

Divided Space, Divided Attitudes? Comparing the Republics of Moldova and Pridnestrovie (Transnistria) Using Simultaneous Surveys

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Abstract

Has twenty years of separation between the Republics of Moldova and Pridnestrovia (Transnistria, PMR) generated a division in attitudes and beliefs in the two populations? Using near-simultaneous social scientific surveys from the summer of 2010 in the two republics, we measured four localized geopolitical divides: the local economies, historical memories, political legitimacies, and geopolitical orientations. Our findings challenge the notion that Moldova's territorial disunion has produced separate experiential and attitudinal worlds. Complicating geopolitical commentary that locates an East-West fault-line running through Moldova, we find that separateness has not created an attitudinal chasm, but prospects of ending the separation are not supported by the surveys.

Keywords: public opinion, Moldova, Transnistria, geopolitics, nation-building

It is widely held that among the so-called "frozen conflicts" in Eurasia that have endured since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the division within the Republic of Moldova between the majority of the country and the secessionist territory of Pridnestrovia (the Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic or PMR) ¹ is the ripest for a "thaw" and progress towards peaceful conflict resolution (Matsuzato 2008). Unlike other violent conflicts that produced de facto states², the conflict that started in the territory of the Soviet Republic of Moldova was not the result of an apparent ethnic security dilemma, though it had ethnicized aspects (Posen 1993; Kaufman 2001). Instead, the PMR owes its existence to how the collapse of Soviet rule in Moldova created opportunity structures for anti-Soviet

titular nationalist forces and for counter-movements to develop in response to these forces (Chin and Roper 1995; Zabarah 2012). The passage of a series of Moldovan language laws on 31 August 1989; elevating the language of the titular nation to the rank of an official language, changing its Cyrillic script to Latin, and implicitly naming it the equivalent of Romanian, created widespread insecurity amongst the hitherto privileged Russophone population in the republic.

Russophones within Moldova before 1992 were largely but not exclusively concentrated in the more industrialized eastern (left) bank cities of the Dniester (Nistru) river. Using existing factory management organizations and a Slavic “unity” cultural organization, a counter-revolt from among Pridnestrovia’s military-industrial nomenklatura drove what started as an autonomy movement but turned into a separatist conflict concentrated on the left bank of the Dniester/Nistru river (see Figure 1). Language and alphabet became symbolic of other attitudinal divisions over nation, state, region, class, and cultural orientation. The PMR identity that emerged owes somewhat more to history and geography than ideology or ethnicity, though the population was more linguistically Russified than the population of the right bank (Kolossoff and O’Loughlin, 1998; Kolstø and Malgin 1998).

Our aim is distinct from ongoing analysis and policy promotion in current discussions about the future status of Pridnestrovia. However, it is highly complementary in certain respects. We pursue a comparative analysis of public attitudes on both banks of the Nistru/Dniester river using near-simultaneous social scientific surveys from the summer of 2010 in both the Republic of Moldova and the PMR. We seek to empirically measure four localized geopolitical divides that many accounts cite: the economy, historical memory, political legitimacy, and geopolitical orientation. Our findings complicate the notion that Moldova’s territorial disunion has produced separate experiential and attitudinal worlds. Complicating geopolitical commentary that locates an East-West fault-line running through Moldova, we find that separateness has not created an attitudinal chasm. Long-standing geographic divides within this borderland region remain, but attitudes on both banks have greater commonalities than is usually acknowledged. While our work has no overt policy aims or agenda, our analysis of public opinions in Moldova

and Pridnestrovia has considerable relevance to the current discussions on reconciliation and the possibility of a peaceful settlement of this enduring conflict.

The Nistru/Dniester War and its aftermath, 1992-2012

The territories that comprise the contemporary Republic of Moldova and the PMR were an historic zone of competition between the Russian and Ottoman Empires. In 1792 after defeating the Porte, the Russian Empire acquired lands that took its writ as far west as the Dniester river. Here, Marshall Suvorov founded Tiraspol as a Russian garrison town, adding lands to the north the following year. The Russo-Turkish War of 1806-12 provided an opportunity to add to these territories. By the terms of the 1812 Treaty of Bucharest, the Russian empire acquired sovereignty over lands to the west between the Dniester and Prut. Tsarist rule became gradually more intensive in this region, with Russification policies adopted for what became the Guberniya of Bessarabia in 1871. These lands remained part of the Russian Empire until the collapse of Tsarist rule in 1917, when they were proclaimed the homeland of a new Moldavian Democratic Republic. This fledgling polity, which did not include Tiraspol and the neighboring east bank of the Dniester, soon voted to unite itself with neighboring Romania. Soviet rule was meanwhile extended to the east bank territories, and a Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) established in Tiraspol in 1924 as part of Soviet Ukraine (King 2000). The MASSR was a vehicle for Bolshevik aspirations to re-take historic Bessarabia, and after World War II, it became (in modified territorial form) a foundation element of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, a polity that conjoined east and west bank lands to create a new territorial entity within the Soviet Union.

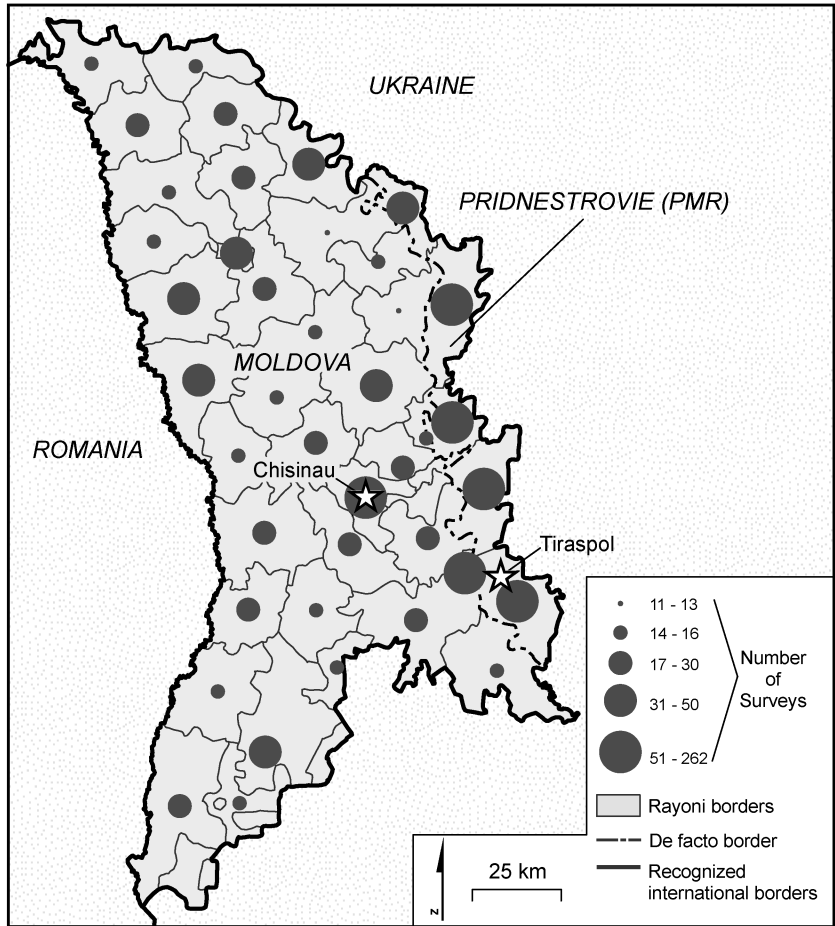


Figure 1: Distribution of the sample across the rayoni of Moldova and Pridnestrovie, 2010.

It was this entity that began to fracture as the Soviet Union disintegrated, with historic divisions between east and west banks becoming salient once more. The violence that accompanied the establishment of the PMR – self-proclaimed as an independent state in December 1991 after a referendum among the region’s population – was limited relative to that in the Caucasus. Slightly over a thousand people were killed, most in June 1992 in the contested city of Bendery (Figure 1). Unlike the Caucasian conflicts (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorny-Karabakh) that gave birth to these de facto states, the Nistru/Dniester war did not see widespread forced population displacement. The Soviet (later Russian) 14th Army’s intervention brought the fighting to an end and established the Russian Federation as a crucial supporter of the PMR regime, though Moscow did not formally endorse the PMR’s secessionist claim, unlike its recognition of the independence

of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008. Over the subsequent two decades after 1992, Russia has been content to subsidize this regime through financial assistance, relatively generous pensions for Russian Federation passport holders, and crucially, gas and energy supplies on credit. This “soft power” has not only supported the regime but allowed Russian firms to benefit from the privatization of the PMR’s most prized assets – its steel, cement, and hydroelectric plants (Chamberlain-Crengă and Allin 2010).

The reasons for optimism about a thaw in the status of the conflict involve improving external and internal conditions. In recent years, the conflict has engaged Russian and European leadership in a renewed push to forge a lasting settlement. Since the war ended, there have been four major sets of initiatives to resolve the stalemate (Korostoleva 2010). After 1997, the mechanism for conflict resolution has been the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)-supervised “5+2 process” that brought together representatives from Pridnestrovie, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, and the OSCE, with the United States and the European Union (EU) officially as observers. This format of negotiations languished until 2011 when a combination of factors, including the US-Russian foreign relations “reset,” deepening German-Russian relations and the change of leadership in Ukraine, created conditions for the resumption of official 5+2 negotiations. The stage was set for this by the June 2010 Meseberg Memorandum, signed by Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. Merkel’s initiative envisaged creating an EU-Russia Political and Security Committee, with Russia cooperating with the EU in seeking a settlement to the Nistru/Dniester conflict as a test case for this diplomatic initiative. In a visit to Chişinău in November 2011, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated Russia’s recognition of Moldova’s territorial integrity and promoted the longstanding idea of a federation made up of differently empowered autonomous regions – Moldova proper, Gagauzia, and the PMR – to resolve the two-decade-long impasse (for the various historic settlement proposals, see Wolff 2011). (Gagauz, a Christian Turkic minority of about 4 percent of the Moldovan total, are concentrated in the south of Moldova and retain a good deal of political autonomy). A federal arrangement is also mooted by the European Union but such proposals have previously failed. On 22 August 2012, German Chancellor Merkel visited the Republic of Moldova and held out the promise of greater

European integration for both it and Pridnestrovie, should they find a settlement to their longstanding divisions (Socor 2012).

Other promising developments are the recent regime changes in both capitals, Chişinău and Tiraspol. Soviet-era leaders have been replaced by a new generation of politicians on both sides of the river. After years of Communist party rule and political stalemate, Moldova formed a government of the pro-democracy Alliance for European Integration led by forty-three-year-old Prime Minister Vlad Filat.³ With the help of defections from the long-entrenched Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova (or PCRM), Moldova finally managed to elect a president (Nicolae Timofti) in March 2012 after three years of indecision and bitter in-fighting. Across the river in Pridnestrovie, Igor Smirnov ruled the PMR from 1992 until his defeat in the presidential elections in the fall of 2011. The figure that eventually triumphed was forty-four-year-old Yevgeny Shevchuk, who campaigned in part on a platform promising “free movement of people and goods” between the de facto region and Moldova. In a first symbolic act, he abolished border checks for Pridnestrovians going to Moldova (though not on those coming back to the secessionist republic). In a meeting in Odessa in January 2012, Shevchuk agreed with Filat to reconnect railway service between the left and right banks, as well as committing to reconnect the telephone network. The 5+2 process talks are ongoing, with meetings in Dublin and Vienna in 2012 and in L’viv in February 2013 under OSCE auspices. Improving the economic prospects of both republics appears to be a powerful motivation for the leadership on both sides to make progress in political arrangements.

Optimism, however, is tempered by the fact that this conflict has endured for twenty years, and divisions that previously looked conjunctural now appear structural. Despite many attempts to force a consensual security order for Central and Eastern Europe after the Cold War, the area remains a zone of competition between Euro-Atlantic institutions – principally NATO – and the Russian Federation (Gower and Timmins 2009). The August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia demonstrated that Russia was willing to exercise military force to prop up the de facto states (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) that it has supported within Georgia over the last two decades. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s appointment in March 2012 of Deputy Foreign Minister Dmitry Rogozin as presidential envoy for the PMR conflict may signal a return to a more hardened Russian nationalist

position on the conflict. Meanwhile, certain elements within the United States have not abandoned a zero-sum attitude towards the division of Moldova. A 2011 US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Report on the conflict written by a staffer of Senator Richard Lugar, for example, has the blunt title: *Will Russia End Eastern Europe's Last Frozen Conflict?* (String 2011).

The assumption that the future of Moldova's internal division is a matter of great power geopolitics overlooks the localized geopolitics of a conflict that has endured for decades (Ó Tuathail 2010). Historic territorial, economic, and social divisions certainly underpin Moldova's partitioned state. The differing political economies of the two regions remain and arguably are more pronounced than before. Historical memory and cultural orientation are divergent within both entities, with Russophone scripts of World War II retaining a strong hold over public consciousness on the left bank, just as Romanian nationalist scripts attract enthusiastic support from a segment of society on the right bank.

The political systems have important differences, too. The Republic of Moldova is a struggling democratic state that Freedom House ranks as "partly free." The de facto state based in Tiraspol is a hybrid authoritarian-democratic regime where power is concentrated in the hands of the presidency, and where parliamentarians are elected from single member districts to a Supreme Soviet (Protsyk 2009). Freedom House ranked its system in 2008 as "not free." A final division is perhaps the most consequential. Moldova is currently split because the leadership of the PMR has articulated the desire to be part of the Russian Federation and not an independent Moldovan state. Finally, these divisions have had twenty years to harden, and a whole new generation has become socialized into thinking that division is the norm. Rojansky (2011, 2), for example, suggests "there is a generational crisis brewing, since Moldovan and PMR youth who have grown up since 1992 have no memory of living together with their neighbors in a single state."

The power of these localized geopolitical divisions – a function of longstanding geopolitical formations, forces, and flows – are enmeshed with contemporary great power maneuvering over Moldova. But while it may be parsimonious to simply declare PMR a subsidized creation of Moscow, as suggested by the 2011 US Senate report, it asks the wrong question. The pertinent localized geopolitical question is the following: Has twenty years of separateness built upon historic divisions produced a chasm of division between

Moldova's two polities? Our interest is not in elite disputes but in the attitudes of ordinary citizens on both sides of the river. Has the enduring geopolitical separation consolidated attitudinal divisions on the ground among ordinary citizens? To what extent do residents of Moldova and the PMR share similar attitudes? Are these attitudes complicated by standard socio-demographic cleavages like age, gender, class, and ethnicity?

A few studies have begun to compare attitudes in both entities. A 2009 project funded by the British Government's Conflict Prevention Pool generated studies from both sides of the Dniester/Nistru that combined social, economic, and demographic statistics with limited surveys of the two populations (Metveev et al. 2009). There was no systematic comparison of public attitudes on both banks, however. The goal of this work was rather to enlist intellectual elites on both banks as facilitators, communicators, and promoters of conflict resolution. More recently, Berg (2012) supervised near-simultaneous surveys on both banks in April-June 2009 as part of a comparative study on political legitimacy in parent states and secessionist entities. Arguing that external legitimacy must resonate with internal legitimation, and following Beetham (1991) that internal legitimacy should include democratic procedures, shared identity, and government performance, Berg reports that on three of the four indexes of legitimacy that he constructs, the Republic of Moldova has a greater level of legitimacy relative to the PMR. From these findings, he leaps to a rather dramatic conclusion: "There seems minimal prospect that it [PMR] will survive and become a legitimate state within international society" (Berg 2012, 1292). Our data allow a further test of this prediction and permit a side-by-side comparison with similar questions about the internal dynamics of Moldovan society.

Description of simultaneous surveys

Our motivation in designing the surveys was to combine representativeness across the nationality categories with a dispersed geographic sample to generate reliable national samples. Therefore, every *rayon* (county) in both entities was sampled, and the margin of error for Moldova is +/- 3 percent and +/-4 percent for Pridnestrovia. (Refer to Figure 1 for geographic locations of the samples and their respective sizes). Taking advantage of the simultaneity of the surveys, we matched about three-quarters of the questions so that the

proportions choosing the various responses can be directly compared. In total, we report here the data for over 2,000 respondents, composed of 1,102 in Moldova and 976 in Pridnestrovie.

The two entities are quite different in both total population and in national composition (Table 1). Just before the war on the Nistru/Dniester in 1992, the results of the last Soviet census in 1989 showed a total population of over 4.3 million in the Moldovan republic, of which about 14 percent (over 600,000) were in Pridnestrovie. By the time of the censuses in 2004, government-controlled Moldova had lost 9.5 percent of its population and Pridnestrovie had lost 6 percent. But the estimates for 2012 show that population loss has accelerated in Pridnestrovie to minus 14.9 percent (current population of 513,400) but slowed in the rest of Moldova – at minus 4.6 percent since the time of independence (current population 3.56 million). Rowland (2009) estimates that the population of the PMR fell by 18 percent from his 1989 estimate of 677,693 to 555,347 in 2004, and he also notes that the population estimates for Moldova include a substantial number (about 8 percent) who are temporarily living abroad (Rowland 2009). Fomenko's data (2009, 143) show that after a period of natural increase to 1994, Pridnestrovie saw natural population decrease every year to 2007, while at the same time experiencing a net loss from migration across its borders to the level of about 5,000 people per year over the same 15-year period (Fomenko 2009).

The most recent nationality data for the respective entities are from the 2004 censuses, with the next ones planned for 2014. The first decade after the end of the Soviet Union showed changes in the nationality mix in both entities (Table 1). While Moldovans increased their representation to 76 percent in the country as the Ukrainian and Russian minorities declined by about 39 percent of their 1989 numbers, the PMR population is now nearly distributed equally amongst the three main nationalities after the fall in the Moldovan population there. Within both entities, Ukrainians are concentrated in the northern *rayoni*, while Russians live predominantly in the cities. Moldovans are predominantly found in rural areas of the PMR, constituting majorities in the center part of the republic (See Figure 1).

Table 1: Populations and Nationalities of Moldova and Pridnestrovie 1989-2012, and Distribution of Survey Samples

Pop. 1989	Moldova all	Pct.	Pridniestrovie	Pct.	Govt-controlled Moldova	Pct.	
Total Pop.	4335260	100	601660		3733600		
Moldovans	2794749	64.5	240062	39.9	2554687	68.4	
Russians	562069	12.9	153423	25.5	408646	10.9	
Ukrainians	600366	13.9	170270	28.3	430096	11.5	
Gagauz	153548	3.5		Na			
Others	224528	5.2	38506	6.4	339570	9.1	
Pct.of total		100		13.9		86.1	
Pop. 2004	Total Pop.	3933812	554088	3379724			
	Moldovans	2742231	69.7	177382	32	2564849	75.9
	Russians	369896	9.4	168678	30.4	201218	5.9
	Ukrainians	442475	11.2	160069	28.9	282406	8.4
	Gagauz	151596	3.9	4096	0.8	147500	4.4
	Others	227614	5.8	43863	7.9	183751	5.4
	Pct.of total			14.1		85.9	
	Pct.change 1989-2004		-9.3		-7.9		-9.5
2012 pop. estimate	4073400		513,400		3560000		
Pct. Change 1989-2012			-6.4		-14.7		-4.6
2010 sample	Total	2078	976	1102			
	Moldovans	1083	52.1	209	21.4	874	79.3
	Russians	425	20.4	360	36.9	65	5.9
	Ukrainians	401	19.3	325	33.3	76	6.9
	Gagauz	54	2.6	19	1.9	35	3.5
	Others	114	5.6	62	6.4	52	4.6

The percentage of rural population in Moldova has grown from 53 percent to 58 percent between 1990 and 2007 as a result of both migration from larger cities and the return of some workers from urban to rural areas. Overall, its urban population loss since 1989 at 15 percent has been more pronounced than its rural loss at 2 percent, with urban residents accounting for about three-quarters of Moldova's emigrants (Rowland 2009). By

contrast, Pridnestrovia's industrial modernization and Russian foreign investment have underpinned its development over the last decade, with 65 percent of inhabitants living in cities and towns and 35 percent in villages, while agricultural-based Moldova remains 60 percent rural and 40 percent urban and predominantly Romanian (Moldovan)-speaking.⁴

The nationality compositions of the samples are shown in Table 1 and their geographic distributions in Figure 1. Compared to the reported nationality figures in the respective 2004 censuses, Ukrainians and Russians are over-sampled by about 5 percent in the Pridnestrovia sample and Moldovans slightly over-sampled (by about 4 percent) in the Moldovan sample. However, if we assume that the divergent trends in migration and demographic profiles of the three main groups continued in the period 2004-2012 as they developed in 1989-2004, the sampling proportions are very close to the respective national group ratios. Overall, pooling both samples, Moldovans constitute 52 percent of the total surveyed with Russians and Ukrainians each about 20 percent.

Each of the 42 cities and *rayoni* of Moldova on both banks of the Dniester (Nistru) were sampled in proportion to the population within the respective territories (Figure 1). The survey sampling procedure was similar on both sides of the river, with regions stratified by urban and rural locations and households selected by the random route method. Individuals over 18 years old with the nearest birthday were asked to take part in the survey in a face-to-face interview. Respondents had a choice of languages, including Gagauz in Moldova. The response rate for all contacts was 83 percent in Moldova and 78 percent in Pridnestrovia. Surveying quality controls were implemented by supervisors among 35 percent of all respondents in Moldova and 25 percent in the PMR. In both territories, the authorities were informed about the survey but neither interfered with its organization or completion.

As an additional check on the nature and quality of the responses, we asked the interviewers to report on the setting of the interview, which persons were present and their involvement, as well as the respondent's demeanor and candor. The summary results of these judgments are presented in Table 2. The vast majority of respondents filled out the questionnaire without assistance or interference in a private setting, and nearly nine-tenths of respondents were judged by the interviewers to be completely open in their answers.

Table 2: Circumstances of Survey Interview and Nature of Interviewee Responses, Moldova and Pridnestrovie (PMR), June 2010

A. Circumstances of Interviews – Who was Present?

	Moldova	Pridnestrovie
Respondent only	904 (82%)	743 (76%)
Family members present	198 (18%)	233 (24%)

B. Nature of Interviewee Responses – judged by the interviewer

Very Open	429 (39%)	496 (51%)
Rather Open	534 (48%)	374 (38%)
Cautious	94 (9%)	65 (7%)
Appears that respondent is not honest	21 (2%)	10 (1%)
Not reported/don't know	24 (2%)	31 (3%)

While the focus of this paper is on the attitudes and beliefs of residents within each of the two polities, the simultaneous surveys with similar questions allow a valid comparison of the attitudes within and between nationalities across the Dniester (Nistru) river. For instance, Moldovans, the largest nationality (209 in Pridnestrovie and 874 in the rest of Moldova) offer a particularly useful comparison (Table 3). The simple comparison shows both a similar profile on some measures and quite substantial differences on a couple of key indicators. Not surprisingly, about twice the ratio of Moldovans in the PMR speak Russian compared to the rest of Moldova, where as a titular group, their national language is dominant. The difference reflects both the nature of employment (more industrial) and residence (more urban) in the more Russified or Russian-speaking region of Pridnestrovie. While the overall self-rating of personal status by Moldovans is somewhat higher in the PMR, their material status as measured by the ability to afford goods is significantly higher. This difference generally reflects a higher standard of living in Pridnestrovie, though, of course, still a low ratio in the European context. While optimism about the future is generally in short supply in both places (less than 50 percent of both communities think that they will live better in 2 years), it remains slightly higher in Pridnestrovie, whose urban townscapes more frequently see new business enterprises and positive investments as opposed to similar-sized cities across the river in Moldova.

Pridnestrovians also feel added security for the future from ongoing financial support from the Russian Federation.

Table 3: Status Comparison of Moldovans in Pridnestrovie and the Rest of Moldova

	Number of Moldovans	Pridnestrovie	Rest of Moldova
		209	874
Religion	Orthodoxy	82.3%	91.6%
	Not a believer	12.0%	5.7%
	Other religion	5.7%	2.3%
Russian ability	Can speak Russian	92.8%	46.9%
Mood	Excellent	17.7%	5.3%
	Normal	50.7%	50.4%
	Stressed, angry	23.0%	30.7%
	Fearful, anxious	7.6%	11.4%
	Don't know/refuse	1.0%	2.2%
Material Status	Can buy everything	12.9%	6.6%
	Can buy all except durables	53.6%	21.9%
	Enough money for food only	21.5%	41.2%
	Not enough money for food	6.7%	23.2%
	Don't know/refuse	5.3%	3.1%
Live better in 2 years?	Definitely yes	12.9%	9.8%
	Probably yes	33.5%	35.6%
	Probably not	28.2%	23.5%
	Definitely not	8.6%	7.6%
	Don't know/refuse	17.7%	23.6%

II. What Pridnestrovians and Moldovans believe: results from the 2010 surveys

I. Economic divisions and perceptions

It can be argued that the secession of the PMR from the Republic of Moldova in 1991 was a typical “secession of the successful,” in which a relatively prosperous region cuts its linkages from the relatively impoverished regions with which it was once united. The dissimilar levels of socio-economic development of Moldova and the PMR are a function of Soviet-era industrial policy. The Soviets made Pridnestrovie a showcase for heavy industry, whereas right-bank Moldova was conceived as a rural farming region (King 2000). This industrial-agricultural split has greatly affected the ethno-linguistic makeup and material

wealth of the two regions. Soviet factory construction in Pridnestrovie attracted Russians and skilled workers from all around the Soviet Union. This led to the influx of large numbers of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking Slavs to Pridnestrovie, where they joined the region's predominantly Ukrainian and Moldovan population in the wake of World War II (Dovgaleac 1984). By contrast, agro-industrial modernization on the western bank of the Dniester/Nistru did not see such an influx and relied on seasonal farm labor from among the titular Moldovan population. The productivity of Moldova's farmland earned it the reputation, along with Ukraine, as the "breadbasket of the Soviet Union." These economic stereotypes and distinctions solidified in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse and the division of the country into two political and economic entities. Pridnestrovie today survives in part on steel and cement production, while Moldova is heavily reliant on export earnings from its wine and food produce. The World Bank calculates (Atlas method) that the 2011 gross national income per capita in the Republic of Moldova is \$1,980 (<http://data.worldbank.org/country/moldova>; accessed 27 July 2012). As an unrecognized state, the PMR does not have an official calculation, but its government puts the figure at \$857 (<http://www.mepmr.org/makroekonomicheskaya-politika/informacziya/1472-doklad-lo-soczialno-ekonomicheskomi-razvitiu-Pridnestrovskoj-moldavskoj-respubliki-v-yanvare-iyune-2012-godar>; accessed 27 July 2012). The actual difference in living standards implied by these comparative numbers is significantly reduced by Russian subsidies to the PMR and, as we show, perceptions of living standards do not line up symmetrically with the published figures. It should be noted, however, that despite the available economic contrasts between the regions, they both share important similarities. Both have aging populations, relatively low per capita incomes, high out-migration rates, and large ratios critical of their respective governments. However, these parallel trends are often downplayed in the literature covering Moldova and Pridnestrovie, which tends to emphasize differences more than similarities between the regions (Berg 2012; King 2000; Kolstø and Malgin 1998; Moşneaga and Tulbere 1998; Troebst 2003).

To draw out the commonalities alongside the distinctions, we begin by grounding the data in people's understandings of their own livelihoods. Figure 2 presents the comparative results for a survey question that seeks to measure self-perception of material

status (which is, of course, different from the actual material condition of the population relative to others). It provides evidence that the majority of residents of the PMR have a more positive disposition towards their material condition than residents of the Republic of Moldova, asserting that they can afford “most” or “all” items. The comparative score for right-bank Moldovans is less than a third. About twice the ratio in the PMR say they can afford “most things.” Our statistical analysis revealed that age was the most significant socio-economic variable accounting for variations in responses on this question. This lifecycle distinction, in turn, has a geographic dimension. Older people are more likely to live in rural areas and younger respondents more likely to live in cities.

Material Well-Being in Moldova and PMR (by Age Group)

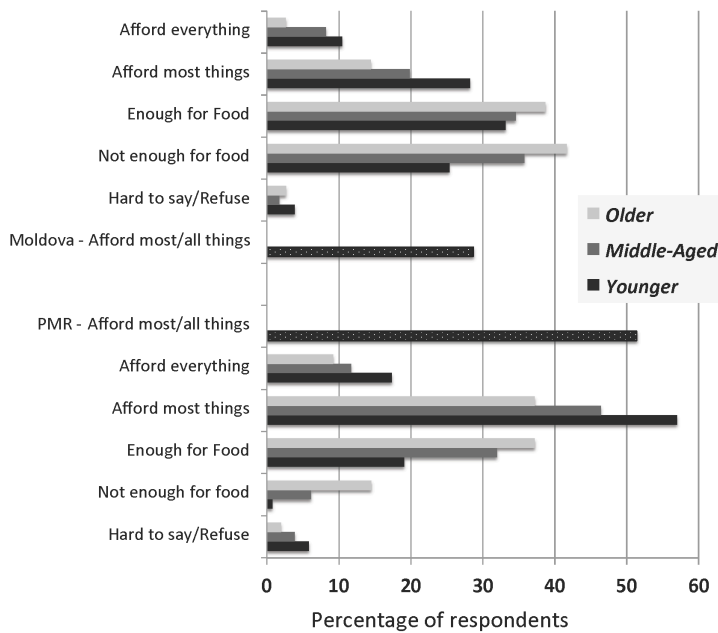


Figure 2: Reported Material Well-Being by Age Groups, Moldova and Pridnestrovie samples 2010.

Both regions show a similar trend of decreasing purchasing power with increasing age. This factor is becoming more important as both entities continue to show increasing ratios of elderly residents at a time when younger cohorts are disproportionately emigrating on either a temporary or permanent basis. As we know from other studies from post-socialist Eastern Europe and Russia (Humphrey 2002; Kideckel 2008) many

provincial and older people have effectively retreated from the market, turning to subsistence farming and bartering when they no longer can access jobs and salaries. Even in industrial-rich Pridnestrovie, whose welfare system is buttressed by Russian Federation subsidies,⁵ an aging population remains insecure and on the fringe of the cash economy. Elderly Pridnestrovians feel just as removed from the cash economy as older right-bank Moldovans, despite receiving supplemental pension payments from Russia, regardless of whether they hold Russian passports or not. This added support from Russia does not seem to matter for older Pridnestrovian’s perceptions of well-being.⁶

Going in the right or the wrong direction? Moldova and PMR

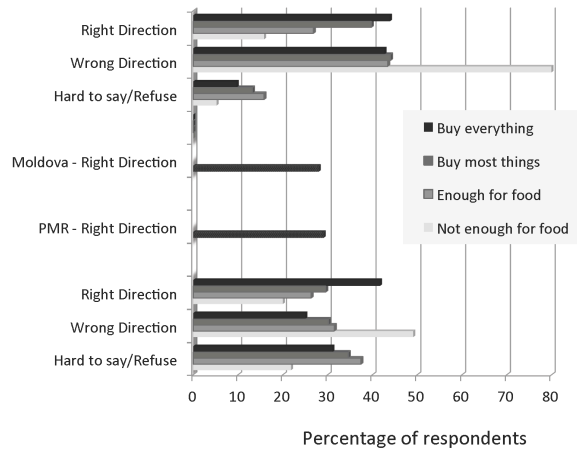


Figure 3: Responses to the Question: “Is your country going in the right or the wrong direction?” by Level of Material Well-Being, Moldova and Pridnestrovie samples, 2010

The difference in perceived material status turns out to be deeply consequential in understanding attitudes towards a respondent’s own entity and comparisons with the other entity. The “right/wrong direction” question is one that is widely used in a variety of political and economic settings across the globe and has been consistently shown to be a good predictor of the functioning of the state apparatus and of the level of support that the state commands from its citizens (Alexander and Welzel 2011). In democratic societies,

parties play close attention to the “right/wrong direction” ratios since their electoral prospects are closely tied to them. The question not only summarizes the current situation but also implies a perspective on the immediate future. Figure 3 reports the results of the usual “right/wrong direction” survey question in both entities. What is most striking is the similarity in overall dissatisfaction on both sides of the Dniester/Nistru, with just over one-quarter of the respective populations expressing satisfaction with the direction of their own polity. Satisfaction is highly correlated with material well-being. Those claiming to be able to afford all things are understandably more satisfied in both polities but the relationship is most pronounced for Moldova, with 80 percent of the poorest cohort believing that the country is going in the wrong direction. The gap between rich and poor in the PMR on this question is not as pronounced, with a minority in all material well-being categories stating that the country is heading in the wrong direction.

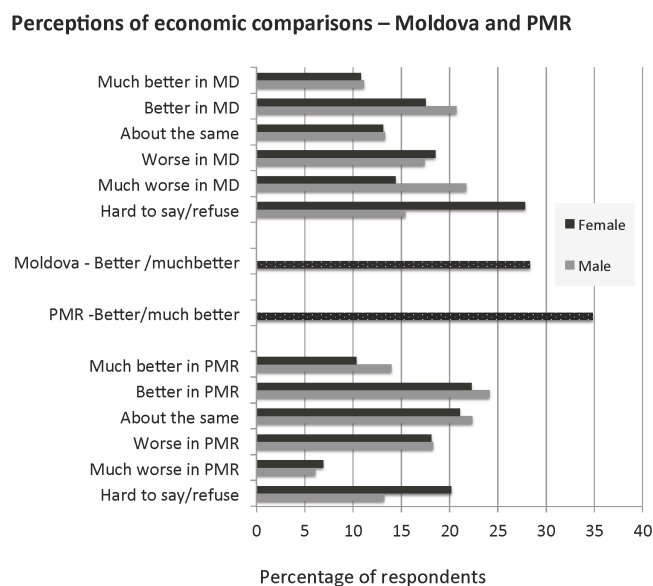


Figure 4: Answers (by Gender) to the Question about Whether the Respondent’s Own State is Better or Worse Off than the Neighboring One, Moldova and PMR samples, 2010.

Figure 4 shows the findings from questions that ask respondents to rank the economic condition in their polity relative to that of the other one across the river. Both wealthier Pridnestrovians and poor Moldovans (both men and women) believe that the PMR economic situation is better. Unlike other post-Soviet de facto regions and their

parent states, such as between Abkhazia and Georgia, there is significant cross-border travel between Moldova and Pridnestrovia, though disproportionately from Pridnestrovia to Moldova. This fact most likely accounts for the relatively high “hard to say” response ratio (approximately 25 percent) in the Republic of Moldova survey, reflecting a lack of knowledge of conditions in the PMR. This question was the only one reported in this paper where gender differences were significant, though the ratios are not dramatically dissimilar. On both sides of the river, more women than men find it “hard to say” – an outcome of the more frequent travel of men through en route to Russia or to Europe in a cyclical labor migration. Men therefore have more points of comparison. Right-bank Moldovan women involved in the migrant labor movement mostly go westwards to the European Union and therefore do not travel through the eastern neighbor of Pridnestrovia.

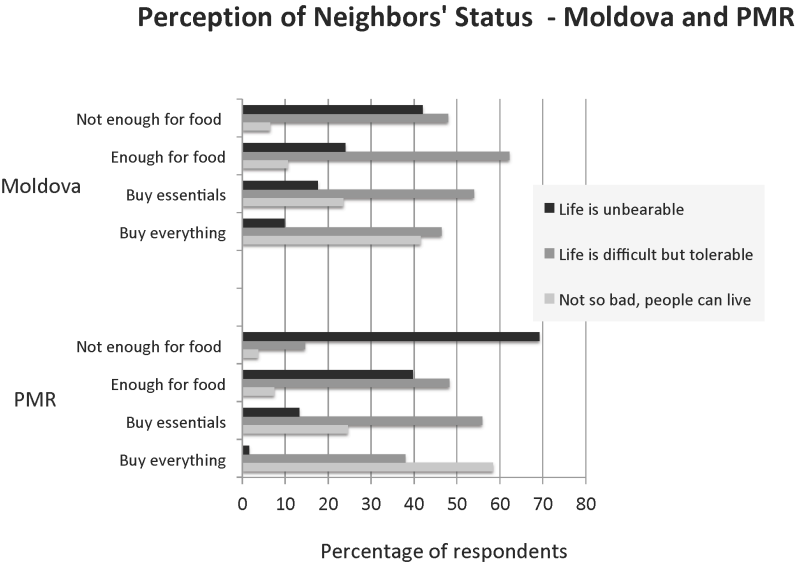


Figure 5: Perceptions of the Material Well-Being Status of the Respondent’s Neighbors, by the Respondent’s Own Well-Being, Moldova and PMR samples, 2010.

The material status of respondents is again crucial to understanding how people on both sides of the river evaluate the situation of their neighbors (Figure 5). Not surprisingly,

well-off respondents see the situation of their neighbors as acceptable, while poorer respondents tend to believe “life is unbearable” around them. These trends are true on both sides of the river. The only difference is that the relationship between personal wealth and perceptions of neighbors is more closely correlated in Pridnestrovie, with the poorest predictably seeing life as “unbearable” and the richest view it as “livable.” In Moldova, though, well-off persons are split between those who consider life is “not so bad” and life is “difficult but bearable.” The divergence is probably related to the interesting trend in Moldova where white-collar professionals tend to migrate abroad, with both positive and negative impacts on families left at home.⁷ Differences in perception among Moldova’s most economically secure residents may also involve the often-cited cleavage among Moldova’s elites (Kolstø 2000); more than half see Moldova’s development and its future tied up with integration into the European Union, while another significant portion look to Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Elite satisfaction with the socio-economic order thus hinges on whether one’s political faction is in power. These elite divides do not help the generally pessimistic outlook on contemporary economic fortunes in Moldova, which is consistently more negative than across the river Dniester/Nistru. The global financial crisis in 2008 produced a national mood of anxiety in Moldova about low employment prospects and diminished remittances (Kramer and Hill 2009). Ongoing political crisis since April 2009 (the government fell in May 2013) creates a lingering climate of uncertainty and deep division in society that likely influenced respondent attitudes.

As expected, the poorest segments of society hold the most pessimistic beliefs – a trend that comes out clearly in these responses. Additionally, the age profile of the disaffected is consistent with that seen in other post-Soviet states and which is often projected as “nostalgia” for Soviet times and support for Communist parties (L. March 2001). Dissimilar macro-economic inheritances therefore cannot be assumed to divide Moldova and Pridnestrovie entirely since the economic prospects remain bleak for both. The 2004-2006 fieldwork in the Pridnestrovian city of Rybnitsa and nearby villages substantiates this proposition, having found that left-bank villagers consider their lives no better (or no worse) off than in right-bank Moldova (Chamberlain-Creangă 2010). The same is true for working-class urban Moldovans in Pridnestrovie, who tend to question the superficiality of Pridnestrovie’s allegedly better living standards. The only Pridnestrovians

who believed that life was better in the break-away region were those holding good industrial or bureaucratic jobs.

II. Divergent internal legitimacy?

A key area where Moldova and its breakaway entity of Pridnestrovie are thought to differ is in levels of internal legitimacy. Berg (2012) finds in his comparisons of four sets of de facto and parent states that there is the “biggest variety of legitimacy levels” between the Republic of Moldova and Pridnestrovie (2012, 292), with the former having far greater legitimacy than the latter. Berg arrives at this conclusion from data showing that Pridnestrovie has low socio-political cohesion and low democratic development, along with a high distrust for authorities. Our surveys approach the question of internal legitimacy in Moldova and Pridnestrovie from measures of trust in political leaders and state institutions, yielding results quite different from Berg’s (2012) conclusions.⁸

It should be noted that Berg’s findings might be the product of the fact that Pridnestrovie was harder hit than Moldova by the financial crisis of 2008-09, due to its construction (steel, cement) and export-based economy. During this time, Pridnestrovie’s earnings from exports dropped from a monthly average of \$82 million (US) between January and September 2008 to \$41 million in the last quarter of 2008 at the height of the crisis.⁹ Shut-down factories and stalled sales had an alarming impact on the PMR’s budget revenues, which shrank by 30 percent by the end of 2008, and made it hard for the de facto government to finance pensions and salaries (Rodkiewicz 2011). It seems no coincidence that Pridnestrovians were exceptionally negative about state structures and officials, as Berg (2012) found, at a time of deteriorating economic livelihoods, coupled with political in-fighting at the same time.

Figure 6 reports the question asking respondents about their degree of trust in the leaders of the two polities. In the Moldova part of the survey, we took the opportunity to ask about two long-standing figures in the political life of the Republic. The first was then-acting President of Moldova Mihai Ghimpu who held this position from September 2009 to December 2010. An ethnic Moldovan (or Romanian, as he often identifies himself), Ghimpu was one of the founders of the Popular Front of Moldova, a coalition of anti-communist forces that were largely committed to the Romanian national idea – the vision that

Romania and Romanians are the rightful owners of the country (Zabarah 2011). A sense of Moldovan as a “spoiled identity” is one ironic consequence of identification with a hierarchy of civilized practices and mores by pro-Romanian and pro-European activists (Culic 2009).

Ghimpu was a major advocate of the language law changes of August 1989 that precipitated the early polarization of Moldovan society at the time of the break-up of the Soviet Union. His movement’s stance was represented by a popular rally banner of the time directed at local Russians: “Suitcase - Train Station - Home” (Kaufman 2001, 140). Ghimpu subsequently founded the Party of Reform, which changed its name to the Liberal Party of Moldova (PL) in 2005. In 2009 the party won over 13 percent of the popular vote and entered parliament, becoming part of the anti-communist Alliance for European Integration. Ghimpu’s appointment as Acting President was triggered by the resignation of President Vladimir Voronin, who had held the position of President from 2001.

Voronin, also an ethnic Moldovan, was a former First Secretary of the Moldovan Communist Party. After a ban on Communist party activity was lifted in 1993, he pushed the (re)establishment of the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) and its revitalization as a political force in the country. Unlike Ghimpu, Voronin championed a Moldovan national idea, the notion that Moldovans were distinct from Romanians and, as the titular nation in Moldova, the rightful owners of a country that should be independent of Romania (Zabarah 2011, 62-65). The position the PCRM staked out was more conciliatory towards non-titular groups (mostly Russians and Ukrainians) and more favorably inclined towards Russia than Romania.

In the PMR, we asked respondents about their trust in the President of the PMR since the 1992 war, Igor Smirnov. At the time of the survey (summer 2010), Smirnov had publicly triumphed in a leadership struggle in the summer of 2009 with Yevgeny Shevchuk and appeared to continue as the dominant force in the political life of the PMR. However, he only came third to Shevchuk in the first round of the PMR presidential elections in 2011; Shevchuk was subsequently elected in the run-off.

The results for trust in leaders in Figure 6 are disaggregated by ethnicity, and the ethnically polarized nature of Ghimpu’s scores is manifest. Voronin’s scores reflect the greater multi-ethnic appeal of his leadership and of the PCRM. Smirnov similarly has

greater multi-ethnic support. What is most significant, however, is the predominant lack of trust of both electorates of their presidential figures, past and present. Ghimpu attracted the highest levels of distrust, but neither Voronin nor Smirnov garnered the trust of more than about a third of respondents. Their support appeared to be waning, especially in the case of Smirnov, with almost equal numbers trusting him as distrusting him, and many more respondents than for other questions refused to respond to this sensitive political question. Smirnov’s 2009 battle with and ousting of the young and up-and-coming Speaker of the Parliament Shevchuk may have hurt more than helped Smirnov’s ratings.

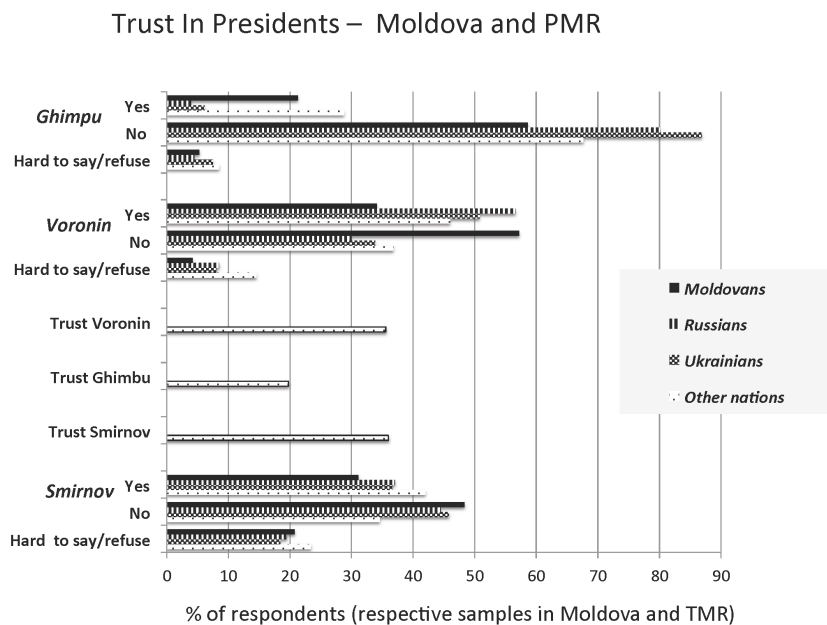


Figure 6: Levels of Trust in the Presidents of the Two States, by Nationality, Moldova and PMR samples, 2010.

Ethnographic research with political parties, their members, and constituents by the third author in the capital Chişinău and in the northern provincial Rezina (Moldovan) and Rybnitsa (Pridnestrovia) raions from March to June 2009 corroborates these survey findings. Different ethno-national groups in Moldova are visibly attracted to different leaders and their divergent visions of the country. Voronin’s supporters overwhelmingly identified as “Moldovan-speaking” or “Russian speaking” and saw the country’s geopolitical

orientation as rightfully belonging to a Russophone orbit, while Ghimpu's supporters self-identified as "Romanian" and belonging in the European Union alongside Romania. Voronin's followers saw themselves as fighting for the country's distinctive multi-ethnic culture against "romanianization" (*romanizare*). They believed that Ghimpu's Liberal Party and its allies are associated with foreign forces detrimental to Moldova's sovereignty. PCRM members' preoccupation with culture and history suggests the party stands for much more than simply a post-Communist paternalistic state providing generous pensions and welfare. PCRM pride in Moldova's multi-ethnicity is reflected in the large number of Russians, Ukrainians, and mixed-ethnic Russian speakers involved in the party leadership and rank-and-file membership of the PCRM. This cross-ethnic appeal helps to explain the large number of Slavs supporting Voronin shown in Figure 6.

This ethno-national divide in public opinion and between leaders Ghimpu and Voronin does not exist in the ostensibly less politically divided Pridnestrovie, whose society rallies around a common pro-Russian trajectory and shared Russian language (Troebst 2003). However, even if inter-ethnic relations are generally harmonious in Pridnestrovie (at least as long as no one publicly challenges the hegemony of the Russian-language), the left-bank is still a highly stratified society, and this stratification undoubtedly affects public opinion. Not unlike Soviet times, Russians and Ukrainians remain very much at the geographical, political, and economic center in the PMR, with Moldovans at the margins (Munteanu 2002). The relative marginality of ethnic Moldovans may help explain why they, more than any other social group on the left bank, are somewhat critical of Smirnov and predominate among the groups believing that Pridnestrovie is going in the wrong direction. With most Moldovans in Pridnestrovie living in rural localities, they are only loosely integrated into the Pridnestrovian state-administrative apparatus. Persons on the fringe of the Pridnestrovian industrial and bureaucratic apparatus tend to think a lot less about "the state" and its leaders. A common sentiment is the desire to be left alone by officialdom while, at the same time, expressing dissatisfaction with the Pridnestrovian authorities (Chamberlain-Crengă 2006). The prevailing sentiment in urban factories along the Rezina-Rybnitsa boundary-zone during the Smirnov-Shevchuk power struggle in 2009 was that both Smirnov and Voronin were "corrupt" and "should be on holiday," stepping down to make way for a younger generation

of leaders. Ultimately, this did indeed happen over the following two years as the Moldovan Alliance for European Integration, under the leadership of Prime Minister Vlad Filat, solidified its power against Voronin's PCRM in 2010, and Shevchuk won the Pridnestrovian presidency in December 2011. Smirnov's low trust rating in our 2010 survey foreshadows his 2011 defeat. Nevertheless, this conclusion cannot ignore that the "hard to say/refuse" response is high in Pridnestrovia, no doubt because of the sensitive nature of the question. As in the days of the Soviet Union, politics are rarely discussed openly with strangers in Pridnestrovia. The situation across the river in Moldova is more open, with frank political discussions more common among people, as reflected in the survey with fewer refusals to answer.

On both sides of the river, there is a high correlation between political support and material well-being. In Moldova, supporters of Voronin and the PCRM tend to be rural or urban working class. Many came of age before the end of the Soviet Union, so they missed out on opportunities to learn an educated, literary Romanian dialect now commonly taught in schools. These rank-and-file Moldovans feel threatened by what they call "cultured" Romanian-ness, partly because they cannot easily access it. The PCRM makes this social group of Moldovans feel proud of themselves, even if they cannot easily access the learning of the literary Romanian language.

In Pridnestrovia, the secessionist entity and its leaders are emblematic of continuity with a Soviet-style paternalist way of life. People of all ethnic groups are bound together by Pridnestrovia's cheap utilities, relatively low cost of living, and generous social entitlements (see the evidence in Chamberlain-Creangă and Allin 2010, 337). Therefore, even Moldovans critical of the break-away PMR are aware that life is generally better in Pridnestrovia than Moldova (recall Figure 6); this may explain why there is still more inter-ethnic cohesion round support for Smirnov, who, at the height of his popularity, was credited for buttressing the Pridnestrovian state and its social-protection way of life. This assumption of well-being in Pridnestrovia may also help explain why fewer Pridnestrovians (less than 50 percent) are negative about the direction of their region than Moldovans (80 percent). Both cohorts, nevertheless, show low levels of satisfaction (around 28 percent approval) with the direction in which their entities are going, leaving much room for improving levels of internal legitimacy.

Perception of people in power – for personal financial gain - Moldova and PMR

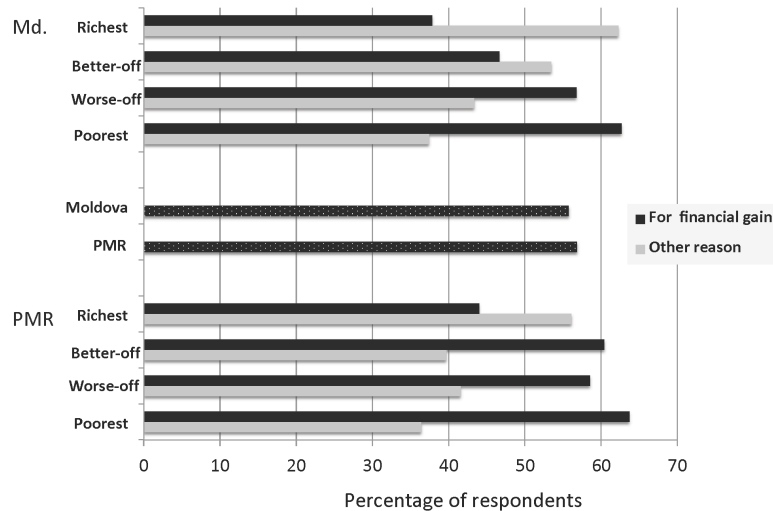


Figure 7: Perceptions of the Motivations of the “People in Power” to Seek Office, by Respondent’s Own Material Well-Being, Moldova and PMR samples, 2010.

While the question that asked about specific political leaders can be seen as a measure of their popular support, another measure is aimed at probing the views of residents about the very core of political legitimacy – trust in the motives of those who hold public office. Figure 7 presents the results of a question that underscores the relationship between material well-being and the motivations of political leaders. Poorer cohorts in Moldova and Pridnestrovie were both inclined to think that politicians are in power for personal gain. The poorer a person was, the more likely that he or she is to question the motives of politicians. Overall, the majority of persons on both river banks tend to think that political leaders are in office to pursue financial gain, which is a prevailing assumption throughout the post-Soviet world (Humphrey 2002). A significant proportion of respondents in both entities did not answer the question, perhaps due to its sensitive nature, but of course, it is hard to attribute a single motivation to any politician. While in the context of the “managed democracy” nature of most post-Soviet states, these relatively-

high ratios are unsurprising; they are higher than comparative figures for the de facto state of Abkhazia, though in that territory, political views are more strongly associated with nationality and the privileged access of the Abkhaz titular group to political office (O'Loughlin, Kolossov and Toal 2011).

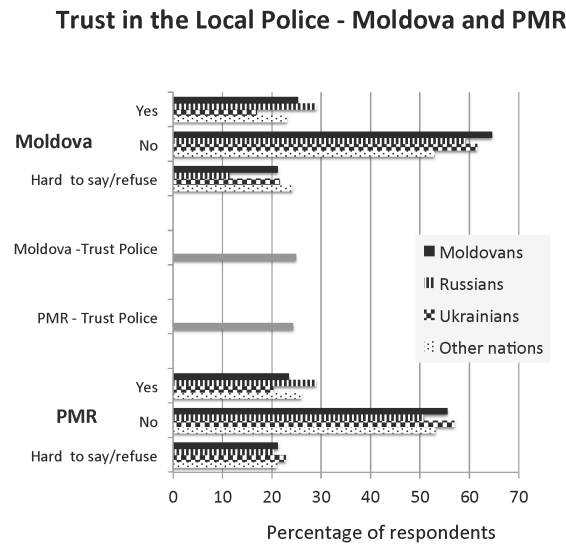


Figure 8: Levels of Trust in the Local Police, by Nationality, Moldova and PMR samples, 2010.

Political legitimacy also derives from tacit support of state institutions and the perceived fairness of their operations. In post-Soviet states, such support is lacking, and though it varies by successor state, law enforcement and the legal systems generally rank amongst the lowest of state institutions (O'Loughlin and Bell 1999; Taylor 2011). Figure 8 displays another potentially sensitive question regarding people's trust in law enforcement officers, which can be considered a good indicator of citizen perceptions of state institutions and their proper functioning. Again, high numbers of persons (about one in five) on both river banks refused to answer the question or could not say if they could trust the police or not. Among those who did respond, about one-in-five in both entities indicated that they trusted the police, a ratio very similar to many other post-Soviet countries (Taylor 2011). What is striking is how results from both sides of the river mirror each other, with low

overall ratios of trust for Moldovans (about 60 percent) and Pridnestrovians (just over half). Ethnicity appears to play little role in these citizen perceptions of law enforcement. Even among ethnic Russians, who predominantly filled law enforcement roles in the former Soviet Union, trust in the police was only slightly higher than for other ethnic groups, at less than 30 percent. This was true on both sides of the river.

Taken in combination with the economic perceptions above, the results on both river banks point to a condition where both polities experience low levels of internal political legitimacy. This dissatisfaction could be an opportunity for those who see manifest economic benefits from building common state structures in a reintegrated state. That case, however, will be difficult to make since residents on both sides of the river appear skeptical of their political systems, respective institutions, and leadership class. Unlike Berg (2012), we do not see a large difference between the two samples. Low trust in current institutions could mean that a new layer of institutions (like a federal structure or a new political system) could be welcomed, if it is seen as better organized, more honest, and more efficient.

III. Memory and experiential differences

Practitioners and scholars commonly portray the division of the territory of the Republic of Moldova as representing a fundamental divide between a population oriented towards a future in the European Union and a population oriented towards the past and the Soviet Union (Tomescu-Hatto 2008; Kramer and Hill 2009). There certainly has been considerable memory work on both banks in the last two decades (Solonari 2003; Cash 2008; Anderson Worden 2011): the Nazi-Ribbentrop 1939 pact that divided Eastern Europe in German and Soviet occupation zones, Moldova's experience with fascism during World War II, and its liberation/occupation by the Red Army remain particularly contentious matters of discussion. The prevalence of Soviet-era iconography and Soviet-style political controls in Pridnestrovia has contributed to an image of the PMR as a bastion of Soviet ideals and traditions. That entity has actively promoted itself more broadly as a "bulwark" of Eastern Orthodox Slavic civilization (Troebst 2003; Zabarah 2011).

Rojansky (2011, 2) suggests that Russian speakers in the PMR "still generally think of Romania as the villain and Russia as the hero in a historical narrative dating back to

World War II, when Bucharest was allied with Nazi Germany.” For Russian speakers, therefore, modern Romanian nationalism is akin to “revanchist fascism, a narrative heavily informed by the persistence of a World War II memory shaped by Soviet ideologists throughout the Slavic core of the post-Soviet space, and in overt conflict with a neo-nationalist historical narrative among many of the post-Soviet and post-Communist states in Eastern Europe, including Romania” (Rojansky, 2011, 2; see also King 2000).

Under PCRM control, the Republic of Moldova reconstituted many Soviet-era celebrations and memorials. The Soviet Army’s victory in World War II (May 9) and Chişinău’s “liberation” from the Nazis (August 24) were celebrated while two war memorials, “Cap de Pod Serpeni” and “Eternitate” were reconstructed and unveiled by the party in memory of the Soviet Army and Soviet patriotism (Suhan 2009). Such celebrations were memory work by the PCRM to promote a Moldovan national idea in response to the claims of the competing Romanian national idea. Like the Baltic nationalist forces that were an important inspiration for them during the upheaval that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, pro-Romanian activists in the Republic of Moldova have worked to re-code World War II’s beginning and its aftermath as an “occupation.” After succeeding Voronin, Acting Moldovan President Mihai Ghimpu, for example, decreed 28 June as the “Day of Soviet Occupation and Commemoration of the Victims of the Communist Totalitarian Regime.” (The memorialization recalls the day of the Soviet occupation of Moldova in 1940 following a secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact). Ghimpu also unveiled a “Monument to the Victims of the Soviet Occupation” in the National Assembly Square in Chişinău on a site where a Lenin statue once stood. The Moldovan Constitutional Court cancelled Ghimpu’s decree of “Occupation Day” in July 2010, though the statue remains (RFE/RL 2010).

To establish whether this divide in memory is widely reflected on both sides of the river we examine three questions on memory and experience of the Soviet Union. Figure 9 reports the results of a question with three substantive options that asks respondents “what is the best political system?” Our analysis revealed that age was the most significant differentiating variable in the responses to this question. Older and middle-aged people on both sides of the river prefer the Soviet system to Western-style democracy and the current ruling system of their respective entities. These age categories are likely similar because of their shared experiences under socialism. The shared socialist experience runs so deeply

Perceptions of best political system - Moldova and PMR

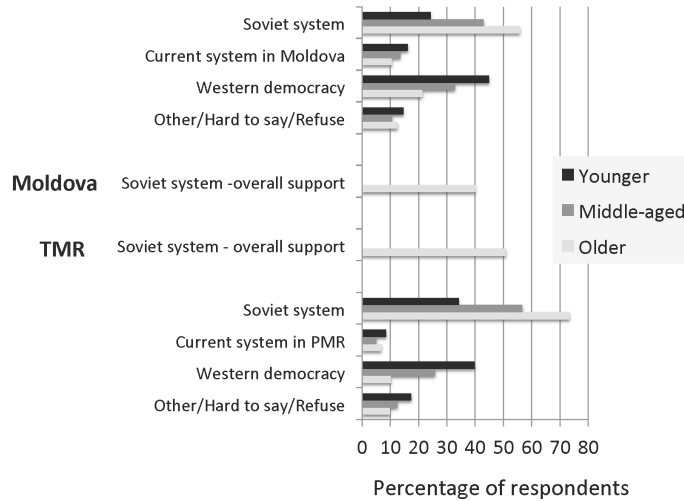


Figure 9: Preferences for Different Political Systems, by Age Group, Moldova and PMR samples, 2010.

that even middle-aged Moldovans integrated into Western structures and exposed to democratic work principles were still steadfastly nostalgic for the Soviet Union and strong in support for Moldova’s Communist Party (Chamberlain-Creanga, 2011). The overall comparison of Pridnestrovie and Moldova shows a similar level of preference for the Soviet political system – 40 percent in right-bank Moldova and just over 50 percent in Pridnestrovie. This finding runs counter to the shorthand notion common in the West that Pridnestrovians are “Soviets” and living in a socialist black hole, as contrasted to an allegedly more enlightened, more Westernized Moldova. That rank-and-file attitudes about the best political system are not so different in Moldova is surprising given that Moldovans have had significantly more opportunities to be exposed to revisionist historiography and Western democracy-building as a recognized and active member of the international community and as an aspirant European Union member. While Figure 9 only shows age comparisons – as we noted earlier, age and material well-being tend to be strongly related, with older people tending to be poorer and younger to be richer – extended analysis of the

responses showed that poorer people tend to prefer the Soviet system, while richer people, the Western democratic model. The “hard to say/refuse” category was relatively high for this question and for the following one on the collapse of the Soviet Union – over 12 percent in both places. This higher rate is most probably a function of the relative abstractness of the question relative to the concerns of everyday lives of the respondents and a lack of detailed knowledge of the alternatives.

What is important to note in Figure 9 is that in both Moldova *and* Pridnestrovie, the younger cohort shows a plurality of preferences for Western democracy. This suggests in the case of Pridnestrovie that even if there is a young generation entrenched in the system and experiencing little beyond Pridnestrovie, this generation nevertheless seems somewhat open to new, outside (even Western) ideas. It cannot be assumed that Pridnestrovian youth who have never lived in Moldova will be necessarily leery about Moldovan-Pridnestrovian reintegration efforts. This runs contrary to Rojansky’s (2011) suggestion of a generational crisis brewing, with more and more young people so unfamiliar with Moldova that they would never want to reintegrate with it. If anything, our findings point to a similar generational crisis within both polities, with the younger cohort on both sides of the Dniester/Nistru river relatively open to a new system.

Alternatively, younger adults frustrated and alienated by the PMR political system may look for opportunities to migrate abroad; currently, 10,000-12,000 persons per year leave the entity (Fomenko 2009). Emigration such as this may be a safety valve diminishing the potentially destabilizing specter of youthful discontent. Evidence suggests that few Pridnestrovian youth who study abroad in Russia or in right-bank Moldovan universities (where their degrees are increasingly recognized across Europe) wish to return to Pridnestrovie after their university education (Fomenko 2009). The finding that Pridnestrovian youth are somewhat open to Western models of democracy has to be contextualized also within the Pridnestrovian system of army conscription for young men not enrolled in university. In Pridnestrovie children of less privileged parents could not bribe themselves out of military service, or change their residency to the right-bank to avoid it, though urban or well-off PMR could. Socialization in the army and into pro-Russian youth political movements, like Pridnestrovie’s *Proryv* group, ensures that many young men are exposed to anti-Moldovan rhetoric (Chamberlain-Creanga, 2011).

Collapse of the Soviet Union, right or wrong? Moldova and PMR

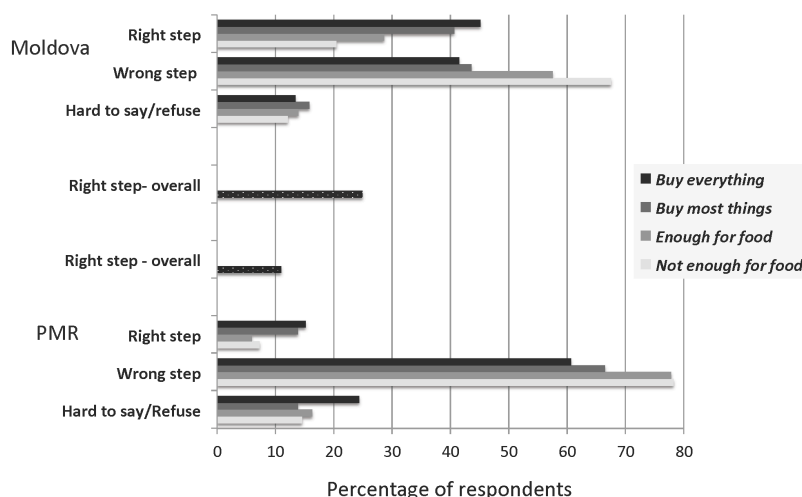


Figure 10: Answers to the Question: “Was the end of the Soviet a right or wrong step?”, by Respondent’s Material Well-Being, Moldova and PMR samples, 2010.

Related to the question about the preferred political system, we also asked respondents to judge whether the collapse of the Soviet Union was the right step or not. The results are portrayed in Figure 10. This question has been posed consistently in post-Soviet states since 1991, and the results seem to fall firmly in line with the overall state of the national economy. In Russia since 1991, the proportion of respondents that state that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a mistake ranges from about 55 percent to 75 percent, with recent values around 60 percent (Levada Analytical Centre 2009). In keeping with expectations, these reveal that more right-bank Moldovans (25 percent) than Pridnestrovians (10 percent) think that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a “right step,” even if overall figures are small. That more ethnic Moldovans (mostly based on the right-bank) than Slavs (concentrated on the left-bank) disproportionately suffered deportation and persecution at the hands of Soviet leaders provides a partial answer for the difference. But this historical legacy is overwhelmed by the most striking feature of the results that reveal that, compared to the “right step” option, twice as many people in Moldova and about five times as many in Pridnestrovia consider the collapse of the Soviet Union to be a “wrong step.”

In both locations, these views are highly correlated to income, with the poorest cohorts believing that the fall of the Soviet Union was a wrong step – almost 80 percent of respondents in Pridnestrovia and about 60 percent in Moldova. Much of this can be attributed to high degrees of nostalgia for socialist-era paternalism in both regions, especially among the elderly and vulnerable who valued the traditional safety net of the state. Paternalism is the state distribution of social entitlements at a generous level thought to secure mass support (Verdery 1996) (24-26). Even if Pridnestrovia's paternalism does not coincide with realities on the ground, nostalgia for this sort of system is alive and well in Pridnestrovia and is probably partly responsible for the outcomes in Figure 10.

In Moldova, it should be noted that all income sub-groups show more support for the “wrong step” choice, except for the wealthiest category, which undoubtedly includes businessmen who have materially benefited from the post-socialist transition. Most other people in Moldova and Pridnestrovia have not benefitted greatly from the post-socialist transition – and many feel they have lost out. For these persons, the legacy of the state as a provider of goods and services lives on strongly in their minds, even twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union for EU-aspirant Moldovans.

The final question in this section on memory and geopolitical choices considers the legacy of the memory of the brief fighting in 1992 that accompanied the secession of the PMR from the Republic of Moldova. The proportions of respondents who strongly agree or agree with the statement “after the war on the Nistru/Dniester [river], Moldova and the TMR cannot be reunited” are displayed in Figure 11. Not too surprisingly, more Pridnestrovians (46 percent) than Moldovans (29 percent) think that territorial reintegration is unlikely or impossible. This finding makes sense given that Pridnestrovians are part of a secessionist entity and generally more vested in the idea of independence for their entity, and there still remains the possibility of assimilation into the Russian Federation. Nearly 20 years of state-building under the Smirnov regime and promotion of a Pridnestrovian identity has had the effect of underlining this separatist belief. The fact that Russia did not also recognize PMR when recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as states in the wake of the 2008 Georgia war was a significant set-back to many members of PMR's political class. PMR leaders have been much more concerned about a perceived threat from right-bank Moldova and from Romania. Romanian-speaking right-bank Moldova is often

depicted as wanting to usurp Russian-language rights from its minorities and left-bank inhabitants, when in fact many right-bank citizens still speak (and sometimes even prefer) Russian, the language of most Pridnestrovians.

Agreement with "Moldova and the PMR cannot be reunited"
Moldova and PMR samples

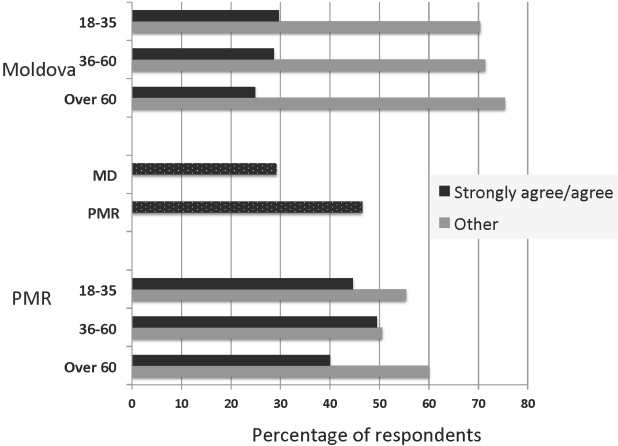


Figure 11: Answers to the Statement that “Moldova and Pridnestrovia cannot be reunited”, by Age Group, Moldova and PMR samples, 2010.

The most important finding from this question on the future is that there are majorities on both banks that reject the fatalistic sentiment that, because of the events of 1991-92, Moldova and the PMR cannot be re-united. This suggests there is a political opening for peace negotiations and some form of a resettlement that would regularize the status of PMR within broad Republic of Moldova structures. How this would be framed, of course, is critical. It should also be noted that there is a sizeable proportion of “hard to say/refuse” for both samples – 10 percent for Pridnestrovia and 12 percent for Moldova – due possibly to the potentially sensitive nature of the question but a result that could also be attributed to the uncertainties surrounding an answer. As we have seen in other questions, age is a significant driver, together with material status, behind people’s attitudes and preferences. While the differences between Moldovan age groups is not significant in Figure 11, in Pridnestrovia, on the other hand, older people (those over 60) stand out as slightly more

compromising towards the possibility of reintegrating the two territories; this Soviet-socialized generation lived in a unified Moldovan Socialist Republic. The middle-aged cohort (aged 36-60) in Pridnestrovia, who lived through and possibly fought in the 1992 war are the most pessimistic about reintegration. Almost half of this cohort thinks that Moldova and Pridnestrovia cannot be reunited.

IV. Geopolitical orientations and aspirations

The aftermath of the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war left many international diplomats with a renewed sense that a competition between a Russian sphere of influence and a Euro-Atlantic one was creating new dividing lines on the European continent. The electoral triumph of the "Alliance for European Integration" marked a decisive tilt on the part of the Republic of Moldova towards a reform agenda, now driven by the EU's Eastern Partnership program and, over the long term, by the prospect of association and eventual membership in the European Union (Korosteleva 2010). Negotiations with the EU on a "deep and comprehensive" free-trade agreement were launched at the end of February 2012. This together with US suggestions that it would involve Romania in its proposed anti-ballistic missile program in Europe renewed the sense that the partition line within Moldova was symbolic of a larger European and even civilizational dividing line. President Igor Smirnov appeared to welcome this geopoliticization when he suggested in mid-February 2010 that PMR would host any new Russian missiles if asked to do so (Thorpe 2010). The Russian government did not take him up on his offer but it attracted international notice. The conservative US news magazine *The Weekly Standard*, for example, suggested that "the 'front line' between Russia's sphere of influence and the West has shifted to the Transnistrian area" (Brickley 2010).

The perception that Moldova and the PMR are pawns of the great powers, and that contemporary internal divisions in Moldova are the product of a geopolitical game between the West and Russia is a sentiment one frequently encounters on both the left and right banks. To test the degree to which this perception is widely shared by both populations, we asked respondents in each survey whether they agreed that Moldova and PMR are used as "playing cards in international games." We were particularly interested in the degree to

which “geopolitical pawn” status was attributed by respondents in one entity to those in the other entity.

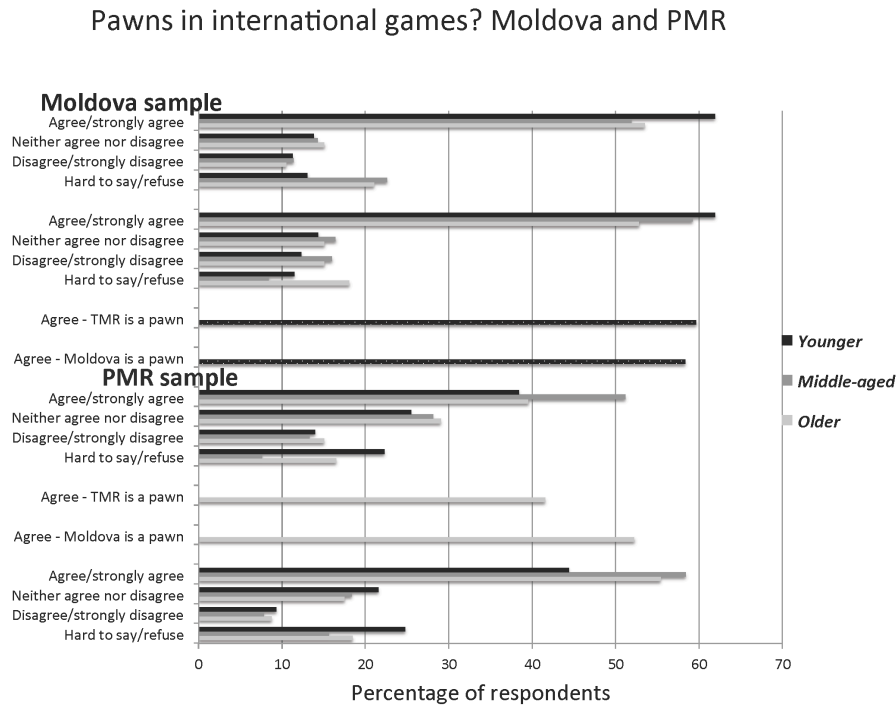


Figure 12: Answers to the Question: “Is Moldova a pawn in international games?” by Age group, Moldova and PMR samples, 2010. The question was repeated for the PMR, and both questions were asked in both entities.

Figure 12 depicts the degree to which right-bank Moldovans and Pridnestrovians think that their respective entities are used as pawns in international negotiations. As one Pridnestrovian explained: “Tiraspol understands that it is little more than a pawn in a large geopolitical game and constantly awaits treachery [from Moldova, Ukraine or Russia].”¹⁰ More than half of our sample in the Republic of Moldova agreed that both Moldova and Pridnestrovia are pawns of the great powers. Younger people were more likely to agree with this proposition, probably on account of the high degree of media discussion on Moldova’s geopolitical position,¹¹ and a tendency to blame foreign powers for their difficulties in travelling abroad for work and study.¹²

Pridnestrovians, on the other hand, are less likely to see their entity as a pawn in international games, but a PMR majority considers Moldova to be a pawn. Again in contrast to Moldovan youth, younger people in Pridnestrovia are less likely to think of their de facto state's future in terms of "pawns" and "international games." Pridnestrovia's older generation appears to associate more closely with this type of language, perhaps on account of socialization in a PMR political culture whose government often generates public fear about geopolitical conspiracies against the entity and remains unhappy about its unrecognized status. A dispute in 2006 over Ukraine's decision to require the official use of Moldovan customs stamps for exports from PMR, for example, generated a hyperbolic campaign against what was framed as an "economic blockade" of PMR. An anti-Ukrainian campaign was also launched in the entity's state controlled media.

It was during this "custom stamp crisis" that President Smirnov first suggested a referendum designed to move the PMR closer towards Russia. Held in 2006, it marked a noteworthy shift in the PMR nation and statehood discourse away from a Pridnestrovian national idea towards what Zabarah (2011) terms a *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) idea. Whereas the former held independence as its preferred form of statehood, the latter vision sought merger or association with the Russian Federation and explicitly positioned the PMR within a broader Russian geopolitical and cultural sphere (Zabarah 2011, 148). The final text of the referendum had two parts (Zabarah 2011, 173). First: "Do you support the course of independence for the Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic and the subsequent free association of Pridnestrovia with the Russian Federation?" and second: "Do you think it's possible to renounce the independence of the Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic and to subsequently agree to the inclusion of Pridnestrovia into the Republic of Moldova?" The text of the first question was designed to fudge the issue of whether it was an either independence or assimilation to Russia choice; the text of the second question was structured to invite a "no" response. As Zabarah (2011, 173) writes the "byzantine and suggestive wording of the referendum questions clearly shows the propagandistic character of the entire enterprise." While both questions mean the PMR's loss of independence, the first question frames this as positive, the second as negative. The first question attracted a 97.2 percent *yes* vote, the second a 94.9 percent *no* vote (Zabarah 2011, 175).

This referendum is useful background for interpreting Figure 13, which shows opinions on the future status of Pridnestrovie. Though we asked about both the future of PMR and the future of Moldova on both sides of the border, only the future of the PMR is reported here. The “hard to say” ratio is one-fifth of all respondents in the Republic of Moldova – over four times the comparative number in the PMR, and thus, a clear indication that many Moldovans have not made up their minds about PMR’s future. Opinions offered on the right bank are very mixed. The only exception is with low support for the option of Pridnestrovie becoming a “part of Ukraine,” which also scored low in the Pridnestrovian sample. Overall, right bank residents of all social backgrounds appear to rally most around the option of Pridnestrovie becoming a region inside of Moldova “with no special rights”; current discussions in the 5+2 format have all considered a special status for the PMR in Moldova – a clear difference with the dominant popular opinion in Moldova on the topic. There is greater support within Moldova for Pridnestrovie becoming an independent state or joining Russia than there is for allowing it an autonomous status inside of Moldova. This may well be a function of the variety of choices on offer but it does indicate two predominant things: (i) most right bank residents do not have one clear overall preference for the future status of the PMR, and (ii) the one option that gains slightly more adherence than the others is the least likely to come out of any negotiated peace settlement. From the responses to other questions (not reported here), the Pridnestrovian impasse does not figure highly into the identification by Moldovans of the biggest problems that they face.

In the PMR sample, only about 15 percent express an interest in being part of the Republic of Moldova, again a result that needs to be contextualized within the multiple options available in this question. The two leading options chosen by Pridnestrovians are independence and integration into Russia. The latter option, the *Russkiy Mir* idea, attracts the most support, with nearly half of all Pridnestrovian respondents selecting it. Only one-third opt for independence as their preferred future for the entity, a score that may reflect not simply a shift in official discourse but also a waning faith that this ideal is realistic and achievable given that Russia chose not to recognize the PMR when recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

While there are significant differences between the material status groups within each entity, the differences are not consistent. Predictably, the poorest respondents in the

Opinions on the future of PMR – Moldova and PMR samples

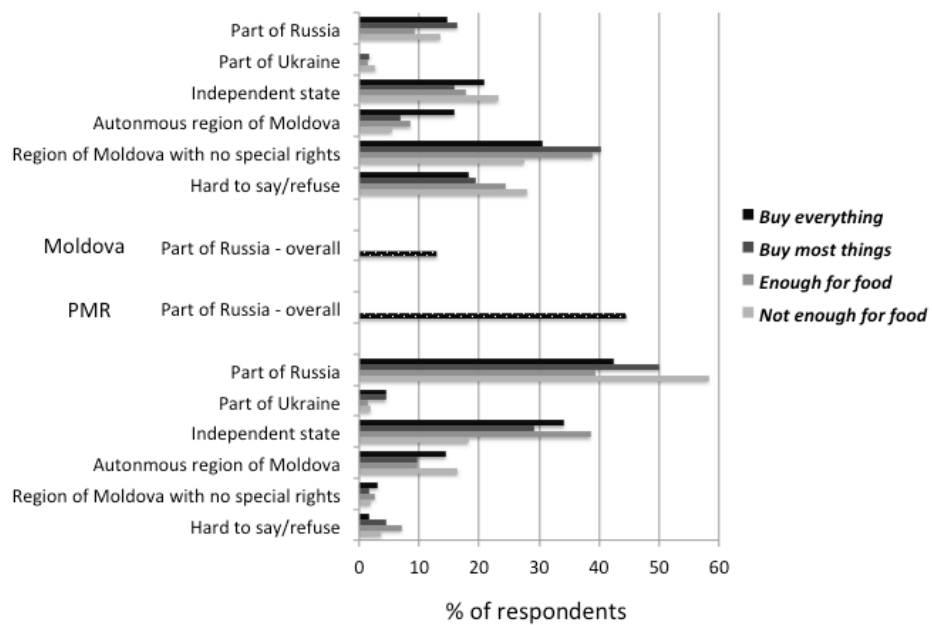


Figure 13: Answers to the Question about the Respondent’s Preferred Future for Pridnestrovie, by Respondent’s Material Well-Being, Moldova and PMR samples, 2010.

PMR are most supportive of the option of joining Russia, a rational economic choice knowing about the weaker economies of Moldova and Pridnestrovie. Figure 13 can be interpreted as the most crucial political divide on the partitioned territory of the Republic of Moldova. Given the seeming endurance of divergent political aspirations and despite the small opening for a possible rapprochement seen in the answers about the impact of the 1992 events on the possibility of re-unification, it would seem that the potential for political progress towards a settlement is barely present in the minds of the ordinary citizens.

We wanted to probe, finally, whether these strong disagreements and preferences on the future status of the PMR would indicate there was waning interest in re-starting negotiations between the sides that would search for a possible settlement. As we have noted, there appears to be a renewed interest on the part of the European Union (and the West more broadly) and Russia in moving discussions forward, as evidenced by the 2010 Merseburg memorandum between Angela Merkel and Dmitry Medvedev that connected Russian interests in European security with its support on resolving the PMR issue.

However, though the two sides remain quite far apart on their respective plans for a final resolution. Figure 14 indicates that more than two-thirds of Moldovans *and* Pridnestrovians support the continuance of negotiations on the future status of Pridnestrovie. This result offers a positive counterpoint to interpretations that divergent aspirations have created a primordial divide that will not be overcome. The PMR side is even slightly more eager (80 percent) to continue negotiations. This finding comes at a time when negotiations had been stalled for five years (negotiations restarted after both surveys in the autumn of 2011). Material status does not seem to affect people’s willingness to see negotiations restarted or not. What stands out most are the similarities in support ratios across the river. Whether these negotiations will continue to flounder on the divergent aspirations of public opinion remains to be seen (clear majorities of Moldovans want the re-integration of Pridnestrovie into their state and clear majorities of Pridnestrovians prefer another option, either independence or integration into Russia). The challenge posed by these dramatically different alternatives remains one to be overcome in any settlement.

Continue negotiations on status of Pridnestrovie? Moldova and PMR

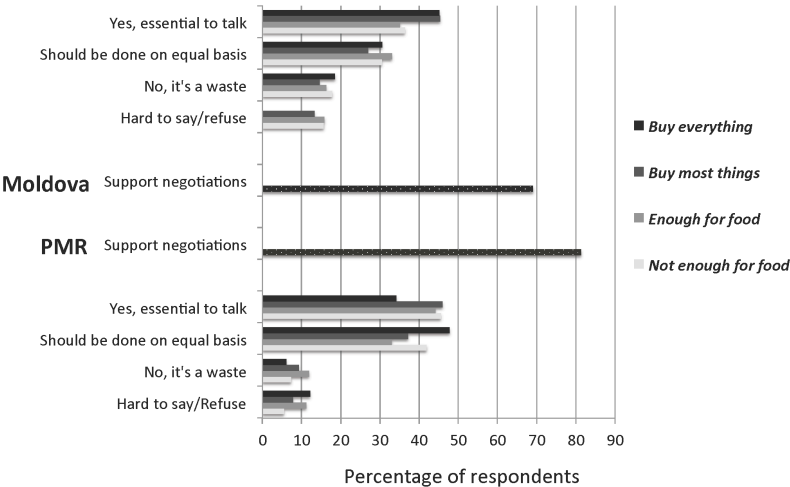


Figure 14: Preferences for Negotiations on the Future Status of Pridnestrovie, by Respondent’s Material Well-Being, Moldova and PMR samples, 2010.

Conclusions: the frustrations that bind?

In this paper, we have empirically measured the degree to which Moldova's twenty-year fragmented geopolitical condition has consolidated polities with distinctly different attitudes and experiences. While there are clear differences between the Republic of Moldova and the PMR over the future of break-away region, the most striking feature of the survey results presented here is the similarities in attitudes across both polities in 2010. Large majorities in both saw their entity as on the wrong track, considered the breakup of the Soviet Union as a wrong step, proffered little support for their longstanding presidents, and expressed interest in negotiations to settle the Moldovan-PMR divide. Both polities revealed residents with frustrations in common, born of twenty years of disappointing developmentalism in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and nostalgia for that lost past. Both exhibited similar socio-demographic cleavages in attitudes, with age and material status being particularly significant. For residents of both territories, concern about their current material status and worries about the future dominate their opinions. Previous comparative work, including Berg (2012), on the nature of the two polities has tended to focus on specific questions and have tried to gauge the relative nature of the populations and their governance. Our work is broader and more comprehensive and compares the territories along a range of indicators. Based on the wider range of topics, we find that earlier research tends to downplay the overall similarity of the opinions in the two entities.

These results complicate commonplace rhetorical conceptions of Moldova-PMR as the location of a geopolitical fault-line that sees residents on either side inhabiting different civilizational mentalities and orientations. Divided space does not mean divided attitudes. While nationality differences are an obvious place to begin to analyze differences within a country's population, in the case of Moldova and the PMR, differences by material status and age are as significant. Since material status and age are correlated, the populations can be more generally categorized into "better-off" and "worse off." This divide does not line up clearly with nationality.

While the habits of great powers and local elites may be to spatialize the world into binary geopolitical categories, the experiences and attitudes of ordinary residents across the region do not affirm such clear and clean divides. Whether this uncertainty provides any basis for the possibility of a future negotiated settlement between all stakeholders is an open question. The shared woes of ordinary citizens, however, are unlikely to unite elite foes.

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Notes

¹ The term "Transnistria" (across the Nistru river) was first used by the Greater Romanian state during the Second World War when it occupied historic Bessarabia, and the river served as its eastern border. It subsequently became widely adopted in the English language as a description of the eastern bank territory. Instead of this external term (which

has an objectionable history and normalizes a west-looking-east gaze) we use the local description, namely Pridnestrovie or “the area of the Dniester/Nistru” river, except when Transnistria is used by authors we discuss. Since this paper is a comparison of a recognized state and an unrecognized de facto state, we adopt as a matter of convenience a comparative language that refers to different polities, entities, and “river banks” (figuratively). In doing so, we do not mean to imply, or in any way insinuate, that the international legal status of the Republic of Moldova and Pridnestrovia is equivalent. It is not.

² We use the term “de facto” to indicate both the international legal status of the separatist territories like the PMR and to choose a more neutral term in a political atmosphere that is strife- and history-laden. Terms such as “pseudo”, “quasi”, “unrecognized”, “non-recognized” etc. have been used as monikers for these territories by various authors.

³ This government collapsed in May 2013, once more plunging Moldova into political uncertainty.

⁴ See http://www.statistica.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/procese_demografice/procese_demografice_2009.pdf; accessed 4 January 2010.

⁵ For example, in 2009 Russian assistance to Pridnestrovie totaled 6 million US dollars for pensions and 880 thousand dollars for elderly homes, orphans and boarding schools, and maternity hospitals (Infotag – Moldovan News Agency – “Russia's Financial Assistance for Transnistria”, 20 February 2009, p.1).

⁶ Ethnographic field research by Rebecca Chamberlain-Creangă, summer 2009.

⁷ According to a study done by the Moldovan non-profit *Alianța Microfinanțare* (2005) (funded by the International Organization for Migration and the Soros Foundation), approximately *two-thirds* of Moldovan migrants have stable occupations prior to travelling abroad to work. Most would be considered “middle class,” employed in the domains of medicine, education, and civil-service (see Chamberlain-Creangă 2011, 280-281).

⁸ It should be noted that Berg (2012) used a legitimation score composed of an index of individual items, while we report the answers to separate individual questions.

⁹ See *Infotag* (Moldovan News Agency) “Tiraspol Hopes for Russian Help, Too.” 16 January 2010, p. 1

¹⁰ Interview with anonymous Pridnestrovian professor from the Shevchenko Pridnestrovia State University, conducted by Rebecca Chamberlain-Creangă, September 2008.

¹¹ See for example the frequent headlines from this prominent online news agency:
<http://www.inprofunzime.md/>.

¹² See Kramer and Hill 2009 for discussion of the dissatisfaction among the youth in Moldova.