

## **Political Crises, Foreign Policy Preferences and Partisanship**

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Note: Highly preliminary. Please do not cite without permission.

The study of public opinion during major political crises offers potential insights into how political views evolve over time. A close examination of how opinions of different groups change in response to a single major event can reveal the ways in which preexisting beliefs, personal experience, media, social networks and local power structures influence how people process new information and update their political views. As such political crises – and important political events more broadly – can provide a much more dynamic picture of the evolution of public opinion than the fairly static snapshots of surveys during periods of relative political stability. Yet, there are major obstacles to understanding the impact of real-world crises on public opinion. Above all, studies of the impact of events often lack baseline data because crises frequently occur too quickly for researchers to collect data before the event (Sorrentino and Vidmar 1974: 271). Thus studies of responses to major events often rely on data collected after the event (cf. Huddy, Khatib, & Capelos, 2002; Traugott et al. 2002). A second body of literature studies the effects of new information on public opinion by simulating different political scenarios through laboratory or survey experiments (Iyengar et al 1982, Iyengar and Kinder 1987, Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1992, Brader and Tucker 2009), but the stylized nature of the treatments raises questions about their external validity, especially for understanding significant political crises. Finally, there is a large literature that analyzes the impact of actual political events using panel survey data but to date most of these studies have focused on relatively stable political settings such as the United States<sup>1</sup> or Western Europe.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast we know much less about the development of public opinion in the much more unstable and poorly functioning hybrid regimes, which are an important part of the post Cold War international political landscape but which have received much less attention from researchers of public opinion. To address this problem, this paper uses a natural experiment to explore the sources of change in opinions about foreign policy in a competitive authoritarian context. We draw on a panel survey in Moldova undertaken immediately before and after a major political crisis in 2009 to compare and contrast two divergent models of opinion formation and change: a top down model, which focuses on elite efforts to shape public opinion through the use of mass media or patronage networks, and a bottom up model, which focuses on alternative

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<sup>1</sup> See *inter alia* Zaller (1992), Bartels (1993), Shaw 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Norris et al 1999, Semetko et al 2003

sources of individual attitude change, such as prior partisanship, social networks and personal experiences. While we found evidence for both types of change mechanisms, the bottom-up drivers – especially social networks, partisanship and personal experiences – had a higher overall explanatory power and suggest that despite their limited access to information and their short experience with competitive politics Moldovans were surprisingly capable of finding alternatives to the government’s top-down manipulation efforts.

### *The Empirical Setting – Moldova’s Twitter Revolution*

On April 6<sup>th</sup> 2009, following the announcement that the incumbent Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) had won the previous day’s parliamentary elections with 49.5% of the vote, several civil society organizations declared a national day of mourning and asked Moldovans to join them in a candle vigil in Chisinau’s main square. While the initial protests appear to have been largely spontaneous, later during the first evening of what eventually became known as the Twitter Revolution,<sup>3</sup> the protesters were eventually joined by leaders of the main anti-communist opposition parties, who denounced what they considered widespread election fraud and asked the protesters to return to the main square on the following day. Less than twenty-four hours later, what had started as a peaceful demonstration targeted largely at electoral irregularities had escalated into a violent political crisis, with serious potential repercussions for Moldova’s inter-ethnic relations and even for regional political stability. Thus, after some initial clashes with the police, some of the roughly 15,000 protesters broke into the Parliament and Presidency buildings and set them on fire, and eventually a few individuals raised the Romanian and European flag on top of the Parliament building.

While several of the crucial details surrounding the protests continue to be disputed, what matters for the purpose of this paper are the reactions of the key political players. The Moldovan government charged that the opposition parties with help from the Romanian authorities had tried to mount a coup d’état in order to undermine Moldovan sovereignty<sup>4</sup> and pursue the ultimate goal of Romanian unification. The charge was also echoed by the Russian Foreign Ministry, and by Alexei Ostrovsky, Chairman of the Russian State Duma's Standing Committee

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<sup>3</sup> The term was due to initial reports about the central role of instant messaging and social networking services (including Twitter) in organizing protesters, though in retrospect these reports may have been somewhat exaggerated.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Vladimir Voronin, the country’s acting President and leader of the PCRM charged that “a handful of Fascists drunk with fury are trying to commit a coup d’etat.”

for CIS Affairs, who claimed that Romanian efforts to destabilize Moldova were part of a broader campaign by Western secret services to destabilize former Soviet republics in order to draw them into Euro-Atlantic structures.<sup>5</sup> In turn, both the Romanian government and the Moldovan opposition denied any involvement in the violence, and the latter actually charged that the government had instigated the violence in order to delegitimize the protests and justify the subsequent repression. Nor was the conflict limited to rhetorical fireworks: thus, on April 8<sup>th</sup>, the Moldovan government unilaterally imposed visas on Romanian citizens travelling to Moldova, expelled the Romanian Ambassador to Chisinau for his alleged involvement in the protests, and two weeks later refused to accredit the Romanian government's new candidate for the Ambassador post in Chisinau. Despite calls by the European Union for a rapid normalization of diplomatic ties between the two countries, tensions between the two countries persisted over the following months, and in fact both the visa issue and the vacant Romanian Ambassador position in Chisinau were not resolved until after the second round of parliamentary elections on July 29<sup>th</sup> 2009 resulted in a new non-communist government taking over in Moldova.

### *Paper objectives*

The unexpectedly severe political crisis triggered by the events surrounding the “Twitter revolution” of April 2009 represented (among other things) a rather powerful shock to the dynamics of political competition in Moldova. While the reverberations of this crisis, which included the Communists' unexpected loss in the repeat elections of July 2009, are likely to affect Moldovan politics and society for years to come, our focus in this paper is on its short-term effects on policy preferences among Moldova's citizens in the immediate aftermath of the April crisis. Given the particular nature of this crisis, we will analyze the crisis effects on the foreign policy preferences of Moldovans. Our analysis is primarily based on two nationally representative public opinion surveys of roughly 1000 respondents, which took place before and after the April 5<sup>th</sup> elections, and included a panel component of 501 respondents who were interviewed in both waves.

This research design allows us to address a number of important theoretical questions, which have not been answered conclusively by the existing literature. First, by analyzing the

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<sup>5</sup> Cited in Romania Libera 4/8/2009 <http://www.romanialibera.ro/a150916/moscova-acuza-bucurestiul-ca-destabilizeaza-moldova.html>.

short-term effect of the Twitter Revolution on Moldovan public opinion, we can get a better understanding of how political crises affect political attitudes in countries with short (and flawed) democratic track records and highly fluid political party systems. Second, the analysis in this paper should contribute to a better understanding of how individuals form and update their foreign policy preferences. While the literature on foreign policy preferences has come a long way since the early “foreign policy moods” perspective (Almond 1950, Converse 1964), and has made some important progress in addressing the question of foreign preference change in advanced Western democracies (Peffley and Hurwitz 1992, Semetko et al 2003) we know much less about foreign policy preferences in small and internationally vulnerable countries, where such issues play a more important role in national policy debates. Moreover, we hope to contribute to a better theoretical understanding of foreign policy preference change by analyzing the relative importance of bottom-up mechanisms (where crisis-driven preference change is mediated by individual personal experience of events or their social networks) and top-down mechanisms (where preference change is shaped by political leaders through their influence on media coverage, patronage networks etc.) Third, the paper provides an opportunity to test the stability of partisan ties between voters and parties in the face of political crises in the context of fairly unstable party systems like the one in Moldova. In particular, our analysis can help establish whether partisanship provides citizens with a lens through which to view and process new information, or whether the new information revealed by political crises determines individuals to update their assessment of political parties and possibly to change their partisan ties. From this perspective, the paper addresses a growing literature that tries to understand the development of partisanship in new democracies.<sup>6</sup> Finally, given that in Moldova ethnic relations and foreign policy orientation have been closely intertwined throughout the post-communist period, this paper should help with understanding the mechanisms of the complicated and often dangerous connections between ethnic and international conflict. In particular, we hope to test whether foreign policy disputes are exacerbated by pre-existing ethnic cleavages and tensions.

While the public opinion dynamics that will be discussed in this paper are obviously rooted in the particular domestic and international context of Moldova in early 2009, the Moldovan case shares a number of important elements with many other countries in the post-Cold War era, and as such the implications of the present analysis should be relevant well beyond the Moldovan

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<sup>6</sup> See for example, Brader and Tucker (2009a,b).

context. First, Moldova's high dependence on external powers is actually fairly typical for many economically and politically vulnerable countries in the developing world, and as such the high domestic political salience of foreign policy issues is arguably much more common than the literature focusing largely on OECD countries would suggest. While the conflicting demands of potential patrons may have declined somewhat since the end of the Cold War, such tensions are nevertheless still frequent in many parts of the world, not only in the post-Soviet space (e.g. Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan) but also in the Middle East (e.g. Lebanon, Palestine), Asia and Africa. Second, Moldova shares with many developing countries a high reliance on migrant labor, which for the purposes of the issues discussed in this paper translates into a prominent role of foreign remittances for the livelihoods of significant portions of the populations and the existence of transnational social networks, which may circumvent the government's efforts to control the flow of information. Third, while Moldova's weakly institutionalized party system, its recently established and flawed democratic institutions, and its underdeveloped and partially free media, may appear exotic by the standards of advanced Western democracies, they will be broadly familiar to scholars focusing on much of the rest of the world. Of course the external validity of the findings of this paper will depend on the degree to which crucial elements of the political context are similar to any given comparative reference point, and this is more likely to be true of other former Soviet republics such as Georgia or Ukraine, but should provide insights that are applicable to many post-colonial developing countries attempting to negotiate the travails of precarious independent statehood.

### *Theoretical approach*

To try to understand the relationship between policy preferences and partisanship, we will start out by proposing two different theoretical models about how citizens may adjust their foreign policy attitudes as a result of the external shock such as the one triggered by the events of the Twitter Revolution and its aftermath. For the sake of simplicity, we will refer to these models as *top-down change* and *bottom-up change* to capture the basic differences in the drivers of change for individual political attitudes and partisan allegiances. Before describing the two mechanisms in greater detail, we want to emphasize that while the two models are theoretically distinctive and predict very different patterns of preference change, they are likely to co-exist at the aggregate level – since it is possible that for some individuals or groups change occurs

primarily bottom-up while others may be more receptive to top-down manipulation. At the individual level we may expect to see a tradeoff between the two types of influence (since persons who are susceptible to government manipulation will be less likely to seek out alternative sources of information) but ultimately most people will be affected at least to some extent by both top-down and bottom-up factors. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that the null hypothesis – along the lines of the traditional theory of foreign policy moods – is that the crisis will either produce no preference change or that any change will be random.

In the *top-down change* model, citizens change their policy preferences on the basis of informational clues provided by political elites. In this framework, elites help citizens process the complicated and often contradictory information generated by new political developments, and thereby reduce the effort necessary for a citizen to form an opinion on any given political issue (cf. Zaller 1992). Top-down influence is likely to be the most effective when elites broadly agree on the interpretation of events and the appropriate policy responses, as in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks or regarding European integration in much of Western Europe. However, for contentious events, such as the Moldovan Twitter Revolution or the Iraq war—different elites offer conflicting accounts of both the basic facts and their broader implications, the direction of policy preference change will depend on the availability and credibility of different elite interpretations for any given individual. In terms of availability, the most basic question – especially in countries where the mass media is underdeveloped or subject to significant government interference – is whether a given individual is exposed to more than one interpretation of the events. But even if a certain degree of pluralism exists, the relative balance in the coverage that each side of a debate receives will presumably affect the direction and the extent of policy preference changes. In multi-ethnic settings such as Moldova, another crucial factor affecting the availability of different types of information is the language in which different types of information is disseminated: thus, the TV station most sympathetic to the anti-communist opposition, ProTV, broadcasts exclusively in Romanian, which means that Moldovan citizens who speak little or no Romanian were much less exposed to alternatives to the government's interpretation of events.

Beyond the questions about the availability of different types of information through the mass media, top-down preference changes may also occur through other channels. One such channel is the partisan identity of local political elites. While national political leaders usually

only have direct interactions with relatively few ordinary citizens,<sup>7</sup> local elites may play an important role in bridging the gap between national parties and ordinary citizens.<sup>8</sup> The influence of local political leaders may include the dissemination of partisan political information through a variety of local outlets, or – more ominously – the use of patronage networks or “administrative resources” (Allina-Pisano 2005; Wilson 2005) to ensure that those dependent on these networks for government jobs or benefits toe the party line on key political issues (especially during periods of conflict). But irrespective of the particular channel of influence at the local level, we should expect that whichever party exercises political control in a given locality will have an advantage in persuading citizens to adopt its preferred policy position.

The *bottom-up change* model posits that political crises such as the Twitter revolution may push citizens to re-evaluate the nature and intensity of their preferences about certain policy issues. The crucial element of this model is that individuals are expected to form and update their policy preferences independently of the attempts of political elites to manipulate public opinion in their favor. The extent to which citizens are willing and able to do so, depends to a large extent on the nature of the policy issue: thus, for issues that are relatively simple, easily observable, and have a significant impact on individual welfare, we would expect bottom-up preference change to be much more likely than in the opposite scenario. From this perspective, foreign policy issues are usually unlikely candidates for independent preference formation and change, since they tend to be complex, hard to observe directly, and usually have a relatively small immediate impact on individual welfare (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987). Nonetheless, in small, poor and externally dependent countries foreign policy crises have much greater potential implications for the lives of ordinary citizens. Thus, in the Moldovan case the country’s economy is highly dependent on the three main poles of tension involved in the April crisis (Romania, Russia and the EU) and many Moldovans rely on remittances received from relatives working abroad, and are therefore likely to be directly affected by deteriorating diplomatic relations between their country and the host countries of Moldovan migrant workers. Moreover, since the political discourse in externally vulnerable countries is often closely attuned to foreign policy issues, their citizens are more likely to be familiar with the broad parameters of their country’s foreign policy than citizens of other countries. This certainly applies to Moldova, where foreign

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<sup>7</sup> Massive political rallies are an obvious exception, but (with the partial exception of Chisinau) they did not play a significant role in the Moldovan case.

<sup>8</sup> For evidence in this respect in the post-communist context, see Pop-Eleches and Pop-Eleches (2009).



policy tensions between Russia, Romania and Western Europe regarding country's geopolitical future have been a very visible feature of Moldovan policy since at least 1990.<sup>9</sup>

As in the case of top-down change, there is not a single channel for bottom-up changes in policy preferences. At the most basic level, we need to distinguish between two broad types of drivers for bottom-up change: informational and interest-based. Information-based explanations focus on the types of information sources through which a given individual receives information about the events and their policy implications. The most direct mechanism – but one that is usually restricted to a fairly small number of individuals – is the direct personal experience of crucial political events, or at least having people in one's immediate circle of family, friends and acquaintances who have witnessed the events first-hand. In the Moldovan case, this particular mechanism was arguably concentrated among Chisinau residents, who had a reasonable probability of at least knowing somebody who participated in or witnessed the protests. To the extent that this acquaintance is considered a trustworthy individual with reasonably moderate political views,<sup>10</sup> their testimony may well override the public statements of politicians or the mass media coverage of the event, especially in environments (such as Moldova) where trust in political parties and public institutions is very low.

Beyond the narrow case of eyewitness accounts, the information available to individuals is shaped by the social networks to which a person belongs, and to the extent that these networks are reasonably horizontal (i.e. without the hierarchy inherent in most patronage networks) they represent an important mechanism for information-based bottom-up preference change. In the context of polarizing events – particularly if they involve an important ethnic component – the nature of these networks is likely to play an important role in determining the direction and the magnitude of preference changes. Building on Varshney's work about the different roles of inter-group vs. intra-group civil society organizations in dealing with religious conflict in India (Varshney 2001), we should expect greater polarization of opinions among citizens who in their daily interactions are not exposed to alternative viewpoints from people of different ethnolinguistic backgrounds or political persuasions.

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<sup>9</sup> This expectation is borne out by the survey data: over 80% of respondents could correctly name the Russian president (not a trivial question, since Medvedev had relatively recently replaced Putin, even though the latter remained highly visible and influential), 47% could name the Romanian president but only 44% knew the name Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament, Marian Lupu.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the importance of the perceived type of protesters, see Lohmann (1994).

In addition to face-to-face interactions, individuals may of course be linked to virtual networks of much broader geographic reach. While Twitter and other online social networks figured prominently in the coverage of the April protests, in the Moldovan context the reach of such networks is probably much smaller than the ties between Moldovan residents and their friends and relatives who work abroad. Such contacts are likely to provide alternative sources of information about how the crisis is viewed abroad, and as such can counter the government's advantage in top-down manipulation.

Even though, as discussed above, mass media coverage of a given issue tends to be associated with top-down efforts by political elites to frame the public debate to their own advantage, to the extent that a given individual has access to media sources presenting different viewpoints, her actual media consumption patterns are at least partly compatible with bottom-up preference change. Thus, to the extent that a given person is inclined to favor a particular policy position, they may choose to follow media that confirms their initial inclination, in which case the resulting radicalization of opinions cannot be simply blamed on biased media coverage.<sup>11</sup>

While a detailed analysis of why individuals seek out and believe certain types of information is beyond the scope of this discussion, we will briefly discuss the role of prior beliefs and attachments in helping individuals filter the new and often confusing information produced by political crises such as the Twitter Revolution. One candidate explanation in this respect is partisanship, which provides an easy cognitive shortcut for citizens who may not have sufficient information, time, or interest to adjudicate between different explanations, and therefore embrace the story that comes from the most credible among the political elites involved in a given conflict. While much of the evidence of the mediating role of partisanship comes from advanced democracies, where voters have much longer histories of partisan ties to certain political parties, recent evidence from survey experiments (Brader and Tucker 2009) suggests that partisan cues matter even in the chaotic environment of weakly institutionalized post-communist party systems.

However, since most citizens are unlikely to simply toe the party line, the difficult task of adjudicating between conflicting claims will depend on the degree and the nature of prior information about a given policy issue. Thus, individuals with a great amount of prior knowledge

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, in some circumstances there may be social or political pressures in favor or against following certain types of media outlets, in which case the media consumption mix – and the resulting preference changes – would be influenced from the top down even if an individual had access to a pluralistic media environment.

should have an easier time making sense of new information, but we would also expect them to be less likely to change their opinions, since they are likely to have an easier time to incorporate the new information into their existing set of beliefs. On the other hand, individuals with no prior knowledge may find the new information so overwhelming that they cannot use it in a systematic fashion, thereby leading to no limited or random preference change. Therefore, some observers have argued that we should observe the greatest opinion changes at intermediate levels of knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the nature of prior information and beliefs should also matter: since individuals are often prone to confirmatory bias, those favoring a certain policy position before a crisis, may seek out new information that confirms their prior beliefs, therefore leading to greater preference divergence in the crisis aftermath.

The second main mechanism of bottom-up preference change focuses on individual economic interests. Even though economic interests have not figured as prominently in accounts of foreign policy preferences as for other questions, such as voting, several analyses of European integration attitudes have focused on the role of economic concerns: thus, support for integration among West Europeans was stronger among the highly educated, among skilled workers and among the financially satisfied, who benefitted or expected to benefit from greater integration (Anderson and Reichert 1996, Gabel 1998, Gabel and Palmer 1995), whereas in Eastern Europe transition winners were more likely to favor their country's EU accession than their less fortunate co-nationals. (Tucker et al 2002, Herzog and Tucker 2010). The logic of many of these arguments should also apply to the Moldovan context: thus, younger, more educated and wealthier individuals should be more likely to embrace the opportunities promised by European integration, while those with fewer marketable skills should be more likely to yearn for the security of the Soviet past, while opposing the reforms required for integration.<sup>13</sup>

The Moldovan case also featured a second important “pocketbook” element that is missing from foreign policy debates in developed countries but is relevant for the foreign policy preferences of citizens in many developing countries: the role of foreign remittances as an important source of income. Thus, given that roughly 30% of Moldovans reported receiving at

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<sup>12</sup> Similar arguments have been made about the relationship between political interest and public opinion change. (Zaller 1992 and Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995).

<sup>13</sup> While the logic developed by Tucker et al 2002 applies primarily to the question of European integration, it should affect individual attitudes towards the Romania vs. Russia question, given that the former would be a key promoter of Moldova EU hopes, while the combination of subsidies and paternalism coming from the latter are clearly reminiscent of the Soviet period.

least occasional remittances from abroad, and given that the sources of these remittances were evenly split between Russia and the West/Romania, the prospect of worsening diplomatic ties with either Russia or the West as a result of the crisis triggered by the April 2009 events had potentially serious implications for the livelihoods of many Moldovans. Therefore, we would expect individual foreign policy preferences to reflect the geographic provenance of foreign remittances, with families relying on remittances from Russia favoring closer ties to Russia and those receiving money from Romania or the West hoping for greater westward orientation.

However, even if economic interests were very effective in explaining levels of foreign policy preferences, it is unclear whether these factors can account for the patterns of *preference change* in the wake of the April crisis. After all, since neither marketable skills nor the source of remittances changed dramatically between March and May 2009, the Twitter Revolution arguably did not affect the nature of economic preferences, and therefore we need an additional assumption to explain change. One possibility, which will be discussed in more detail in the final part of the paper, is that the April events highlighted the tensions between Russia and the West/Romania and therefore undermined the wishful thinking promoted by the Communist government in recent years, whereby Moldova could simultaneously pursue European integration and closer ties to Russia. To the extent that Moldovans realized that their country may have to choose between Russia and the West, then we could expect economic interests to explain the nature of this reconfiguration of foreign policy preferences (even if the economic interests themselves did not change).

## **Historical background**

The centrality of foreign policy in Moldovan politics and the divergent reactions to the political crisis of 2009 are grounded in Moldova's highly contentious path to independence in 1989-1992. Most of present-day Moldova, which had been a Romanian speaking territory in the Russian empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was incorporated into Romania after World War I and subject to active nation-building efforts by the Romanian state (Livezeanu 1995). Following the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact and Romania's defeat in World War II, the region was reincorporated into the Soviet Union and was joined with the Slavic-dominated Transnistria region to the east, to create the Moldavian Union Republic. Fearful of Romanian claims on Soviet-Moldovan territory, Soviet authorities encouraged Russification and engaged in an active effort to promote

a separate “Moldovan” identity distinct from Romanian.<sup>14</sup> There was widespread feeling that speakers of Romanian/Moldovan were discriminated against in educational institutions and in the workplace.<sup>15</sup> In 1989, the opposition Moldovan Popular Front (MNF), tapping into widespread resentment, led massive demonstrations in favor of Moldovan/Romanian language rights and took control of the Moldovan government after legislative elections in February-March 1990. Emboldened by its quick successes and faced with an old communist guard stunned into inaction by the rapid events in Moscow, the Front was very vocal in its support of Romanian ethnic rights as well as unification with Romania.<sup>16</sup> However, given extremely weak support for unification, the Front’s influence dwindled rapidly.<sup>17</sup>

More critically, the Front’s rhetoric contributed to a polarized reaction in the Slavic dominated Transnistria (Crowther 1996: 36). The Transnistrians, backed by Russia’s 14<sup>th</sup> Army, declared autonomy in September 1990 and gun battles between Moldovan and pro-Russian forces broke out in 1991-1992. In March 1992, Moldova’s President Mircea Snegur attempted to impose martial law. However, despite some backing from Romania, the Moldovan military was no match for Russian forces and Snegur was forced to cede the territory. Backed by steadfast Russian support, Transnistria has been able to maintain de facto independence until the present day.

As a result of these early conflicts, relations with Russia and Romania have remained highly polarizing issues within Moldova.<sup>18</sup> For much of the 1990s most of the population supports closer ties to Russia; while a highly vocal minority privileged closer relations to Europe and Romania (White 1998). In parliamentary elections in 2001, the Communist Party of Moldova (PCRM) gained power by promising closer ties to Russia and a resolution of the Transnistria issue. However, Russian refusal to make compromises on Transnistria essentially forced the PCRM to adopt a pro European stance and Putin threw support behind two pro-

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<sup>14</sup> Soviet authorities promoted the idea that “Romanian” and “Moldovan” were separate languages. Thus, the Latin alphabet, which had been introduced after World War I, was abandoned and replaced by Cyrillic.

<sup>15</sup> Bookstores rarely stocked Moldovan/Romanian books (Eyal and Smith 1996: 128). Russian also dominated in education. Thus, in Chisinau, half of which was Moldovan, just 10% of kindergardens used Moldovan/Romanian as the primary language (Chinn 1994: 312). In general, knowledge of Russian was considered essential for career advancement during the Soviet period.

<sup>16</sup> Nationalists explicitly argued for restrictions on Russian migration into the territory and for increased employment opportunities for Romanian speaking members of the population. At the same time actual policies tended to be relatively liberal. See Crowther (1996); King (2000).

<sup>17</sup> The Front’s membership in parliament went from 140-145 in 1990 to 24 by the end of 1993 (IFES 1994: 25).

<sup>18</sup> “Moldova” in this study excludes the Transnistria area.

Russian opposition parties in elections in 2005. Following these elections, the PCRM ironically retained power through an alliance with the Christian Democratic People's Party – a remnant of the Moldovan Popular Front. At the same time, the PCRM continued to rely extensively on an older Russian-speaking electorate, which made it quite hard for the party to take a stridently anti-Russian position.

## Data and methods

Our analysis relies primarily on data from two public opinion surveys we commissioned in Moldova before and after the April 5<sup>th</sup> elections. The first wave took place from March 7-April 2, 2009 using a representative sample of 1028 adult Moldovan citizens, while the second wave took place from May 7-30, 2009 on a sample of 937 Moldovan citizens, 501 of which had already been interviewed in the first wave. Given that our primary theoretical interest is in assessing the impact of crises on foreign policy preferences and partisan attachments, most of the analysis focuses on the panel component of the two surveys. This setup allows us to assess the changes in individual attitudes in reaction to the April events, and given that the two waves were on average less than six weeks apart,<sup>19</sup> it reduces the likelihood that any attitude changes are due to other factors, such as the unfolding economic crisis or subsequent political developments.<sup>20</sup>

In our statistical tests we use lagged-effect static score models, where the dependent variable in the second period is predicted both by its own lagged value and by the lagged value of other variables.

$$Y_t = \beta_0 Y_{t-1} + \beta_1 X_{t-1} + \varepsilon_i$$

Such an approach represents a conservative statistical approach to evaluating the impact of indicators for bottom-up and top-down drivers of attitudinal change, since it excludes from the model specification indicators of synchronous effects, and may therefore miss short-term causal effects. While we intend to analyze the possibility of synchronous effects in future versions of the paper, such an approach requires finding statistical instruments for all the endogenous variables in the system of equations (Finkel 1995:32-37). Without such instrumental variables

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<sup>19</sup> Initially, we had planned to start the second survey wave by mid-April but given the political instability and the uncertainty about the extent of political repression, we ultimately decided to postpone it by three weeks in order to minimize the risk of non-random interview refusals and the possibility of biased answers.

<sup>20</sup> Fortunately, fieldwork for our second survey wave was finished before Marian Lupu, the former Speaker of Parliament, announced his defection from the PCRM on grounds that the party was not reformable from within, since this event arguably changed the partisan dynamics in ways that were distinctive from the dynamics of the April events (which Lupu had also denounced as a coup d'état attempt at the time).

(or if using inappropriate instruments) including synchronous variables runs the risk of drawing inappropriate conclusions about the direction of causation. For example, if we were to find that opposition partisans in the second wave desire closer ties to Romania compared to their first-wave responses, it would not be appropriate to conclude that partisanship causes foreign policy attitude changes, since it is possible that the change in foreign policy attitudes was triggered by other factors (e.g. being present at the protests) and that these changing foreign policy preferences were actually among the drivers of changes in partisan affiliation towards the opposition parties. Meanwhile, when using the initial partisan affiliation (from the first wave) in the model, we do not run the risk of drawing misleading inferences about the direction of causation.

We use two questions to capture distinctive aspects of the foreign policy dilemmas facing Moldova in recent years. The first aspect, which arguably received the greatest attention in the aftermath of the Twitter Revolution, is whether Moldova's foreign policy should steer closer to Romania or Russia. Respondents were given three options (1) "Moldova should be closer to Russia," (2) "Moldova should be closer to Romania," and (3) "Moldova should keep its distance from both Russia and Romania" and since the answers to this question cannot be interpreted as an ordinal variable, we will use multinomial logistic regressions to analyze it (with option 3 as the excluded category.)

The second aspect concerns the second major fault line of Moldovan foreign policy since independence – namely the tension between the nostalgia for the Soviet past harbored by many Moldovans and the desire for European integration expressed by most citizens and (at least officially) by most politicians in recent years. The survey question asked respondents whether they thought their country's future should be tied to (1) with countries of the CIS (former Soviet Union); (2) with Western Europe<sup>21</sup> or (3) with both/all countries.<sup>22</sup> Once again, we treated the resulting variable as nominal, and analyzed it using multinomial logistic regressions (with option 3 as the excluded category.)

To test the impact of political crises on partisan affiliation and to understand the reciprocal effects of foreign policy attitudes and partisanship on each other, we used a survey question,

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<sup>21</sup> For both the CIS and the Western Europe options, the respondents could choose between "definitely" and "probably" but for the purpose of this analysis these categories were collapsed to facilitate interpretation.

<sup>22</sup> This last option was not read but was recorded when the respondent volunteered such an answer. In the statistical tests we also included "don't know" in this category, since their other foreign policy preferences most closely resembled the "all countries" option.

which asked respondents whether there was a political party that represented their interests, and if such a party existed to identify which party it was. While the Moldovan elections of April 2009 were contested by twelve political parties (of which nine received at least 1% of valid votes), our main focus here is on the main contestants on the two sides of the April protests: the incumbent PCRM on the one side, and the three main anti-communist opposition parties (PL, PLDM and AMN) on the other. Therefore, our variable of interests identifies respondents who identified with either the Communists or one of the three opposition parties, while supporters of other parties and respondents without partisan allegiances represent the residual category for the purpose of the statistical tests.

### *Hypotheses and independent variables*

Building on the discussion from the theoretical section, we will briefly lay out the key hypotheses and their expected observable empirical implications based on the data from the two-wave Moldovan public opinion survey. These key indicators and hypotheses are also summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 here

To test the importance of **top-down** channels in explaining changes in foreign policy attitudes, we start by looking at indicators of the nature of the mass media environment for a given respondent. Since over 80% of respondents identified TV as their main source of political information, we will focus primarily on the extent to which respondents had access to different TV stations. This aspect is particularly important because the coverage of the April events was significantly biased towards the pro-government and anti-Romanian point of view, which dominated not only in the state-owned TV Moldova1, but also in several of the other main TV channels watched by most Moldovans, including the Russian ORT(Prime), and the pro-government privately-held Moldovan NIT. The main exception, which presented coverage more sympathetic to the anti-communist opposition, was ProTV Chisinau, the Moldovan subsidiary of the private Romanian TV station ProTV. Since TV Moldova 1, ORT, and NIT had network coverage in most of the Moldovan territory, the key variation in coverage was for ProTV, which was only available to roughly half the respondents. Since ProTV was also the main Moldovan-based TV source for pro-opposition (or at least neutral) coverage of the crisis, citizens living in areas without ProTV access were arguably limited in their choice of different viewpoints and



were therefore more vulnerable to top-down manipulation by the Communist government. Therefore, we would expect access to ProTV to have a positive effect on pro-Romanian and pro-Western policy attitudes, and a negative effect on pro-Russian views.

Beyond network TV stations, about a third of Moldovan citizens in our surveys reported having access to cable/satellite TV. While the particular channels vary by subscription package, it is nevertheless highly likely that cable access represented a dramatic expansion of the respondent's informational choices (including in many cases access to TV stations from Romania and Western Europe), which was likely to significantly reduce the cognitive impact of the government's overwhelming advantage in most of the Moldovan mass media. Therefore, we should expect to see cable access being associated with weaker moves towards the government policy positions, and potentially with greater support for pro-Romanian and pro-Western foreign policies.

We also consider another well-known source for circumventing government information monopolies in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes: the internet. While only 1.6% of respondents listed the internet as their main source of political information, and only 11% reported having read news on the internet in the past week during the first survey wave,<sup>23</sup> it nevertheless offered an opportunity to access a wide variety of different news resources over which the Moldovan government had little to no control. Since our survey did not ask respondents about whether they had internet access,<sup>24</sup> we will use computer ownership as a proxy for such access,<sup>25</sup> and expect it to be associated with foreign policy and partisan moves away from the governing PCRM and its anti-Romanian rhetoric (though we would expect weaker effects with respect to European integration questions.)

Another less prevalent but more clearly top-down method of political information diffusion consists of direct efforts by political elites to persuade citizens to change their policy preferences and political allegiances. As discussed in the theory section, since national leaders have

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<sup>23</sup> However, the percentage increased quite rapidly to about 15% in the second wave (May) and to almost 20% in the third wave (in August).

<sup>24</sup> The survey included a question about the number of days the respondent had read news on the internet, but such a measure includes an important bottom-up component, because it implies that the respondent is seeking out additional sources of information, thereby suggesting higher levels of political interest.

<sup>25</sup> While computer ownership is neither necessary for internet access (due to the existence of internet cafes) nor sufficient (since the cheapest monthly subscription of dial-up internet costs almost \$6 plus connection fees, which is not trivial given the low incomes in Moldova), we were reassured by the high correlation between computer ownership and internet news readership (as high as .49 for the most politically interested respondents).

relatively limited direct contact to most citizens, we expect the partisan identity of local leaders to matter significantly for the direction in which public opinion will move in a given locality. Therefore, we have coded the party affiliation of the mayor of the settlement in which the respondent resides, and we expect that in places with opposition mayors public opinion should move more in the direction of pro-Romanian and pro-European preferences, than in areas controlled by the Communists.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, as discussed earlier, citizens are likely to differ in their vulnerability to top-down political pressures. In particular, we should expect the poor and state employees (working either in SOEs or in government institutions) to be more vulnerable to such pressures, since perceived disloyalty may result in diminished state support for the former and career opportunities for the latter. However, we should expect the direction of the policy shift resulting from such vulnerability to depend on which party controls the local government: thus, vulnerable groups in communist-controlled towns should be expected to shift their opinions and allegiances more closely towards the communist/pro-Russian side, while those in opposition-controlled towns should shift in the opposite direction.

Finally, partisan loyalties towards certain political parties or leaders are likely to act as important filters when citizens process conflicting political claims, and thereby affect the extent to which citizens will change their foreign policy views in line with the official party position on the subject. While in the long run partisan ties are at least in part the results of bottom-up processes such as life experience or family socialization, we argue that for explaining short-term attitude change initial partisan ties are best interpreted as proxies of top-down mechanisms of change, since they capture the greater effectiveness of top-down messages among respondents predisposed to believe the messages coming from a particular party or its leaders.<sup>27</sup> In particular, we expect to see that respondents who identified with the Communist Party prior to the April

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<sup>26</sup> The survey also included a more direct question about whether the respondent had been asked by a local public official or by a boss at work to support a certain party. However, only a very small proportion of respondents reported this to be the case (roughly 6% for the two categories combined), which raises questions about under-reporting. Moreover, the resulting variable was never a significant predictor of attitude changes, either by itself or interacted with the mayor's partisan affiliation (where in fact it tended to reduce the impact of local government partisan affiliation, suggesting that such strategies were counter-productive.) Therefore, we did not include it in the statistical models presented in this paper.

<sup>27</sup> It is of course possible that Communist partisans would have turned more anti-Romanian or pro-Russian/CIS in response to the April events even if they had not been exposed to the repeated statements by the Communist leadership about the Romanian-backed coup d'état attempt. However, over 91% of our respondents reported watching TV coverage of the protests and were thus exposed to the top-down persuasion efforts of the Communist leadership (and to a lesser extent to those of the opposition leaders).

elections will be more likely to change their policies towards the anti-Romanian/pro-Russian position in line with the official Communist interpretation of the Twitter Revolution as a Romanian-backed attempt by the opposition to overthrow the government and pursue unification with Romania.

To analyze the channels for **bottom-up changes** in foreign policy preferences and partisan loyalties, we start with the most obvious alternative to top-down persuasion efforts: the personal experience of an individual. In the most immediate sense, Chisinau residents had a much higher probability than other Moldovan citizens to be either directly involved in or to have witnessed the protests or to know somebody personally who had done so. Moreover, Chisinau residents were also more likely to be aware of the extent of the government repression following the protests. For both of these reasons, we should expect Chisinau residents to be less receptive to the government's interpretation of the events, and therefore to be less likely to move towards an anti-Romanian and pro-communist direction after April.

The second major channel for information-based bottom-up policy preference change involves the horizontal flow of information within social networks. Given the close link between foreign policy and domestic ethnic divisions, the logical starting place for testing network effects has to do with the ethnic composition of a respondent's social network. As a first step, we use the respondent's declared primary language as a proxy for the nature of their local social interactions<sup>28</sup>: thus, we would expect native Moldovan/Romanian speakers to interact primarily with others colinguals and to be, therefore, more likely to receive pro-Romanian information and political opinions than their Russian-speaking counterparts.<sup>29</sup> Second, even though roughly 70% of Moldovans are bilingual, we focus on the attitude change among Russian-only and Moldovan-only speakers, since such individuals are likely to face greater obstacles in interacting with members of the other ethnicity and may therefore be more prone to receiving one-sided information from their social environment. To the extent that social networks matter, we should

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<sup>28</sup> This is, of course, not the only channel through which language matters. Thus, it is possible that native Russian speakers will be more drawn to Russian-language media, even if they understand Moldovan/Romanian sufficiently well to access TV programs in that language. However, even for this channel, language is still a proxy for bottom-up opinion change.

<sup>29</sup> This will be almost certainly true for family members, whereas for friends and acquaintances the degree of inter-ethnic contacts is likely to vary significantly. Note that throughout the analysis we are using primary language rather than ethnicity, both because it is a theoretically more salient mechanism for information transmission, and because in practice primary language produces much stronger statistical results than ethnicity.

see greater preference divergence among monolinguals in the wake of the crisis.<sup>30</sup> Third, we used the data from the survey to create rough indicators of the ethnic balance for the localities included in the survey. Thus, we would expect that in overwhelmingly ethnically Moldovan towns the likelihood of interacting with Moldovan speakers should be higher for both Moldovans and non-Moldovans, while the opposite should apply to Moldovan-minority towns. From a social networks perspective we predict foreign policy to shift from Russia towards Romania in Moldovan-majority towns and vice-versa.

The other type of relevant network – especially for the formation of foreign policy preferences – consists of a respondent’s friends and relatives living and working abroad. As mentioned in the theoretical section, Moldovans with close contacts to migrant workers in Russia are likely to receive more pro-Russian information and since this information is often reinforced by a personal stake in stable diplomatic ties between Moldova and Russia, we should expect such networks to pull respondents towards more pro-Russian/CIS foreign policy views in the wake of the April crisis. By contrast, for respondents with similar contacts in Romania and Western Europe, the short-term deterioration of diplomatic ties to Romania and the prospect of longer-term repercussions on ties with the West are likely to reinforce the alternative political information conveyed by these migrants and result in more pro-Romanian and pro-West foreign policy views.

While in the earlier discussion we argued that indicators of media access are likely to capture top-down channels of attitude change, media consumption patterns are probably more indicative of individual choices (especially if we control for access), and should therefore be interpreted as indicators of bottom-up policy preference formation. Thus, if an individual has reasonably easy access to both pro-Russian and pro-Romanian information sources, then the particular mix of TV stations she views or internet sites she visits arguably reflect her individual preferences about which types of evidence she finds more agreeable or credible. To test the impact of such choices, we coded the frequency in the preceding week with which respondents reported watching news on Moldova 1, ORT, NIT and ProTV, with the expectation that higher

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<sup>30</sup> As discussed earlier, Russian-only speakers were also more vulnerable to top-down manipulation by the government and as such any effect of the Russian-only indicator cannot by itself help us distinguish between the top-down and bottom-up explanations. However, here a comparison of the Russian-only and the Romanian-only indicators would be instructive: from a top-down perspective, then we should see stronger polarization effects for Russian-only speakers, since Moldovan-only speakers still had plenty of pro-Russian information sources at their disposal. By contrast, from a bottom-up perspective, the polarization effects should be similar for both types of monolinguals.

viewership of the first three programs would translate into more pro-Russian/CIS/Communist attitudes, while for ProTV we would expect the opposite effect.

We also tested the impact of two important aspects of an individual's personal economic interests. The first is based on a set of indicators, which measure the frequency and the origin of international remittance payments received by a respondent's family. To the extent that foreign policy preferences are driven by the economic interest in maintaining good relations with the countries from which these remittances originated, we should expect recipients of remittances from Russia to become more pro-Russian, while those of remittances from Romania or Western Europe to move in the opposite direction. The second indicator tests the logic of Tucker et al's (2002) argument about transition winners espousing more pro-EU attitudes in order to consolidate their post-communist losses. To do so, we constructed a three-question index based on the respondent's evaluation of the post-1990 change in their housing conditions, food and medical care access.<sup>31</sup>

The statistical tests also include a number of demographic variables, which may capture different propensities of individuals to be experience either bottom-up or top-down policy preference changes. In addition to the implications of primary language, Chisinau residence, and state employment, which have already been discussed, there are a few other variables worth mentioning. First, several of the demographic variables, including *education*, *economic status*,<sup>32</sup> and *personal employment status* are likely to capture different aspects of being a transition winner or loser, as well as the prospective gains from greater Western integration vs. Russian rapprochement. *Knowing a Western language* should be expected to lead to a pro-Western shift, though it is unclear whether such an effect would be due to greater personal expected gains from Western integration or from greater access to non-government information sources. Finally, the regressions also included a number of additional demographic controls, including age, age squared, sex, student status, rural residence and private enterprise employment.

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<sup>31</sup> This index is arguably a more direct indicator of transition performance than Tucker et al's (2002) original measure, which focused on a respondent's evaluation of personal economic changes in the preceding year.

<sup>32</sup> We used a five-item household goods index, which was correlated at .6 with declared household income but had considerably less missing data.

## Statistical results

In interpreting the statistical results in Tables 2-4 below, it is important to remember that regression coefficients in lagged-effect static score models capture the effect of an independent variable on the change in foreign policy preferences between the two time periods (i.e. between March and May 2009). However, given the quasi-experimental setup of the research design, most of the crisis effects are quite easily observable on the basis of simple crosstabs of the change in foreign policy attitudes among different subsets of Moldovan citizens.<sup>33</sup> The results of the crosstabs for the most important variables are illustrated in Figures 1&2, and they have the advantage of illustrating the magnitude of the crisis impact in a much clearer way than the multinomial regression coefficients from the models in Tables 2-4.

### *Top-down preference change*

The statistical results in Figure 1 and Table 2 provide some supportive evidence for the hypotheses of the top-down perspective but overall it appears that the government's top-down manipulation efforts were not particularly effective.

*Table 2 and Figure 1 here*

Thus, the broad national-level trends illustrated in Figure 1a indicate that public opinion moved at least slightly away from Russia and towards Romania, which suggests that the government's top-down efforts to paint the April events as a Romanian-backed coup d'état were not very persuasive, and may have even been counterproductive. By comparison, there was little movement on the question of a Western vs. CIS future, as support for both options declined slightly.

However, these broad national trends mask important differences across subgroups: according to Figure 1b, the foreign policy preference moved in opposite directions in response to the April crisis depending on whether a respondent had cable TV access. Thus, in line with the predictions of top-down manipulation, individuals without cable access, who had fewer informational alternatives to the government's biased coverage of the events, became more pro-Russian and less pro-Romanian after the Twitter Revolution, while cable TV viewers moved

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<sup>33</sup> As we will discuss, a few of the bivariate relationships revealed by the crosstabs are changed once we control for other covariates in a regression framework, but the clearly visible changes in the raw data are important confirmations that the regression findings are not simply artifacts of particular model specifications.

sharply in the opposite direction (and the difference were statistically significant at .05 according to models 1&2 in Table 2). Similarly, according to Figure 1c, individuals with access to the pro-Romanian *ProTV* station became even more pro-Romanian and less pro-Russian between March and May but the results did not hold up in regression analysis. Finally, Figure 1d suggests that computer owners became less pro-Russian (and more pro-Romanian) than their counterparts with fewer internet access opportunities, and the results were highly statistically significant according to models 1&2. Overall, these results confirm that the government's top-down persuasion efforts were much less effective for individuals who had access to a greater variety of mass media choices.

While we found no evidence that the political affiliation of a town's mayor had a significant impact on the foreign policy preference change of the residents, the effects were stronger (and in the expected direction) when we focused on politically vulnerable groups. Thus, according to the results in Model 1, which are illustrated in Figure 1e, poor residents in Communist-controlled towns were significantly more likely to turn pro-Russian than other Moldovans. By contrast, the positive and marginally significant coefficient for *Poor* in model 1A suggests that the poor in non-Communist towns were actually likely to shift to a pro-Romanian position, which suggests that both the Communists and the opposition used the leverage of local political power to build support for their preferred foreign policy positions.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, the large and marginally significant positive interaction effect in model 1B confirms the temporal patterns in Figure 1f, whereby state employees in opposition controlled towns became much more pro-Romanian in the aftermath of the Twitter Revolution. However, it should be noted that in this case there was no evidence of a similar effect in the opposite direction for state employees in Communist-controlled towns.

Finally, it is worth noting the much weaker effects of top-down factors in explaining change on the question about whether the country's future should be in the West or with the former Soviet republics. The limited spillover between the two foreign policy dimensions is somewhat surprising given their fairly high correlation in the minds of survey respondents. However, the difference is in line with the fact that the main conflict was with Romania rather than Western Europe, and therefore the top-down persuasion effects by domestic political elites primarily focused on the Romania vs. Russia question. Moreover, the disconnect was further

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<sup>34</sup> We found similar results when using unemployment status as a proxy of economic vulnerability (results omitted).

encouraged by the cautious West European response to the Twitter Revolution and the fact that the Moldovan Communists did not broaden the scope of their anti-Romanian campaign to include the West.

### ***Bottom-up preference change***

Turning to the bottom-up change mechanisms in Table 3 and Figure 2, one of the most striking findings is the large and highly statistically significant pro-Romanian boost among Chisinau residents compared to the rest of the country following the April events (see Fig. 2a). Given that this deficit holds even if we control for media access, partisan affiliation of the local mayor, and a variety of other demographic indicators, this effect suggests that being closer to the contentious events of the Twitter Revolution gave Chisinau residents very different sources of information about the events and resulted in a very different interpretation of its foreign policy implications than that broadcast to the rest of the country by much of the mass media.

*Table 3 and Figure 2 here*

The results also confirm the importance of a respondent's social networks. Thus, the regression results suggest a large and statistically significant pro-Romania boost among native Moldovan speakers, though Fig. 2b suggests that this boost occurred almost exclusively among Chisinau residents, who experienced a tripling of pro-Romania attitudes, and an almost two-thirds reduction of pro-Russia attitudes. The important mediating effect of Chisinau residence is even clearer for native Russian speakers: for non-Chisinau residents Fig. 2b confirms the theoretical expectations of a pro-Russian shift among native Russian speakers. However, for native Russian speakers from Chisinau the crisis triggered a change that was more similar (though of a smaller magnitude) to their Moldovan-speaking Chisinau neighbors than to their co-ethnics elsewhere in Moldova. This surprising pattern helps explain the marginally significant pro-Romania shift among native Russian speakers in model 1A. The importance of the local context is further emphasized by the change patterns illustrated in Fig. 2d, which show that residents of mixed and minority-Moldovan towns were more likely to turn pro-Russian after the April crisis than their counterparts in majority-Moldovan towns (and the difference was statistically significant according to model 1 in table 3). By comparison, the evidence for language based networks was weaker when judging by the crisis impact on monolingual Moldovan citizens: thus, even though Fig. 2c reveals some evidence of growing preference



polarization between Moldovan-only and Russian-only speakers (with the former turning more pro-Romanian and the latter more pro-Russian), the magnitude was fairly modest and according to model 1 the effect disappeared completely in a regression setting. Taken together, these findings confirm the importance of social networks for driving policy change but suggest that these networks are defined not just by ethno-linguistic but by geographic proximity.

As suggested by the cross-tabs in Fig. 2e and confirmed by models 2 and 3 in Table 3, the nature of an individual's international networks also affected their policy preferences in the aftermath of the Twitter Revolution. Thus, respondents with friends or relatives working in Russia were significantly more likely to experience a pro-Russian shift in foreign policy preferences after April, while those with contact in Romania shifted their choices from Russia towards Romania.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, the impact of foreign remittances was surprisingly modest and did not significantly shape foreign policy preferences once we control for international contacts. The only exception in this respect was the pro-West shift among recipients of remittances from Western Europe, which is in line with economic interest predictions but interestingly did not seem to affect attitudes towards Romania and Russia.

The results in Table 3 offer mixed evidence about the impact of other economic interests in driving foreign policy preference changes. Thus, according to the simple cross-tabs in Fig. 2f the crisis impact on transition winners and losers was inconclusive (with winners becoming slightly more pro-Romanian and pro-Russian and losers become somewhat less pro-Russian), while the results of the regressions in model 2 and 5 actually pointed in the opposite direction that would have been predicted based on Tucker et al's (2002) findings. Thus, the results suggest that transition losers were more likely to shift towards Romania and the West than towards Russia/the CIS, and the differences in coefficients were at least marginally significant for both models. Along similar lines, unemployed respondents, who would definitely qualify as transition losers, turned away from Russia and towards Romania/the West in the aftermath of the crisis. Only the household goods ownership index pointed in the expected direction, with better off respondents less likely to embrace Russia and the Soviet past than their poorer counterparts. Overall, however, the evidence presented here suggests an interesting scope condition for the Tucker et al's (2002) argument about the greater EU support among transition winners: since

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<sup>35</sup> Note that while the individual coefficients for the *Relatives/friends in Romania* variable were not statistically significant in Models 1 and 2, the difference between the two coefficients was significant at .05 in both models.

their argument, which was developed in the context of the East European EU candidates, does not seem to work in the Moldovan case, it seems that the way in which ex-communist citizens interpret the transition is not uniform. Instead, it appears as if Moldovans dissatisfied with their post-communist economic trajectory responded by asking for *greater* Westernization and European integration, which suggests that many of them viewed their troubles as stemming from too little rather than too much reform. Future research – ideally involving countries with similarly mixed European integration records, such as Ukraine – will be needed to establish whether this pattern is due to the much more modest scope of EU conditionality in Moldova or with the country’s more proximate experience of eight years of Communist rule.

Finally, the results confirm a strong bottom-up “demand-side” component to mass media consumption: thus, citizens who watched the Russian ORT more frequently prior to the April crisis turned significantly more pro-Russia in the wake of the crisis, while the exact opposite was the case for frequent viewers of the more pro-Romanian ProTV.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, with the partial exception of a marginally significant greater westward orientation among more knowledgeable respondents, neither prior political knowledge nor prior political interest played an important role in shaping the policy preferences of Moldovans following the Twitter Revolution. While a more detailed explanation of this non-finding is beyond the scope of the present paper, it may be related to the exceptionally high degree of popular awareness of the events surrounding the Twitter Revolution, which may have muted the usual effects of interest and knowledge: thus, over 96% of respondents in our survey had recalled hearing about the electoral protests following the April elections, and over 91% had watched the TV coverage of the events.

### *The role of partisanship*

As discussed in the theoretical section, the sharp and highly visible disagreements between the communist government and the anti-communist opposition about the foreign policy implications of the Twitter Revolution lead us to expect partisanship to be an important factor shaping foreign policy preference change in the wake of the crisis.

*Table 4 and Figure 3 here*

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<sup>36</sup> Notice, however, the negative and significant effect of ProTV access in model 3. This coefficient captures the predicted attitude change of a respondent who has access to ProTV but does not watch it at all, and therefore illustrates the limitations of the top-down change model.

However, both the crosstabs in Fig. 3a and the regression results in model 1 of Table 4 suggest that initial partisan allegiances were surprisingly weak predictors of post-crisis foreign policy preference change. The only notable finding was a sharp and statistically significant reduction in pro-Russian views among initial opposition supporters, which suggests that the initial partisan bias led them to interpret the April events differently than non-partisans or communist partisans. However, initial communist partisans did not exhibit the sort of public opinion movement we would have predicted based on their higher expected receptivity to communist political discourse.

A much clearer partisan picture emerges in Fig. 3b and model 2 of Table 4, which use post-crisis partisan allegiances to explain foreign policy preference changes, and show very clear signs of partisan polarization: thus opposition partisans turned more pro-Romanian and less pro-Russian, while communist partisans moved in the opposite direction. However, we need to be very cautious about interpreting these patterns causally, since it is possible that at least for some respondents the direction of causation is reversed, with pro-Romanian citizens shifting away from the PCRM and towards the opposition as a result of the greater salience of foreign policy issues and the greater clarity of party positions on foreign policy issues as a result of the crisis.

To put these findings in perspective, models 3-5 in Table 4 present the results of simple multinomial logistic regressions using contemporaneous partisanship to predict attitudes on the Romania vs. Russia question at three points in time: in March 2005 (following the previous parliamentary elections), and then in March and May 2009 (before and after the Twitter Revolution.)<sup>37</sup> The data for 2005 comes from a post-electoral survey we did using the same research firm and the same survey questions but it does not have a panel component with the 2009 surveys. The models do not include any demographic controls and instead focus only on the impact of partisan identifications with three main types of parties: the Communists, the mainstream opposition, and the pro-Romanian PPCD.<sup>38</sup>

Even though, as discussed earlier, the results in models 3-5 have to be interpreted cautiously when making causal claims, they nevertheless reveal some interesting insights into the partisan dynamics of foreign policy attitudes. For the purpose of the present analysis, the most

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<sup>37</sup> Since we are not using the panel design for this analysis, we have included the full samples for the two rounds of the 2009 survey.

<sup>38</sup> The composition of the mainstream opposition changed between 2005 and 2009 (since only the AMN was represented both in the BMD opposition alliance of 2005 and the among the three main opposition parties that contested the 2009 elections).

important comparison is between models 4 and 5. First, it is worth pointing out that judging by the (admittedly imperfect) standard of the pseudo-r-squared statistics for the two models, the overall explanatory power of partisan affiliations was 2.5 times greater in May than in March, which confirms the much closer alignment between partisanship and foreign policy views in the wake of the April crisis.<sup>39</sup>

Judging by the size of the regression coefficients in models 4 and 5 (as well as by the crosstabs in Fig. 3c), the most important changes occurred with respect to the much lower likelihood that an opposition partisan would support closer ties to Russia in the aftermath of the Twitter Revolution. The other significant change (but of a smaller magnitude) was the lower likelihood that a communist partisan would support closer ties to Romania. However, the coefficients for communists being pro-Russia and mainstream opposition partisans being pro-Romania did not change substantially. Taken together, these patterns suggest that even though partisans did not embrace their own party's foreign policy platform with more vigor after the April crisis, they were much less likely to subscribe to a foreign policy vision that was completely at odds with that of their party. The greater magnitude of the change for opposition partisans

#### *Explaining the stronger partisan nature of foreign policy views*

As we have seen above, the link between partisan ties and foreign policy views increased sharply from March to May. Moreover, the greater overall explanatory power of model 5 compared to model 3, combined with the much stronger anti-Russian bias of mainstream opposition partisans and the stronger anti-Romania bias of communist partisans, suggest that partisan polarization following the Twitter Revolution was very high by recent historical standards.<sup>40</sup> While this growing partisan polarization is not surprising given the dynamics of the April crisis, it is nevertheless worthwhile to discuss (at least briefly) three distinct – but not necessarily mutually exclusive – mechanisms for these findings.

One possibility is that Moldovans became significantly more radicalized and polarized in their foreign policy opinions in the aftermath of the crisis. While this may have been the case for

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<sup>39</sup> Note that this difference is not driven by the very large negative effect of PPCD partisanship in model 5B (which applied to a very small number of respondents).

<sup>40</sup> It would be interesting to compare this to the dynamics from the early 1990s, when foreign policy was also a very divisive issue but unfortunately we do not have comparable survey data from that period.

some demographic groups, our survey data does not seem to support this hypothesis. If radicalization was indeed occurring, then we would expect the number of neutral responses and “don’t knows” to drop significantly in the wake of the crisis. However, judging by the answers of our panel respondents to the most divisive foreign policy question about the relationship towards Russia and Romania, the number of respondents opting for “keeping distance from both” declined minimally (from 30.8% to 28.5%) while the don’t knows were virtually unchanged at 13%.

A second possibility is that the crisis was instrumental in revealing the “true” foreign policy positions of the main political parties, and therefore may have determined Moldovan citizens to shift their allegiances if their previously preferred party adopted a foreign policy stance that differed significantly from its pre-crisis rhetorical claims. While this question merits greater attention in future research, the possibility is supported by the fact that the proportion of respondents who thought that “the Communist government is focused on getting Moldova closer to Russia at the expense of closer ties to Western Europe” increased from 9.4% in March to 20.3% in May. While we do not have a comparable survey question about the opposition parties, the extent of updating was probably even greater for these parties, given their much shorter public track record. This expectation is in line with the larger drop in pro-Russian individuals among opposition partisans than for the corresponding drop in pro-Romanian communist partisans (see model 4 vs. 5).

The final possibility is that the salience of foreign policy issues increased significantly in the aftermath of the April crisis. From this perspective, even if individuals do not necessarily change their assessment of party foreign policy positions, they may now place more importance on foreign policy issues and may therefore suffer greater cognitive dissonance if they support a party whose foreign policy positions are at odds with their own. Of course, resolving such cognitive dissonance can occur in two very different ways – either by changing partisan ties to reflect strongly held foreign policy views or by changing one’s foreign policy views to follow the party line – but the direction of causation on this issue is beyond the scope of the present paper. However, we do have some tentative evidence to support the greater salience of foreign policy: while our surveys did not include a direct question about the salience of relations with Russia and Romania, respondents were asked to identify the most important reason in their decision for which party to vote, and one of the options was “European integration.”

Even though the European dimension played only a secondary role in the April events, among the panel respondents the proportion increased quite dramatically from 11.7% to 18.2% over the course of less than two months, which suggests that the overall increase in salience for foreign policy issues may have been considerably higher.

## **Conclusion**

This paper represents a first effort at analyzing the impact of foreign policy crises on citizen attitudes towards foreign policy issues and their relationship to partisan politics based on evidence from a panel survey of Moldovan citizens before and after the crisis triggered by the “Twitter Revolution.” We proposed two basic mechanisms through which these attitudinal changes can occur – top-down and bottom-up change – and then identified a number of more specific channels for each of the mechanisms, which we then tested using the Moldovan survey data.

Our preliminary findings suggest that while there is evidence in support of both mechanisms, bottom-up change indicators seem to have greater predictive power for two of the key dilemmas confronting Moldovan foreign policy: the country’s balance-of-power efforts between Russia and Romania, and the tension between the hopes for Western integration and nostalgia for the Soviet past (and its admittedly diminished successor, the CIS). We find that both personal experiences and social networks represent important channels that help individuals collect and process information and thereby to resist (at least in part) the top-down persuasion efforts of political elites. Furthermore, we show that in the aftermath of the crisis there is a much tighter link between individual foreign policy positions and partisan allegiances. While the exact causal nature of this relationship needs to be addressed more carefully by future research, we have identified two plausible mechanisms: a crisis-driven increase of foreign policy salience and the crisis’ role in revealing new information about the foreign policy positions of the main parties.

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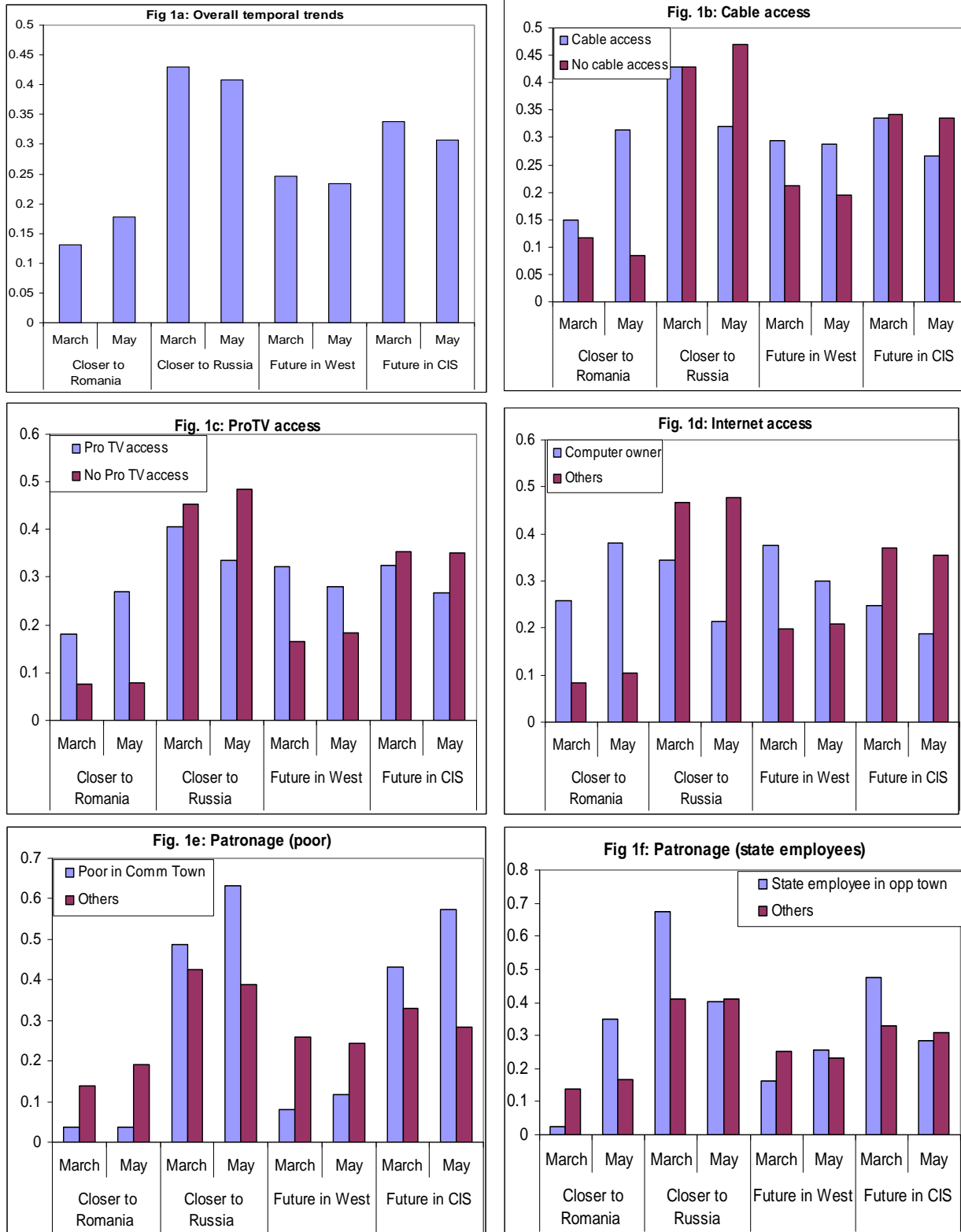
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**Figure 1: Top-down preference change**



**Figure 2: Bottom-up preference change**

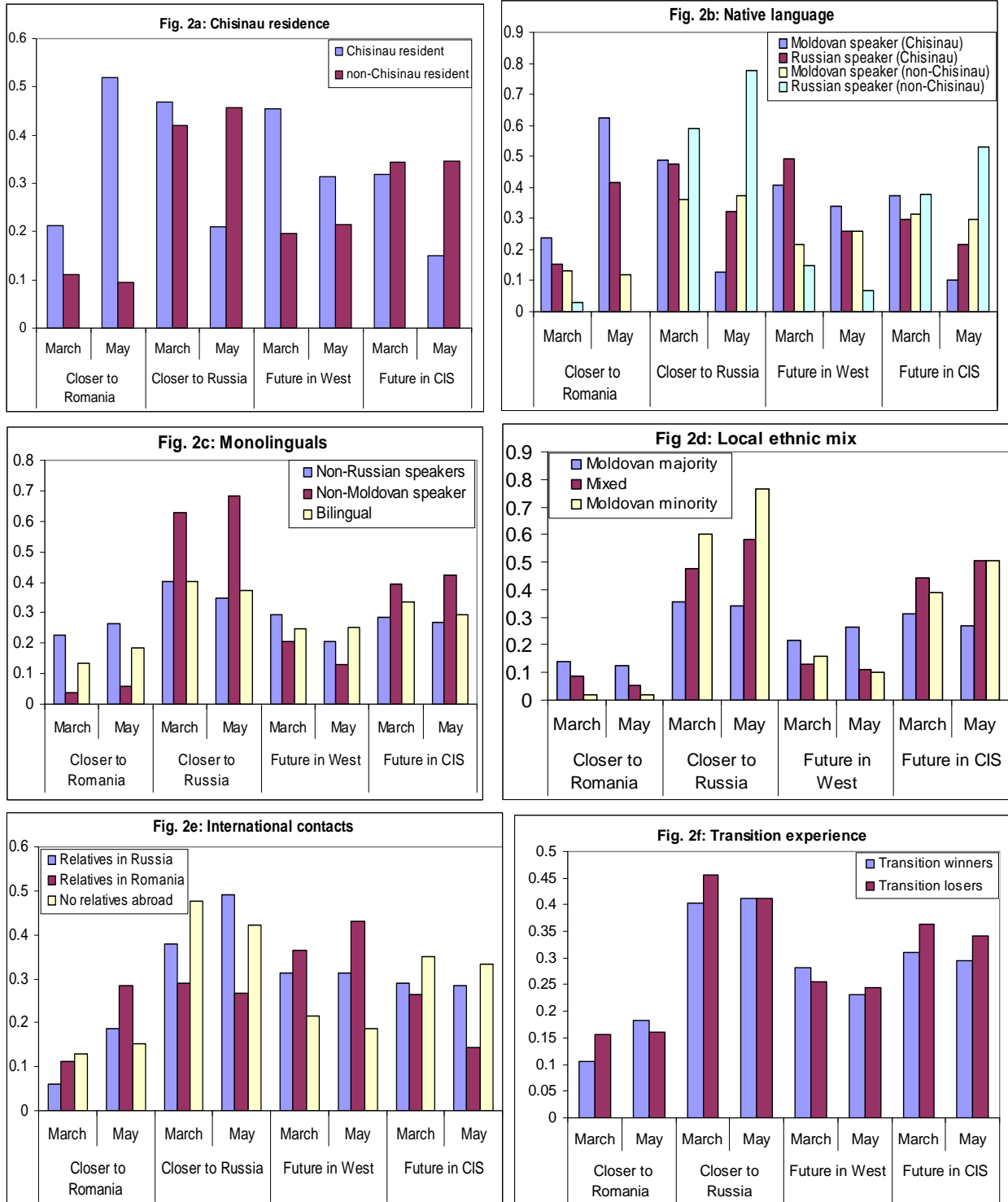


Fig. 3: Partisanship and foreign policy attitudes

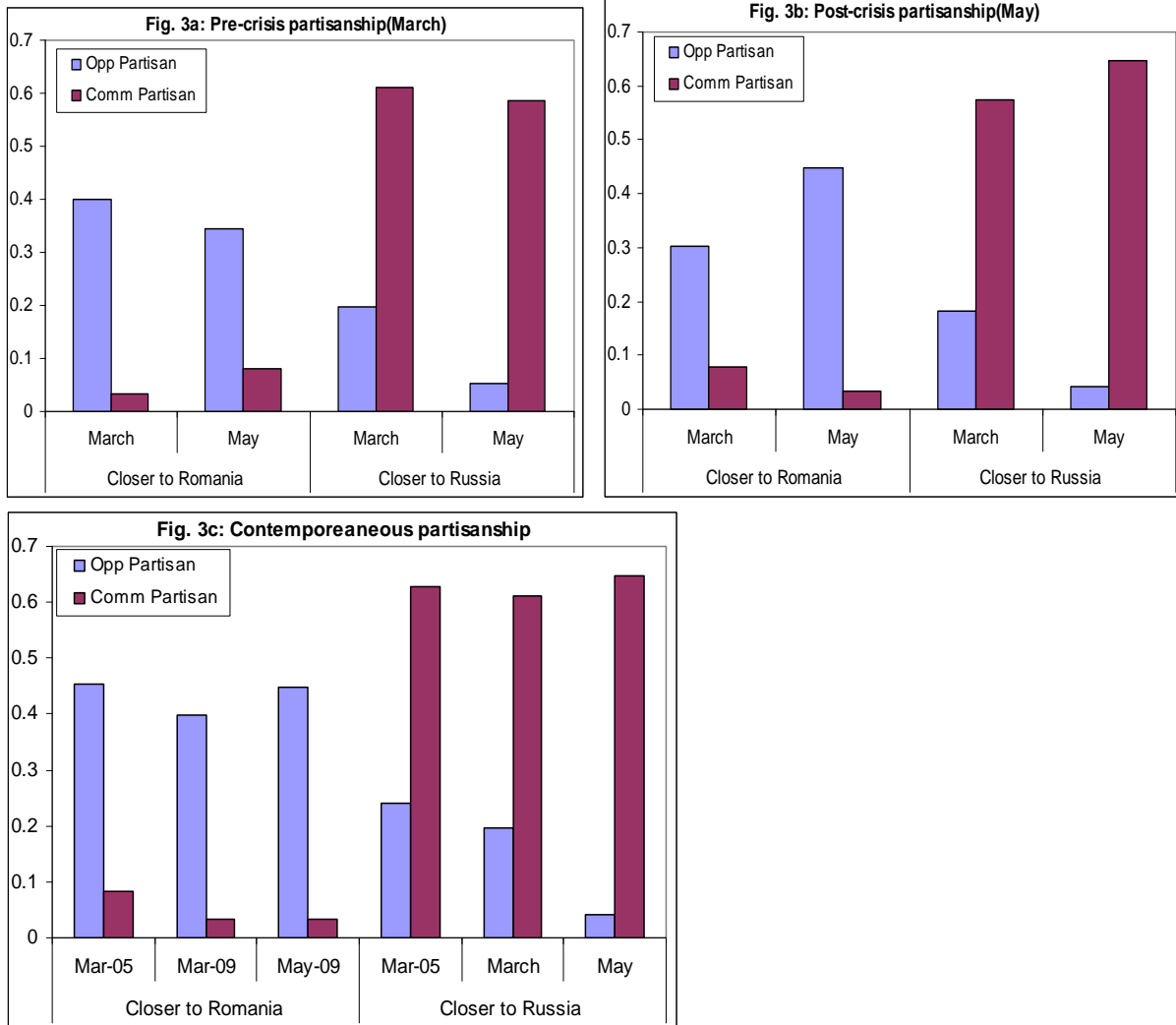


Table 1: Overview of main hypotheses

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Closer to Russia</b>	<b>Closer to Romania</b>	<b>CIS/Russia future</b>	<b>European future</b>
<b>Top-down change</b>				
Pro TV access	-	+	-	+
Cable access	-	+	-	+
Internet access	-	+	-	+
Locality w/ opp mayor	-	+	-	+
State employee in locality w/ opp mayor	-	+	-	+
State employee in locality w/o opp mayor	+	-	+	-
Locality w/ Comm mayor	+	-	+	-
Poor/unemployed in locality w/ Comm mayor	+	-	+	-
Poor/unemployed in locality w/o Comm mayor	-	+	-	+
<b>Bottom-up change</b>				
Communist partisan (t-1)	+	-	+	-
Opposition partisan (t-1)	-	+	-	+
Chisinau	-	+	-	+
Non-Russian speaker	-	+	-	+
Non-Moldovan speaker	+	-	+	-
Native Moldovan speaker	-	+	-	+
Native Russian speaker	+	-	+	-
Resident of Mold majority town	-	+	-	+
Resident of Mold minority town	+	-	+	-
Pro TV frequency	-	+	-	+
ORT frequency	+	-	+	-
Friends/relatives in Russia	+	-	+	-
Friends/relatives in Romania	-	+	-	+
Remittances from Romania	-	+	-	+
Remittances from Russia	+	-	+	-

Table 2 Top-down drivers of foreign policy attitude change

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	A: Closer Rom. ties	B: Closer Russ ties	A: Closer Rom. ties	B: Closer Russ ties	A: Ctry future West	B: Ctry future CIS	A: Ctry future West	B: Ctry future CIS
Closer Russia ties (t-1)	-.055 (.356)	1.276*** (.240)	-.158 (.364)	1.236*** (.238)				
Closer Romania ties (t-1)	1.398*** (.475)	-.042 (.414)	1.405*** (.473)	.009 (.407)				
Ctry future in CIS (t-1)					.288 (.321)	.803*** (.266)	.316 (.319)	.812*** (.263)
Ctry future in West (t-1)					1.180*** (.338)	-.227 (.370)	1.159*** (.342)	-.182 (.366)
Communist mayor	.442 (.487)	-.311 (.276)			.060 (.319)	-.161 (.300)		
Poor*Communist mayor	-1.277 (.976)	1.235** (.533)			1.040 (.790)	1.530*** (.564)		
Poor	1.120* (.572)	-.256 (.407)			-.998 (.635)	-.374 (.407)		
Opposition mayor			-.222 (.487)	-.349 (.272)			.062 (.348)	-.311 (.287)
State empl.* Opp. mayor			1.462* (.840)	.648 (.624)			-.869 (.726)	-.195 (.635)
Cable TV access	1.014** (.445)	.138 (.274)	1.089** (.450)	.112 (.277)	.204 (.328)	.109 (.289)	.221 (.328)	.109 (.285)
Computer owner	.011 (.477)	-.832** (.348)	-.255 (.479)	-.786** (.345)	-.549 (.389)	-.639* (.377)	-.451 (.386)	-.534 (.375)
ProTV access	-.176 (.443)	-.067 (.269)	-.203 (.442)	-.032 (.265)	.254 (.323)	.110 (.283)	.227 (.325)	.121 (.279)
Chisinau resident	2.529*** (.591)	-.305 (.449)	2.337*** (.584)	-.108 (.455)	-.364 (.464)	-.573 (.451)	-.368 (.455)	-.466 (.454)
Rural resident	.188 (.432)	-.238 (.235)	.120 (.438)	-.214 (.234)	-.000 (.292)	.257 (.257)	-.048 (.290)	.234 (.252)
HH goods index	-.024 (.315)	-.238 (.200)	.028 (.334)	-.196 (.199)	.391 (.248)	-.178 (.202)	.359 (.251)	-.163 (.201)
State employee	.832** (.395)	.159 (.321)	.013 (.670)	-.083 (.384)	.822** (.382)	.655* (.338)	1.235** (.481)	.735* (.435)
Private firm employee	1.036** (.444)	-.327 (.325)	1.044** (.434)	-.391 (.328)	.840** (.351)	.565 (.353)	.828** (.351)	.489 (.348)
Unemployed	.082 (.472)	-.790** (.316)	-.006 (.470)	-.730** (.312)	.269 (.378)	.375 (.328)	.280 (.371)	.383 (.323)
Student	-.343 (.755)	-1.128 (.730)	-.332 (.769)	-1.154 (.704)	1.077* (.625)	-.458 (.886)	1.035 (.640)	-.543 (.860)
Education	-.061 (.091)	.012 (.060)	-.079 (.094)	.009 (.060)	.075 (.076)	.070 (.064)	.076 (.076)	.062 (.065)
Observations	494	494	494	494	494	494	494	494
Pseudo r-squared	.226	.226	.218	.218	.122	.122	.113	.113

Logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<.01, \*\* p<.05, \* p<.1

Note: Also included in the regressions but not reported were controls for sex, age and age-squared.

Table 3: Bottom-up drivers of foreign policy attitude change

VARIABLES	(1) A: Closer Rom. ties	(2) B: Closer Russ ties	(3) A: Closer Rom. ties	(4) B: Closer Russ ties	(5) A Closer Rom ties	(6) B Closer Russ ties	(7) A: Ctry future West	(8) B: Ctry future CIS	(9) A: Ctry future West	(10) B: Ctry future CIS	(11) A: Ctry future West	(12) B: Ctry future CIS
Closer Russia ties (t-1)	-.117 (.384)	1.142*** (.250)	-.003 (.381)	1.263*** (.249)	.098 (.388)	1.15*** (.247)						
Closer Romania ties (t-1)	1.253*** (.445)	.002 (.436)	1.186** (.469)	.039 (.439)	1.145** (.446)	-.136 (.418)						
Ctry future in CIS (t-1)							.365 (.325)	.774** (.274)	.291 (.334)	.786*** (.270)	.490 (.339)	.780*** (.272)
Ctry future in West (t-1)							1.15** (.330)	-.313 (.358)	1.08*** (.335)	-.268 (.359)	1.16*** (.330)	-.311 (.362)
Bad post-comm experience			.302 (.220)	-.106 (.175)					.399** (.192)	-.024 (.177)		
Relatives/friends in Russia	.348 (.435)	.881*** (.250)	.379 (.458)	.713** (.283)			.106 (.288)	.114 (.260)	.345 (.337)	.317 (.300)		
Relatives/friends in Romania	.569 (.436)	-.408 (.353)	.514 (.512)	-.398 (.408)			.605* (.345)	-.443 (.397)	.386 (.417)	-.361 (.442)		
Relatives/friends in West	-.041 (.411)	-.314 (.273)	-.336 (.491)	-.348 (.339)			.383 (.302)	.175 (.303)	-.184 (.364)	.080 (.350)		
Remittances from Russia			.345 (.431)	.370 (.259)					-.250 (.289)	-.395 (.266)		
Remittances from Romania			-.110 (.507)	-.401 (.508)					.333 (.418)	-.336 (.649)		
Remittances from West			.222 (.378)	.050 (.336)					.702** (.296)	.014 (.360)		
Moldovan speaker	2.194** (.929)	.043 (.530)	1.803** (.810)	-1.09*** (.364)	1.700** (.779)	-1.01** (.369)	.769 (.655)	.124 (.533)	.960** (.476)	-.508 (.376)	.801* (.472)	-.435 (.377)
Russian speaker	1.426* (.790)	.743 (.514)	1.064 (.784)	.353 (.477)	1.247* (.757)	.468 (.475)	-.008 (.587)	.834* (.475)	.111 (.557)	.571 (.457)	.004 (.557)	.473 (.480)
Western lang speaker	.925** (.452)	.363 (.414)	1.018** (.475)	.443 (.428)	.929* (.476)	.515 (.428)	.390 (.404)	.414 (.403)	.385 (.423)	.316 (.419)	.708 (.442)	.587 (.437)
Russian-only speaker	-.344 (.824)	.119 (.477)					.006 (.746)	-.441 (.469)				
Moldovan-only speaker	-.098 (.641)	-.133 (.418)					-.584 (.560)	-.198 (.427)				
Local proportion of Mold speakers	-.382 (1.015)	-1.68*** (.536)					.396 (.740)	-1.30** (.571)				
Chisinau resident	2.518***	-1.068**	2.557***	-.983**	2.45***	-.929*	-.025	-.937**	-.288	-.922**	-.354	-.956*



	(.591)	(.447)	(.528)	(.457)	(.546)	(.477)	(.528)	(.458)	(.497)	(.470)	(.490)	(.488)
Rural resident	-.028	-.114	-.118	-.212	.108	-.183	-.144	.357	-.228	.234	.021	.207
	(.426)	(.245)	(.455)	(.244)	(.421)	(.241)	(.292)	(.259)	(.303)	(.257)	(.293)	(.256)
HH goods index	-.102	-.454**	-.066	-.461**	.007	-.491**	.404	-.288	.498*	-.235	.336	-.397**
	(.302)	(.192)	(.326)	(.201)	(.297)	(.195)	(.258)	(.208)	(.271)	(.208)	(.238)	(.200)
State employee	1.005**	-.080	.964**	-.087	.934*	-.014	1.05**	.412	1.02***	.513	.933**	.600*
	(.441)	(.323)	(.440)	(.331)	(.485)	(.325)	(.420)	(.363)	(.391)	(.368)	(.405)	(.352)
Private firm employee	1.235***	-.390	1.152**	-.532	1.35***	-.451	.685*	.550	.635*	.511	.878**	.516
	(.430)	(.347)	(.449)	(.345)	(.414)	(.336)	(.364)	(.339)	(.379)	(.341)	(.365)	(.342)
Unemployed	.305	-.665**	.200	-.778**	.211	-.697**	.345	.440	.358	.420	.512	.448
	(.476)	(.324)	(.457)	(.326)	(.504)	(.311)	(.393)	(.329)	(.403)	(.326)	(.386)	(.329)
Student	.344	-.873	.723	-.684	.353	-1.097*	1.29**	-.369	1.284**	-.346	1.434**	-.400
	(.832)	(.659)	(.884)	(.700)	(.817)	(.664)	(.653)	(.686)	(.638)	(.699)	(.636)	(.732)
Education	-.082	.019	-.082	.012	-.096	-.010	.033	.073	.043	.067	.018	-.005
	(.095)	(.066)	(.098)	(.066)	(.102)	(.066)	(.081)	(.071)	(.081)	(.068)	(.079)	(.074)
Political interest					-.127	-.171					.019	.024
					(.168)	(.115)					(.146)	(.126)
Political knowledge					.443	.186					.414*	.163
					(.293)	(.200)					(.235)	(.213)
ProTV access					-1.142*	-.003					-.791	.489
					(.686)	(.473)					(.564)	(.453)
ORT frequency					-.198**	.076					-.057	.026
					(.071)	(.051)					(.056)	(.048)
ProTV frequency					.209**	-.052					.110	-.129
					(.103)	(.083)					(.089)	(.085)
Observations	501	501	497	497	499	499	494	494	490	490	499	499
Pseudo r-squared	.269	.269	.272	.272	.266	.266	.157	.157	.162	.162	.140	.140

Logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<.01, \*\* p<.05, \* p<.1

Note: Also included in the regressions but not reported were controls for sex, age and age-squared.

**Table 4: Partisanship and foreign policy preferences**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	May 2009		May 2009		March 2005		March 2009		May 2009	
	A.Closer Romania	B.Closer Russia	A.Closer Romania	B.Closer Russia	A.Closer Romania	B.Closer Russia	A.Closer Romania	B.Close r Russia	A.Closer Romania	B.Closer Russia
Closer Russia ties (t-1)	-.146 (.370)	1.008*** (.247)	-.077 (.403)	.906*** (.249)						
Closer Romania ties (t-1)	1.383*** (.451)	.331 (.479)	1.077** (.432)	-.138 (.470)						
Communist partisan (t-1)	.029 (.459)	.263 (.262)								
Main opposition partisan (t-1)	-.395 (.424)	-2.192*** (.582)								
Communist partisan (t)			-.965 (.641)	.760*** (.247)	-.215 (.222)	.839*** (.133)	-.625* (.334)	.736*** (.161)	-1.35*** (.406)	.889*** (.159)
Main opposition partisan (t)			.912** (.398)	-1.826*** (.605)	1.417*** (.219)	-.187 (.233)	1.054*** (.243)	-.465* (.242)	1.110*** (.245)	-1.655*** (.336)
PPCD partisan (t)					1.988*** (.296)	-1.104** (.479)	1.192* (.699)	-1.544 (1.124)	1.131 (.836)	-31.9*** (.587)
Demog controls	Yes		Yes		No		No		No	
Observations	501		501		1557		1028		937	
Pseudo r-squared	.268		.300		.0751		.0486		.114	

Logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<.01, \*\* p<.05, \* p<.1

Note: Also included in the models 1&2 but not reported, were controls for native language, urban/rural residence, employment status, a household goods ownership index, employment type, education, sex, age and age-squared.