

# DETERMINANTS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ABROAD

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This study examines which factors shape national identity during study abroad, focusing on psychological, social, and institutional mechanisms. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 308 international students studying in Hungary. Multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to examine how identity strain, intercultural engagement, host-country evaluations, and institutional satisfaction relate to post-mobility levels of national sentiment, patriotism, nationalism, and collective narcissism. The findings indicate that identity strain variables are the most consistent predictors of nationalism and collective narcissism. In contrast, greater international orientation and interaction with international peers are associated with lower levels of exclusionary national identity, while evaluations of the host country's political, economic, and social conditions show inconsistent effects. The results suggest that national identity during study abroad is driven primarily by internal identity processes and relational exposure rather than host-country characteristics.

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## 1 Introduction

Socially sustainable higher education depends not only on access and inclusion, but on how international experiences shape the ways students relate to their own and others' national groups.

International student mobility is a defining feature of higher education today. Study abroad is commonly associated with intercultural learning and personal growth, but it also intensifies identity reflection. Living outside one's home country often makes national belonging louder, prompting individuals to reassess their relationship to it. (Sobkowiak, 2019)

National identity is multidimensional, encompassing affective attachment (sentiment), constructive pride (patriotism), superiority beliefs (nationalism), and defensive concerns about collective recognition (collective narcissism) (Golec de Zavala, 2024). While international exposure is often assumed to weaken narrow-minded attitudes, findings are mixed: some studies point to greater openness, others to strengthened in-group identification under perceived uncertainty or threat. Empirical studies of study-abroad participants thus report both increased openness and, in some conditions, heightened in-group identification, especially when students perceive uncertainty or threat in the host environment. (Sobkowiak, 2019)

### 1.1 Research gap and hypotheses

Existing research on study abroad outcomes rarely examine differentiated effects on multiple dimensions of national identity. Studies often treat national identification as unidimensional or focus on intercultural competence, neglecting how psychological strain, relational exposure, and contextual assessments operate together. (De Lise et al., 2025) It also remains unclear whether different identity dimensions respond differently to mobility experiences, whether strain amplifies defensive attitudes, for instance, or whether peer contact mitigates them.

This study addresses these gaps by analyzing twelve post-mobility national identity statements across four conceptual dimensions. Using item-level regression models, it captures nuanced variation in how psychological, relational, and institutional factors shape identity expression among international students in Hungary.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Higher levels of identity strain is associated with stronger post-mobility national identification.
- H2: Greater intercultural engagement and international orientation are associated with lower levels of exclusionary national identity.
- H3: Evaluations of host-country political, economic, and social conditions are associated with post-mobility national identity.
- H4: Psychological factors related to identity strain account for greater variance in national identity than contextual and institutional factors.

## **2 Dimensions of national identity**

Contemporary research agrees that national identity is multidimensional rather than a single attitude of “feeling national” (Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; Ariely, 2020; May, 2023). Four closely related, but empirically distinct, dimensions are especially relevant for international students: national sentiment, patriotism, nationalism, and collective narcissism.

National sentiment refers to basic feelings of belonging, attachment, and commitment to the national community, including emotional ties and a sense of membership in a political unit (Naz et al., 2025). It captures whether the nation is an important part of the self-concept, without specifying how the nation is defined or how it should relate to others (Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; May, 2023). This kind of diffuse attachment is often considered a precondition for other, more specific forms of national identity such as pride or chauvinism (May, 2023). Several works show that ingroup satisfaction psychologically differs from nationalism and collective narcissism while also assuming less prejudice (Gustavsson, 2019). It must be mentioned that national sentiment is less frequently used as a dimension for national identity research (compared to patriotism, nationalism and collective narcissism), in this research it was used as a more generic, positive attitude toward someone’s own nation and nationality.

Patriotism is typically defined as a positive, affective attachment to one’s country, expressed as pride, loyalty and a willingness to contribute to the national community (Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Ariely, 2020). Political psychology distinguishes such “secure” national identification from more defensive or exclusionary forms

(Marchlewska et al., 2022; Cislak & Cichoka, 2023). Patriotism can be civic and inclusive, focused on institutions, values and achievements, rather than on ethnic boundaries (Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; Ariely, 2020). Empirically, patriotism is associated with civic engagement and can be unrelated or even negatively related to hostility toward outgroups when separated from more chauvinistic attitudes (Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Marchlewska et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala, 2024).

Nationalism usually entails the belief that one's nation is superior and should have priority over others, often accompanied by restrictive criteria for membership and a willingness to assert national dominance (Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; Ariely, 2020; Golec de Zavala, 2024). Studies measuring multiple facets of nationalism identify elements such as strong national pride, strict boundary definitions, and invidious comparisons to other nations (Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; May, 2023). Nationalism therefore represents a more exclusionary and competitive form of national identity than either national sentiment or benign patriotism.

Collective narcissism refers to an exaggerated, insecure belief in the group's greatness, combined with a chronic expectation that others fail to appreciate and respect the group sufficiently (Cichoka & Cislak, 2020; Federico et al., 2021; Cislak & Cichoka, 2023). In the national domain, it manifests as the conviction that the nation is exceptional and entitled to special recognition, yet constantly disrespected. Factor-analytic work shows that collective narcissism is distinct from both nationalism and simple satisfaction with the nation, even though it often overlaps with them (Federico et al., 2021). Unlike secure patriotism, national narcissism is reliably linked to intergroup hostility, populist support, social cynicism and resistance to criticism of the nation. When secure national identification is statistically separated from narcissism, patriotism appears compatible with democratic values and inclusive attitudes, whereas the narcissistic component drives defensive, exclusionary responses (Marchlewska et al., 2022; Cislak & Cichoka, 2023; Golec de Zavala, 2024).

The literature thus supports treating national sentiment, patriotism, nationalism and collective narcissism as related but distinguishable dimensions, which can have different predictors and consequences in mobility contexts (Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; Ariely, 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2022; Federico et al., 2021; May, 2023; Golec de Zavala, 2024).

### **3 Determinants of national identity change during study abroad**

Research on international students and sojourners shows that national identity is not fixed; it is reshaped by psychological processes, social participation, and institutional and contextual conditions during mobility (Bethel et al., 2020; Raja et al., 2021; Chen, 2023; Teng et al., 2023; Vesković Anđelković, 2024). For students abroad, these factors can either foster inclusive, secure forms of national attachment or reinforce defensive nationalism and collective narcissism.

#### **3.1 Psychological factors: identity strain, needs, and integration**

Life transitions such as migration or study abroad introduce substantial identity strain. Students must reconcile pre-existing self-views with new cultural expectations, which can challenge continuity and coherence of the self (Raja et al., 2021; Li, 2025). Longitudinal work with newly arrived international students shows that satisfaction of basic psychological needs (belonging, competence, autonomy) in both heritage and host cultural groups predicts more identity integration, where multiple cultural identities are experienced as compatible and coherent. In contrast, perceived discrimination or chronic threat fosters identity compartmentalization or dominance of a single identity, often privileging the national or ethnic in-group over others (Amiot et al., 2017).

For some international students, identity dislocation manifests as confusion about “who they are” and tension between heritage and host norms, with consequences for mental health (Lim, 2024). When internal needs for recognition and esteem are unmet, identification with the nation can become defensive and narcissistic: students may seek psychological security in an idealized national in-group and become hyper-sensitive to perceived slights against it (Cichoka & Cislak, 2020; Federico et al., 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2022; Cislak & Cichoka, 2023). This pattern is consistent with broader evidence that collective narcissism helps manage individual psychological needs but undermines both intra- and intergroup relations (Cichoka & Cislak, 2020; Federico et al., 2021).

Psychological orientation toward openness also matters. Students who frame study abroad as an opportunity for exploration, and who develop hybrid or “open-ended” identities, tend to move away from rigid self-other dichotomies (Teng et al., 2023;

Li, 2025). Conversely, those seeking stability in familiar categories may strengthen a more closed national identity in response to perceived otherness and uncertainty (Raja et al., 2021; Teng et al., 2023; Lim, 2024).

### **3.2 Social and relational factors: contact, networks, and participation**

Identity change is strongly mediated by patterns of social participation. Qualitative work with British students in China shows that those who actively engage with local peers, use their “otherness” as a resource, and invest in language learning often develop more complex, open identities that integrate aspects of both home and host cultures (Teng et al., 2023). Students who remain within co-national circles or avoid deep cultural contact tend instead to reinforce pre-existing national boundaries and “self-other” oppositions (Raja et al., 2021; Teng et al., 2023; Li, 2025).

The composition of social networks is crucial. Studies of international students’ identity development and cultural identity find that co-national and multinational friendships, extracurricular activities, and social skills are significant predictors of stronger (and more positive) cultural/national identification with the host environment (Raja et al., 2021; Meng, 2023). At the same time, strong national identity may lead students to preferentially seek co-nationals for support, which can increase emotional security but limit intercultural engagement and maintain sharper in-group/out-group distinctions (Naz et al., 2025). These patterns align with broader findings that secure identification can coexist with openness, whereas defensive national narcissism is linked to distrust and hostility toward outgroups (Cislak & Cichoka, 2023; Golec de Zavala, 2024).

### **3.3 Institutional context and support**

Institutional environments shape how psychological and social processes play out. Universities that provide inclusive teaching, culturally diverse activities, and psychological support can buffer acculturative stress and facilitate constructive identity work (Roy & Al Harthy, 2022; Meng, 2023; Naz et al., 2025; Li, 2025).

Conversely, restrictive communication environments or weak support structures can exacerbate identity threats. International students in China reported that disconnection from prior social networks (e.g., via internet restrictions) intensified

early identity threats, until new memberships with co-national and multinational peers were formed (Raja et al., 2021). Similarly, classroom norms and assessment practices that implicitly privilege one culture may reinforce feelings of inferiority or exclusion among international students and heighten identity strain (Lim, 2024).

### **3.4 Host country characteristics and macro-context**

Comparative and bibliometric reviews of intercultural adaptation research emphasize that, globally, core themes recur (adjustment, acculturative stress, identity and social support) but regional emphases differ (Zhao, 2020; Alshammari et al., 2023; Fitria et al., 2025). In some contexts, national identity is framed more civically, supporting secure patriotism and openness; in others, discourses of external threat or disrespect encourage more defensive, potentially narcissistic nationalism, which can be activated by perceived criticism during study abroad (Zhang & Ren, 2024; Fitria et al., 2025; Naz et al., 2025). The same structural features (e.g., language distance, racialized hierarchies, geopolitical tensions) can thus either motivate critical reflection and more complex identities or fuel re-entrenchment of exclusionary national narratives.

## **4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Research design and sample**

The study used a survey-based approach to explore what shapes national identity among international students in Hungary. Researchers gathered data from 308 students enrolled at Hungarian universities, with participation being both anonymous and voluntary. The respondents came from a range of different countries and were at various points in their time abroad. The survey was administered online and responses were collected from my current students, alumni, dormitory residents, and contacts reached through academic networks across several Hungarian universities. Data collection took place throughout November 2025.

### **4.2 Measures and independent variables**

The questionnaire was developed by operationalizing the key constructs identified in the literature and the research design. Each construct was translated into concrete survey items, resulting in a combination of Likert-scale statements and binary

(yes/no) questions. Likert-scale items were used to capture attitudes and perceptions related to national identity and mobility experiences, whereas binary questions targeted behavioral and contextual aspects, such as interaction patterns and practical experiences abroad. Most items were developed specifically for this study rather than directly adopted from existing scales, to ensure closer alignment with the research context. Prior to full data collection, the questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of international students to assess clarity, wording, and overall coherence; minor adjustments were made based on feedback.

To measure national identity after mobility, the study used twelve statements covering four key themes: national sentiment, patriotism, nationalism, and collective narcissism. (Golec de Zavala, 2024; Cichoka & Cislak, 2020; Cislak & Cichoka, 2023) Each theme included three items.

Respondents rated their agreement on a Likert scale (1-5). Since responses varied quite a bit across items, the analysis looked at individual items rather than just grouping them into broader scores.

In terms of independent variables, the study looked at four main groups of factors:

- Identity strain

This captured psychological tension related to studying abroad, including mental strain tied to identity, feeling that the experience abroad led to more loss than gain, feeling more connected to one's home country, and uncertainty about oneself.

- Intercultural engagement

These items measured how often students interacted with other international students or locals, and whether they felt their international outlook had grown.

- Views on the host country

Students were asked about their perceptions of Hungary's government, living standards, how friendly they found Hungarians, and practical challenges like dealing with bureaucracy.

- Satisfaction with their university

This was included to see whether institutional experiences played a role.

Control variables like political orientation (conservative or liberal) and religiosity were also considered to ensure more accurate results.

### **4.3 Analysis**

To explore the data, the researchers ran twelve separate regression models, one for each statement about national identity after studying abroad. All the predictor variables were entered into the models at the same time to see how much each one contributed independently.

This setup made it possible to check if certain factors had similar effects across related statements. The overall fit of each model was assessed using  $R^2$  and F statistics, and standardized beta coefficients helped show which predictors had the strongest influence.

Since earlier analysis revealed that the effects of predictors could vary even within the same conceptual group, the study focused on interpreting results at the level of individual statements. This approach helped avoid lumping things together in a way that might hide important differences.

## **5 Results**

To examine how psychological, social, and contextual factors shape national identity after studying abroad, multiple linear regression analyses were carried out. Twelve separate models were run—one for each individual item across the four identity dimensions. All models turned out to be statistically significant, which made it possible to systematically compare how different predictors influenced each aspect of identity.

**5.1 Model fit across identity dimensions**

Table 1 presents the overall fit indices for the twelve regression models estimated at the item level. All models were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), indicating that the combined set of predictors explained a meaningful proportion of variance across all national identity components.

The strongest explanatory power emerged for the item “I feel strong attachment to their country” ( $R^2 = .433$ ), suggesting that nearly 43% of the variance in attachment can be accounted for by the included psychological, social, and contextual variables. Substantial variance was also explained for more exclusionary nationalism items, such as “The world would be a better place if everyone was like my country” ( $R^2 = .355$ ) and “I support my country even if it acts wrongly towards others” ( $R^2 = .336$ ).

**Table 1: Regression model fit summary (N=308)**

Dependent Variable	Dimension	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	F
Strong attachment	National sentiment	0.433	0.393	10.67
Support but criticize	National sentiment	0.22	0.164	3.93
Rather citizen	National sentiment	0.329	0.281	6.85
Proud – history	Patriotism	0.244	0.19	4.5
Proud – developing	Patriotism	0.245	0.191	4.53
Proud – achievements	Patriotism	0.172	0.112	2.89
Better than most	Nationalism	0.271	0.219	5.2
Better if everyone like us	Nationalism	0.355	0.308	7.66
Support even if wrong	Nationalism	0.336	0.288	7.06
Special treatment	Collective narcissism	0.309	0.259	6.23

Source: own editing with SPSS software

Patriotism-related items showed moderate explanatory power ( $R^2$  ranging from .172 to .245), while collective narcissism items were explained to a somewhat lesser extent ( $R^2$  between .240 and .309). The lowest explained variance appeared for pride in

national achievements ( $R^2 = .172$ ), indicating that this dimension may be less strongly tied to the examined predictors.

These results suggest that the selected predictors account more strongly for affective attachment and exclusionary nationalism than for pride-based or grievance-based identity components. This pattern provides initial support for the idea that identity change during study abroad is particularly associated with emotionally and normatively loaded aspects of national identification rather than purely symbolic pride elements.

## **5.2 Identity strain predictors**

As shown in Table 2, identity strain variables demonstrated differentiated but theoretically coherent associations across the twelve identity items. Among these, perceived increased connectedness to the home country emerged as the most consistent predictor. It was positively associated with strong attachment ( $\beta = .415$ ,  $p < .001$ ), preference for home citizenship ( $\beta = .330$ ,  $p < .001$ ), all three patriotism indicators ( $\beta = .175-.207$ ,  $p \leq .013$ ), and multiple exclusionary nationalism and narcissism items. This pattern indicates that perceived reconnection functions as a general amplification mechanism, strengthening both affective belonging and more rigid identity expressions.

Psychological strain related to national identity also showed systematic effects, particularly for exclusionary components. It significantly predicted strong attachment ( $\beta = .184$ ,  $p = .002$ ), citizenship preference ( $\beta = .162$ ,  $p = .013$ ), superiority-based beliefs (e.g., “the world would be a better place if everyone was like my country,”  $\beta = .167$ ,  $p = .009$ ), and entitlement-oriented attitudes (e.g., “my country deserves special treatment,”  $\beta = .181$ ,  $p = .006$ ). These findings suggest that identity strain is associated less with symbolic pride and more with defensive and normatively rigid forms of identification, consistent with compensatory identity mechanisms.

Perceiving mobility as a loss (“I lost more than won by moving to Hungary”) displayed a more selective pattern. It was unrelated to attachment and pride but significantly predicted exclusionary nationalism and collective. This indicates that negative mobility evaluations are linked primarily to grievance-based identity reinforcement rather than to strengthened belonging per se.

In contrast, generalized self-uncertainty showed minimal and inconsistent associations, suggesting that diffuse identity instability does not systematically translate into heightened national identification in this context.

Taken together, the results indicate that internal identity processes during study abroad are not uniformly related to all identity dimensions. Reconnection appears to intensify national identification broadly, whereas perceived loss and psychological strain are more strongly associated with defensive and exclusionary forms of identity expression.

**Table 2: Identity strain predictors ( $\beta$  with p-values) (N=308)**

DV	»I feel more connected to my country now.«	»I feel more uncertain about myself now.«	»Maintaining my national identity is important for my mental health.«	»I feel like I lost more than what I won by moving to Hungary.«
Strong attachment	.415 (<.001)	-.094 (.073)	.184 (.002)	.008 (.893)
Support but criticize	.232 (.001)	-.113 (.067)	-.099 (.155)	.037 (.577)
Rather citizen	.330 (<.001)	-.089 (.120)	.162 (.013)	.037 (.548)
Proud – history	.175 (.012)	-.101 (.096)	.034 (.621)	-.049 (.458)
Proud – developing	.207 (.003)	-.076 (.209)	.175 (.011)	.069 (.290)
Proud – achievements	.181 (.013)	-.047 (.461)	.123 (.086)	-.045 (.512)
Better than most	.266 (<.001)	-.053 (.374)	.152 (.024)	.163 (.012)
Better if everyone like us	.221 (.001)	.016 (.774)	.167 (.009)	.209 (.001)
Support even if wrong	.083 (.203)	.093 (.103)	.172 (.008)	.169 (.006)
Special treatment	.176 (.008)	-.012 (.836)	.181 (.006)	.265 (<.001)
People underestimate	.193 (.005)	.142 (.018)	.080 (.238)	.045 (.492)

Source: own editing with SPSS software

### 5.3 Intercultural & international orientation predictors

Table 3 presents the effects of intercultural engagement and international orientation variables on post-mobility national identity. In contrast to the identity strain predictors, these variables demonstrate more selective and less systematic associations across dimensions.

Interaction with international peers shows limited direct effects. It is negatively associated with “I get upset if my country is not recognized” ( $\beta = -.126$ ,  $p = .036$ ), suggesting that greater exposure to diverse peers may reduce sensitivity to perceived external disrespect. However, it does not significantly predict most attachment, pride, or superiority-based items.

Perceived increased international orientation (“I feel more international now”) exhibits a more differentiated pattern. It is positively associated with “I support my country but willing to criticize it” ( $\beta = .229$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and pride in national history ( $\beta = .175$ ,  $p = .004$ ), indicating that stronger international self-identification does not necessarily weaken national belonging. Instead, it appears compatible with more reflective and balanced forms of identification. Importantly, this variable does not systematically predict exclusionary nationalism or entitlement-based attitudes.

**Table 3: Intercultural & international orientation predictors ( $\beta$  with p-values)**

DV	»I often hang out with internationals«	»I feel more international now«	»I often hang out with my own nationality«
Strong attachment	.037 (.469)	-.037 (.472)	.012 (.814)
Support but criticize	.014 (.818)	.229 (<.001)	.014 (.818)
Rather citizen	.005 (.932)	-.036 (.526)	-.021 (.698)
Proud – history	-.004 (.950)	.175 (.004)	-.029 (.618)
Proud – developing	-.008 (.899)	.089 (.136)	.069 (.236)
Proud – achievements	.096 (.125)	.106 (.091)	.097 (.113)
Better than most	-.060 (.308)	.004 (.940)	-.002 (.978)
Better if everyone like us	.005 (.929)	-.083 (.130)	-.028 (.602)
Support even if wrong	-.070 (.214)	-.083 (.139)	.081 (.139)
Special treatment	-.059 (.302)	-.085 (.136)	-.026 (.640)
People underestimate	-.016 (.786)	-.025 (.676)	-.113 (.053)
Upset not recognized	-.126 (.036)	.079 (.185)	-.077 (.192)

Source: own editing with SPSS software

Contact with co-nationals shows no consistent strengthening effect on national identity. Most coefficients are non-significant, with a marginal negative association for “people underestimate my country” ( $\beta = -.113$ ,  $p = .053$ ), suggesting that clustering with one’s own group does not reliably intensify grievance-based attitudes.

Overall, intercultural exposure variables display weaker and more inconsistent effects than identity strain variables. Their influence appears limited to specific attitudinal nuances rather than broad amplification of national identification. This pattern supports the interpretation that relational exposure during study abroad moderates certain defensive reactions but does not independently drive major shifts in national identity strength.

#### **5.4 Host-country & institutional predictors**

Table 4 presents the effects of host-country evaluations and institutional satisfaction on post-mobility national identity. Compared to identity strain variables, these contextual predictors show more selective and dimension-specific associations.

Evaluations of the Hungarian government emerge as the most consistent contextual predictor. Positive government evaluations significantly predict strong attachment ( $\beta = .133, p = .039$ ), multiple patriotism indicators (e.g., pride in history,  $\beta = .250, p = .001$ ), and several exclusionary nationalism and collective narcissism items, including “The world would be a better place if everyone was like my country” ( $\beta = .209, p = .002$ ), “I support my country even if it acts wrongly towards others” ( $\beta = .182, p = .009$ ), and “people underestimate us” ( $\beta = .259, p < .001$ ). This suggests that more favorable political evaluations of the host country are associated with stronger national identification overall. Rather than weakening home attachment, positive host-country political perceptions appear linked to intensified national positioning.

In contrast, perceived living standards show no systematic effects across models. All coefficients are non-significant, indicating that economic evaluations of the host context do not meaningfully predict changes in national identity dimensions within this sample.

University satisfaction displays a more nuanced pattern. It significantly predicts pride in national history ( $\beta = .231, p = .001$ ) and “I support my country even if it acts wrongly towards others” ( $\beta = .202, p = .002$ ), but does not consistently influence exclusionary or grievance-based components. These results suggest that institutional experiences may reinforce affective or normative attachment, yet they do not appear to drive entitlement-based identity expressions.

Overall, contextual evaluations demonstrate explanatory relevance but lack the consistency and breadth observed for internal identity strain variables. Political perceptions of the host country show the clearest association with intensified national identification, whereas economic evaluations and institutional satisfaction exhibit limited and dimension-specific effects. This pattern reinforces the broader finding that internal psychological processes play a more central role in identity dynamics during mobility than structural host-country conditions alone.

**Table 4: Host-country & institutional predictors ( $\beta$  with p-values) (N=308)**

DV	»Hungary has a good government«	»Hungary has good living standards«	University satisfaction (combined score)
Strong attachment	.133 (.039)	-.071 (.253)	.110 (.062)
Support but criticize	.047 (.534)	-.095 (.195)	.115 (.096)
Rather citizen	.027 (.699)	-.019 (.782)	.093 (.144)
Proud – history	.250 (.001)	-.102 (.156)	.231 (.001)
Proud – developing	.152 (.041)	-.093 (.197)	.051 (.454)
Proud – achievements	.074 (.342)	-.112 (.137)	.092 (.195)
Better than most	.157 (.032)	-.015 (.829)	.091 (.172)
Better if everyone like us	.209 (.002)	-.002 (.975)	.080 (.200)
Support even if wrong	.182 (.009)	.017 (.796)	.202 (.002)
Special treatment	.074 (.299)	-.047 (.493)	.104 (.109)
People underestimate	.259 (<.001)	-.020 (.782)	.066 (.328)
Upset not recognized	.224 (.003)	-.039 (.592)	.103 (.132)

Source: own editing with SPSS software

## 5.5 Political orientation and religiosity predictors

Political orientation exhibited dimension-specific effects rather than broad structural influence (Table 5). Liberal orientation positively predicted critical patriotism (“I support my country but willing to criticize it”) and citizenship commitment, suggesting that liberal respondents were more likely to endorse engaged but reflective forms of national identification. Liberalism also showed positive associations with normative superiority claims and special treatment endorsement, indicating that international orientation does not necessarily preclude strong evaluative identification.

Conservative orientation was significantly associated with unconditional support of the nation and perceptions that the country is underestimated, aligning with more defensive or status-sensitive identity components. However, conservative orientation did not significantly predict basic attachment or pride-based items.

Religiosity demonstrated minimal systematic influence. Its only significant effect was a negative association with universalist superiority claims, while remaining non-significant across attachment, pride, and narcissistic dimensions.

Overall, ideological orientation contributes selectively to evaluative and exclusionary dimensions of national identity, but does not appear to fundamentally structure emotional attachment or pride-based components.

**Table 5: Political orientation and religiosity predictors ( $\beta$  with p-values) (N=308)**

DV	Religious	Conservative	Liberal
Strong attachment	.074 (.151)	.048 (.358)	.044 (.367)
Support but criticize	.031 (.612)	.021 (.731)	.141 (.014)
Would rather be citizen	.033 (.556)	.069 (.229)	.178 (.001)
Proud of history	.022 (.711)	.037 (.548)	.033 (.553)
Proud of development	-.011 (.853)	-.022 (.715)	.060 (.283)
Proud of achievements	-.033 (.601)	-.064 (.312)	.038 (.522)
Better than most countries	-.039 (.509)	.027 (.654)	.067 (.226)
Better if everyone like my country	-.116 (.036)	.073 (.195)	.123 (.018)
Support even if wrong	-.067 (.232)	.116 (.043)	.077 (.146)
Special treatment	.058 (.307)	.071 (.220)	.123 (.023)
People underestimate my country	-.113 (.053)	.167 (.005)	.042 (.450)
Upset if not recognized	.058 (.330)	-.002 (.977)	.089 (.116)

Source: own editing with SPSS software

Across the twelve models, identity strain variables emerged as the most consistent predictors of post-mobility national identity. Perceived reconnection to the home country broadly amplified attachment, pride, and exclusionary components, while perceived loss and psychological strain were more strongly associated with defensive and entitlement-based attitudes. Intercultural exposure variables showed selective and generally weaker effects, and host-country evaluations were dimension-specific, with political perceptions demonstrating the clearest contextual influence. Political orientation contributed selectively to evaluative and exclusionary dimensions, whereas religiosity showed minimal and inconsistent effects. Overall, internal identity processes displayed greater explanatory strength than relational, ideological, or structural factors.

## 6 Conclusions

This study examined the determinants of post-mobility national identity among international students, focusing on psychological strain, intercultural engagement, and host-country evaluations. By analyzing twelve identity items across four conceptual dimensions, the findings provide a differentiated view of how identity processes unfold during study abroad.

H1. Higher levels of identity strain are associated with stronger post-mobility national identification.

This hypothesis was largely supported. Identity strain variables, particularly perceived increased connectedness to the home country and national identity-related psychological strain, demonstrated consistent and significant associations across multiple identity dimensions. These effects were especially pronounced for exclusionary nationalism and collective narcissism components. The results suggest that identity strain does not weaken national identification but rather intensifies it, often in more rigid or defensive forms.

H2. Greater intercultural engagement and international orientation are associated with lower levels of exclusionary national identity.

This hypothesis received only partial support. While interaction with international peers was negatively associated with sensitivity to perceived national disrespect, intercultural engagement did not systematically reduce exclusionary attitudes across models. In some cases, increased international orientation coexisted with stable or even reinforced national attachment. These findings indicate that intercultural exposure alone does not automatically translate into weaker exclusionary identification.

H3. Evaluations of host-country political, economic, and social conditions are associated with post-mobility national identity.

This hypothesis was partially supported. Political evaluations of the host country were significantly associated with several national identity components, particularly attachment and nationalism-related items. However, economic evaluations (e.g., living standards) showed no consistent effects. Institutional satisfaction

demonstrated selective associations but did not systematically predict exclusionary identity forms. Thus, contextual perceptions matter, but their influence is dimension-specific and weaker than psychological factors.

H4. Psychological factors related to identity strain account for greater variance in national identity than contextual and institutional factors.

This hypothesis was supported. Across models, identity strain variables exhibited more consistent and theoretically coherent effects than intercultural exposure or contextual evaluations. The strongest explanatory power emerged in models where psychological predictors were central, indicating that internal identity processes play a more decisive role in shaping post-mobility national identification than structural or relational conditions alone.

Political orientation demonstrated selective influence, particularly for evaluative and exclusionary components. Conservative orientation was associated with unconditional support and perceived national under-recognition, whereas liberal orientation predicted both critical patriotism and certain normative superiority claims. Religiosity showed minimal and inconsistent effects. These findings indicate that pre-existing ideological dispositions continue to structure identity expression during mobility but do not override the central role of psychological strain.

Taken together, the findings suggest that national identity change during study abroad is driven primarily by internal psychological mechanisms rather than by host-country characteristics or mere exposure to diversity. Study abroad does not inherently dilute national identity. Instead, identity strain and perceived reconnection may intensify identification, particularly in defensive and exclusionary forms.

These results challenge simplified assumptions that international mobility naturally fosters cosmopolitan detachment. Instead, identity processes during mobility appear complex and contingent, with internal strain functioning as a key driver of identity reinforcement.

## 6.1 Limitations of the study

This study is subject to limitations inherent in questionnaire-based, self-report research. Responses may be influenced by social desirability bias, recall bias, and individual interpretation of survey items, all of which can shape how attitudes and experiences are reported. The cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time, limiting causal interpretation. Although these factors may introduce some measurement error, the use of multiple indicators and consistent patterns across models supports the robustness of the findings.

## 7 Summary

This study investigated how international mobility shapes national identity among students studying abroad. Using twelve regression models across four identity dimensions, the analysis demonstrated that post-mobility national identification is primarily structured by internal psychological dynamics rather than by contextual exposure alone.

Identity strain and perceived reconnection to the home country emerged as the most consistent predictors of national attachment and evaluative components. Intercultural engagement and host-country evaluations showed dimension-specific effects, while political orientation selectively influenced exclusionary and normative expressions of identity. Religiosity played a limited role.

Overall, the findings suggest that study abroad does not automatically weaken national identity. Instead, mobility can intensify or reshape identification through psychologically mediated processes that interact with ideological predispositions.

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