROWING POPULISM

Before reviewing how globalization has flourished populism worldwide, we must recognize that the resurgence of populism in the 19th century American and Russian movements points to the naissance of egalitarian struggle against the elite (Urbinati, 1998; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013; Woods, 2014). This is not to say that all populism has followed a similar path everywhere since. As Mueller (2016) describes “*Anti-elitism is a necessary, but not a sufficient criterion for understanding politicians, parties, or movements as populist. These actors also need to be anti-pluralist, and they need to frame politics predominantly in moral terms*” (Abstract of Political Theory Workshop). Mueller also addresses how “*Populist regimes are characterized by mass clientelism and discriminatory legalism. ... What is distinctive about populist regimes is that they practice clientelism and discriminatory legalism with a clean conscience, so to speak: only those who properly belong to the people as defined by populists should benefit from the regime.*”

Globalization has brought along a number of divisive consequences, in which two striking features instigate populism. One is the economic insecurity resulting from uneven income distribution, and the other is cultural insecurity mainly caused by immigration trends and their relative intensities that, compounded with the persistence of wars and conflicts, foster further mobility, with subsequent cultural influences resulting in the advent and advance of populism (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Zakaria, 2016).

Using a different lens and analyzing the relationship from the standpoint of its consequences in social and political economics, populism is seen as producing considerable unconstructive strength since the beginning of the 21st century. As Mudde

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(2004) and others have established, populism has drawn a black and white demarcation between the corrupt elite and the pure people—a phenomenon that has grown into a movement or a powerful force of dissent in many parts of the world (Golder and Golder, 2016; Kaltwasser et al., 2017; Deist, 2017). Whether right-wing or left-leaning, conservative or liberal, populism has been on the rise and often stemming from socio-cultural backlash (Gidron and Hall, 2017), triggering unrest and sharp divisions among citizens, as well as causing political and economic downturns.

Though both ‘globalization’ and ‘populism’ have generated varying perceptions, functions, and influences, there is a prevalent argument that populism is triggered by the economic insecurity and sociocultural backlash fueled by globalization (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). The claim that globalization causes increased migration, inequality, and a recharged posture against corruption may also shed light on what drives or grows populism. These same factors are the key elements of populist demagoguery, albeit in varying degrees, vividly apparent in Armenia. Whether populism could lead to positive or negative consequences is somewhat associated with factors of institutional strength, political culture, as well as the level of public discontent. Thus, in a country with weaker institutions, populism might be fueled faster and activate political turbulence, as evidenced in the cases of Latin America and Southeast Asia (Case, 2016; Bajo-Rubio and Yan, 2019).

Moreover, Rodrik (2018) claims that the role of globalization in the making of populism is rather striking. When small nation-states are incompetent or unable to embrace programs and policy solutions to resolve persistent social and economic challenges, their reliance on external support from international organizations and foreign nations grows higher forcing global integration. Most often, the globalization thrust is disguised under a populist agenda that upholds the ‘good of the people’ and promotes often deceptive policy reforms. In that context, though perceived as a generally advantageous reduction of barriers in the movement of goods, capital, and people, globalization may produce negative consequences on peripheral countries. It is to be noted, however, that populism can be exercised by the ruling elite as well as by opposition groups.

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UNDERSTANDING ETHNICITY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Social science theories related to ethnicity tend to explain the phenomenon from different perspectives, the most common of which include primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism. Primordialist theories are grouped around the notion that ethnicity is what one gets at birth. Instrumentalists, on the other hand, claim that ethnicity is derived from people’s historical and symbolic memory (Wan et al., 2009). Contrary to these, constructivists claim that ethnic identity is not what one possesses, but what one constructs from interpretations of social and historical events, which could be markedly influenced by globalization as well as populism.

Along the primordialist line of argument, the seminal work by Anthony D. Smith on nations and national identity presents an explanation of ethnies as “*named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity*” (Smith 1986: 32). Smith’s subsequent works further elucidate the linkages of origin, ethnic or cultural identity and nationalism (Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Anderson, 1983). More modern theorists take a slightly different position arguing that people may share citizenship but come from different ethnic backgrounds and national identities. These changes are triggered by growing influences of globalization.

In this research, *national identity* is used in the context of the *sense of belonging* to a nation. As elaborated by social scientists, people belonging to the same national identity draw on and are rather inspired or influenced by national events and heroes, historical and cultural phenomena to bring meaning into their lives thereby constructing their identity and value system accordingly. The mere fact of belonging to a nation—a notion that lies beyond the person—is, for all intents and purposes, what defines the people of a nation giving it identity, what many recognize as national identity.

Looking at Wodak et al. (1999), national identity “*is constructed and conveyed in discourse, predominantly in narratives of national culture. National identity is thus the product of discourse.*” In that sense, identities are in many ways depicted and communicated in different forms from one generation to the next. Identity, therefore, is a construct that defines the way a people, groups or individuals view situations and communicate with one another. It is what shapes their likes and dislikes, and gives meaning to their personal being, their existence, and their various roles in society (Sunny, 1998). Naturally, identities are not static; they are subject to change as the holders assume new roles and learn from new experiences in a changing world undeniably affected by globalization.

Thus, viewed from a *constructivist* lens, the concept of national identity has evolved over time serving changing purposes and circumstances of respective times. Thus, “*new meanings of nation, culture, time, and space become forces actively reconstructing the social reality*” (Barseghyan, 2007) together with what constitutes national identity and how it is itself constructed. Using a *discursive* lens, the phenomenon of national identity can be viewed as derived from political processes (in turn affected by

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globalization to the extent allowed by the respective nation-state); therefore, as those processes and conditions change, so does the construct of national identity.

Throughout history, political differences and shared interests have brought nations together or pushed them farther apart while shaping their respective political and social ideologies. Consequently, the collective views of morality, character, race, values, and religion have often loosened or, conversely, tightened bonds even strengthening what is commonly known as *national identity*. However, this begs the question whether or not national identity has the same resonance today? Is the perception of national identity a territorial concept of dominance? Has globalization eroded the borders of nationalism? Has globalization affected the perception of national identity among Armenians?

THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

A broad range of perspectives exist in academic discourse on how globalization impacts national identity. These positions can be grouped according to the following three explanations: (a) assimilation or homogenization of national identity; (b) strengthening and proliferation of national identity; and (c) reconstruction of national identity.

Some scholars have argued that globalization has a negative impact on national identity as it blurs the distinctive characteristics that a nation or an ethnic society holds. Many of these works are based on the concept of Westernization (Antinno and Bonano, 2007; Smith, 2007; Gul, 2003; Petras and Veltmayer, 2001), which argues that most of the world eventually embraces the Western culture and lifestyle beyond simply opting for economic and political systems of the West. As such, Armenians living in various countries outside Armenia get gradually more detached from what they once perceived as national values. People start to westernize—speak Western languages, admire Western idols, and favor Western lifestyles. As a result, many would rather be associated solely with the West with no concern or effort for preserving their national identity.

Moreover, studies also show that globalization undermines the position of nation-states as the principal custodians of national identity (Bauman, 1998; Featherstone, 1995; Wallenstein, 1991), while others posit that the resistance to globalization by nation-states strengthens national identity (Castells, 2006; AlionSouday and Kunda, 2003). In this regard, scholars offer different approaches to bolstering the distinctiveness of a nation by promoting specific social and political principles as national values. Such discussions also are apparent in more recent analyses of national identity in post-socialist states (Blum, 2007; Tomlinson, 2003). These authors argue that globalization has led some independent states of the former Soviet space to work on actually constructing their distinct national identities and differentiating themselves from others placing greater emphasis on their unique characteristics and on the importance of sustaining national values.

Beginning with Mikhail Gorbachev's transformative approach to dealing with foreign nations, the world witnessed a dramatic change in the distinctions between the Soviet self-image and the images of the other. The subsequent fall of the USSR and the reconfiguration of the Soviet Union to more than a dozen independent states in the early nineties have, in many ways, redefined the meaning of national identity in that part of the world. Studies on this topic analyze the impact of globalization on national identity in post-Soviet countries from the standpoint of the conditions that the newly independent states faced after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some post-Soviet states follow the principles of civic nationalism, contrasted with those where national identity serves as an instrument of policymaking.

According to instrumentalists, globalization has created new ways of interpreting national identity in post-Soviet countries. For instance, the governments of Georgia, Moldova, and the Baltic states have moved toward creating strong affiliations with the European Union. In this regard, they have taken measures to specifically strengthen the European identity among their citizens. Hence, what emerged is a hybrid nationalregional identity (Blum, 2007). To a large extent, Armenia has been divided along those lines, with a large and potentially growing segment of the population favoring the European affinity (versus the Russian). It is also argued that national identity is shaped by the prevailing economic and educational policies and politics (Abdelal, 2001). In particular, post-Soviet countries often demonstrate a clear penchant to Western values and principles thereby building favorable conditions for cooperation with Western states and creating what they considered the 'right environment' to attract investors from the West. This has not been the situation with Armenia where Russian investments have continued to prevail.

Discussing the virtues as well as the disadvantages of nationalism, Sen (2008: 40) points to the positive and constructive role of nationalism in unifying a divided nation claiming that "*nationalism can indeed be a boon, offering benefits that are significant and substantial,*" while arguing that "*nationalism can also be a source of huge conflicts, hostilities and violence.*" Acknowledging that every individual may possess multiple identities that exist together and do not create contradictions, there is a need to "*weigh the relative importance of these different identities, and the need for us to choose our relative priorities between them*" (Sen, 2008: 42). Notions that can help understand the differences of perceptions of national identity among Armenians.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Aside from the above brief conceptual analysis of the existing literature, the current study uses qualitative data to investigate the phenomenon of Armenian national identity and also to explore differences that may exist in the interpretation and understanding of the concept to suggest further research. In this stage, the study examines the effects of globalization on the preservation of Armenian

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national identity and weighs whether or not this must be a topic of national debate. Using a qualitative design, this segment deals with topics of national identity from interpretations sought from community leaders, academics, legislators, party leaders, and activists. Thus, in-depth interviews were conducted in September 2021-March 2022 with 12 individuals from different backgrounds, residing in Armenia and in the United States, providing diverse understandings and interpretations of issues related to globalization, populism, and national identity.

Thus, the qualitative data gathered from these in-depth interviews was analyzed to capture the deeper meaning and perception of national identity across the different strata of Armenians and to consider factors of globalization and populism that may have contributed to the strengthening or weakening of national identity. The in-depth unstructured interviews allowed tackling the issue of national identity from multiple facets of the phenomenon, as well as revealing the differences in understanding and identifying the key drivers that weaken or strengthen national identity. The methodology employed in this research afforded investigation of the issue from various political, ethnic, social, cultural, economic, and other considerations without manipulating or biasing thought through structured questions and prompting for clarification of concepts or perceptions expressed by the interviewees themselves, only if needed.

Though the analysis of data was primarily based on thematic coding steered by the underlying concepts of globalization, populism, and national identity, the richness of ideas expressed by the interviewees compelled the extraction of new meaning and interpretation not anticipated at start but revealed through subsequent *In Vivo* coding that helped gain new insight and understanding through inductive reasoning of interviewee assertions (Saldaña, 2016). This approach was helpful to develop a more current construct and meaning that may not have been possible through structured interviews or simply by thematic coding.

Subsequently, and in view of the fact that the interviews were unstructured and open ended, zoom focus sessions were conducted in March-April 2022 with two separate groups of nine participants to determine the degree to which the most dominant themes derived from the interviews are consistent among Armenians in different age groups. One group assembled men and women in the 25-40 age group and the other age 41 and older. The different age groups were established to support or dismiss earlier statements made in reference to generational differences vis-à-vis national identity and to record the dominant reactions to key findings from the interviews. The selection of participants was purposive within each focus group to ensure maximum variation of background, locale, and current occupation, besides age.

The section that follows presents the dominant patterns or thoughts consolidated from the coding of interviews while depicting the degree to which each opinion or situation assessment is shared or disputed among the interviewees. The condensed presentation of the most prevalent reflections is somewhat based on the relative intensity of each theme, without consideration of the political affiliation, personality, or area of expertise of the persons interviewed.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

At the center of the conversations with the interviewees was whether or not globalization would advance to form a global society where there are no demarcations of state borders and no distinctions among people of different nations, somewhat along Hobsbawm's argument that the world would become supranational, devoid of heritage or deep-rooted national ethos. Aside from the considerations of globalization, views on the triggers and influences of populism varied widely from the sense of complementarities, cultural shocks, as well political penchants. The interviewees covered multiple boundaries of national identity in contrast to ethnic identity, touching upon those concepts and unfolding the political aspects of globalization and issues of religion, family, moral principles, and traditional values. All of them were quick to praise some of the advantages of global trends in education, health, commerce, and technology, but the majority also admonished against the potential fading or dismissal of national aspirations despite the pronounced differences among their individual positions.

The dominant common element was that globalization is a powerful force which often steers government action, with the majority of respondents positing that it would not grow stronger to ultimately wither the Armenian national identity (9/12)¹. As one interviewee expanded, *"Globalization, though ostensibly manifested as economic liberalism, more often involves other obscure or hard to imagine developments that threaten individual livelihoods and even beliefs. ... Besides the blatant adverse economic consequences, however, through the use of populist government demeanor and demagoguery in praise of globalization, people are ushered to a nation-statehood of a somewhat different color and shape. But we, the people, still hold the ultimate power to determine our fate and preserve our national identity"* (I-10).² When considered from a constructivist lens, *"Sovereignty as well as national identity are reconstructed as a result of emergent new forms of cross-border associations and the organization of different types of economic and political transactions in the broader geopolitical sense. This is where lies the difference of impact from globalization, largely driven by the public acceptance or rejection of government actions and transactions"* (I-3). These interviewees also referred to national identity and ethnic identity as notions that contain distinct differences of belief and conviction.

¹ The numbers in brackets show the number of interviewees expressing that opinion.

² Statements by various interviewees are denoted in this format to protect their anonymity.

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Essentially, the responsibility for protecting the nation-statehood rests on the people and, rather unequivocally, on the governments the people elect. Though this notion was perceived as axiomatic by almost all the respondents, the understanding of national identity in the context of a homogenized global society, some argued, takes on diverse paths and raises contradictory claims. *“In fact, the principle of egalitarianism or the concept of social equality among people places emphasis on the right of all people to their unique cultural values and differences”* (I-8). Among the interviewees, there were those strong believers in egalitarianism (4/12), while others placed emphasis on consolidating national strengths in defense of the rights of the people to uphold the unique cultural characteristics and values of Armenians (6/12), and also those who even questioned if social equality were within reach for dependent small states, such as Armenia (2/12).

The interviewees had different opinions on whether or not aspirations or populist agenda in favor of globalization are shaping the new Armenian ethos that could gradually blur the traditional pillars of national identity and disrupt the collective sense of belonging. *“The growing liking for Western education, lifestyle, and demeanor, especially by the younger generation, are leading to a weakening of national identity,”* believes one respondent (I-7). *“There is a discernible change in our consciousness, our axiological orientation, including our perception of religion, family, community,”* opined another (I-11). The majority of the interviewees suggested that, in the case of Armenia, the impact of globalization must be analyzed over the longer term from the perspective of those experiences and the extent to which the values attached to religion, family, and community are changing from one generation to the next and vary between one locale and another.

The next dominant notion was that nationalism can play a uniting role, no matter how generated. Divisiveness among the people of a country can be resisted with a unifying identity and nationalism can indeed play that constructive role. *“Nationalism must be understood not only as an ideology that fosters a strong belief in nationhood, but also as an unceasing struggle to uphold sovereignty and protect traditional values. Such a national struggle is particularly significant for states such as ours and also involves designing modern but fitting educational models and content for training educators in teaching Armenian history, language, and culture in public schools. The criticality of modernizing methodology does not eliminate or reduce the necessity of instilling in children and youth the foundational pillars of our national identity”* (I-3). Similar ideas were expressed by several other interviewees in reference to the importance of modernizing the educational system to keep pace with the modern world but without foregoing or erasing the key components of what constitutes national identity even if Armenia is somewhat stunted in its capacity to develop the most productive system without reliance on existing foreign models (5/12).

In the context of globalization or globalism, there are significant advantages that can be gained, especially those related to the ease of exchanges, trade, and other types of relations among nations. In education, for example, most interviewees were in favor of adopting Western teaching methodologies that encourage critical thinking and in-class discussions of real-world applications (10/12). Methodological and didactic advances in teaching, however, do not imply deterrence from or exclusion of national identity dialogues. *“The fundamental purpose of schools is to educate the next generations by transmitting to them the important constructs of our history, culture, and values that make our nation different than another”* emphasized a scholar interviewed (I-6), further explaining that without those characteristics that differentiate among nations there would be no multiculturalism that produces rich color and form in a globalized world rather than creating detrimental contrasts among nations.

At least one political party leader interviewed (I-12) associated nationalism with sovereignty and a necessary conduit for promoting the interests of the nation-state. *“Nationalism holds that our nation should govern itself, free from outside interferences. In that context, the state serves as the foundation or rightful source of political power and as such it is responsible for preserving and fostering our national identity.”* This person viewed globalization as a potential counterpoint to national sovereignty. The speed of globalization in the postSoviet era, another explained (I-9) *“has intensified the effects of those global mechanisms that, under the guise of helping underdeveloped nations such as ours, promote dependence and ultimately increase reliance on and even subservience to foreign powers.”*

Moreover, a strong national foundation is indispensable for the survival and advancement of a nation, notwithstanding the elements that constitute the pillars of sovereignty and democratic rule, elaborated the majority of interviewees. The concepts expressly articulated comprised law and order, justice, integrity, and public trust, and the fundamental freedoms that citizens are afforded by virtue of the provisions in the constitution and/or the body of laws adopted (11/12). But several interviewees (5/12) also placed emphasis on the preservation of national identity and, in the words of one, *“the significance of propagating and inculcating in the generations, current and future, a national vision that characterizes our national identity and signifies our strength, while embracing the plurality of nations”* (I-2). Aside from the important role that family and school play, *“the media serves as an influential channel for interpreting the meaning of national identity and shaping the path forward especially by creating the most functional toolbox for the construction of national identity in Armenia’s unending conflict reality”* (I-11).

For the newly independent states in the former Soviet space, *“the lead obligation of every government still is, even past thirty years of independence, to construct the identity of the nation, to endeavor to shape the most supportive, sound, and sensible meaning of national identity that consistently acts as the force or core driver of foreign and domestic policy”* (I-2) argued a scholar-researcher. This is even more important, she argued, for periphery states that depend on those tools to delineate their ideational and spatial boundaries in relations across borders. Viewed from a wider and more comprehensive lens, *“Knowledge, culture and*

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nationalism serve as major political forces in dealing with the challenges the nation faces, both domestically as well as globally. ... Hence, fragmentation within the nation, often derived from the discordant aspects of globalization, can be as destructive as enemy forces in times of war” (I-4).

Particularly for periphery states grappling to find their space in the global arena, *“national identity is continually undergoing the tests of time and relative power in the foreign policy domain. Within this framework, foreign policy is indeed about national identity, it is about the sovereignty that government seeks to defend and the values a nation represents in negotiations with foreign nations”* (I-3). In that sense, the normative process of globalization also comprises influences that limit state sovereignty, but which are often disguised from public perception or popularized by way of emphasis on other benefits. *“The increased political and economic focus on often trivial popular advantages gained in the global arena have caused measurable regressions in our national convictions and beliefs. Even among the more educated segments of the population, issues of identity have fallen out of the national policy debate, which has indeed affected the construction of national identity”* (I-9).

Under the semblance of modernity, globalization is driving dependent peripheral states to modify their frame of reference vis-à-vis the nation-state and implications of nationalism, opined an interviewee (I-8). *“In that process of globalization, aided by the transformational changes and use of information and communication technologies, the role or function of fundamental institutions of governance—including political, social, educational, as well as religious institutions—are subjected to reconfiguration, which often constitute distinct departures from the notion of nation-state, some being inapprehensible in the short term.”* Like in many other societies, tensions arise questioning traditional characteristics that may not appear to keep pace with times. Potential consequences of the so-called modernity could take different forms and manifest themselves in various domains. As one interviewee explained, modernity is a distinct departure from our traditional understanding of ‘nation’ or the transformation of family as the primary unit that fosters national values and a shared vision of national identity. *“From opting to a ‘modern’ upbringing of our children, the gradual fading of our national heroes, and distancing ourselves from traditional and cultural observances, such as holidays and festivals, we often lose sight of our history and fail to adopt a shared vision of our nation”* (I-1). Effectively, another explained, *“The growing discontent with the seen and unseen of what globalization has brought, and the widening inequalities in the populace have also produced hostile attitudes and extremely hateful verbal expressions of intolerance of nationalism serving as a fertile soil for growing populism”* (I-4).

The views of the interviewees about the role of family, school, church, and state with respect to promoting a national vision of Armenian identity appear to be aligned with their respective interpretation and perceived beneficial or damaging influence of the phenomenon of globalization. Since the interviews were not directed by structured questions that would have allowed follow on questions in some instances, it can be inferred that those who valued the historic role of the Armenian church in the preservation of national identity also spoke in favor of the family unit and its traditional place in the children’s education and upbringing. This group of interviewees (7/12) used examples to suggest the gradual erosion of family values, to a lesser or larger extent, mostly referring to the younger generation.

Thus, the discourses with the twelve interviewees were analyzed to identify constructs of shared meaning within the framework of the influence and/or counterinfluence of globalization and populism on national identity, as well as the associated beneficial and/or detrimental factors. Below is a tabular depiction of the main constructs mentioned by all or the majority of the interviewees, ranked in the order of their relative prominence in the respective category,³ and measured by the tonality, pitch, and vocal emphasis of expression and body language. The table also shows the recurrence of each theme among the interviewees.

	Prominence	Recurrence
Globalization		
Globalization is a powerful force that steers policy direction and government action	4.5	25
Globalization influences the reconstruction of national identity as a consequence of emergent new forms of cross-border relations	4	19
Globalization advocates egalitarianism but with uneven outcomes and even subservience to powerful nations	3.5	18
Globalization impacts our value system and perceptions of religion, family, community	3.5	15
Globalization will not grow into a stronger force to wither the Armenian national identity	3.4	14

³ Prominence is reflected as the weighted average score assigned to the tonality, pitch, and vocal emphasis of expression, and body language, measured on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is the highest score and 1 the lowest.

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<i>National Identity</i>		
Nationalism plays a critical role in constructing and upholding national identity	4.6	23
Nationalism embedded in a modernized educational system instills in generations the foundational pillars of national identity	4.5	20
Inculcation with nationalism does not deter adoption of Western teaching methodologies	4	17
Adoption of a shared national vision is important for instilling in future generations the significance of national identity	4	13
Preservation of national identity must continue to be a central consideration in formulating foreign and domestic policy	3.5	12
<i>Populism</i>		
Populist discourse is constructed such that it is uniquely convincing and appealing to certain masses	5	29
Populist discourse masks the facts, pursuits, and undertakings actually occurring within and by government	4.5	24
Populism is used as an instrument to deflect the attention of citizens away from imperative current issues	4.5	19
Populism deepens 'black or white / for or against' divisions in the populace	4.2	18
Populists mesmerize the uneducated and uninformed masses to thrust fictitious and false information presented as evidence	3.5	14

The above table captures the dominant concepts or ideas expressed by the interviewees that have received an above-average prominence (i.e., above the middle point of 3 on a scale of 1 to 5) in individual arguments related to globalization, nationalism, and populism, along with their respective frequencies. The same concepts were used in the focus sessions of 25-40 and 41 and above year-old groups to measure the degree to which they agree or disagree with the same postulates.

The focus sessions were held on different days and recruited participants from various segments of the population within their respective age groups. The postulates were presented in the same order following a brief presentation of the topic of the research and how these statements were derived. The participants were then asked to simply indicate their position online within five minutes from presenting each statement, without allowance for discussion or exchange of opinion but slotting time for clarification questions, if any. Below is a side-by-side depiction of the average scores from each of the focus groups (combined with the table of scores from the interviews).

	Scored from Interviews	25-40 Age Group	41 & Older Age Group
<i>Globalization</i>			
Globalization is a powerful force that steers policy direction and government action	4.5	4.7	4.8
Globalization influences the reconstruction of national identity as a consequence of emergent new forms of cross-border relations	4	3.7	4.1
Globalization advocates egalitarianism but with uneven outcomes and even subservience to powerful nations	3.5	4.2	4.4
Globalization impacts our value system and perceptions of religion, family, community	3.5	4.1	4.6
Globalization will not grow into a stronger force to wither the Armenian national identity	3.4	4.2	4.7
<i>National Identity</i>			
Nationalism plays a critical role in constructing and upholding national identity	4.6	3.1	4.4
Nationalism embedded in a modernized educational			

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system instills in generations the foundational pillars of national identity	4.5	3.7	4.8
Inculcation with nationalism does not deter adoption of Western teaching methodologies	4	4.2	4.1
Adoption of a shared national vision is important for instilling in future generations the significance of national identity	4	4.1	4.8
Preservation of national identity must be a central consideration in formulating foreign and domestic policy	3.5	3.7	4.6
Populism			
Populist discourse is constructed such that it is uniquely convincing and appealing to certain masses	5	4.6	4.2
Populist discourse masks the facts, pursuits, and undertakings actually occurring within and by government	4.5	4.2	4.6
Populism is used as an instrument to deflect the attention of citizens away from imperative current issues	4.5	4.1	4.7
Populism deepens 'black or white / for or against' divisions in the populace	4.2	4.1	4.8
Populists mesmerize the uneducated and uninformed masses to thrust fictitious and false information presented as evidence	3.5	4.6	4.7

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

This brief qualitative study has offered varying opinions, beliefs, and perspectives vis-à-vis the utility and influence of globalization in the preservation of national identity. The study has shown that though Armenians have different perspectives of globalization, the vast majority of respondents claim that it steers policy direction and government action (some interviewees elaborating that this phenomenon is more evident in foreign policy). Closely associated with this position is the notion that globalization influences the reconstruction of national identity as a consequence of emergent new forms of cross-border relations and changing global connections.

Though less intense overall, there were those few who expressed total dismissal of any associated impact of cross-border relations on the reconstruction of national identity, hence the lower average scores reflected in the consolidated table above. Further examination of this topic could involve cross-border issues of national security concern in view of the geographical and political realities of different countries involved and the scope of disputed territories. There is undoubtedly an increasing awareness of the significance of cross-border political transactions and commerce, but a thorough analysis of more current data would be required to reach more precise conclusions and recommendations. These findings point to the need for further research and continued debate of national identity.

The study found general unanimity among the groups on the elements of populism as observed in Armenia in the data collection period (and potentially continuing), except for the notion that populists mostly mesmerize the uneducated and uninformed masses to thrust fictitious and false information presented as evidence. Among those interviewed, there were two who dismissed such a notion existed driven by their assumed party affiliation or political penchant and two others who did not address the issue at all, as is often the case in unstructured, open-ended discourse.

The most prevalent variances among the groups of respondents were found (a) in the meaning or interpretation of nationalism by the younger focus group participants who hold a less definite (almost neutral) view of the role of nationalism in the construction and preservation of national identity; and (b) in the less persuasive view of some in the younger focus group that if nationalism were embedded in a modernized educational system it would instill in generations the foundational pillars of national identity.⁴ Considering that 'nationalism' encompasses multiple dimensions that elicit contrasting lines of reasoning, some in the younger focus group might have perceived the concept as more of an ethnocentric or isolationist (anti-other) positioning rather different from how the moderator defined it.⁵

⁴ In the pre-response clarification, the pillars were explained in terms of language, culture, religion, history, and traditions.

⁵ This is how the focus group moderator responded to a clarification question on nationalism: The traditional meaning of nationalism as the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their identity as members of that nation, including the actions that the members of a nation take in seeking to achieve (or sustain) some form of political sovereignty (Nielsen, 1998-9: 9). The definition provided did not refer to any territorial dominance.

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The positions are more or less uniform among the interviewees and focus groups on the notion that inculcation with nationalism does not deter adoption of Western teaching methodologies. Similarly, there is consensus among all respondents on the importance (not imperative as was articulated by an interviewee) of adopting a shared national vision for instilling in future generations the significance of national identity, with a near full score in the older focus group. This same group also voiced near full agreement that preservation of national identity must be a central consideration in formulating foreign and domestic policy.

The interviewees as well as focus group participants conveyed that Armenian national identity could withstand the force of globalization even under the influence of increasing emigration trends and global tendencies that are influencing the traditional perceptions of religion, family, and community, and reconstructing the meaning of national identity. This, many asserted, requires us to reflect on our national identity and reaffirm its meaning and significance for the Armenian nation. Though this is congruent to what Smith has maintained that, despite globalization, “self-reflective and self-celebrating communities, nations and nationalism are still very much alive” (Smith, 2007: 30), there is a need to re-evaluate our understanding of what constitute pillars of national identity and how those are inculcated in future generations. Inferring from the nuances of the dialogue with several interviewees, the pillars comprise language, religion, family, and also character. Elaborating on each pillar (and perhaps others) would require additional research and evaluation to shape the potential conclusions on this multi-layered notion.

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