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# Violence in the Caucasus: Economic Insecurities and Migration in the “De Facto” States of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

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**Abstract:** Two noted political geographers examine the results of surveys in the “de facto” states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia conducted in 2010. They assess the migration intentions of their residents, the likely destinations and motivations for planned departures, as well as the dramatic population decline due to emigration and expulsion of Georgian residents after wars in the early 1990s. Discussed are economic dislocations, the breakaway republics’ uncertain geographical status, as well as improvements in security and economic conditions due to Russian military guarantees and massive economic aid that followed the 2008 wars with Georgia. The authors utilize key predictors derived from hypotheses about the push and pull forces affecting the decision to migrate (socio-demographic, war experiences, and attitudes about the “de facto” state prospects) to develop explanatory models of migration for each territory before deriving a pooled set of explanations. Both surveys suggest the likelihood that the majority of potential migrants have already left. *Journal of Economic Literature*, Classification Numbers: F220, F510, I300, J110, O150. 1 figure, 7 tables, 60 references. Key words: Russia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Georgia, migration, de facto states,

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Most of the world’s interest in “de facto” states<sup>2</sup> has been directed to their geopolitical affairs, the circumstances of their military victories and subsequent political stalemates, and their tense relations with the parent states from which they separated; the daily lives of the inhabitants of the “de facto” states receive little attention. In addition to the types of daily economic challenges facing most citizens in independent, recognized states, the residents of the “de facto” territories have to cope with the additional problems posed by the lack of recognition. Non-recognition typically involves heavy dependence on an external benefactor for aid and investment, a blockade or at least a significantly burdensome trade regime with the parent state, and an uncertain relationship with more formal trading regimes and international

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<sup>2</sup>We prefer the term “de facto” state as the most neutral to describe the political units that are now a feature of the world political map. Various described as “quasi-states,” “pseudo-states,” “separatist states,” etc., these regions are not recognized by the majority of the global community but are effectively separated from their parent units. There are approximately 15 such territories in 2011. For an account of their emergence and continued survival, see O’Loughlin et al. (1998), Kolstø (2006), and Sebentsov and Kolossov, 2012.

norms (Lynch, 2004). Blockades exacerbate the difficulties of developing new trade partners and repositioning internal economic structures in the wake of the destruction of a previously integrated political-economic system. Informal and black market economic arrangements proliferate in the absence of proper customs and tax regimes. Additional burdens for residents derive from the destruction of industry, infrastructure, and housing during the war of separation; even two decades after the conflicts, the physical evidence is apparent in the post-Soviet “de facto”<sup>3</sup> states as the slow economic recovery has been paralleled by declining populations and strong emigration. In this paper, we examine the relationship between domestic economic insecurities and potential out-migration as reflected in public opinion surveys that we conducted in 2010 in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two unrecognized “de facto” states that separated from Georgia after the conflicts of 1991–1993.

The short war in August 2008 between Georgia and the South Ossetians that quickly escalated to fighting between Georgia and the Abkhazians and to Russia’s entry into the conflicts has dramatically changed the geopolitical landscape of the south Caucasus (Asmus, 2010). Russia recognized the independence of the two “de facto” states on August 26, 2008, a move followed later by four other countries. The presence of Russian troops on the borders with Georgia as well as Russian security guarantees mean that omnipresent fears of further attacks from Georgian forces have been largely removed, a change evident in our surveys: only 13 percent of respondents in Abkhazia and 24 percent in South Ossetia stated that the threat of a renewed war with Georgia is a problem. After almost 20 years of separation from Georgia, the emphasis within “de facto” states can now turn fully to the weak economies, tackling pervasive un- and under-employment, reversing population losses, and reducing the substantial Russian subsidies.

As is the case across the mountains in the North Caucasus district of Russia, another region that has also seen significant post-Soviet conflict,<sup>4</sup> residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are much more concerned with economic problems than they are with political or geopolitical ones. In our 2010 surveys, 79.8 percent of respondents in Abkhazia and 85.3 percent in South Ossetia list “lack of economic development and unemployment” as a “very big” or “big” problem. Our focus in this paper concerns the effects of these economic worries on the future trajectory of out-migration. We first review historical trends in population composition before emphasizing the recent effects of the post-Soviet break-up on the local economies, and the dependence on Russian aid that is redressing the dramatic effects of the conflicts. We then present the responses to our questions about migration aspirations in the representative 2010 public opinion surveys. Using key predictors derived from hypotheses about the push and pull forces affecting a choice of moving or staying (socio-demographic, war experiences and attitudes about the “de facto” state prospects), we then present explanatory models of migration for each territory before deriving a pooled set of explanations. Factors that affect the decision to migrate are age (young more likely), having close relatives living in Russia, belief that the “de facto” state is heading in the wrong direction, inability to influence policies, and the damage-destruction caused to the respondent’s house in the recent wars. These explanations, though, are somewhat varied between the two republics.

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<sup>3</sup>The four post-Soviet “de facto” states are Transnistria (seceded from Moldova), Nagorno-Karabakh (seceded from Azerbaijan) and Abkhazia and South Ossetia (seceded from Georgia).

<sup>4</sup>See the accompanying paper in this issue by O’Loughlin et al. (2011a)

## POPULATION TRENDS IN ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA

The “de facto” territories have seen both a dramatic loss of population in the post-Soviet period and a noteworthy shift in population composition: a significant drop in the numbers of Georgians and a comparative rise in the percentage shares of the respective titular groups. We review briefly the historical trends but emphasize recent developments despite the difficulties of acquiring reliable data from politically charged population enumerations.

### Abkhazia

At the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Abkhaz still constituted the absolute majority of their ethnic homeland’s population, despite the expulsion and mass emigration of Cherkessians (of whom the Abkhaz are a sub-group) (Table 1). Abkhazia was initially proclaimed a Soviet Socialist Republic like Georgia, but later was included in the Transcaucasian Federated Socialist Republic (as was Georgia), before becoming an autonomous republic within Georgia in 1931. Stalinist repressions destroyed the Abkhazian intellectual and political elite and the Georgian communist leadership stimulated the colonization of Abkhazia by settlers from Mingrelia and other Georgian regions with land shortages.

The share of the ethnic Georgian population, constituting an absolute majority in the almost mono-ethnic Gal(i) district (94 percent), along the Black sea littoral, and in the capital, Sukhum(i),<sup>5</sup> continued to increase until the collapse of the USSR. Russian out-migration started in the 1970s, while a fourth major group in the region, the Armenians, did not experience a major shift in numbers. Overall, the Abkhaz share of the population of their titular republic had declined to 15–18 percent by the end of the Soviet era. The Abkhaz felt themselves a small discriminated minority during Soviet times, suffering from forced attempts at assimilation (Dzidzoyev, 2009).

As a result of the Georgian-Abkhaz war (August 14, 1992–September 30, 1993), the population of Abkhazia shrank by half, with the hostilities radically changing the ethnic composition of the “de facto” state. Most Georgians and Mingrelians, especially those who lived in the northern part of the republic and in Sukhum(i), left or were expelled by the Abkhaz. Only about 60,000 returned, mostly those who lived in the compact area of Gal(i). Because before 1992, 250,000 Georgian/Mingrelians lived in Abkhazia, the total number of refugees moving to Georgia can be estimated at 190,000–240,000. Having now regained their role as the largest ethnic group in their homeland, a very important marker for them, the Abkhaz remain very sensitive to any possibility of again becoming a small minority.<sup>6</sup>

### South Ossetia

In South Ossetia, the Ossetian titular group predominates after two periods of post-Soviet conflicts (1991–1993 and 2004–2008), with attendant expulsions and out-migration of Georgians. In contrast to Abkhazia, the majority of Ossetians do not live in the “de facto” state but in the adjoining North Ossetian republic (population of 713,000 in 2010) of Russia to the north of the main Caucasus mountain chain (see Fig. 1). South Ossetia (population estimated at 54,000 in 2010) has a per capita GDP of only US\$250 dollars (Gabarayev, 2009),

<sup>5</sup>We use the nomenclature Sukhum(i) to denote its name in two languages, Abkhazian (Sukhum) and Georgian (Sukhumi). We use a similar designation for Gal(i), Tskhinval(i), and Akh'algor(i), also known as Leningor(i).

<sup>6</sup>For a comparison of attitudes about return on both sides of the border, see Toal and Grono (2011, this issue).

**Table 1.** Ethnic Composition of the Population of Abkhazia in Selected Census Years, 1897–2003

Ethnic group	1897		1926		1939	
	<i>N</i>	Pct.	<i>N</i>	Pct.	<i>N</i>	Pct.
Abkhaz	58,697	55.3	55,918	27.8	56,197	18.0
Georgian <sup>a</sup>	25,873	24.4	67,494	33.6	91,967	29.5
Armenian	6,552	6.2	25,677	12.8	49,705	15.9
Russian	5,135	4.8	12,553	6.2	60,201	19.3
Other <sup>b</sup>	6,806	6.5	14,045	7.0	45,496	14.5
Total	106,179	100.0	201,016	100.0	311,885	100.0
Ethnic group	1970		1989		2003	
	<i>N</i>	Pct.	<i>N</i>	Pct.	<i>N</i>	Pct.
Abkhaz	77,276	15.9	93,267	17.8	94,597	44.2
Georgian <sup>a</sup>	199,595	41.0	239,872	45.7	44,041	20.6
Armenian	74,850	15.4	76,541	14.6	44,869	21.0
Russian	92,889	19.1	74,914	14.3	23,420	10.9
Other <sup>b</sup>	26,903	5.6	40,467	7.6	7,079	3.3
Total	486,959	100.0	525,061	100.0	214,016	100.0

<sup>a</sup>Also Mingrelian.

<sup>b</sup>Mainly Greeks, Estonians, and Ukrainians.

*Sources:* Compiled by the authors from the Russian (1897), Soviet (1926–1989), and Abkhazian (2003) national population censuses.

whereas North Ossetia's was about \$3100 (2009 Rosstat statistics; Federal'naya, 2011). In addition to ethnic kinship, the close attachment of South Ossetia to North Ossetia is explained by powerful economic factors.

The boundaries of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region within the republic of Georgia were created in 1922 (Saparov, 2010). With only 11 percent of its territory lying below an elevation of 1,000 meters, South Ossetia is one of the most sparsely populated territories in the Caucasus. In parts of the Akh'algor(i)/(Leningor(i)) district (see Fig. 1), the Georgian share of the total population reached 54 percent and in Tsk'inal(i) district 47 percent (Goskomstat SSSR, 1993). But unlike in Abkhazia, the proportion of Ossetians and Georgians remained quite stable during the Soviet period (Table 2).

Despite ongoing conflict from 1991 to 2008, residential patterns in South Ossetia did not change, as the 1992 peace agreement fixed the zones of Georgian and South Ossetian military and administrative control by matching them to the ethnic composition of the populations. Inside these zones, however, the villages with mixed populations became mono-ethnic. The total population of the Georgian-controlled territories in South Ossetia has been estimated as 22,800 (Bagapsh, 2011). The 2008 Georgian-Ossetian/Russian war dramatically changed the ethnic map. After the defeat of Georgian forces, the houses of ethnic Georgians were burned and then systematically destroyed to prevent any possibility of their return (Wendle, 2008),



**Fig. 1.** Location of the “de facto” states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and of place names mentioned in the text.

**Table 2.** The Ethnic Composition of the Population of South Ossetia, 1926–1989

Ethnic groups	1926		1939		1959		1979		1989	
	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.	N	Pct.
Ossetian	60,351	69.1	72,266	68.1	63,698	65.8	66,073	66.5	65,232	66.2
Georgian	23,538	26.9	27,525	25.9	26,584	27.5	28,125	28.3	28,544	29.0
Jews	1,739	2.0	1,979	1.9	1,723	1.8	1,485	1.5	396	0.4
Armenian	1,374	1.6	1,537	1.4	1,555	1.6	1,254	1.3	984	1.0
Russian	157	0.2	2,111	2.0	2,380	2.5	1,574	1.6	2,128	2.2
Total	87,375	100.0	106,118	100.0	96,807	100.0	99,421	100.0	98,527	100.0

Source: Compiled by authors from the respective Soviet census reports.

and South Ossetia established its control of the (previously) Georgian part of Leningor(i) / (Akhalgor(i)) Rayon.

**Population and Socio-economic Data: The Problem of Reliability**

In South Ossetia there has been no population census since the last Soviet one in 1989, as the statistical service is only currently being established.<sup>7</sup> Population estimates vary widely

<sup>7</sup>Interview by authors with Erik Pukhayev, Head of the South Ossetian Statistical Services, Tskhinval(i), March 29, 2010.

between 35,000 and 70,000. The Head of the Statistical Services of South Ossetia gives the estimate of 54,000 for South Ossetia and 25,000 for Tskhinval(i) in January 2010.<sup>8</sup>

Although Abkhazia held a census of population in 2003 (see Table 1), the data on urban and rural populations and on ethnic composition should be interpreted cautiously (Yamskov, 2009a, 2009b). The republic of Georgia contests these numbers, and claims that the actual populations of the “de facto states” are less than half the figures reported by their statistical services. Socio-economic statistics are even more difficult to find and to compare than demographic data. While Russia and other former Soviet republics gradually switched to the international accounts system, Abkhazia and South Ossetia still use Soviet statistical methods.

### THE “DE FACTO” STATE ECONOMIES IN THE POST-SOVIET PERIOD AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONFLICT

While both “de facto” states have experienced a double economic dislocation over the past 20 years (i.e., the collapse of the Soviet economic arrangements followed by the economic consequences of wars with Georgia), their economic prospects are dramatically different. As a self-perceived remote periphery ignored by Georgian planners, South Ossetia’s industrial production and income shares were consistently lower than its population ratio. In 1982, as 1.9 percent of the population of Georgia, the republic accounted for only 0.8 percent of industrial and 0.7 percent of agricultural production, with an average salary of 118 rubles per month compared to 186 rubles in the Georgian SSR (Dzidzoyev and Dzugayev, 2007). At the end of the Soviet period, South Ossetia remained a relatively backward agricultural region. Agriculture (mainly stock-breeding) provided 55 percent of its output, with the food industry contributing an additional 15 percent (Tibilova, 2009; Zhmailo, 2009). The Roki Tunnel, completed in 1974 through the Caucasus range, has played a crucial geostrategic role after the collapse of the USSR in linking the economy and people of South Ossetia to their fellow Ossetians north of the mountains (Dzidzoyev and Dzugayev, 2007). As the border with Georgia is effectively sealed, the tunnel provides the lifeline for the “de facto” state.

In Abkhazia, the agro-industrial complex was the leading economic activity. As Abkhazia was one of the few Soviet regions situated in the subtropics, making possible the cultivation of tea and citrus fruit, the food industry accounted for more than half of industrial production. Besides processing subtropical agricultural products, another major local specialization was tourism, based on the beach resort season that lasts until late November, unique in the former Soviet Union. All road transport with Georgia and Russia occurs along a single coastal highway; there are no other road connections, which makes Abkhazia highly vulnerable from a military perspective and economically dependent on its large neighbor to the north.

The economies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia both suffered from the separatist wars with Georgia and the subsequent years of military tension, blockade, and isolation. Infrastructure, housing, and industry were destroyed or severely damaged during the wars, and much of what remained standing soon was economically obsolete. The continuing crisis created survival and mobilization economies focused on military opposition to Georgia, provoking a massive outflow of skilled labor and undermining the human capital accumulated during the Soviet years.

In South Ossetia in 2008, the total production of the seven industrial plants was estimated at only \$500,000 (Mamedova, 2009). Almost all essential goods are imported from Russia via the Transcaucasian Highway and Roki Tunnel, considerably increasing their cost.

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<sup>8</sup>Erik Pukhaye, interview with the authors, March 29, 2010.

Prices of basic goods are 50–100 percent higher than in the North Caucasus region of Russia, effectively lowering local incomes. In total, the cost of the restoration of South Ossetian economy and infrastructure is estimated at \$16–18 billion, or \$20,000 per square kilometer (Osia, 2010).

Abkhazia was particularly strongly affected by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the conflict with Georgia, because these events almost destroyed tourism, one of the main sources of income. Economic damage is estimated at \$11.3–13.0 billion, about 50 times more than the republic's GDP. About 60 percent of agricultural land remains uncultivated (Osia, 2010). Almost two decades after the intense fighting, many neighborhoods of Sukhum(i) are still in ruins and the large towns of Ochamchira(e) and Tkvarchal(i) in the south remain almost totally demolished.

### RUSSIAN ASSISTANCE TO SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

In September 2008, soon after Russian recognition of Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence, bilateral treaties of friendship and cooperation were signed. They provide the legal basis for agreements on the Russian military presence, assistance to restore the local economies, and the provision of social aid and public services. The ultimate goal is the creation of conditions for autonomous economic development in the two states through private investments, thereby decreasing the financial burden on Russia's budget.

The South Ossetian budget is almost totally (96 percent) shaped by financial assistance from Russia. Due to large financial flows from Russia, the budget tripled from 2008 to 2010. Between August 2008 and May 2010, Moscow spent 26 billion rubles (about \$900 million), or about \$28,000 per person (Gabuyev et al., 2010). Russian assistance includes not only investments, loans, subventions, and technical aid, but also direct payments to the population; 99 percent of South Ossetian citizens now have Russian citizenship. South Ossetians also receive Russian pensions and social benefits that are not counted in the the republic budget.

After the 2008 war, the Russian government offered South Ossetia 6.5 billion rubles in financial assistance for the restoration of 93 economic and social infrastructure projects and 2.8 billion rubles for redressing the war's consequences (Ministry of Regional Development, 2008). Among the major projects funded is the construction of the gas pipeline from Dzaurikau (North Ossetia) to Tskhinval(i), started before the 2008 war and crossing the Caucasus range at high altitude. Its construction is based on the presumption that any economic relations with Georgia are "dangerous and undesirable" (Tibilova, 2009). Russia also funded the construction of a water line, which ended the shortage of drinking water in Tskhinval(i), the renovation of the Roki Tunnel, and the construction of new roads bypassing Georgian territory, in particular between Tskhinval(i) and Leningor(i)/(Akhakgor(i)). The most visible and vitally important reconstruction for ordinary Ossetians, however, is that of housing and schools destroyed in the Georgian attack on Tskhinval(i) in August 2008. The owners of totally destroyed houses/apartments receive gratis 80 to 125 square meters of new housing and all municipal infrastructure (sewage, gas, and water pipelines) is scheduled to be replaced. Despite the official declaration in spring 2011 that the program of South Ossetia's restoration has been successfully finished, the massive financial and technical support of the republic continues (RES, 2010).

Abkhazia received 2.36 billion rubles in financial assistance from Russia in 2009, rising to 10.9 billion rubles (about \$360 million) in 2010–2012 under the "Complex Plan of Assistance for Socio-economic Development" (RIA-Novosti, 2011). This assistance increases the Abkhazian state budget by 250 percent (Osia, 2010) and also certifies a radical change

in Russian relations with Abkhazia, whose main border crossing on the Psou River was officially blockaded by Russia until spring 2008.

As in South Ossetia, a segment (about 25 percent) of the Abkhazian population gets Russian pensions and social benefits. The location of 3,800 Russian troops on two military bases also indirectly contributes to its economic reanimation (Mamedova, 2009). Russia is restoring and renovating infrastructure, in particular, the main road from the Russian boundary at the Psou River to Sukhum(i) (see Fig. 1). The state company Russian Railways finished the restoration of 130 kilometers of Abkhazian railways in mid-2011 using the Russian government's loan of 2 billion rubles to Abkhazia; Russian Railways will operate the railways in Abkhazia for 10 years (until 2019). Regular passenger service between Moscow and Sukhum(i) has now resumed, in addition to several daily local trains between Sochi and Sukhum(i) (Vnachale, 2011). Russian companies have restored the airport in Sukhum(i), and the first regular flights from Moscow are planned for autumn 2011 (RZHD, 2011)

Though the consequences of the war were still quite visible in 2010, in Abkhazia (unlike South Ossetia), elements of an economic revival can be observed, particularly in Sukhum(i) and in the partially restored resorts along the Black Sea coast in the north. Industrial production increased between 2004 and 2009 by 230 percent and the volume of construction by 1130 percent (*Respublika Abkhazia*, 2010). Although salaries remain much lower than in Russia,<sup>9</sup> the quality of life is certainly higher than five or ten years ago, rapidly increasing after 2008. The increase in retail trade turnover—from 973 million to 5391 million rubles (2004–2008)—is impressive, and a particularly useful indicator is the growth in the number of automobiles imported, up from 1,174 in 2004 to 3,883 in 2008 (*ibid.*)

### FOREIGN ECONOMIC RELATIONS OF SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

While South Ossetia exports practically nothing and imports almost all its non-food needs from Russia via the Roki Tunnel, Abkhazia's foreign economic relations play a considerable role (although Abkhazia's imports are seven times greater than exports). In 2010, tourism contributed 40 percent of the income accruing to the republic budget, and Abkhazians living in Russia and other countries also transferred a significant amount of remittances.<sup>10</sup> Most adult Abkhazians, except for Mingrelians/Georgians living in Gal(i) district, have Russian citizenship and, if they worked for at least five years during the Soviet period, have the right to Russian pensions.

Abkhazian foreign trade is highly focused on Russia, from about two-thirds in 2008 to 90 percent in 2010 (Osia, 2010). According to President Dmitriy Medvedev's office, the trade turnover between Abkhazia and Russia reached \$130 million in 2010 (Selivanova, 2011). Raw materials (coal from Tkvarchal(i)), timber, and unprocessed agricultural production (citrus fruits, tea, walnuts, and vegetables) constituted about 90 percent of Abkhazian exports in 2008, with mandarin oranges representing by far the leading export (35 percent of total exports) (Osia, 2010).

As noted above, receipts from tourism accounted for two-fifths of all income in the republican budget. According to Abkhazian official statistical data, the republic accommodated 113,000 tourists in sanatoria and registered hotels, and hosted 729,000 other visitors in private houses and small hotels. Abkhazia thus receives about half the tourists that it did during the Soviet period (Selivanova, 2011). In 2009, 95.9 percent of tourists came from Russia (mainly

<sup>9</sup>The average salary in July 2009 was only 4597 rubles, or about US\$170.

<sup>10</sup>On the importance of remittances more generally in the post-Soviet space, see O'Hara et al. (2009).



from the Moscow region, St. Petersburg, and Rostov) (Moskvichi, 2009) and 3.9 percent from Ukraine and Belarus (Mamedova, 2009).

The main crossing point along the Russian-Abkhazian boundary, on the Psou River, is incapable of adequately handling the 30,000 persons and 3,000 vehicles that may transit daily (Rossiysko, 2011). The authors observed long lines of Abkhazians sitting in cars filled with boxes of mandarin oranges, waiting for Russian customs clearance at this crossing point in November 2009. To improve the situation, the Russian customs service has recently proposed canceling border checks of individuals. Total traffic across the border increased in 2004–2010 from 1.8 million to 7 million people annually (FTS, 2011).

On the southern Abkhazian border, traffic across the boundary with Georgia near the dam of the hydroelectric power station on the Inguri River consists almost exclusively of residents of Gal(i) Rayon (Mingrelians/Georgians). In traveling abroad, South Ossetian and Abkhazian citizens use their Russian foreign passports.

### **Too Close a Rapprochement with Russia?**

The strong unilateral and asymmetric dependence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on Russia inevitably creates misunderstandings and mutual discontent on both sides. In the case of South Ossetia, both sides strongly criticized corruption and an inefficient use of the huge subsidies from the Russian federal authorities. Despite official declarations, the restoration of destroyed houses was not finished in March 2011 (Gabuyev, 2011), as locals complained about slow progress, lack of coordination, and low construction standards.<sup>11</sup> In May 2010, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin expressed his dissatisfaction at progress in South Ossetia and sent his first deputy Igor Shuvalov to examine the situation there (Gabuyev et al., 2010). Competition for potential reconstruction contracts was weak and many Russian companies arrived in South Ossetia, followed by subcontractors. This opened the way for mass corruption and, in 2011, the scheme for financing construction was changed; the Russian Ministry of Regional Development no longer pays construction firms but sends the money directly to the South Ossetian Ministry of Finances, which now deals with the contractors. Ninety-five percent of construction materials and machinery are imported from Russia via the Transcaucasian Highway (Roki Tunnel), which is sometimes closed in winter because of heavy snow and avalanches. Skilled labor also must come from Russia, which requires the construction of temporary housing for workers.<sup>12</sup>

Although appreciative of Russia's efforts to secure their independence, residents in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia fear the cultural threat of excessive rapprochement with their large neighbor. Russian is the only language of official communication and one of two principal languages in education. Russian TV, other media, and mass culture absolutely dominate in South Ossetia and the presence of more than 5,000 workers from Russia in the small city of Tskhinval(i) contributes to a further strengthening of the Russian presence. Ossetians, promoting their mother tongue, demand an increase in the use of the Ossetian language in schools (Gabuyev, 2011). This notwithstanding, South Ossetians consider themselves a part of a single Ossetian people, and strongly prefer integration with North Ossetia within the Russian Federation<sup>13</sup>; over 85 percent trust the current Russian leadership.

<sup>11</sup>They have also blamed the authorities for ignoring the restoration of the old historical core of Tskhinval(i) and, in particular, its Jewish neighborhood (RES, 2011).

<sup>12</sup>Interview with Russian Deputy Minister of Regional Development, Roman Panov, reported in Gabuyev (2011)

<sup>13</sup>Fifty-seven percent preferred this option in our November 2010 survey in South Ossetia, whereas 23 percent would like to see South Ossetia as a separate republic in Russia.

By contrast, in Abkhazia well before the 2008 war and recognition by Russia, almost a quarter of respondents were in favor of full independence, particularly young people and those who worked in the field of tourism and services (Tekushev, 2006). Our survey in Abkhazia, conducted in March 2010, showed an impressive increase in this share (of those who would like to see their republic as an independent state), to 62.5 percent. Only 24.6 percent desired integration with the Russian Federation and 4.5 percent with Georgia (see O’Loughlin et al., 2011b).<sup>14</sup>

Among the Abkhazian elite, there are two differing perspectives on the republic’s future (see Inal-Ipa and Shakryl, 2011). The first holds that the republic can get all it needs from its patron and benefactor, Russia, and can be satisfied with the role of economic appendage, viewing actual independence as a political façade. The second sees independence as both a burden and a historical responsibility, and posits the necessity of building a political nation based on an identity shared by all citizens and of an ethnic state of the Abkhaz. Proponents of the second approach argue that the massive financial assistance from Russia, and especially its use for social needs, reduces the people’s initiative.<sup>15</sup>

Fears persist about the influx of Russian capital posing a major threat to Abkhazian identity and sovereignty (Arsyukhin and Chichkin, 2008). Abkhazian businessmen are particularly concerned with the activities of large Russian companies that purchase properties along the coast for new hotels and sanatoria, claiming they receive preferential treatment. Acting President Alexander Ankvab<sup>16</sup> stressed that, although he was interested in Russian investments, his administration nevertheless “will not allow dictators into the republic” (Novoye Vremya, 2011). The intention of former President Sergey Bagapsh to change the legislation forbidding foreigners from buying real estate in the republic was heavily criticized and not implemented (RFE/RL, 2010); some Abkhazians feared that not only Russians but Abkhazian Georgians who traveled to Russia would qualify to buy housing. In 2009, Russian citizens constituted 85 percent of real estate buyers in Abkhazia (Selivanova, 2011), prompting Sukhum(i)’s newspaper *Nuzhnaya Gazeta* to accuse Russia of “colonial behavior” (Allenova, 2010).

Fear of losing language and identity is even stronger among Abkhazians than among South Ossetians. The depopulation of the countryside after the 1992–1993 war with Georgia weakened the positions of the ethnic Abkhaz because rural dwellers are the main users of the titular language. A special law obliging newspapers to publish at least half of their stories in Abkhaz was adopted by the parliament, but is widely ignored. Sometimes the tone of critical comments addressed toward Russia (“the coexistence of Abkhazia with Russia reminds one of sex with an infected partner”) has been so sharp and insulting that the Russian ambassador to Abkhazia believed it necessary to protest (Grigor’yev, 2010).

Geopolitical commentary in the wake of the 2008 war frequently invokes the asymmetry in the relative size and sustainability of the two “de facto” states. While both have signed agreements with Russia for the stationing of Russian troops inside their borders for 49 years, with the possibility of another 15 years extension, differences between their possible futures are noteworthy. Whereas South Ossetia is portrayed as a military and economic dependency of Russia, Abkhazia is represented as a political unit with a dynamic internal politics, significant potential for growth, tourism, and trade, and an elite that wishes to widen diplomatic and economic ties to the West and Turkey (Acherson, 2008). Georgia, supported by the European Union and the United States, continues to maintain its position that both territories are illegal

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<sup>14</sup>Another 8.4 percent refused to answer or do not have an opinion.

<sup>15</sup>There is still no treasury in Abkhazia, and as a result only 60 percent of the subsidies received in 2010 were actually spent (Ekspert, 2011).

<sup>16</sup>He was since elected president, in August 2011 (Schwartz, 2011).

and that travel to them from Russia is thus a violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The current National Security Concept of Georgia maintains that "uncontrolled territories host illegal militant groups, create conditions favorable to a variety of terrorist groups and provide fertile ground for contraband and transnational organized crime; and separatist regimes systematically violate human rights" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, n.d.). Despite Western governments' unwavering support of Georgia's position, recent policy proposals by regional experts have advocated more engagement with the Abkhazian government (but not South Ossetia) while still maintaining support for the Georgian government position (Cooley and Mitchell, 2010; Mitchell and Cooley, 2010; Charap and Welt, 2011). As we have argued elsewhere (O'Loughlin et al., 2011b), the debates in the corridors of government and policy centers in Washington, Brussels, Moscow, or Tbilisi are far from the daily lives of residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and usually pay little heed to the views and aspirations of these residents. In this paper, we focus on these opinions by examining the migration preferences of residents and relate these preferences to the enduring economic difficulties of both territories.

### PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS IN ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA

As part of a broader project that is examining the internal dynamics of the Eurasian "de facto" states through the perspectives of their residents, we conducted two public opinion surveys in Abkhazia (March 2010,  $N = 1,000$ ) and South Ossetia (November 2010,  $N = 506$ ). The survey instruments contained about 120 questions, with 75 percent of the questions standardized across the different samples so that comparative study might be pursued. While the Abkhazian sample was designed to reflect the population distribution from the 2003 census and other sources such as the registry of the electorate, the South Ossetian sample could not be processed in such a manner because of the absence of reliable population data by settlements and *rayony* (counties).

As a result of the reluctance of Georgians living in Akh'algor(i)/(Leningor(i)) Rayon in southeastern South Ossetia to participate in the survey, the data only report attitudes in Tskhinval(i) and its surrounding rayon, and in the rayons of Dzau (Java), and Znaur(i). While the Abkhazian sample has a margin of error of  $\pm 4$  percent, the absence of population information does not allow such a calculation for the South Ossetian sample.<sup>17</sup>

The overall ratios of the samples in Abkhazia and South Ossetia who would like to move, their motivations for moving, and their preferred destinations are shown in Table 3. As we have shown above, the local economy is better in Abkhazia than in South Ossetia, yet the ratio of respondents wishing to move is higher in Abkhazia (32 percent compared to 24 percent). One reason for this unexpected finding is connected to the timing of the recent 2008 war, which was much more destructive in South Ossetia than in Abkhazia and resulted in a significant displacement in the former. Over one-fourth of South Ossetia's population before the August 2008 war was still living in Russia, mostly in North Ossetia, two years later at the time of our survey. In a sense, therefore, many of the potential migrants had already moved, either temporarily or permanently. Overall, however, the pool of potential migrants is modest and if one removes those who wish to relocate within the respective "de facto" states (29 percent of the movers in Abkhazia and 29 percent in South Ossetia) (Table 3), the migration

<sup>17</sup>Further details on the general sampling procedures, geographic design, and implementation are reported in O'Loughlin et al. (2011b).

**Table 3.** Summary of 2010 Public Opinion Surveys Detailing Intentions to Depart from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Reasons for the Possible Moves, and Preferred Destinations

Respondents and basic questions	Abkhazia	South Ossetia
Overall percentage of respondents who would like to move	32.2	23.96
Reasons why you would like to move (pct. of potential movers)		
Economic reasons	34.78	43.76
Family and move home reasons	31.05	34.26
Other reasons	33.17	21.98
Where would you like to move (pct. of potential movers)		
Elsewhere in the “de facto” state	29.19	28.66
Russia, former Soviet Union, European Union	34.48	53.96
Georgia	5.90	0.40
Other	20.43	16.98

*Source:* Data from national surveys conducted by the authors.

potential remains surprisingly low. Less than one-fifth of respondents in both states wish to move abroad.

The destinations for possible moves show that Russia together with the states of the former Soviet Union and (a tiny ratio for) the European Union is the preferred destination for potential migrants from both states<sup>18</sup> As we will show below, many respondents have family members already living in Russia and such contacts provide information regarding job opportunities, a social network in a foreign environment, and frequently a place to stay. Not surprisingly, North Ossetia constitutes the majority of the destination choices (36 percent overall of the respondents who would like to move) in Russia for the South Ossetian sample. Only a small proportion of Georgians in either state wish to move across the border to Georgia; most of those displaced in both states by the wars of the early 1990s have stayed in Georgia (estimated at 300,000 by the Georgian government) and were joined by 22,000 who left or were forced out during and after the 2008 war in South Ossetia (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Only the Gal(i) district in the south of Abkhazia retains a significant number of Georgians, and though their status is tenuous and marginalized, their interest in leaving for Georgia is now minimal. Many had left at the end of the 1992–1993 war but returned shortly thereafter despite pressure from the Tbilisi government (Clogg, 2008). Many residents of the Gal(i) district take advantage of their geographical location and geopolitical position, receiving international aid and pensions on both sides of the boundary (see O’Loughlin et al., 2011a, this issue).

The motivations for a possible move are evenly divided among three sets of explanations. Push and pull factors offer the simplest dichotomy of explanations for individual motivations. Economists (e.g., Borjas, 1989) stress the incentives to move provided by differences in wages between origin and destination (in this case, almost always Russia). In the often-quoted

<sup>18</sup>On conditions in Russia favoring it as a migration destination, see Ioffe and Zayonchkovskaya (2010).

words of Hicks (1932, p. 76), “differences in net economic advantages, chiefly differences in wages, are the main causes of migration.” For potential migrants, the sizeable differences between the low wage rates between Abkhazia/South Ossetia (push factor) and high rates in Russia (pull factor), when combined with the additional pull factor of the presence of family members already in Russia, provides a powerful incentive to move. Economic motivations are noted by a plurality of respondents in both states, but family reasons (joining family members elsewhere) also feature prominently in the answers. Other reasons include moves abroad for educational purposes, (a few) potential moves due to feelings of discrimination and ostracism in the local community, and unspecified reasons. Similar to migrations to Western countries (Castles and Miller, 2009), the potential migrants in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are responding to economic pressures at home and opportunities abroad, and ending the separation of families due to previous moves is closely connected to this factor.

In order to focus on the foreign destinations and the economic elements of the out-migration, we selected: (a) those respondents who wished to move to Russia, the former Soviet Union, and the European Union; and (b) those respondents who wished to move for economic reasons. There is, of course, some overlap between the two groups, as 77 percent of the potential movers to Russia from Abkhazia also wished to move for economic reasons; the comparable figure for South Ossetia is 59 percent. In the surveys, respondents were asked if they “would like to move.” We combined the “definite” and “probable” yes answers to define those who wished to move from other respondents who answered “definitely not,” “probably not,” or “don’t know.” For those adults who were categorized as likely movers, we then asked their preferred destination (Russia/former Soviet Union/European Union) and reasons for moving. By distinguishing adults who wished to move to this destination from all other respondents, we could fit logistic models for a binary outcome variable. Similarly, we made a binary outcome variable between those who wanted to move for economic reasons and the rest of the sample. Below, we report the results of the modeling procedures for each “de facto” state separately, and then fit a pooled model for all respondents using the significant predictors for the separate states to see how consistent these predictors are.

In selecting predictors for the migration models, we drew from the substantial literature on theories of motivation for migration as well as factors expected to be important in recent war zones. The migration literature has documented that younger adults (defined as 18–35 in our study) and males have higher rates of migration than others (Massey et al., 1993). In difficult economic environments, we expect those under economic pressures to have a greater propensity to move. Thus, the variables of family income (measured on a four-point scale of ability to afford goods from “afford everything” to “cannot afford to buy food”) and optimism about future earnings<sup>19</sup> are expected to be useful predictors of movement. Education (rated on a four-point scale from elementary school to university level) is also expected to be significant, with more educated individuals unhappy about limited employment prospects. An important socio-demographic measure is the respondents with family ties to Russia, the major destination and most likely geographical target for potential movers. In both “de facto” states, nationality is important in understanding attitudes toward the state authorities and to perspectives on the future. Specifically, Georgians see themselves as more likely to be the victims of discrimination, and therefore we added predictors for the other nationalities—Abkhaz and Ossetians as the respective titular groups, and also in Abkhazia the sizeable Armenian and Russian nationalities.

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<sup>19</sup>The question posed was “how likely is it that you can improve your standard of living in the next two years?,” and possible answers were “very likely,” “likely,” “not likely,” and “very unlikely.”

Two other sets of predictors are based on the nature of the post-war economies and societies in the “de facto” states and are expected to be important push factors. Three measures summarize a respondent’s outlook on the future of the states: whether they believed that the country was “moving in the right direction” (74 percent in Abkhazia and 68 percent in South Ossetia), whether they felt that they “were able to influence local matters” (on a four-point scale from “definitely” to “not at all”), and whether they believed that the “local economy was a big problem” (a four-point scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”).

The final set of predictors explicitly assessed the effects of the recent wars on the propensity to move. Respondents were categorized as “displaced” (or not) by the fighting (48 percent in Abkhazia and 63 percent in South Ossetia), whether their homes were damaged or destroyed (51 percent in Abkhazia and 73 percent in South Ossetia), whether they or a close family member had witnessed a violent event resulting in injury or death (60 percent in Abkhazia and 67 percent in South Ossetia), and whether they were able to forgive members of other groups for their actions (a four-point scale from “very likely” to “very unlikely”). In the models reported in Tables 4 and 6 below for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, respectively, each set of predictors is added in a cumulative manner to highlight the specific relationships and the changes in overall model fit.

### **MODELING THE LIKELIHOOD OF MIGRATION ABROAD AND ECONOMIC MOTIVATIONS FOR MOVING**

#### **Likelihood of Migration Abroad**

We fit logistic models for binary outcomes (likely to move to Russia/other former Soviet republic/European Union or not). As well as the regression coefficients reported in the tables, we also report the relative risk ratios for the final model in which all variables are included. Unlike odds ratios that are often reported in logit analysis, the relative risk ratios indicate the ratio of the probability of the event occurring (e.g., the respondent stating that he/she would like to move to Russia) while controlling for the other factors in the model. Taking its cue from epidemiology and the reports of clinical trial data, the ratios are more intuitive and easier to interpret than either the regression coefficients or odds ratios. Thus, a value of .79 indicates a relative risk ratio 21 percent lower than the mean, while a value of 2.21 indicates a risk that is 121 percent higher. We also report two other indicators of model fit in the summaries: percent of responses (either 1—intends to move, or 0—not intending to move) that are correctly classified by the model and area under the ROC (Receiver Operator Characteristic) curve, where a value closer to 1.0 indicates a better model fit; it is also connected with the ratio of correct and false classifications of the outcome variable. We employed STATA 10.0 for model fitting.

Only three of the nine socio-demographic predictors of out-migration to Russia/former Soviet Union/European Union are significant for Abkhazia and only two of the seven predictors for South Ossetia (Model 1 in Table 4). Not surprisingly, for both sets of respondents, having close relatives in Russia is positively related to preference to move there and holds across all six models for the two territories. The relative risk ratios for the final models with all variables shows that Abkhazian respondents with relatives in Russia have a 190 percent increase in the likelihood of moving there, with the corresponding ratio for South Ossetia showing a 75 percent increase. In Abkhazia, age and Abkhaz nationality also have strong negative associations with likelihood to move abroad in the expected direction—older respondents and ethnic Abkhaz show a stronger likelihood of not moving, findings in line with the

literature and experience in other contexts where younger people and members of non-titular groups are expected to show greater migration preferences. Whereas the age predictor holds up in a positive direction across the models (when we added the variables measuring perceptions of state conditions and of war experiences), the Abkhaz factor is not significant when war experiences are added. A similar personal factor is seen in Abkhazia Model 2 for males and is evident in two of the three models in South Ossetia; males are less likely (23 percent in the final model) to want to move abroad, a finding inconsistent with the international migration literature, which generally reports that males are more likely to move than females (Massey et al., 1993).

Of the variables measuring the perception of the nature of the condition of the “de facto” state, only the summary measure (“is the state heading in the right or the wrong direction?”) is significant, in both Abkhazia models and in Model 2 for South Ossetia. Those who believe that Abkhazia is heading in the right direction are 36 percent less likely to intend to move to Russia in the final models. Similarly, war experiences are not significant in Abkhazia, but having a home damaged or destroyed in South Ossetia reduces the relative risk (by 43 percent) of stating that a move abroad is likely. Although the severe damage from the fighting was much more recent in South Ossetia (15 years after the destruction of the 1992–1993 war in Abkhazia), this result is somewhat unexpected. In Abkhazia many of those whose homes were destroyed had already resettled elsewhere in the republic or moved abroad. In South Ossetia, however, the process of housing repair and rehabilitation with strong financial support from Russia as discussed earlier was continuing at the time of our survey (November 2010). Two possible explanations offer themselves. First, there may be an incentive to remain in the republic during the relatively short period of massive gratis housing restoration financed by Russian aid. It is also likely that most of the residents whose homes were destroyed in South Ossetia had already moved temporarily or permanently to North Ossetia.

Adding variables helps improve the model fits, but the increases are small. The model fits for Abkhazia are significantly better, another reflection of the special relationship between South and North Ossetia that distorts the move abroad findings, because North Ossetia is part of Russia. In order to estimate the comparative strength of the predictors, we combined the data sets and estimated a pooled model, reported in Table 5. Pooling in this manner (constraining the variances of the two groups to be similar) allows us to gauge the behavior of the key predictors identified in the separate models, comparing the within- and between-group (between the Abkhazian and South Ossetian) sample. For clarity and parsimony, only the variables previously identified as significant for the separate models are included in the pooled analysis. The relative risk ratios show that residence in Abkhazia reduces the likelihood of moving abroad by 44 percent (compared to the South Ossetian sample). The other ratios are similar to the separate models but the pooled analysis allows us to show clearly that the effect of having relatives in Russia is much greater in Abkhazia than in South Ossetia (raising the ratio by 114 percent compared to 30 percent). At the time of the survey, nearly half of the South Ossetian pre-2008 war population was still in North Ossetia. This war-induced movement undoubtedly affected the responses to the questions about migration intentions, inasmuch as many potential movers had already made the trip across the mountains to Russia.

### **Economic Motivations for Moving**

The models for the likelihood of moving abroad as reported for the respondents in Abkhazia and South Ossetia do not indicate strong support for the effects of the wars or for the attitudes that the respondents hold about their republics. To probe further into the

**Table 4.** Logit Model of Preference to Move to Russia/Other Former Soviet Republic/European Union among Individuals Who Wish to Depart from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, 2010\*

Variable	Abkhazia			South Ossetia			Relative risk values for Model 3
	Model 1 (Personal factors)	Model 2 (Add state conditions)	Model 3 (Add war experiences)	Model 1 (Personal factors)	Model 2 (Add state conditions)	Model 3 (Add war experiences)	
Male	-.175(.214)	-.192(.215)*	-.172(.216)	-.445(.220)*	-.448(.223)*	-.626(.240)**	0.77
Age	-.024(.060)**	-.024(.006)**	-.022(.007)**	.009(.006)	.009(.006)	.009(.006)	1.04
Family income	-.166(.145)	-.181(.146)	-.202(.147)	-.297(.173)	-.291(.178)	-.291(.193)	0.89
Optimism	.150(.289)	.150(.289)	.345(.305)	-.311(.246)	-.384(.253)	-.469(.269)	0.84
Relatives in Russia	.849(.215)**	.881(.217)**	.925(.221)**	.799(.246)**	.785(.255)**	.560(.271)*	1.75
Education	.275(.164)	.285(.165)	.299(.167)	.297(.172)	.278(.175)	.289(.189)	1.12
Abkhaz	-.806(.275)**	-.602(.288)*	-.459(.312)	—	—	—	—
Russian	-.093(.351)	-.013(.355)	.042(.367)	—	—	—	—
Armenian	-.211(.306)	-.036(.316)	.027(.228)	—	—	—	—
Ossetian	—	—	—	.107(.372)	.206(.393)	-.003(.404)	0.97
Right direction	—	-.675(.254)**	-.638(.256)*	—	-.051(.221)**	-.097(.235)	0.98
Economy big problem	—	-.290(.259)	-.283(.261)	—	-.067(.297)	-.148(.316)	0.95
Able to influence	—	.041(.232)	.021(.235)	—	.042(.131)	.080(.135)	0.97
Displaced by war	—	—	.253(.245)	—	—	.298(.251)	1.11
Home destroyed/damaged	—	—	-.244(.238)	—	—	-.1.656(.298)**	0.57
Witnessed violence	—	—	-.234(.228)	—	—	.015(.253)	0.98
Able to forgive	—	—	.165(.227)	—	—	.317(.266)	1.11
Constant	-1.362(.704)	-.983(.728)	-1.137(.774)	-.305(.789)	-.276(.911)	1.581(1.053)	—
Log likelihood	-316.8	-312.9	-311.4	-277.9	-268.5	-247.8	—
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.067	.078	.083	.043	.047	.117	—
Pct. correctly classified	88.93	88.93	88.83	60.43	61.22	63.97	—
Area under ROC curve	.688	.688	.706	.634	.641	.721	—
Number of cases	976	976	976	422	410	408	—

\*\*\* = significant at .01; \* = significant at .05.  
 Source: Data from national surveys conducted by the authors.



**Table 5.** Pooled Logistic Model of Preference to Move to Russia/Other Former Soviet Republic/European Union among Individuals Who Wish to Depart from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, 2010<sup>a</sup>

Variable	Relative risk ratio	Robust standard error	z-score
Abkhazia	0.56	0.186	-1.75
Age-Abkhazia	0.98	0.005	-4.01***
Age-South Ossetia	1.01	0.002	-1.49
Male-Abkhazia	0.84	0.151	-0.95
Male-South Ossetia	0.83	0.074	-2.06*
Relatives in Russia-Abkhazia	2.14	0.373	4.36***
Relatives in Russia-South Ossetia	1.30	0.102	3.39***
Right direction-Abkhazia	0.61	0.110	-2.77**
Right direction -South Ossetia	1.00	0.084	0.03
Home damaged/destroyed-Abkhazia	0.88	0.154	-0.74
Home damaged/destroyed-South Ossetia	0.65	0.049	-5.69***
Log-likelihood -645.8			
Pseudo $R^2$ .236			
LR $\chi^2$ (11) 403.84			
Probability of greater than $\chi^2$ .000			

<sup>a</sup> $N$  of cases = 1496; \*\*\* = significant at .01; \*\* = significant at .05; \* = significant at .10.

Source: Data from national surveys conducted by the authors.

motivations for a possible move, we identified those respondents who indicated that economic reasons (a job, better wages) were their main consideration. In the analysis that follows, we are comparing these individuals to all others in the samples, to both movers for other reasons and non-movers. Having shown the weakness of the local economies, we wished to consider the impact of these economic stresses directly on possible migration outcomes in the form of economic moves. We are thus examining directly the factors that economists stress as important in migration, but in our case, from two recent war zones. The results of these analyses are reported in Tables 6 and 7.

As in the models of the likelihood of moving abroad, only a few of the predictors for economic motivations are significant. In other words, the predictors fail to distinguish well between those who want to move for economic reasons and those who move for other reasons or who are not moving. Increasing age again reduces the chances of moving for economic reasons in the Abkhazian sample, but the pull of a relative living in Russia is not significant for economically motivated migration. In Abkhazia, respondents who felt that they were able to influence affairs in their republic showed a significantly reduced economic motivation to move (a relative risk ratio of 35 percent below the mean). The only significant relationship is for the war-displaced respondents in South Ossetia, whose motivation to move for economic reasons is lowered. Compared to the relative risk ratios for the likelihood to move abroad, the

comparable values for the economic motivation predictors have fewer extreme ratios (Table 6). The model fit is again noticeably better for Abkhazia.

After pooling the samples in Table 7, there are no significant differences between the samples (residence in one republic is not more important for economic migration). In Abkhazia, only age (older less likely to move for economic reasons), having relatives in Russia (45 percent increased risk ratio), believing that Abkhazia was heading in the right direction (33 percent reduced risk ratio), and believing in the ability to influence matters (32 percent reduced risk ratio) are significant factors in the pooled model. In South Ossetia, only owning a damaged or destroyed home is significant (34 percent reduced risk ratio). We conclude that the unusual nature of the republics—still suffering the effects of conflicts in human and economic terms—has complicated the normal expectations of migration due to wage differences, availability of employment, and material status.

### CONCLUSIONS

Abkhazia and South Ossetia have both seen rapid population decline in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and as a result of the wars of the early 1990s. The double effect of economic dislocation (due to the ending of the Soviet planned economy that determined production and export specialization and the destruction of much of the infrastructure during the wars) only partially explains the population decline. Additional Georgians were expelled or emigrated (about 10 percent of the total) from the two territories after the 2008 wars. Visible signs of land abandonment, desolate villages, and destroyed homes are evident in the landscapes of both territories. Any sizeable return of former residents is dependent on improved relations between Georgia and the “de facto” state regimes, a vision that continues to elude reconciliation efforts.<sup>20</sup>

The close connections between North and South Ossetia allowed a modicum of assistance and support during the 1993–2008 period when Georgia controlled the main road to the Roki Tunnel and substantial parts of the “de facto” state; Abkhazia’s economy suffered through an extended period of blockade from Russia and military confrontation with Georgia. The 2008 war changed both the geopolitical and economic scenes. Russian security guarantees have been matched by significant economic assistance that now has effectively rendered South Ossetia an economic dependency. While Abkhazia has certainly benefitted from the Russia aid, its economic prospects are much brighter than South Ossetia’s due to its tourism attractions and markets for its agricultural produce.

Our analysis of the migration potential in Abkhazia and South Ossetia has indicated that less than one quarter of the current adult residents plan to leave the territories, despite the economic travails and political uncertainties. The trauma of the 2008 war on both the Ossetians who still live in South Ossetia and on those who fled across the Caucasus to Russia was evident in our surveys (much greater than Abkhazia) and suggests that the longer term likelihood of future residence is not yet fixed for many respondents. Typical economic explanations of emigration do not fare well in the two “de facto” states nor do expectations of migration as a likely outcome of attitudes toward the political situation or of the experiences of war. Relatively low intentions to migrate are explained by the large numbers who have already moved to Russia, and also by a strong identity and aspirations generated by the geopolitical changes since 2008, especially among Abkhazians.

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<sup>20</sup>See the contrasting perspectives of the South Ossetian and Georgian sides in Nan (2011).

**Table 6.** Logit Model of Economic Motivations among Individuals Who Wish to Depart from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, 2010<sup>a</sup>

Variable	Abkhazia			South Ossetia			Relative risk values for Model 3
	Model 1 (Personal factors)	Model 2 (Add state conditions)	Model 3 (Add war experiences)	Model 1 (Personal factors)	Model 2 (Add state conditions)	Model 3 (Add war experiences)	
Male	.042(.210)	.067(.212)	.073(.214)		.073(.220)	-.033(.227)	0.98
Age	-.045(.007)***	-.044(.008)***	-.043(.007)***		-.011(.006)	-.011(.006)	0.93
Family income	-.184(.146)	-.196(.147)	-.203(.147)		-.169(.175)	-.155(.181)	0.92
Optimism	-.342(.297)	.117(.290)	-.106(.293)		-.210(.247)	-.187(.254)	0.91
Relatives in Russia	.388(.219)	.410(.120)	.430(.224)		.107(.241)	-.102(.253)	0.95
Education	.163(.163)	.130(.165)	.147(.166)		-.104(.172)	-.166(.178)	0.91
Abkhaz	-.248(.272)	.021(.290)	.153(.314)				
Russian	.248(.368)	.355(.373)	.373(.380)				
Armenian	-.082(.327)	.112(.339)	.170(.348)				
Ossetian							
Right direction					.256(.384)	.909(.398)	1.06
Economy big problem		-.565(.253)	-.537(.254)		.094(.217)	.087(.225)	1.05
Able to influence		.149(.282)	.152(.285)		-.372(.291)	-.417(.302)	0.81
Displaced by war		-.453(.243)	-.477(.245)		-.159(.128)	-.221(.135)	0.89
Home destroyed/damaged			.065(.244)			-.893(.254)***	0.98
Witnessed violence			-.059(.236)			-.085(.239)	0.63
Able to forgive			-.255(.226)			.372(.250)	0.96
Constant	-.019(.696)	.128(.729)	.041(.778)			.372(.250)	1.21
Log likelihood	-316.3	-311.1	-310.1	-277.9	-268.5	-247.8	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.080	.095	.097	.043	.047	.117	
Pct. correctly classified	88.73	88.83	88.73	55.6	58.1	62.90	
Area under ROC curve	.706	.724	.728	.634	.641	.653	
Number of cases	976	976	976	422	410	408	

\*\*\* = significant at .01; \* = significant at .05.  
 Source: Data from national surveys conducted by the authors.

**Table 7.** Pooled Logistic Model of Economic Reasons to Move among Individuals Who Wish to Depart from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, 2010<sup>a</sup>

Variable	Relative risk ratio	Robust standard error	z-score
Abkhazia	0.75	.277	-0.78
Age–Abkhazia	0.96	.005	-6.95***
Age–South Ossetia	0.99	.003	-1.28
Relatives in Russia–Abkhazia	1.45	.253	2.13**
Relatives in Russia–South Ossetia	0.96	.115	-0.33
Right direction–Abkhazia	0.67	.117	-2.32**
Right direction–South Ossetia	1.02	.113	0.16
Able to influence–Abkhazia	0.68	.134	-1.97*
Able to influence–South Ossetia	0.90	.053	-1.81
Home damaged/destroyed–Abkhazia	0.98	.170	-0.09
Home damaged/destroyed–South Ossetia	0.66	.072	-3.80***
Log-likelihood -641.4			
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> .174			
LR chi <sup>2</sup> (11) 270.2			
Probability of greater than chi <sup>2</sup> .000			

<sup>a</sup>N of cases = 1496; \*\*\* = significant at .01; \*\* = significant at .05; \* = significant at .10.

Source: Data from national surveys conducted by the authors.

The securitization of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's de facto independence by Russia after August 2008 has opened new prospects for their economic revival, particularly in Abkhazia. But both republics heavily depend on Russian direct and indirect (geopolitically motivated) aid and can hardly survive without it. Such assistance is certainly increasing the standard of living but is also changing the mindsets of local peoples. For South Ossetia, Russian assistance in the restoration of housing and basic infrastructure destroyed by the recent war is critically important. However, the large involvement of Russia in all fields of social and economic life of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has highlighted the problems of identity (especially related to the status of native languages), gives rise to corruption, and discourages local initiative. Abkhazia has better odds of developing the mechanisms for autonomous growth. Most Abkhazian citizens wish to build an independent state, while a majority of South Ossetians would like to be joined to the Russian Federation, either as a part of reunited Ossetia or as a separate republic in Russia. The expected and unexpected war outcomes have given rise to indeterminate economic and political situations that make future employment prospects for the residents of the war zones problematic.

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