

BACHELOR THESIS

THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON THE VOTING BEHAVIOR IN THE ORIGIN COUNTRY - EVIDENCE FROM MOLDOVA

submitted by:

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Abstract

As citizens emigrate, they not only remit monetary support, but also the predominant values, ideas, as well as the political system, they are exposed to. With almost one third of the population living abroad, Moldova is one of the major migration sending countries. This bachelor explores the causal link between emigration patterns and the landslide victory of the pro-European party during the parliament elections of 2021, by replicating the methods, used by Barsbai *et al.* (2017) for the 2009 parliament elections, as they found a causal link of emigration to the West and the results for the pro-European party due to political remittances.

1 Introduction

In 2020, approximately 280 million people are living, either temporarily or permanently, in another country than in which they were born in. In total, international migrants make up a share of 3.6 percent of the population worldwide (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2021).

Germany and other Western European nations play a central role as primary destinations for international migration. Within the countries media, the topic is ever-present and subject to intense debates within societies.

When discussing the impact of international migration in Western Europe, the debates predominantly focus on the most apparent consequences for the destination countries which arise from the temporary or permanent settlement of migrants. However, the chain of causality not only reaches far beyond the plain effects on destination countries, but also affects the country of origin. As often being neglected in the ongoing debate, these effects add an important piece to the puzzle of arguments favoring and opposing the way, Western countries and policymakers may proceed in the handling of international migration, as they are also effected by the impact of migration on the origin country.

One of the most evident assumptions for an individual who is not satisfied with the political situation in its home country has been "exit, voice and loyalty" (Hirschman, 1980). With this phrase, Hirschman argues, that a migrant, once emigrated, has no further options to impact the political ongoing in his country of origin. Nevertheless, when individuals cross borders temporarily or permanently to live, work or study abroad, they are inevitably exposed to an environment, which differs from their origin country. Often, not only social norms, values, and beliefs differ, but also the institutional setting, as well as the entire political system. The exposition to these changes is hard to evade, and therefor also affect migrants on a personal level. Driven by cheap and easily accessible communication, migrants eventually pass on these impressions to those left behind in the country of origin. Hereby, they not only influence the left behind household, but also others who are directly and indirectly in touch with the migrant. This raises the question, how big the migrant's impact on those who remain behind is, and to what extent migration can influence voting behavior in favor of the migrant's shared experiences.

Barsbai *et al.* (2017) provide an answer to this question, by making use of a quasi-experimental setting in Moldova, a former member of the Soviet Union. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the Eastern European country was part of the Soviet Union. Before acquiring independence in 1991, legal emigration was highly limited and had to be granted by the Communist party. Throughout the decade after the independence, emigration quickly picked up, and Moldova became one of the countries with the largest stock of emigrants. After the turn of the millennium, the communist party got reelected with an absolute majority for 3 consecutive elections. Barsbai *et al.* (2017) provide empirical evidence on the causal link between migration and the victory of the pro-European party during the election of 2009.

In the following elections, the formation of a functioning government coalition con-

tinuously struggled, as the political landscape in Moldova is divided by the question if the country should remain close, historical conditioned, ties with Russia, or approach a pro-European course. In 2021, the pro-European party claimed a landslide victory during the parliament elections. With the recent violent escalation in the East-West conflict, the poorest country in Europe is back in the focus of international attention, as the political tug-of-war about the former Soviet Union country is stronger than ever before. This bachelor thesis continues the work conducted by Barsbai *et al.* by replicating the used methods and explores the causal effect of emigration in Moldova on the outcome of the parliament elections in 2021. For a broader overview, the first section explains the political history of Moldova further detail, as well as the historic and present developments of migration. In a next step, the effect on migrants of being exposed to a different political system is explained briefly, in order to argue, how migrants transfer the perceived differences back to their country of origin. In a last step, this bachelor thesis summarizes key elements to measure unbiased political remittances, before expanding the work by Barsbai *et al.* (2017) to identify the role, migration played in the landslide victory of the pro-European PAS party in the Moldovan parliament election of 2021.

2 Moldova

In the context of Russia’s violent attempt to exert influence on Ukraine, the European Union’s influence on former states of the Soviet Union (USSR), has come into the focus of international attention. As the smallest country in the USSR, Moldova today is the poorest country in Europe and has one of the largest share of population living abroad. In order to understand the political happenings and the magnitude of the pro-European landslide victory in 2021, the following section reviews the political history of the country.

2.1 Political History

In the past century, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 marked the key event of the countries political history. Despite the collapse, a major share of the eligible voters was has been influenced by the predominant political system in the years before.

2.1.1 The shaping of Communist Preferences

In the time period from after the first world war, until 1940, the Eastern two thirds of today’s Moldovan state territory was unified with its Western neighbor Romania. During that time, democratic institutions were established, and modernization efforts were targeted, with the goal to establish a Romanian coined country (Baar and Jakubek, 2017).

From 1940, until its independence, Moldova was first occupied by the Red Army and later integrated into the Soviet Union. The rule not only influenced the political system, but also contributed to a continuous establishment of Soviet Policies and a process of “Russification”. (Baar and Jakubek, 2017). The process was driven by the marginalization of the predominant Moldovan and Romanian language and culture and the establishment of the Russian language, as well as the Russian culture and norms. Furthermore, Ethnic Russians and Ukrainians were encouraged to settle in the Moldavian Soviet Socialistic Republic, leading to a shift in the ethnic composition of the population (Heintz, 2005).

In 1990 the first and only free elections in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic were held. The Communist Party of Moldova was the only legitimate party allowed to run and gained the majority of the votes. However, an affiliate front, united as the Popular Front of Moldova, and other tolerated independent candidates, gained the absolute majority through a coalition. The victory of moderate Communists and a pro-Romanian party guided the path to the independence of Moldova, and initiated efforts to reverse the efforts of Sovietization of the previous decades. After the failed coup d’état against Mikhail Gorbachev, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moldova declared its independence in 1991 (Roper, 2001).

2.1.2 Striving for independence in the Post Soviet Era

After claiming independence on 27th August 1991, Moldova soon received official recognition from the United Nations and became a member of the NATO’s Partnership for Peace program. A first approach of a closer connectedness with Western European states, as

well as the European Union (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, 2023).

In Transnistria, a border region with Ukraine, the rise of the independence and nationalist movements was perceived to be a threat for the East Slavs of Ukrainian and Russians, which accounted for more than half of the population in Transnistria. As a consequence, violent unrest occurred, which ended with a ceasefire and the establishment of a security zone. Until today, the region has maintained its status as an unrecognized breakaway state (Roper, 2001; Borsi, 2007).

The first independent parliament elections were held in 1994. With 43% share of votes, the election was won by a party which united different ethnicities, dispersed across Moldova. The main political focus in the following years was the likewise independence from Russia, and from Romania. The party followed an ideology referred to by many as Moldovenism, which followed the idea to preserve and promote the idea of a Moldovan identity and culture, and furthermore differentiated between Moldovans and Romanians as two different ethnic groups (Baar and Jakubek, 2017). To date, nine continuous elections followed in a designated time lag of four years.

In 1998, the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) gained the majority of the votes, without reaching the absolute majority. Through a coalition, two democratic parties gained the absolute majority of Parliament seats, leading to market reforms and a Western-directed foreign policy (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021).

The election results, in the 1990s, appear to be contradicting to the findings by Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln (2007). Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln find, that people's preferences are highly influenced by the predominant regime they live in. Despite the exposition to a different political system, it can take decades for political and institutional preferences to change. A major reason for the Communist party to miss the absolute majority in all three elections can be found in the independence movements throughout the 1990s, which received strong support from a heterogeneous share across the young country. The parties favoring an independent Moldova pronounced their efforts to restore the Moldovan identity. Brass (1991) describes the idea behind ethnic groups as a result of competing elite groups by manipulating symbols of geography, language, and ethnicity to form an identity. In Western Moldova, a majority of the population proclaimed themselves to be Romanian, allowing the pro-Romanian party to cast votes. However, further East, the ethnicities occur to be more heterogeneous. In addition, the Eastern regions were far more influenced by the Soviet Union, e.g., due to an industrial prioritization by the USSR government. The idea, that the distinct Moldovan identity is wedded with the history of the Soviet era, allowed a party of reformed Communists to claim the majority in these regions during the elections in 1994 (Juska, 1999). Furthermore, language is another identity-shaping factor. While the pro-Romanian parties promoted the implication of the Romanian language after taking over power in 1990 to promote the reunification with the Western neighbor. Many, especially in Eastern Moldova, felt threatened by the uprising impact of Romanian elites. Hereby, moderate Communists did not neglect the former influence of the Soviet Union, by proclaiming significant differences between the Romanian

and Moldovan language, which lead to a broader consent in the population (Pavlenko, 2008). The sense of belonging due to the spoken language also occurred to be the major reason for the breakaway of the Eastern Region Transnistria, following the independence of Moldova. The case of Transnistria and underlines the importance of the language as a symbol of identification, as described by Brass (1991); Pavlenko (2008). In addition to the regional and language factors, used to promote an artificial ethnicity, addressing the sense of belonging is a third major player. The census in 1989 shows, that the sense of belonging to a Moldovan ethnicity was predominant for many citizens already prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. While the pro-Romanian party intended to closely link the Romanian and Moldovan identity together, moderate Communists were able to also unify smaller ethnic groups within the Moldovan territory, shaping the Moldovan identity towards multiethnic groups, especially with an embedment of the former Soviet Union influence, which many Eastern Moldovan were still devoted to (Gorton and White, 2003).

The political dynamics in Moldova throughout the 1990s were characterized by the question of the political connectedness to Russia due to the formative influence of the Soviet rule. While the pro-Romanian parties claimed the Moldovan identity to be closely related to the Romanian, they lost many votes due to the neglect of a majority of Moldovans, who still believed in the structure and institutions of the Soviet Union. In this sense, the election results of 1994 are in line with the findings by Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln (2007). Furthermore, many voters demanded an independent Moldova as proclaimed by moderate Communists, allowing them to win the majority in the elections of 1994.

2.1.3 Rearising of Communism

The parliament elections in 2001 marked a turning point in the political direction the country was heading. With a landslide victory, the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCMR) won 71 out of the 101 parliament seats. For the first time since its independence ten years ago, a hard line communist party had won the elections. This dominance would continue for the following two elections, in which the PCMR was able to win the absolute majority both times. The consecutive wins of a hardliner communist party for the first time in over a decade, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, raises the question, for the cause of the sudden shift in voting preferences. The explanation can be found in a string of events prior to the election of 2001.

The most evident reason was the economic situation of the country around the turn of the millennium. With the breakaway of the eastern region of Transnistria, Moldova lost no more than 12% of its state territory and 17% of the population, however the economy in Transnistria made up close to 40% of the countries GDP, one third of the industrial output, as well as almost the entire energy output. As Moldova itself has no natural resources, and mainly relied on agriculture, it soon became the poorest country in Europe (Borsi, 2007). As a result, many citizens were threatened by poverty and demanded a political change. Not only the economic situation, but also the accusation of a corrupt government, allowed the Communist Party to promote their political agenda. Without being involved

in previous government activities, little accusations of corruption could be raised against them (Hill, 2001). Another determining factor was the strategy, which the Communist party used during the election campaign. The availability of technological devices, such as TV or Radio, was progressing only slowly. By relying on print media, instead of TV or radio broadcasts, remote villages were also reached. The young age of the Moldovan democracy had also limited the number of parties which were in power. So far, the main focus had been on shaping a distinct Moldovan identity. The political program of the most parties was not of interest. For the elections in 2001, the top candidate of the Communist party was perceived by many as “avuncular” (Hill, 2001, 135). At the same time, the appearance during the election campaign of the governing elite occurred, for many, to be alienated (Hill, 2001). The Communist party further benefited by the unsolved Moldovan identity, and the uncertainty of the political future, which the country was heading into. As a majority of the population was influenced by the Sovietization, the parties, who promoted independence, focused on highlighting the distinct Moldovan ideology. However, the ideology alone did not help the country to overcome its economic struggles. While the prior government laid its foreign policy objective on the accession to the European Union. The completion was estimated to take decades due to the lag in the economic development, allowing the communist party to further cast votes, as they were promoting the principles of a system, many were familiar with (Hill, 2001; Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln, 2007).

Despite a loss of 15 seats, the Communist party still won 56 out of 101 seats in the following parliament election in 2005. With 60 out of 101 seats in April 2009 the PCRM was able to govern with an absolute majority both times. The Moldovan constitution states that the election of the president requires a three fifth majority from the representatives, which was not reached during the elections in 2005 or 2009. In 2005, these votes were provided by the Christian-Democratic People’s Party, the successor of the pro-Romanian party in the 90s. In April 2009 the PCRM was the only party favoring a pro-Russian politics. With the three opposition parties boycotting the presidential election, new elections had to be held.

2.1.4 The rise of the pro-European parties

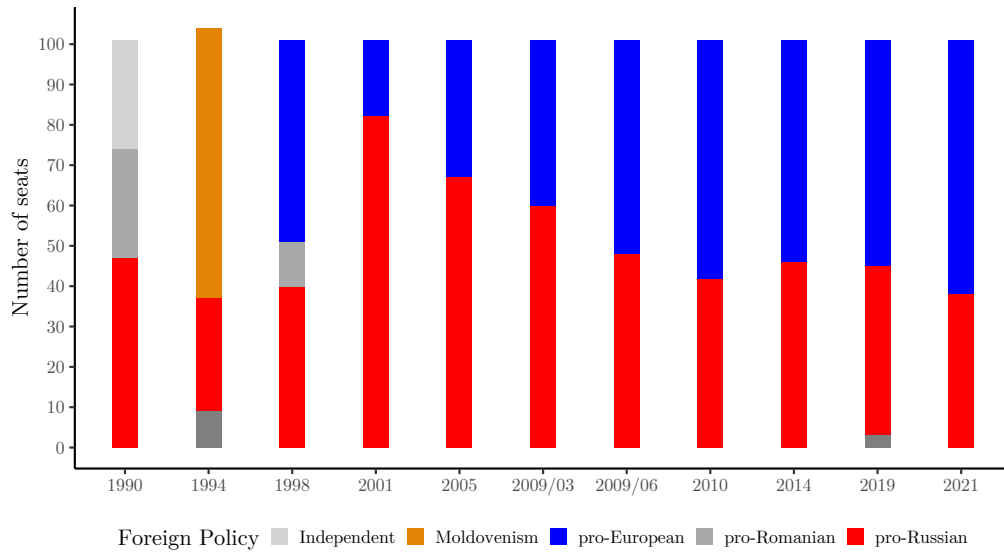
During the elections three months later, after the parliament failed to elect a president, the PCRM suffered heavy losses in votes. The three opposition parties, which favored pro-Western foreign politics, formed a coalition. The Alliance for European Integration (AIE), had enough seats, to push the Communist party into opposition. However, once again, the majority was not sufficient to elect the president, causing a third round of elections 16 months later (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). During the elections in 2010, the AIE consisted of three pro-European parties, which gained a total of 59 seats, missing 2, in order to elect the president. Four months later, Moldova’s highest court confirmed the government, even without an elected president, in order to avoid new early elections, averting a political crisis (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021).

During the following elections in 2014, the focus laid on the future direction of foreign policy. The Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) casted the majority

of votes, the pro-European parties, however, were able to form a minority government (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). The election outcome caused a shift in the directions of the Moldovan foreign politics, emphasizing the European integration and pro-European reforms. Due to a worsening economic situation and a low standard of living, the dissatisfaction in the population rose. In the same year as the elections, a major corruption scandal known as the "Theft of the Century" unfolded, implicating high-ranking officials and leading politicians. As a response to the scandal, protests started in spring 2015, demanding political and institutional reforms, as well as the prosecution of those involved. At its peak, 100,000 people were out on the streets, demanding political reforms. It was the largest protest movement since gaining independence from the Soviet Union. In 2016, the Moldovan people were able to directly elect the president for the first time, as the indirect election by the parliament was claimed to be unconstitutional (Pilkington, 2019). The runoff elections were won by the head of the PSRM party, with a total of 52% of the votes. The parliamentary elections held in Moldova in 2019 resulted in a highly fragmented political landscape, with no single party gaining a clear majority. The pro-European ACUM bloc and the pro-Russian party PSRM emerged as the two largest factions. In an attempt to form a government, a coalition was established between ACUM and PSRM, showcasing the contrasting visions for the country's future. However, the coalition faced significant challenges due to ideological differences and political disputes, particularly in areas such as judicial reform and anti-corruption measures. These disagreements led to a no-confidence motion and subsequent resignation of the prime minister. Snap parliamentary elections were held in 2019, with the PSRM winning the largest number of seats but failing to secure a governing majority. As a result, a new government was formed, led by a coalition of pro-European parties (Gherasimov, 2019). Meanwhile, the role of the presidential elections in 2020 was significant in influencing the political landscape. Maia Sandu, the candidate representing the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), a successor of the pro-European ACUM bloc, won the presidential election, defeating the incumbent president Igor Dodon, head of the PSRM. Sandu's victory further shifted the political dynamics towards a pro-European direction and led to a recalibration of power relations between the executive and legislative branches of government (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). The presidential elections of 2020 can be seen as a catalyst for the ongoing political transformations and the government's agenda in Moldova.

The formed coalition in 2019 lasted two years, before it broke apart. In 2021, new parliamentary elections were held, marking another turning point in the 30-year history of the country. The PAS won enough seats to not only gain an absolute majority with 52% of the votes (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). The Block of Communists and Socialists, which united the PSRM and the PCRM, received 27% of the votes. As a third political fraction, the "Socio-Political Movement" (SOR) received 5% of the votes. The party is described to follow a political agenda of hard Euroscepticism, social conservatism, as it follows a Russophilia politics. The party was founded in 1998. After 2019, it won enough votes to get a seat in the parliament. In June 2023, the party was banned, and declared to be unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of Moldova.

Figure 1: Development of election outcomes in the Moldovan parliament elections by the direction of foreign policy



Note: The graph illustrates the development of the voting patterns during the parliament elections in Moldova. The blue bars represent the grouped number of parliament seats for the pro-European parties. The red bars group the number of parliament seats for the pro-Russian parties. Orange, light grey and grey represent the grouped results for the pro-Moldovenism, Independent and pro-Romanian parties. The number of parliament seats throughout the elections was 101. 51 seats were needed for a majority. In 1998, 104 parliament seats were assigned and 53 seats were needed for a majority.

The major topics in the Moldovan election campaigns have shifted since the independence in 1991. As described, the 90s were shaped by the strive for independence after the Soviet rule for almost half a century, as well as the definition of the Moldovan identity. While the pro-Romanian parties saw the future of Moldova as a reunification with the western neighbor, a majority was asking to maintain some of the close ties which were established during the era under the Soviet Union. An economic crisis, as well as the ability to reach out to more citizens by applying a better strategy during the election campaign, then helped a Communist party to win the absolute majority for three consecutive elections in the beginning of the 21st century. The uprising of the pro-European opposition parties led to a shift in the political landscape, causing a reorientation of the direction of foreign affairs. Finally, in 2021, the pro-European PAS party claimed a landslide victory. Together with a pro-European president, Moldova today is approaching a pro-European path.

In the following section, this bachelor thesis quantitatively explores the development of migration in Moldova, in the post-Soviet era, linking it to immediate effects, the exit of migrants had on the country. After explaining how the exposition of a different political and social system affects the migrant himself and how he transmits these values to his country of origin, the expansion of the work by Barsbai *et al.* (2017) empirically explores the causality of migration patterns on the landslide victory of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) in 2021.

Table 1: Results of the Census conducted in 2004 and 2014

variable	cohort	2004	2014
age	0-20	12.4	9.44
	21-65	86.7	90.1
	65+	0.3	0.4
destination	Russia	56.2	54.4
	Flaw-western democracy	24	23.8
	Full-western democracy	11.7	13.5
origin	rural	66.6	78.7
	urban	33.4	21.3
education	Primary education	32.8	-
	Secondary education	51	-
	Tertiary education	8.42	-

Note: The table quantitatively describes the similarities among the censuses conducted in 2004 and 2014. As data on municipality level for the 2014 census is not available, the similarities in the distribution allow to assume similar results for 2014. The results are given in percent. The classification of full and flawed democracies within Western destinations are based on the classification provided by the Economist Intelligence Unit's index of democracy of 2006 (the index is not available for earlier years). Full Western democracies include Portugal, Greece, Spain, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Great Britain, Ireland, the United States, Belgium, Austria, Canada, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Flawed Western democracies include Italy, Romania, Israel, Cyprus, Bulgaria, and Poland.

The classification follows the methods used by Barsbai *et al.* (2017).

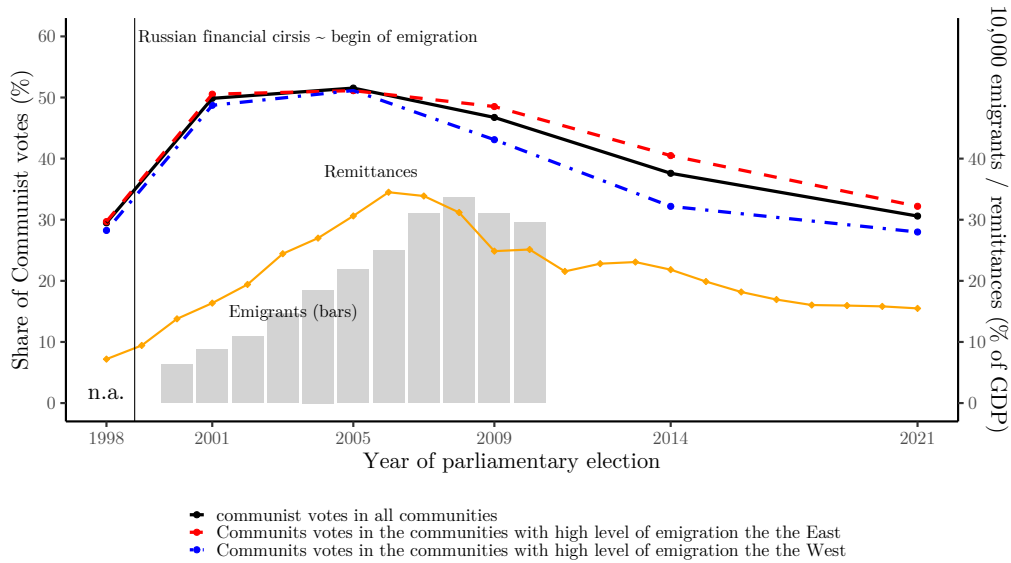
2.2 Migration in Moldova

As discussed in Section 2.1, the year 1991 marked Moldova's attainment of independence from the Soviet Union. Under the Soviet regime, emigration was strictly regulated, necessitating permission from state authorities for individuals to leave the country. However, in the post-Soviet era, there was a rapid surge in emigration, resulting in Moldova being one of the nations with one of the highest proportion of its citizens residing abroad. The following section aims to provide an overview of the pre- and post-Soviet periods, examining their economic and political impacts.

2.2.1 Migration under Communism

The Communist USSR government's granting of permissions for emigration was influenced by various factors. One prominent reason was the impact on the Western public opinion prior to the climax of the Cold War in the 80s. Also, family reunification was a common official reason, for the government to permit emigration (Heitman, 1993). Another central motive was driven by the idea, that emigration causes a loss of opposing voices, and therefor functioning as a safety valve. The idea is explained in Hirschman's "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty" framework. It primarily describes an individual's possible response within markets or organizations. In case of a consent within an institution, an individual is going to choose the option of loyalty. In case of discontent, Hirschman describes two main options: exit or voice. In the context of international migration, the exit effect

Figure 2: Communist Votes, Number of Emigrants in Stocks, and Share of Remittances, 1998–2021



Notes: The black line shows the unweighted average share of Communist votes across all communities. The solid and dashed gray lines show how communities with high levels of emigration to the West and communities with high levels of emigration to the East deviate from the overall trend. Communities with high levels of emigration to the West (East) are defined as having an above median prevalence of westward (eastward) migration and above 50 percent share of westward (eastward) migrants among all migrants. Bars show the overall number of emigrants in stocks (in ten thousands). Data come from yearly waves of the Moldovan Labor Force Survey. Pre-2006 numbers of emigrants are adjusted to account for a change in the sampling method of the Moldovan Labor Force Survey. Data on emigration from Moldova before 1999 and after 2010 are not available. The first wave of the Moldovan Labor Force Survey was conducted in 1999, just after the unexpected Russian financial crisis hit Moldova in late 1998 and triggered the first big wave of emigration. Information on destination countries is not available in pre-2006 waves. The line segmented with diamonds shows the amount of remittances as a share of GDP in percent. Reproduced with the permission by Barsbai *et al.* (2017).

refers to individuals who are dissatisfied with the current situation in their home country and therefor search for better living conditions elsewhere (Hoffmann, 2010; Barsbai *et al.*, 2017). This decision can be driven by political instability, as well as economic or social factors. In any case, the migrant opposes to the third possible option, which Hirschman describes to be loyalty. The exit effect comes along with different positive and negative effects for the origin country, primarily depending on the predominant political system (Hirschman, 1980). For autocratic governments, migration can function as a safety valve (Hoffmann, 2010). By allowing dissatisfied citizens to exit the country, governments can prevent them from raising their voice and expressing their discontent through protests. This approach helps maintain stability and control by effectively silencing opposition and reducing the likelihood of internal unrest.

An example of a repressive regime in the past century was the government apparatus of German Democratic Republic (GDR). Between the establishment of the state in 1949 and the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, approximately 2.7 million individuals migrated to Western Germany. After the erection of the German wall in 1961, emigration was

strongly hampered. Many citizens, who decided not to remain loyal, saw themselves with no other option but to raise their voice. As a result, protests across the country picked up. The government of the GDR reacted and in the 1980s, a larger number of individuals were granted permission to leave legally (Martens, 2020). Empirically, Pfaff and Kim (2003) evaluated the impact of these legal emigrations on a county level. By predicting the average participation rate, as well the protest event rate, they find an inverse hyperbola correlation. The protest activities were the highest in counties and municipalities with a moderate level of emigration, while counties and municipalities with large emigration waves recorded significantly less protest. The least number of protests occurred in municipalities with the lowest rate of emigration. Exiting the GDR and immigrate into Western Germany, meant to immigrate into a nation with the same language and culture, receiving an immediate citizenship in a booming economy. In conclusion, this explains that an arising stream of refugees within a country, would predictably decrease the number of those opposing the GDR regime.

In the historical context, the Cuban exodus in 1959 marks another historic event, where the emigration of opposing voices was found to function as a safety valve for a communist regime. After the Cuban revolution, Fidel Castro and his government implemented socialist reforms and established close ties with the Soviet Union. As a consequence, tensions rose between the new regime and various sectors of Cuban society. The mass exodus primarily consisted of individuals and families who were opposed to the revolutionary government and its policies. Many of them were from the upper and middle classes, including professionals, intellectuals, and business owners who feared the confiscation of their assets or disagreed with the ideological direction of the country. The exodus also contributed to the polarization of Cuban society, with those remaining in the country being more aligned with the revolutionary government (Hoffmann, 2010).

As the section illustrates, the exit of a migrant can impact the political stability, especially under autocratic and suppressing governments. In both cases, the Communist governments would not have allowed a return of the migrants, and the exit effect had no further consequences. However, as Moldova became independent, unrestricted exits and returns were possible, which would limit the effect of Hirschman’s framework.

2.2.2 Migration patterns in the post Soviet era

In the following years after the independence, emigration was picking up consecutively, as it can be seen in Figure 2. Today, Moldova has one of the highest stock of emigrants worldwide. In 2020, around 1,160,000 Moldovan citizens lived abroad, which makes up 28.7% of the entire population (Chilari and Gribincea, 2021). Precise migration census data from the year of 2004 and 2014, provide an overview of the age distribution, gender, educational attainment, as well as the main destination for Moldovan migrants. The census results are summarized in Table 1. As the dependent outcome variable in the following part is the destination of migration, the descriptive data of the census is divided into flawed and full democracies, as well as Russia. The three groups account for the majority of migration out of Moldova.

3 Political remittances in Moldova

In the context of migration, the impact on the country of origin extends beyond the absence of migrants, as discussed in Section 2.1. Remittances play a pivotal role in shaping the effects of migration on the origin country. In the common perception, remittances refer to the financial transfers made by individuals working abroad to their home country. However, remittances encompass more than monetary transfers, as they also include non-financial aspects, such as the social and political experiences that migrants encounter in their destination countries. The transmission of these experiences occurs through different channels, ultimately influencing those left behind in the country of origin. As outlined in the preceding section, these effects manifest in multiple dimensions of society, including economic, demographic, cultural, and social dynamics.

The following section aims to elucidate the channels through which political remittances are transmitted and further identifies potential biases in the impact on voting behavior, specifically in the case of Moldova. Finally, it provides a summary of key aspects of the study conducted by Barsbai *et al.* (2017), before presenting the results of the replication for the parliament election in 2021.

3.1 Channels of impact

The influence of return migrants and individuals who can only communicate across borders differs in their impact on the remaining population. Careja and Emmenegger (2011) argue that residing in a foreign country which values individual respect highly leads to an increase in self-confidence among return migrants, making them more likely to share their experiences with non-migrants in their home country. However, establishing a causal link is challenging due to the potential self-selection bias, as individuals with higher self-confidence are more likely to emigrate in the first place. Moreover, Tuccio *et al.* (2019) find that Moroccan households with returning migrants exhibiting a significant increase in the demand for political and social change. Conversely, households with migrants residing abroad show limited political demands. Notably, this effect is primarily observed in non-Western destination countries, such as Arabian and other African nations. The findings illustrate that migrants can indeed exert an impact on their country of origin and further highlight the importance of differentiating the countries, depending on the analyzed characteristics. Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow (2009) identify three primary channels through which migrants transmit perceived values and internalized norms from their destination country to individuals remaining in their country of origin.

The most direct channel is the return of the migrant to their home country. This channel appears to be particularly significant for Moldova. The Moldovan census from 2014 indicates that approximately 63% of migrants stay abroad for less than one year, while only around 12% stay for more than five years. The census captures migrants who maintained family ties with their original households. Therefore, the values may not be accurate, as they rely on qualitative interviews on households. While households can report the absence of a single, or multiple members, an entire household cannot report

itself.

Another channel of transmission arises from cross-border communication. Technological advancements over the past decades have led to significant changes in communication, as the costs of communication decreased and the speed of communication increased. This transformation has elevated the importance of cross-border communication as a channel for transmitting values and information. Barsbai *et al.* (2017) analyze the total hours of incoming calls. They find, that the total hours of calls between communities with a prevailing migration to the East and West are similar. Further, the communication volume through their analysis of call hours to Moldova from abroad increases, as the data shows a consistent rise from 28,000 hours per week in 1998 to 150,000 hours per week in 2006. Subsequently, with the reduction in international call costs, the volume further increased to 348,000 hours per week in 2009. Qualitative interviews reveal that many Western European migrants are conscious of educating their family and friends back home about the political system in Western Europe, as a large share reported, that they speak out electoral recommendations to their contacts back home due to the belief that those left behind, particularly individuals residing in impoverished rural areas, were politically apathetic and lacked information (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017). Over a decade later, the accessibility of free and readily available internet communication is ubiquitous, allowing migrants to communicate with friends and family back home on a regular basis. The channel of communication therefor plays a key role in transmitting profound values and ideas to Moldova.

A third channel is formed by migrant information networks within communities experiencing high levels of emigration. Barsbai *et al.* (2017) highlight the role of these networks in the formation of emigration clusters. The initial migration choice made by a member of the community influences the subsequent decisions of others, leading to the formation of clusters. These clusters facilitate the exchange of information regarding job opportunities and destination-specific details, resulting in reduced costs for prospective migrants who follow suit. This explains the heterogeneous migration patterns throughout communities in the census of 2004 and intensifies the spill-over effects.

3.2 Measuring unbiased political remittances

Measuring the effect of political remittances can be driven by different confounders. This implies, that the electoral preferences are not initially caused due to the experiences, a migrant shared with his household or friends, but through other factors, such as self-selection.

3.2.1 Confounding channels

One confounder arises if the transfer of information from migrants to households and friends in Moldova do not alter their political preferences, but instead affects their incentive to participate in voting. Careja and Emmenegger (2011) investigate the impact on the political attitudes of temporary labor migrants from countries that were formerly under Communist rule but are now members of the European Union, specifically focusing on Central and Eastern European (CEE) states. These migrants exhibit differences such

as “a higher level of trust in international institutions such as the European Union and greater interest in international politics” (Careja and Emmenegger, 2011, 892), as well as a higher participation rate in European Parliament elections. Initially, significant differences are observed between migrants and non-migrants. However, when considering established democracies versus young democracies, the statistically significant difference diminishes for young democracies and becomes more pronounced for established democracies. If these factors also influence the propensity of others to participate in elections, the observed effect would reflect a change in political engagement rather than voting behavior itself. The issue is addressed, by drawing data from a nationally representative public Moldovan opinion poll. The evaluation is used to compare individuals from communities with eastward migration of political related questions on the trust in government, and the media, as well as the overall satisfaction. They find, that individuals from communities with westward migration experience a decrease in life satisfaction, trust their government and the local media less, and show less favor for state intervention (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017). These effects align with the proposition that the transmission of information and norms alters the frame of reference for those who remain in their home country, subsequently influencing their political inclinations. Additionally, they find, that residents of communities with westward migration exhibit a lower likelihood of voting for the Communist party following the year 2006. As the survey also includes non-voters, the findings imply that the impact of westward migration on voting behavior is primarily driven by changes in individuals’ political inclinations rather than their inclination to participate in the electoral process.

As the census implies, a majority of migrants stay for less than a year. Therefore, return migrants can bias the effect, as the community level change in voting preferences is not caused by the transfer of political norms from migrants abroad, but by migrants, which have returned and are now voting in favor of the political system, which they were exposed to. In this case, a reversed Hirschman’s exit effect would occur. To address the issue of return migrants, Barsbai *et al.* (2017) report the result of an exit poll. Assuming, that political spillovers primarily operate through information and norm transfer of individuals who are in touch with a migrant in the West, they check, if the exposure to Westward migration is more influential than for the exposure to Eastward migration, or no migration at all. The findings suggest that the impact of westward migration on voting behavior is influenced by the presence or absence of family members abroad. Therefore, the influence of the casted votes by return migrants plays a subordinate role. Furthermore, finding an effect of migration on the change in the migrants voting behavior would still send an important sign to policymakers in destination countries, when deciding on the handling of migrants.

3.2.2 Political self-selection

Self-selection occurs, as migrants can not be randomly assigned to their destination country, but migrants choose their destination country based on prevailing, most likely, political preferences. For Moldova, the case of self-selection implies, that a migrant was discontent with the political situation in the country, and therefore decides to emigrate into a

country which meets his personal, political preferences. In explaining the election outcomes, self-selection induces an underestimation of the election results in votes for the opposition party. As described in Section 2.1, the Communist party came into power just after the first major wave of emigration occurred. The emigration decision of those, who are discontent with the political situation, increases the relative share of supporters for the communist party. Furthermore, migrants give up the option to raise their voice and influence other in their voting decision, as described by Hirschman (1980). For these two reasons, political self-selection would result in an underestimation of the election results. In addition, a vast majority of migrants, as the 2014 census shows, migrates for less than a year. In that regard, the bias due to political self-selection would be minimized.

With precise census data from the year of 2004, (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017) are able to determine, that migrants on average at the age of 35, whereas Communist voters are on average 48 years old and the average pro-European voter is at the age of 40. Secondary education has been completed by close to 60% of the migrants, as this is the case for 65% of pro-European voters, but only accounts for half of Communist voters. Barsbai *et al.* (2017) furthermore report, that the voter turnout for the Communist party at the Moldovan embassies in other countries was only at 12 percent, in 2005. Recent election results indicate, that this seems to be a downward trend, as only around 3% of the migrants abroad voted a Communist party in 2021. The data indicates, that migration itself more likely underestimates the effect of political remittances on election outcomes.

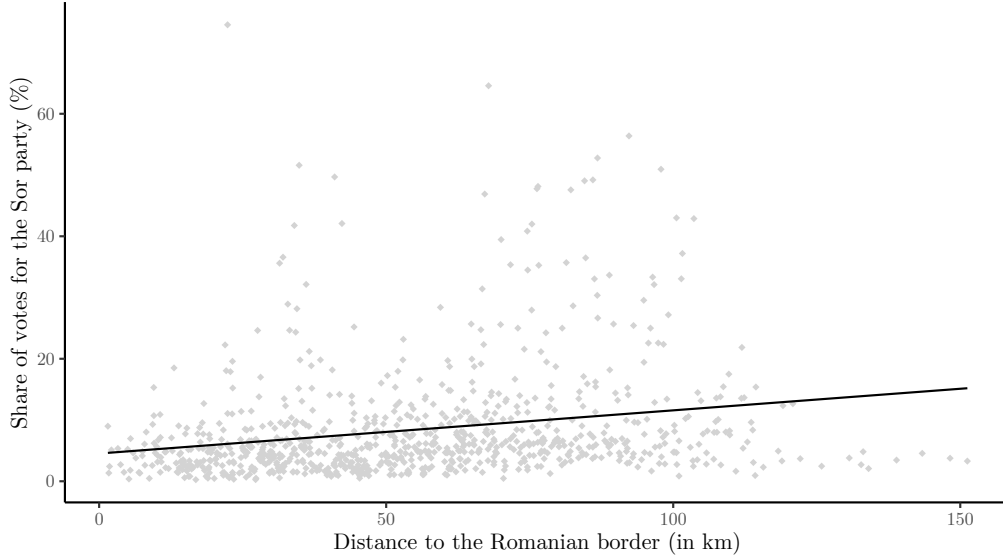
3.2.3 Pre-migration village characteristics

The history of Moldova impacted, inter alia, the composition of ethnic groups within communities. Therefor, the election results by pre-migration village characteristics. Self-selection on the community level implies, that migrants choose their destination, based on the predominant political tendency of the community (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017). The correlation depicted in Figure 3 shows, that the share of votes for the Șor Party is positively correlated with the distance from the Romanian border. Therefor, Barsbai *et al.* (2017) control for pre-migration election results and other observable community characteristics by using the parliament election results of 1994 and 1998. The first migration wave started just after 1998 as a consequence of the economic crisis in Russia. Therefor, the results of the elections in Moldova can be used as an unobservable counterfactual, allowing to control for self-selection bias on community level.

3.2.4 Characteristics of destination countries

In a cross-country comparison, Acemoglu *et al.* (2021) explore the variations across attitudes of migrants, such as age, sex and educational attainment within 110 counties, controlling for the political stability. Using an index for the quality of the democracy in the migrants' destination country and qualitative surveys of 540,000 emigrants over 37 years with five different measures to quantify the migrant's democratic support. The scaled questions ask for the aversion towards army rule and a strong leader, as well as the endorsement of democracy. As a result, Acemoglu *et al.* (2021) find a statistically

Figure 3: Distance to the Romanian border and Share of Votes for the Șor Party in July 2021 across Communities



Note: The figure illustrates the correlation between the distance to the Romanian border and the share of votes for the communist-hardliner Șor party across 847 communities in Moldova. The horizontal axis represents the distance to the Romanian border in kilometers. The vertical axis describes the share of votes for the Șor party in percent during the elections of 2021. The light grey dots represent the villages throughout Moldova. The black line uses Ordinary Least Squares to describe a linear correlation.

significant impact of exposure to democracy on the support of the democratic system. The effect is stronger, when not only controlling for the individual attitudes, but also for each country's fixed effects. They conclude, that the main driver of their outcome variable "support for democracy" is the quality of the countries' democracy. Therefore, destination countries are not only categorized, as either Western or Eastern based on their democracy levels, but Western democracies are further divided into "full" and "flawed" Western democracies. The classification is based on the Polity IV score, relative to the score achieved by Moldova. Countries classified as Eastern destinations have a score equal to or lower than Moldova's. It can be noted, that the classification closely aligns with the geographical position of the destination countries relative to Moldova. Major Western destinations include Italy (mainly Northern Italy) and other Romance-language countries, while Russia is the dominant Eastern destination (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017).

3.3 Data

Barsbai *et al.* (2017) examine the share of Communist votes in the parliamentary election of July 2009, which marked the downfall of the Communist government. Their analysis excludes the communities in the Transnistria region due to data unavailability. The average community counts 3,793 inhabitants, and the vast majority (803 out of 848) are classified as rural.

A comparison of migrants to the East and West indicates, that the average migrant

to the West is older, has a higher level of education and remits higher monetary amounts, than the average migrant to the East. Among the two subgroups of migrants to full and flawed democracies, the average characteristics, as well as the distribution across sectors and occupations, are similar (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017).

The election results at the community level originate from the official election results provided by the Central Election Commission. Out-of-country votes by migrants in Moldovan embassies and consulates abroad are excluded, as they cannot be assigned to a community.

The percentage share of migrants heading westward or eastward in the total population of each community are the two key variables, allowing the authors to quantify the prevalence of emigration (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017). The emigration data originates from the 2004 population census, which provides detailed information on individuals' origin, destination, and duration of absence. Even though, the census potentially underestimates the number of people who are absent for more than five years, as often long term migration is linked to the migration of an entire family, friends, as well as former neighbors can still be impacted by the impressions transmitted by the migrated household and still contribute to a change in voting behavior.

Figure 2 depicts the changes in Communist votes across different types of communities during the parliamentary elections of 1998, 2001, 2005, July 2009 and the following elections 2014 and 2021. As the graph is a prosecution of the work, published by Barsbai *et al.* (2017), neither the data on the total emigration stock abroad, nor the total number of incoming calls, were accessible from 2014 onwards. Due to further unavailability of data, the election results of 2019 are lacking. The remittances as a share of GDP are used in order to convey a sense of how the absolute emigration stock has changed over the years. Furthermore, monetary remittances can also function as a channel of influence, as migrants can better convey the message of a working system, if they are financially successful. The overall share of votes for the communist party is illustrated by the black line. The solid and dashed gray lines depict the trends for communities with high levels of emigration to the West and East. As the graph controls for observable pre-migration community characteristics, the share of Communist votes in 1998 among the communities are nearly identical (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017).

From 1998 to 2005, which corresponds to the initial years of emigration from Moldova, all community types follow a similar trend. However, as an aftermath of the Russian financial crisis, the Communist Party experiences an increase in vote share from 1998 to 2001, followed by a modest increase from 2001 to 2005. It is only between 2005 and 2014 that the trend start to diverge. While there is an overall decline in Communist votes, communities with westward migration experience a much stronger decrease, than communities with eastward migration. In the recent parliament election in 2021, which marked a landslide victory of the pro-European party, the effect size declined slightly.

3.4 Empirical strategy

In the paper “The Effect of Labor Migration on the Diffusion of Democracy: Evidence from a Former Soviet Republic”, the authors investigate the relationship between migration patterns and Communist votes. Hereby, Barsbai *et al.* use the share of votes for the Communist Party in the parliamentary election of July 2009 as the dependent variable. The explanatory variables “Prevalence of emigration to the East/West” represent the share of the population in each community that emigrated to the West and East, as measured by the 2004 population census. The number of emigrants prior to the independence and the first economic crisis in 1998 was fairly low, as described in Section 2.2. Therefore, Barsbai *et al.* (2017) interpret the variables as changes in the prevalence of migration between 1998 and 2004, which resembles in a difference-in-difference approach. To further investigate the magnitude of political spillovers within Western democracies, the authors rely on the Economist Intelligence Unit’s index of democracy, which distinguishes between “full” and “flawed” Western democracies. The index allows a differentiation of countries such as Italy, Romania, Israel, Cyprus, Bulgaria, and Poland as flawed Western democracies. Strong western democracies include Portugal, Greece, Spain, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Great Britain, Ireland, the United States, Belgium, Austria, Canada, Switzerland, and the Netherlands (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017).

As stated in section 3.2, different variables need to be addressed, in order to measure an unbiased effect. Therefore, multiple control variables are introduced. The control variables include the community level election results before the onset of migration in 1998. To control for community characteristics, predetermining factors, such as number of inhabitants, the age composition and the average level of education are included in the model. Additionally, the authors consider the primary factors influencing destination choices for the initial migrants after independence. In line with the information presented in Section 2.1, the location of the community within Moldova impacts the ethnic sense of belonging. Therefore, the proximity to the Romanian border is included, by using the distance to the nearest Moldovan-Romanian border crossing that was opened in 1998. As the breakaway region of Transnistria demonstrates, the ethnic composition also impacts the political opinion. Therefore, the authors incorporate the population shares of the four major ethnic minorities (Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz, and Bulgarians, with Moldovans as the reference category), as well as the degree of ethnic fractionalization on a community level. Dummy variables are used to control for urban and rural communities, as well as the capital city Chişinău and the city of Bălţi, which are the only major cities in Moldova. Further included is the proximity to the district capital, in order to control for the remoteness of the communities (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017).

By using ordinary least squares, the authors find the coefficient for westward migration to be negative and the coefficient for eastward migration to be positive. The findings by Barsbai *et al.* (2017) underline the existence of political remittances, based on the destination country. The impact on voting for the communist party in communities with prevalence of emigration to the East is found to be weaker than that of westward migration. The difference can be explained by the sociopolitical ties, Moldova had with the Soviet

Union. The impact of political remittances from Western destinations are mainly driven by countries, which are classified as full democracies.

4 Impact of Migration Patterns on Electoral Preferences in 2021

Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between migration prevalence in 2004 and the share of Communist votes in the parliamentary election of 2021. Despite a lack of precise census data from 2014, Table 1 indicates, that the outcome of the census from 2004 and 2014 are fairly similar. Panel A reveals that there is no consistent association between overall migration and Communist votes at the community level. However, after distinguishing between emigration to the West and East, a correlation becomes visible. In Panel B, the share of Communist votes declines as the level of westward migration increases. The negative correlation demonstrates, that communities with prevailing emigration to a Western democracy, on average votes less for one of the two Communist parties. On the other side, Panel C illustrates, that the share of Communist votes rises as the level of eastward migration increases. Nevertheless, the figure only shows a correlation. The biases, such as pre-migration village characteristics, as described in Section 3.2 are not yet controlled for.

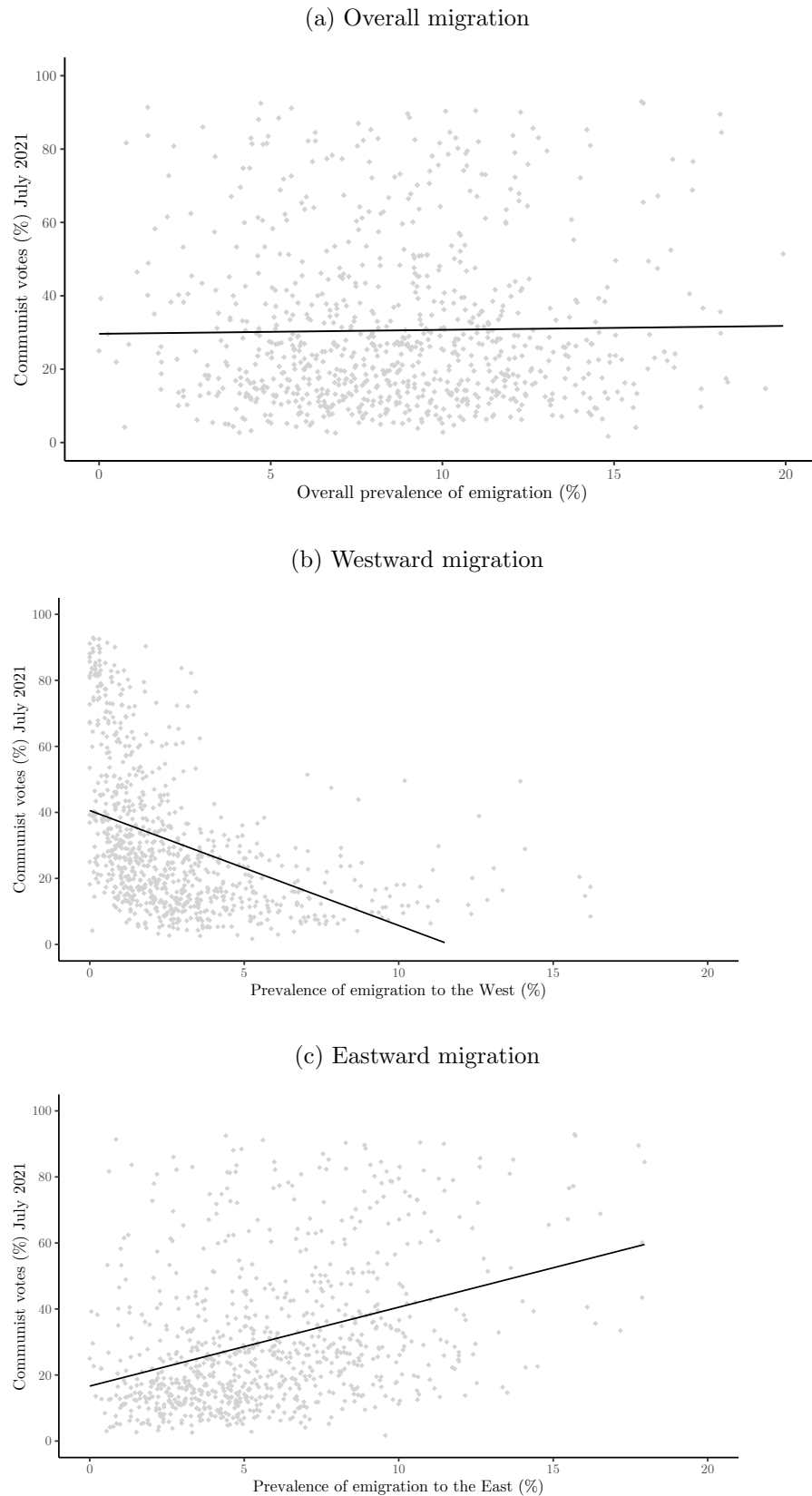
In Table 2, Columns 1–3 focus on the causality between migration patterns and Communist votes in the 2021 parliamentary election. In order to control for confounding factors, as described in Section 3.2, additional control variables are introduced.

Column 1 in Table 2 controls for the baseline specifications, addressing the heterogeneity among communities, which are size, location, demographics, and the ethnic composition. The coefficients imply, that the migration patterns from 2004 still drive the spillover effects of political remittances in parliament election 2021. Communities, which experienced prevailing westward migration, exhibit a significant decrease in votes for Communist Parties. A 1 percent increase in departure of the community population to the West corresponds to a decrease of approximately 0.46 percentage points in the share of Communist votes. With 0.24 percentage points less, the effect is smaller than in for findings during the parliament elections of 2009, reported by Barsbai *et al.* (2017). The result indicates that the departure of a predominantly non-Communist electorate to the West, which would typically increase the share of Communist votes through the exit effect, is surpassed by the political spillovers from abroad. On the other hand, emigration to the East shows an opposite but weaker association. For communities with prevailing migration to the East, a 1 percentage point increase in the migration causes a rise of 0.19 percentage points in the share of Communist votes. Same as the effect for communities with prevalence to the west, the effect became smaller.

Column 2 further controls for the parliamentary election outcomes in the 1990s, as they are a predictor of future election results. However, the results barely have an impact on the coefficients. The fairly small change indicates, that the election results prior to the major migration movements cannot forecast migration patterns. It can be concluded that political self-selection at the community level or another confounding factor that remains constant over time does not account for the association between migrants' destinations and Communist votes.

Column 3 introduces nighttime light data to control for the economic development.

Figure 4: Emigration in 2004 and Share of Communist Votes in July 2021 across Communities



Notes: The figure illustrates the correlation between the overall prevalence of migration (panel A), migration prevalence towards Western regions (panel B), migration prevalence towards Eastern regions (panel C), and the proportion of Communist votes across 847 communities in Moldova. The horizontal axis represents the percentage of migrants in relation to the total population, as determined by the 2004 population census. The vertical axis represents the proportion of Communist votes obtained in the parliamentary elections held in July 2021, as recorded in the official election results. The analysis focuses solely on votes cast within the territory of Moldova, excluding those cast by migrants residing abroad.

Reproduced with the permission by Barsbai *et al.* (2017).

Table 2: Migration Patterns and Results of the 2021 Parliamentary Election

	Share of votes for the Communist parties (percent)				Share of votes for opposition parties (percent)		
	Basic con- trols (1)	Plus pre- migration election results (2)	Plus nighttime light (full model) (3)	Hetero- geneity within the West (4)	Party of Action and Soli- darity (6)	Block of Communi- sts and Socialists (7)	Şor Party (8)
Prevalence of emigration to the West (percent)	-0.46 (0.20)	-0.41 (0.19)	-0.41 (0.19)		0.39 (0.18)	-0.39 (0.18)	-0.02 (0.09)
Prevalence of emigration to the East (percent)	0.34 (0.15)	0.28 (0.14)	0.27 (0.14)	0.27 (0.14)	-0.22 (0.11)	0.15 (0.13)	0.12 (0.07)
Prevalence of emigration to flawed Western democracies (percent)				-0.14 (0.29)			
Prevalence of emigration to full Western democracies (percent)				-1.03 (0.33)			
Observations	847	847	847	847	847	847	847
R ²	0.86	0.87	0.87	0.87	0.85	0.86	0.64

Notes: The table reports OLS estimates for 848 Moldovan communities. The dependent variables are the vote shares of different parties in the July 2021 parliamentary election at the community level (in percent). The set of basic controls includes community-level variables capturing population size, age structure, ethnic composition, skill level, and distribution of the population, a dummy for district capitals and the cities of Chişinău and Bălţi, the distance to the district capital, and the next Romanian border crossing. Column 4 distinguishes between full and flawed democracies within Western destinations based on the classification provided by the Economist Intelligence Unit's index of democracy of 2006 (the index is not available for earlier years). Full Western democracies include Portugal, Greece, Spain, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Great Britain, Ireland, the United States, Belgium, Austria, Canada, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Flawed Western democracies include Italy, Romania, Israel, Cyprus, Bulgaria, and Poland. Moldova is also classified as a flawed democracy.

Reproduced with the permission by Barsbai *et al.* (2017).

Due to the unavailability of economic data at the community level for the 1990s and early 2000s, Barsbai *et al.* (2017) rely on satellite data on nighttime light intensity as a substitute. Night light activity reflects the development of local economic activity, since various nighttime activities such as consumption and production necessitate the use of lights (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017). Using high-resolution satellite images from the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program's Operational Linescan System, the average light intensity within the administrative boundaries of each community is calculated (Barsbai *et al.*,

2017). The difference in light intensity between 1992 and 1999 quantifies the impact of the economic shock on the communities due to the Russian financial crisis, which triggered the first major wave of emigration in Moldova. It can be seen, that the economic development neither impacts the share of votes for the communist parties for communities with prevailing eastward, nor westward migration.

After distinguishing the destination countries into flawed and full democracies based on the democracy index, the findings in Column 4 of Table ?? reveal that the effect of westward migration is primarily driven by emigration to full Western democracies. An increase of 1 percentage point in emigration to full Western democracies, based on the census of 2004, leads to a reduction of Communist votes by approximately 1 percentage point during the elections in 2021. Column 4 further underlines the hypothesis, that political remittances can cause a change in voting patterns, given the level of exposure on the migrant is high enough. On the other hand, the equivalent marginal effect for emigration to flawed Western democracies is -0.14. As the migrants characteristics among flawed and full democracies in the census of 2004 are similar, they are unlikely to explain the heterogeneous effects observed within the Western destinations (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017).

Columns 5 through 7 in Table 2 further report the impact of emigration on the parties, which have moved into the parliament in 2021. The Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) was the only pro-European party. While the causal effect of emigration on votes for the communist party got smaller in 2021, compared to the elections in July 2009, the PAS benefited as much as the Liberal Democratic Party in 2009 from the spillover effects in communities with prevailing westward migration. The Block of Communists and Socialists, which unites the two major pro-Russian parties over the past elections (PCRM and the PSRM), suffers far more losses due to emigration, than the more radical SOR party, which is nearly unaffected by the emigration to the West. At the same time, the SOR party benefits in nearly in the same extent by eastward migration, as a 1 percentage point increase in migration to the East, results in a gain of 0.12 percentage points of votes. With the SOR party being a hard-line communist party, the results imply, that the party unites those, who are unaffected by the spillover effects of westward migration.

Table 3 reports the impact of migration patterns on Communist votes over time. The coefficients include the control variables, which have been included in Column 3 of Table 3. (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017) find, that the impact of migration on Communist votes in the elections of 2001 and 2005 is rather small. In 2001, many migrants, captured in the 2004 census, were not yet migrated. In 2005, the number of emigrants had already picked up, while the intensity of communication, still remained fairly low (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017) and therefor also political remittances didn't influence the share of votes for the Communist parties. This can also be seen in a negative coefficient for the year of 2005, as the Communist party suffers losses due to Eastward migration. The negative coefficient for Eastward migration in Column 2 supports the Exit Effect framework by Hirschman. In later elections (2009 and 2010), migration becomes significantly connected to voting behavior, particularly westward migration, likely due to increased political engagement after the disputed 2009 elections. Eastward migration's influence seems weaker and unstable.

Table 3: Migration Patterns and Communist Votes over Time, 2001–2021

	Share of Communist votes in parliamentary elections (percent)						
	2001	2005	April 2009	July 2009	2010	2014	2021
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Prevalence of emigration to the West (percent)	-0.30 (0.30)	-0.18 (0.34)	-0.40 (0.20)	-0.63 (0.18)	-0.85 (0.17)	-0.75 (0.24)	-0.41 (0.19)
Prevalence of emigration to the East (percent)	0.00 (0.14)	-0.13 (0.16)	0.27 (0.14)	0.39 (0.16)	0.20 (0.20)	0.31 (0.21)	0.27 (0.14)
Observations	848	848	848	848	848	847	847
R ²	0.79	0.52	0.68	0.82	0.82	0.77	0.87

Notes: The table reports OLS estimates for 848 Moldovan communities. The dependent variables are the vote shares of the Communist Party in the parliamentary elections between 2001 and 2021 at the community level (in percent). The full set of controls includes community-level variables capturing population size, age structure, ethnic composition, skill level, and distribution of the population, a dummy for district capitals and the cities of Chişinău and Bălţi, the distance to the district capital and the next Romanian border crossing, as well as premigration election results and night-light intensity. Standard errors, clustered at the district level, are in parentheses.

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For the consecutive years, 2014 and 2021, the impact of eastward migration remains low. A prevailing westward migration within communities, still impacts share of votes for the communist parties, however the effect became smaller than in the prior elections. With -0.75 percentage points, Westward migration, as captured in 2004, has a similar impact, as in between 2009 and 2010. In 2021, the effect is on the same level as during the elections in April 2009. The effect may be limited, as migrants, capture in 2004, may be already returned and also contribute to the effect of the votes favoring pro-European parties.

Furthermore, (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017) estimate the relationship between migration patterns and the propensity score for Communist votes over time. The expanded analysis in Table 4 reports stable coefficients for the propensity score throughout the two decades. Migration variables exhibit a time trend, with significant increases between 2001 and 2009/2010. (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017) conclude, that preexisting community differences aren't driving the political preference results. These findings narrow down potential confounders, suggesting that any remaining confounder would have influenced migration before 2004 and electoral preferences only years later.

Table 5 investigates further dimensions of effect differences. Column 1 excludes urban areas, and the impact of westward migration becomes larger at -0.46 for the pro-European party, as well as for the pro-Russian parties with 0.4. Columns 2 and 3 divide the sample based on the population's age, and Columns 4 and 5 divide the sample into the level of education since 1991. The effect of westward migration on Communist votes is more

Table 4: The Relationship of Migration Patterns and Non-migration Community Characteristics with Communist Votes over Time, 2001–2021

	Share of Communist votes in parliamentary elections (percent)						
	2001	2005	April 2009	July 2009	2010	2014	2021
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Prevalence of emigration to the West (percent)	-0.00 (0.25)	0.21 (0.20)	-0.30 (0.14)	-0.65 (0.14)	-0.78 (0.17)	-1.06 (0.17)	-0.97 (0.26)
Prevalence of emigration to the East (percent)	0.06 (0.19)	-0.45 (0.28)	0.07 (0.14)	0.45 (0.15)	0.33 (0.14)	0.87 (0.18)	0.58 (0.26)
Propensity score	1.08 (0.04)	0.57 (0.06)	0.88 (0.03)	1.18 (0.03)	1.13 (0.03)	0.84 (0.04)	1.29 (0.08)
Constant	-2.60 (2.95)	26.16 (3.03)	11.44 (2.16)	-11.18 (1.84)	-14.33 (1.95)	-5.19 (2.57)	-23.92 (5.00)
Observations	848	848	848	848	848	847	847
R ²	0.69	0.28	0.63	0.79	0.78	0.67	0.71

Notes: The table reports OLS estimates for 848 Moldovan communities. The dependent variables are the vote shares of the Communist Party in the parliamentary elections between 2001 and 2021 at the community level (in percent). These results correspond to the results in Table 2. The propensity score summarizes the role of all non-migration community characteristics in explaining average Communist vote shares over the period 2001–2021. To construct it, a regression of the Communist vote share averaged over the period 2001–2021 is ran on all covariates used in the baseline specification (column 3 of Table 2) except the prevalence of emigration to the West and East. The propensity score is defined as the prediction from this regression. Standard errors, clustered at the district level, are in parentheses.

pronounced in older and less educated communities, which is in line with the findings by (Barsbai *et al.*, 2017). Generally, just like in 2009, political remittances have the strongest impact within communities, which had limited exposure to Western information and norms without migration.

Table 5: Heterogeneity of the Effect of Migration Patterns on Communist Votes

	By share of population who grew up in the Soviet Union (were older than 21 years in 1990)			By share of population with higher education		
	Only rural communities	Below median	Above median	Below median	Above median	no specifi- cation
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Prevalence of emigration to the West (percent)	-0.46 (0.19)	-0.25 (0.20)	-0.41 (0.44)	-0.61 (0.26)	-0.10 (0.36)	-1.45 (0.40)
Prevalence of emigration to the East (percent)	0.40 (0.11)	0.57 (0.16)	0.17 (0.17)	0.32 (0.25)	0.19 (0.19)	0.78 (0.31)
Prevalence of emigration to the West (percent) ²						0.09 (0.03)
Prevalence of emigration to the East (percent) ²						-0.03 (0.02)
Observations	802	424	423	423	424	847
R ²	0.87	0.89	0.86	0.87	0.90	0.88

Notes: The table reports OLS estimates. The dependent variable is the vote share of the Communist Party in the July 2021 parliamentary election at the community level (in percent). Column 1 excludes the few urban communities from the sample and is based on only 802 communities. For columns 2 and 3 as well as 4 and 5, the total sample is split at the median of the respective variable. The full set of controls includes community-level variables capturing population size, age structure, ethnic composition, skill level, and distribution of the population, a dummy for district capitals and the cities of Chişinău and Bălţi, the distance to the district capital and the next Romanian border crossing, as well as premigration election results and night-light intensity. Standard errors, clustered at the district level, are in parentheses.

5 Conclusion

The political landscape of Moldova has changed and so has the effect, migration has on the voting outcome. During the reign of the Communist regime for almost half a century, migration acted as a safety valve to silencing opposition, as explained through Hirschman’s “Exit, Voice, and Loyalty” framework (Hoffmann, 2010). However, the effectiveness of Hirschman’s framework was observed to be limited as unrestricted exits and returns were possible, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The political landscape in the 90s was driven by the strive for independence, and the Moldovan voters expressed their will to shape a new Moldovan identity. The victory of the Communist Party in the parliament elections 2001, can partially be explained by Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln (2007), as the elections results were further driven by economic struggles, accusations of corruption, effective campaigning, and the uncertainty of the country’s political future.

The formed government coalition of the pro-European party after the elections in July 2009 marked the end of the predominating Communist party and led to a change in the foreign politics of Moldova. The rapid change in voting behavior is contradicting the findings by Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln (2007), who described the change in election preferences to be an intergenerational process. As the outflow of migrants increased, many Moldovans were exposed to different norms, values, as well as a political system with stronger democratic institutions in Western Europe through political remittances. As Barsbai *et al.* (2017) show, the effect of remittances had a causal impact on the votes for the pro-European opposition parties. In the following years, the party landscape in Moldova continuously drifted apart, as the direction of foreign politics split the population. The formation of a government coalition was difficult and different political crises followed, until the presidential election in 2020, as well as the parliament election in 2021 were won by the pro-European camp. The landslide victory in 2021 enable the PAS party to govern with an absolute majority.

This bachelor thesis expanded the work conducted by Barsbai *et al.* (2017) on the recent parliament elections, exploring the causal impact of emigration to the landslide victory of the pro-European PSA party in 2021. The reviewed channels of cheaper and easier accessible communication, an increasing number of return migrants, as well as the establishment of migration networks in Moldova, allowed political remittances to be transmitted easier than during the elections of 2009 and therefor allow the assumption of an increased impact of political remittances on the election outcomes. However, the findings imply that the effect of emigration on the outcome became smaller over the time of more than a decade.

Due to a lack of census data on community level from 2014, the reproduced findings are limited, as the census data used, were collected in 2004. However, the available summary of the census data in 2014 imply, that the share of destination countries and the age distribution among cohorts is fairly similar. Furthermore, a higher share emigrated from a rural background. As Barsbai *et al.* (2017) find in interviews, migrants from a rural background describe their families to often be politically indifferent and less informed,

which would be in favor of the findings by Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln (2007) and therefore underestimate the effect.

Nevertheless, the reproduced findings imply, that migration patterns in Moldova still have an effect on the electoral preferences in the election outcome of the parliamentary election in 2021. The reviewed channels of transmission, as well as the effectiveness of spill-over effects allow the broader conclusion, that the power of autocratic regimes can be challenged through the experiences, migrants make and remit, as they are exposed to different institutional norms.

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