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Geopolitical Shocks, Perceived Discrimination, and Immigrant Political Attitudes: A Moderated Mediation Study of Migrants in Russia

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Article

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Abstract

Drawing on intergroup-threat and social-identity theories, this study analyses survey data from 212 Central Asian male labour migrants residing in Russia in the post-2022 Russia-Ukraine-war context. It explores how perceived geopolitical shocks are associated with migrants' perceived discrimination, political attitudes towards the Russian regime, and their subjective social identification with host-country society. A moderated-mediation analytical framework was constructed and tested via SPSS and the PROCESS macro. The empirical results demonstrate that perceived discrimination exerts a statistically full mediating effect in the link between perceived geopolitical shocks and both pro-regime political attitudes and Russian-host-society identity. Specifically, migrants who report higher levels of perceived discrimination tend to express more positive evaluations of the Russian political regime and display stronger subjective belonging to Russian society. Russian-language fluency marginally amplifies this indirect mediating pathway (p = .061), whereas duration of residence in Russia yields no statistically significant moderating influence. Four mutually non-exclusive interpretive frameworks are deployed to unpack this counter-intuitive empirical pattern: threat-triggered intragroup cohesion, realignment of social-comparison reference frames, social-desirability response bias embedded within authoritarian survey contexts, and survivorship bias generated by selective out-migration of dissatisfied migrants. Important limitations must be emphasized: cross-sectional research design, low internal reliability of the exploratory geopolitical-shock measurement scale (α = .58), and high sample homogeneity (92% male respondents, 92% of Central-Asian ethnic origin). Therefore, all empirical outputs should be treated as hypothesis-generating rather than conclusive causal evidence. Reverse causality and unmeasured confounding variables cannot be statistically ruled out in the current analytical setup. This study stresses the necessity of refined scale development and longitudinal research designs to clarify whether observed correlations reflect genuine psychological processes whereby discrimination paradoxically reinforces regime support, or alternatively stem from measurement artifacts and contextual response biases.

1. Introduction

The large-scale military conflict breaking out in February 2022 profoundly reshaped European security architecture and the global geopolitical order. Meanwhile, it has created a rare real-world context for academic research on migration and migrant political psychology. In comparison with migration scholarship rooted in Western-European and North-American societies, where receiving countries usually remain outside major interstate wars, Russia represents a special case: the host state itself is deeply involved in large-scale geopolitical confrontation. Migrant communities settled on its territory are inevitably caught in the interplay between international conflict, domestic nationalist mobilization and everyday social exclusion.

Central-Asian labour migrants constitute the main component of Russia's foreign-born labour force. These migrants have long faced structural disadvantages in legal protection, labour rights and social integration. Even though Central-Asian states were not included on Russia's "unfriendly countries" list

after the outbreak of war, rising domestic xenophobia, politically oriented media narratives and security-focused administrative practices produced obvious spill-over effects for non-Slavic migrant groups. Migrants may encounter various forms of unfair treatment simply based on physical appearance, religious identity or migrant status, regardless of the diplomatic stance of their home governments.

Existing literature on migration in Russia has richly documented the precarious living conditions, informal survival strategies and everyday resistance of Central-Asian migrants. Nevertheless, prior work seldom systematically investigates how large-scale geopolitical shocks originating from the host country reshape migrants' political evaluations and social identity through subjective experiences of discrimination. Classic acculturation theory, social-identity theory and intergroup-threat theory were mostly built on the background of relatively stable peacetime social environments. They lack sufficient explanatory power for scenarios where the receiving state itself participates in international conflict and triggers domestic nationalist mobilization.

Against this backdrop, this study puts forward three core research questions. First, how does migrants' subjective perception of geopolitical shocks affect their experiences of institutional, interpersonal and symbolic discrimination? Second, to what extent will heightened perceived discrimination further shape migrants' political attitudes toward host-country institutions and their sense of belonging to Russian society? Third, whether such indirect psychological mechanisms are contingent upon individual-level characteristics including Russian-language proficiency, length of residence in receiving society, and ethnic background.

The present research carries exploratory theoretical value. Conceptually, it operationalizes the construct of perceived geopolitical shock as a macro-micro bridging variable, helping to reveal how high-level international events penetrate individual migrant psychology. By combining intergroup-threat theory and social-identity theory within a moderated-mediation framework, this paper expands migration political-psychology research into authoritarian-nationalist conflict contexts. Practically, if core findings can be replicated by follow-up work, conclusions may provide reference for receiving-state migrant governance, origin-country consular protection policies, as well as psychological-support services delivered by international organizations and non-governmental organizations for vulnerable migrant populations under geopolitical pressure.

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses

This study synthesizes three classic theoretical traditions in migration research: Berry's acculturation framework, social-identity theory proposed by Tajfel and Turner, and intergroup-threat theory developed by Stephan and Stephan. Each theory can partially explain migrant adaptation processes yet bears evident limitations for conflict-ridden geopolitical contexts. Acculturation theory mainly focuses on cultural difference and economic integration under stable host-society attitudes. Social-identity theory explains how group membership shapes individual self-concept but does not elaborate concrete

channels through which macro-geopolitical events reshape group identity. Intergroup-threat theory predominantly analyses threat perceptions held by majority native groups toward immigrants, rather than the subjective experience reconstruction of migrants themselves.

Intergroup-threat theory distinguishes realistic threat and symbolic threat. Realistic threat refers to majority-group worries over losses in security interests, economic resources and material benefits. Symbolic threat denotes perceived challenges to local cultural traditions, value systems and collective identity. During periods of war-driven nationalist mobilization, both types of threat will be activated simultaneously. Such societal-level threat perceptions will be transformed into three-dimensional discriminatory experiences for migrant minorities: institutional discrimination from state administrative organs, interpersonal discrimination in daily public and work-life scenarios, and symbolic discrimination conveyed by political discourse and mass-media stigmatization.

Perceived discrimination in this paper is defined as migrants' subjective cognitive and emotional responses to unfair treatment caused by nationality, ethnic origin or migrant status. It is not merely a passive mirror of objective unfair events, but is filtered through individual interpretation shaped by broader social and geopolitical contexts. We divide perceived discrimination into institutional, interpersonal and symbolic dimensions. Institutional discrimination emerges in interactions with police, immigration authorities and courts; interpersonal discrimination occurs in employment, housing and daily public contacts; symbolic discrimination originates from stigmatized media representation and official political rhetoric.

Our core conceptual pathway is as follows: perceived geopolitical shocks will not directly change migrants' political attitudes and host-society identification. Instead, macro-geopolitical shifts are first internalized by migrants in the form of elevated perceived discrimination across institutional, interpersonal and symbolic domains. These discriminatory experiences subsequently reshape migrants' evaluations of host-country political institutions and their sense of belonging to Russian society. Furthermore, individual social resources represented by Russian-language fluency, length of residence and ethnic identity may adjust the strength of this mediating pathway.

Based on above theoretical reasoning, concrete research hypotheses are proposed:

H1

Perceived geopolitical shocks have a significant positive predictive effect on perceived discrimination. Migrants who feel greater negative influence brought by geopolitical conflicts will report higher levels of institutional, interpersonal and symbolic discrimination.

H2

Perceived discrimination is associated with migrant political attitudes. Given competing theoretical expectations, the direction of correlation remains an open empirical question. Classical integration

perspectives predict negative correlation; threat-cohesion logic under authoritarian contexts may produce positive association.

H3

Perceived discrimination is associated with host-country social identity. Similarly, hypothesis does not preset correlation direction. Discrimination may erode belonging, yet psychological defence and strategic adaptation may generate stronger host-society identification.

H4

Perceived discrimination mediates the relationship between perceived geopolitical shocks and migrants' political attitudes.

H5

Perceived discrimination mediates the relationship between perceived geopolitical shocks and migrants' host-society social identity.

H6

Russian-language fluency moderates the above-mentioned mediating pathway; the specific moderating direction will be determined by empirical testing.

H7

Duration of residence negatively moderates the effect of perceived geopolitical shocks on perceived discrimination. For migrants with shorter residence time, the positive influence of geopolitical-shock perception on discrimination perception will be more prominent.

H8

Compared with migrants of other ethnic backgrounds, Central-Asian migrants display stronger indirect effect along the path "geopolitical shocks → perceived discrimination → political attitudes / social identity".

H9

Significant moderated-mediation effects exist within the conceptual model; the magnitude of indirect effect varies according to the level of moderating variables.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Sources and Sample Profile

Questionnaire-survey data were collected between April and May 2026 in major Russian cities including Moscow, Saint-Petersburg and Yekaterinburg. Combined community-based recruitment and snowball-sampling strategies were adopted. Field investigators accessed migrant community centres, labour dormitories and ethnic-association sites to distribute paper questionnaires. Online survey links were disseminated through migrant Telegram and WhatsApp groups. All questionnaires were designed in Russian; no translation into Central-Asian local languages was provided due to resource constraints, which may introduce literacy-related sample-selection bias. No monetary compensation was offered for survey participation.

Before formal investigation, participants received full information regarding research purpose, anonymity and confidentiality guarantees. Written informed consent was collected from each respondent. Participants were informed that they could skip arbitrary items or terminate participation without penalty. “Do not know / refuse to answer” response option was reserved for every survey question. The final valid sample size is N = 212.

Table 1
Distribution of sample characteristics (N = 212)

variable	class	frequency	percentage (%)
sex	man	195	92.0
	woman	17	8.0
age	19–25 years old	68	32.1
	Ages 26–35	86	40.6
	Ages 36–45	54	25.5
	46 years of age and above	4	1.9
education	Junior high school and below	42	19.8
	High School/Secondary Vocational School	98	46.2
	undergraduate course	56	26.4
	Master's degree or higher	16	7.5
home country	Uzbekistan	88	41.5
	Tajikistan	52	24.5
	Kyrgyzstan	38	17.9
	Kazakhstan	18	8.5
	Others (Armenia, Azerbaijan, etc.)	16	7.5
Ethnic Identity	Central Asian ethnic groups	195	92.0
	Russian	3	1.4
	Caucasian and others	14	6.6
Total duration in Russia	3 months to 1 year	38	17.9
	1-4 years	72	34.0
	4-10 years	62	29.2
	More than 10 years	40	18.9
Immigration status	Temporary worker	124	58.5
	student	28	13.2
	Short-term / Long-term resident / Citizen	60	28.3

variable	class	frequency	percentage (%)
From an “unfriendly country”	yes	0	0
	deny	212	100

Sample demographic characteristics show that 92.0% of respondents are male, only 8.0% are female. Age concentrates within 19-35-year-old brackets. Respondents mainly originate from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan; 92.0% belong to Central-Asian ethnic groups. Migrants’ total length of stay in Russia distributes across 3 months to more than 10 years. Most participants hold temporary-worker migration status. None of the sampled migrants come from officially-defined “unfriendly states”. Considering sample composition bias, subgroup robustness check was conducted among male Central-Asian subsample (N = 180). Core mediation results maintained stable direction and magnitude, but research findings cannot be generalized to female migrants, non-Central-Asian ethnic groups or migrants with different legal statuses without further empirical validation.

3.2 Variable Measurement

All core latent variables are measured by 5-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Average score of corresponding items is calculated as the observed indicator for each construct.

1. **Perception of Geopolitical Shocks**: Exploratory scale reflecting how migrants perceive the impacts of Russia-Ukraine war and Russia-West relation deterioration on personal social status and daily life. Original four-item scale contained one reverse-coded item with poor item-total correlation. After deleting this problematic item, the remaining three-item scale achieves Cronbach’s α = 0.58. Although still below conventional reliability thresholds, it is acceptable for exploratory research targeting hard-to-access migrant populations. Multiple robustness specifications are adopted for this construct in subsequent analysis.
2. **Perceived Discrimination**: Seven-item multidimensional scale covering institutional, interpersonal and symbolic discrimination dimensions. Respondents evaluate unfair treatment experience triggered by nationality or migrant identity. Cronbach’s α reaches 0.920, indicating excellent internal consistency.
3. **Political Attitude**: Seven-item scale measuring migrant evaluations toward Russian political system and authorities, covering institutional trust, political efficacy and regime-satisfaction sub-dimensions. Cronbach’s α = 0.947.

4. **Host-society Social Identity**: Three-item scale focusing on migrants' sense of belonging to Russian society, including items measuring emotional connection, common-identity perception and group-membership pride. Cronbach's α = 0.890. The extended full social-identity scale (8 items containing ethnic and transnational identity) is used for robustness testing.
5. **Moderating variables**: Russian-language fluency is self-evaluated across listening, speaking, reading and writing four dimensions (α = 0.94). Residence duration is transformed from categorical brackets into continuous-year variable. Ethnic identity is recoded as dummy variable (1 = Central-Asian ethnicity; 0 = other ethnic origins).
6. **Control variables**: Gender, age and education level are incorporated as covariates in regression models to eliminate potential confounding effects.

3.3 Analytical Strategy

SPSS 26.0 software and Hayes' PROCESS 4.1 macro are applied for statistical analysis. First, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis are implemented to observe variable distribution and preliminary correlation patterns. Second, PROCESS Model 4 with 2000-sample Bootstrap resampling is utilized for mediation-effect testing. Mediation effect is judged significant when Bootstrap 95% confidence interval does not contain zero. Third, hierarchical regression is conducted to test simple moderation effects; simple-slope analysis is adopted for interpreting significant interaction terms. Fourth, PROCESS Model 7 and Model 14 are deployed for moderated-mediation analysis, calculating conditional indirect effects under different moderator-value levels. Harman single-factor test is performed to assess potential common-method bias. The significance threshold is set at α = 0.05 (two-tailed).

4. Empirical Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 2
Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation Coefficient Matrix (N = 212)

variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Geopolitical shocks	3.27	0.59	1					
2. Discrimination Perception	3.16	0.88	0.822**	1				
3. Political Attitude	2.70	1.00	0.738**	0.898**	1			
4. Social Identity	3.18	0.88	0.768**	0.897**	0.903**	1		
5. Russian fluency	3.65	1.14	0.477**	0.552**	0.577**	0.544**	1	
6. Duration in Russia (years)	6.38	5.87	0.104	0.064	0.010	0.026	0.345**	1

Descriptive results show mean value of perceived geopolitical shocks is 3.27 (SD = 0.59), slightly higher than scale theoretical median, meaning migrants generally perceive tangible geopolitical-conflict spill-over influences. Mean value of perceived discrimination is 3.16 (SD = 0.88). Political-attitude average score is 2.70 (SD = 1.00), demonstrating overall relatively negative evaluation toward Russian political regime among sampled migrants. Mean value of host-society social identity equals 3.18 (SD = 0.88), with large individual variation.

Pearson correlation matrix reveals several noteworthy patterns. Perceived geopolitical shocks are strongly positively correlated with perceived discrimination ($r = 0.822$, $p < 0.01$), offering preliminary support for H1. Counter-intuitively, perceived discrimination shows strong positive correlation with political attitudes ($r = 0.898$, $p < 0.01$) and host-society social identity ($r = 0.897$, $p < 0.01$). That is, migrants reporting more discriminatory experiences tend to hold more positive evaluations of the Russian regime and stronger identification with host society. Russian-language fluency presents moderate positive correlations with all core variables. By contrast, residence duration displays no significant correlation with political attitudes, perceived discrimination or social identity. This counter-intuitive correlation pattern lays foundation for subsequent mediation-effect interpretation.

4.2 Mediation-Effect Test

Table 3
Results of the Mediation Effect Test (after controlling for gender, age, and education)

dependent variable	Effect Type	Effect Size	Boot SE	95% CI	Conclusion
political attitude	indirect effect	1.263	0.096	[1.073, 1.448]	significant
	direct effect	0.025	0.108	[-0.189, 0.234]	Not significant
	total effect	1.288	0.106	[1.079, 1.497]	significant
social identity	indirect effect	1.015	0.081	[0.856, 1.172]	significant
	direct effect	0.155	0.095	[-0.039, 0.336]	Not significant
	total effect	1.170	0.088	[0.996, 1.344]	significant

Controlling gender, age and education covariates, PROCESS Model 4 mediation outputs are as follows. Taking political attitude as dependent variable: indirect effect of perceived geopolitical shocks via perceived discrimination reaches 1.263, Bootstrap 95% CI [1.073, 1.448], which excludes zero and proves significant mediating effect. Direct effect equals 0.025, 95% CI [-0.189, 0.234], containing zero and statistically insignificant. Total effect is 1.288 (95% CI [1.079, 1.497]). Statistically speaking, this conforms to full-mediation pattern described by Baron-Kenny criteria. Nevertheless, due to cross-sectional survey design, we cannot draw causal conclusions of “full mediation”. Only statistical indirect-pathway evidence can be confirmed.

When host-society social identity serves as outcome variable: indirect effect = 1.015, 95% CI [0.856, 1.172], significant; direct effect = 0.155, 95% CI [-0.039, 0.336], non-significant. Statistical results support

H4 and H5. It should be highlighted that the mediating effect coefficient is positive, indicating that higher geopolitical-shock perception will raise perceived discrimination level, which in turn generates more positive pro-regime attitudes and stronger host-society belonging. This result deviates from conventional theoretical expectation and requires careful theoretical discussion.

4.3 Moderation-Effect Results

Table 4
Key Test Results for Regulatory Effects

regulated variable	dependent variable	Interaction Term Coefficient	p price	Simple Slope (Low Regulation)	Simple Slope (High Adjustment)
Russian fluency	political attitude	0.112	0.061	0.56**	0.78**
Russian fluency	Discrimination Perception	0.048	0.342	—	—
Total duration in Russia	political attitude	0.094	0.246	—	—
Ethnic Group (Central Asian):	political attitude	-0.998	0.017	—	—

4.3.1 Moderation of Russian-Language Fluency

Hierarchical regression test for political-attitude outcome: interaction term coefficient between perceived geopolitical shocks and Russian-language fluency is 0.112 (p = 0.061), marginally significant. Simple-slope analysis shows that among high-fluency group (Mean + 1SD), the positive predictive effect of geopolitical-shock perception on political attitude is stronger (b = 0.78, p < 0.01); for low-fluency group (Mean-1SD), effect magnitude decreases but still remains significant (b = 0.56, p < 0.01).

However, when perceived discrimination acts as dependent variable, interaction term is non-significant (β = 0.048, p = 0.342). No significant interaction effect emerges for social-identity outcome. Therefore, Russian-language fluency only produces marginally significant moderating influence on the path toward political attitudes.

4.3.2 Moderation of Residence Duration

Interaction term between perceived geopolitical shocks and duration of residence shows no statistical significance for political attitudes, perceived discrimination and social-identity outcomes. Hypothesis H7 receives no empirical support. One plausible explanation is that geopolitical-conflict impacts are relatively recent shared social events, exerting comparable influences both for newly-arrived migrants and long-term settlers.

4.3.3 Moderation of Ethnic Identity

Ethnic-identity dummy-variable interaction term reaches statistical significance for political-attitude outcome (β = -0.998, p = 0.017). Yet comparison group size is merely n = 17 and carries high internal heterogeneity. Result stability cannot be guaranteed, so H8 cannot be reliably tested on current sample.

4.4 Moderated-Mediation Analysis

Table 5
The moderated mediating effect of Russian fluency (conditional indirect effect)

Russian fluency level	Conditional Indirect Effect	Boot SE	95% CI
Low (-1 SD)	0.418	0.065	[0.298, 0.551]
Mean (average)	0.580	0.051	[0.481, 0.682]
High (+ 1 SD)	0.758	0.081	[0.603, 0.922]

We further test moderated-mediation effects corresponding to H9. For Russian-language fluency, Model 7 result shows non-significant interaction on the first-stage path (geopolitical shocks → perceived discrimination). Model 14 tests moderation on second-stage path (perceived discrimination → political attitude), interaction term β = 0.065 (p = 0.208), non-significant. Still, calculation of conditional indirect effects finds obvious differences across fluency subgroups: conditional indirect effect for high-fluency group is 0.758 (95% CI [0.603,0.922]); mean-fluency group is 0.580 (95% CI [0.481, 0.682]); low-fluency group is 0.418 (95% CI [0.298, 0.551]). Confidence intervals between high- and low-fluency groups do not overlap. This provides tentative suggestive evidence for moderated-mediation, but because corresponding interaction term fails significance threshold, such conclusion remains exploratory and awaits replication with larger-sample data. No meaningful conditional-indirect-effect differences are detected for residence duration and ethnic identity.

4.5 Robustness Checks

Multiple groups of robustness tests are implemented. First, replacing host-society-identity three-item scale with full eight-item social-identity scale; indirect effect still keeps significant and direction unchanged. Second, decomposing political-attitude construct into institutional-trust, political-efficacy and regime-evaluation sub-dimensions. Mediation tests for every sub-dimension all obtain significant indirect effects and non-significant direct effects. Third, re-estimating model adopting three-item geopolitical-shock scale, core mediation results remain stable despite low scale reliability. Fourth, removing control variables from regression specification; key coefficient magnitude and significance do not experience obvious fluctuation. The above tests demonstrate that core empirical findings are not produced by specific measurement settings or covariate selection.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Main Empirical Findings

Based on questionnaire data of 212 migrants in Russia, this study constructs and tests a moderated-mediation theoretical model linking perceived geopolitical shocks, perceived discrimination, political attitudes and host-society social identity. Main conclusions are summarized as four points.

First, migrants' perceived geopolitical shocks positively predict their multi-dimensional perceived discrimination. When migrants subjectively feel greater negative impacts brought by international geopolitical conflicts, they report more institutional, interpersonal and symbolic unfair-treatment experiences. This finding supports H1 and verifies core logic derived from intergroup-threat theory: macro-level international conflict can be transmitted to individual migrant groups through everyday discriminatory experiences in host societies.

Second, the correlation between perceived discrimination and outcome variables presents counter-intuitive positive pattern. Migrants who perceive more discrimination tend to show more positive evaluations of Russian political regime and stronger subjective belonging to Russian society. This is inconsistent with conventional migration-adaptation expectation that discrimination will reduce host-country support and belonging sense.

Third, perceived discrimination plays a statistically significant mediating role. The association between perceived geopolitical shocks and migrant political attitudes as well as social identity operates fully through perceived-discrimination pathway; direct effects are non-significant. H4 and H5 gain statistical support. Nevertheless, cross-sectional data cannot support causal inference, and reverse-causality possibility cannot be excluded.

Fourth, moderating-effect results are mixed. Russian-language fluency shows marginally significant moderating trend, and conditional indirect effect is stronger among high-fluency respondents, yet interaction term for moderated-mediation does not reach formal statistical significance. Hence evidence supporting H6 and H9 is weak and preliminary. Residence duration displays no moderating effect, rejecting H7. Due to sample-size limitation of comparison subgroup, H8 cannot be effectively examined.

5.2 Theoretical Interpretation for Counter-Intuitive Positive-Mediation Pattern

Four non-mutually-exclusive mechanisms are raised to interpret the puzzling positive-correlation result between perceived discrimination and pro-regime attitudes. Two mechanisms relate to survey-response bias, and two correspond to substantive psychological explanations.

First, social-desirability bias under authoritarian survey context. Central-Asian labour migrants in Russia are in legally vulnerable positions, depending on state institutions for work permits and residence rights. Even under anonymity promises, respondents who suffer more discrimination may have stronger motivation to demonstrate loyalty toward state power, strategically delivering pro-regime answers to

avoid being labelled as “hostile outsiders”. Survey responses may reflect strategic self-presentation rather than genuine inner attitudes.

Second, survivorship bias. Our sample only includes migrants who chose to stay in Russia by survey time. Migrants holding negative political attitudes may have already left Russia because of discrimination and poor life prospects. Sample selective retention may create statistical illusion that discrimination reinforces regime support. We cannot observe the attitudes of those who have exited receiving country.

Third, threat-induced cohesion hypothesis. From substantive-psychology perspective, multi-layer external threats including geopolitical conflict and domestic social exclusion may trigger “rally-around-the-flag” effect among vulnerable migrant groups. Faced with chaotic threatening surroundings, migrants may regard state authority as source of social order and protection. Discriminatory experiences may strengthen psychological dependence on host-country state instead of eroding regime approval.

Fourth, social-comparison realignment. Geopolitical-conflict-shaped official discourse may reshape migrants’ reference-group selection. Instead of comparing self-situation with local ethnic-Russian majority, migrants may compare their own status with groups defined as “enemies” in official narratives. Under such adjusted comparison frame, migrants may form relatively positive subjective evaluation toward host-country regime.

Current cross-sectional dataset lacks capacity to distinguish which mechanism dominates observed pattern. Reverse causality (for example, migrants holding pro-regime inclination may subjectively perceive higher discrimination) and unmeasured confounding variables (such as personality traits) remain plausible alternative explanations.

For the tentative moderating role of Russian-language fluency, two interpretations coexist. On one hand, high-fluency migrants can better understand domestic political narratives and perceive subtle discrimination signals, making their attitudes more sensitive to geopolitical-shock stimuli. On the other hand, better Russian-language capability also enables respondents to more accurately capture survey-context political risks and produce socially-desirable answers. Existing evidence cannot prioritize one interpretation over another. Residence duration exerts no moderating effect, possibly because geopolitical-conflict shocks belong to recent shared social events that affect new arrivals and long-term residents equally.

5.3 Theoretical Contributions

This research delivers tentative hypothesis-generating theoretical contributions under the premise of acknowledging methodological limitations. Firstly, this study demonstrates the feasibility of operationalizing perceived geopolitical shock as a macro-micro connecting construct in migration-psychology research, although measurement tools still require large-scale revision and validation. Secondly, this paper integrates intergroup-threat theory and social-identity theory within moderated-mediation framework, providing analytical template for studying migrant attitudes under

host-country-involved geopolitical-conflict contexts. Thirdly, the study highlights methodological challenges for migrant survey research within authoritarian-nationalist contexts: researchers must take social-desirability bias and survivorship bias seriously instead of merely treating them as marginal limitations. Future research should adopt list-experiment, randomized-response technique or qualitative interview methods to separate genuine attitudes from strategic survey responses.

5.4 Practical Implications

For Russian migrant-management practice: since perceived discrimination acts as core mediating channel translating geopolitical shocks into migrant attitudes, policy-makers ought to focus efforts on reducing institutional and interpersonal discrimination against Central-Asian labour migrants. Over-reliance on securitized “external-enemy” political narratives may bring short-term behavioural compliance, yet may accumulate long-term social-conflict risks.

For Central-Asian origin countries: governments need to strengthen consular-affairs capacity, provide legal-aid services for citizens working overseas, and establish systematic social-reintegration support programs for returning migrants who leave Russia under geopolitical pressure.

For international-organization and non-governmental practitioners: migrant populations trapped in geopolitical-conflict contexts require not only conventional legal assistance and employment support, but also targeted psychological-intervention services coping with discrimination-related trauma, as well as capacity-building for navigating politicized public discourse.

5.5 Research Limitations

Several prominent limitations constrain interpretation of findings. First, survey data cannot rule out social-desirability bias and survivorship bias, which constitute primary alternative explanations for counter-intuitive positive-mediation pattern. Second, the exploratory geopolitical-shock scale suffers low internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.58$), despite robustness-test stability. Reverse-worded items generate comprehension difficulty for cross-cultural migrant respondents. Third, high sample homogeneity (92% male, 92% Central-Asian ethnicity) restricts population generalizability. Fourth, cross-sectional design cannot establish causal order among variables; mediating-effect testing only describes statistical association rather than causal process. Fifth, even though Harman single-factor test does not indicate severe common-method bias, all variables rely on self-report questionnaire, so shared-method variance cannot be completely eliminated.

5.6 Future-Research Directions

Future scholarship can advance along multiple paths. First, improve measurement instruments for perceived geopolitical shocks: abandon problematic reverse-coded items, decompose construct into multi-dimensional sub-dimensions (economic threat, social threat, identity threat), and implement cognitive-interview validation among target migrant groups. Second, adopt longitudinal panel data or quasi-experimental design to identify causal relations. Combine list-experiment and qualitative in-depth interviews to distinguish genuine psychological attitudes from strategic response bias. Third, further

explore other potential mediating and moderating variables, such as economic-insecurity perception, migrant-network support and media-trust level. Fourth, carry out cross-context comparative research to test whether observed mediating mechanism is universal or specific to Russia's post-war institutional background.

5.7 Conclusion

Taking 212 Central-Asian-origin migrants in Russia as sample, this exploratory study investigates how perceived geopolitical shocks correlate with migrant political attitudes and host-society social identity through perceived-discrimination mediating pathway. Statistically significant indirect effects are detected: perceived geopolitical-shock perception is associated with higher perceived discrimination, which further links to more positive pro-regime evaluation and stronger Russian-society belonging. Such counter-intuitive positive-correlation pattern can be interpreted by threat-induced cohesion, social-comparison realignment, social-desirability bias and survivorship-bias mechanisms. Current dataset cannot judge which explanation is empirically dominant. Weak tentative evidence suggests Russian-language fluency may amplify the indirect mediating pathway.

This paper introduces perceived geopolitical-shock construct to migration political-psychology domain and integrates multiple theoretical perspectives for analysing migrant adaptation under authoritarian-nationalist geopolitical-conflict settings. It should be repeatedly emphasized that all findings are hypothesis-generating. Cross-sectional constraints, scale-reliability defects and sample-representativeness shortcomings forbid causal-conclusion drawing. More rigorous follow-up research is urgently needed to verify or falsify the observed moderated-mediation pattern.

Declarations

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The study protocol was reviewed and formally approved by the Local Ethics Committee of Kazan Federal University in March 2025. All research was performed in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations, including the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Participation in the study was voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. All data were anonymized and used solely for academic research purposes.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Data availability

The data and materials supporting the findings of this study are provided as supplementary files accompanying this submission. These materials include the anonymized raw dataset, the processed analysis dataset, the full survey questionnaire, the variable codebook and coding scheme, the statistical analysis script, and documentation describing the statistical models and data-processing procedures. All data made available for review have been anonymized to protect participant confidentiality. No directly identifying personal information is included in the shared datasets. The supplementary materials are available to the editors and reviewers for the purpose of verifying the study methodology, data processing, statistical analyses, and reported findings.

Authors' contributions

Yong Zhi contributed to the study conception and design, data collection, data analysis, and preparation of the original manuscript. Hugejiletu Bao contributed to supervision, interpretation of the findings, and critical revision of the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Declaration of generative AI use

Generative AI tools were used solely to assist with language editing, stylistic refinement, and manuscript formatting. All research design, data collection, statistical analyses, interpretation of results, and substantive academic content were conducted and verified by the authors. The authors reviewed and take full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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Figures

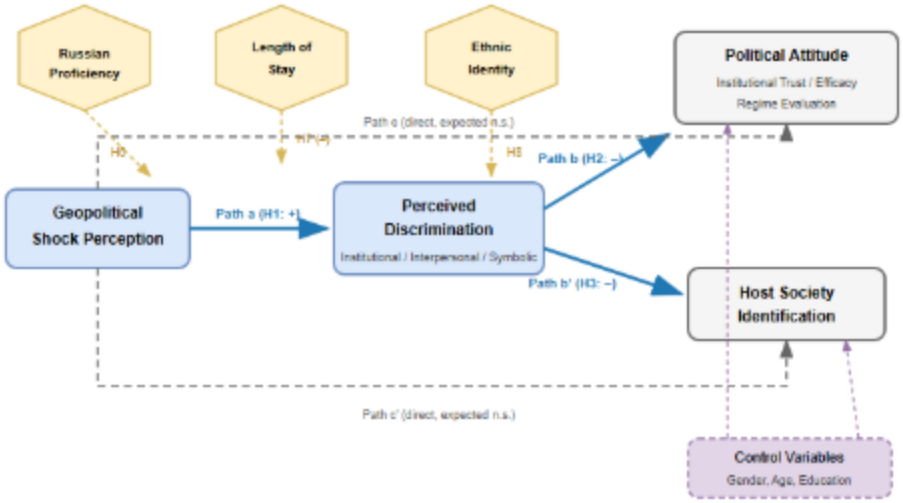


Figure 1

Conceptual model of the moderated mediation framework.

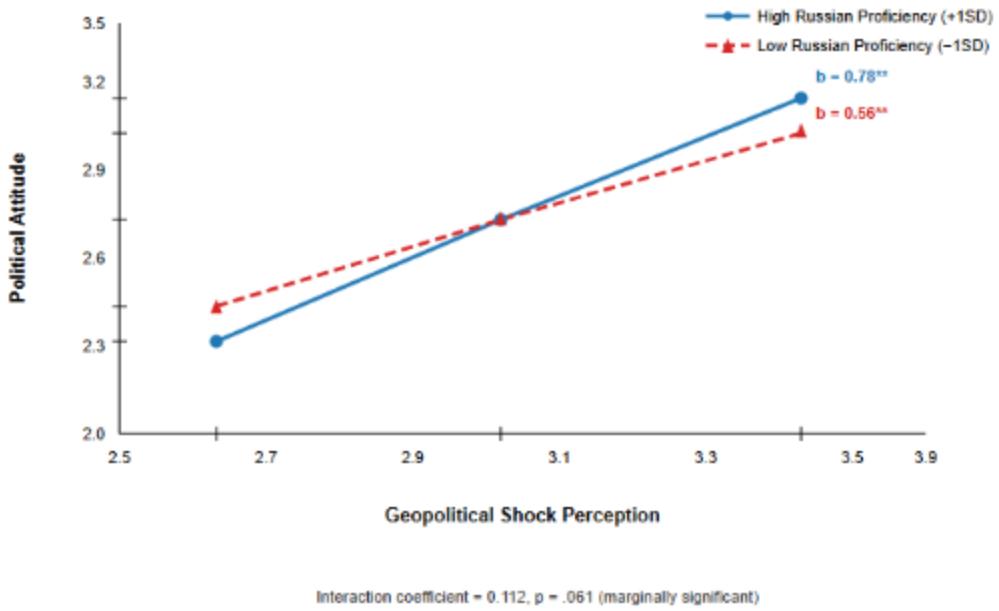


Figure 2

Moderating effect of Russian language fluency on the relationship between perceived geopolitical shocks and political attitudes.

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- 1SurveyQuestionnaire.docx
- 2AnonymizedRawData.xlsx
- 3ProcessedAnalysisData.xlsx
- 4VariableCodebook.xlsx
- 5StatisticalAnalysisScript.py
- 6StatisticalModelsandDataProcessing.docx
- 7DataCollectionandProcessingProtocol.docx