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The Effect of Labor Migration on the Diffusion of Democracy: Evidence from a Former Soviet Republic[†]

By TOMAN BARSBAI, HILLEL RAPOPORT, ANDREAS STEINMAYR,
AND CHRISTOPH TREBESCH*

Migration contributes to the circulation of goods, knowledge, and ideas. Using community and individual-level data from Moldova, we show that the emigration wave that started in the aftermath of the Russian crisis of 1998 strongly affected electoral outcomes and political preferences in Moldova during the following decade, eventually contributing to the fall of the last Communist government in Europe. Our results are suggestive of information transmission and cultural diffusion channels. Identification relies on the quasi-experimental context and on the differential effects arising from the fact that emigration was directed both to more democratic Western Europe and to less democratic Russia. (JEL D72, D83, F22, P23, P26)

When people cross borders, they are exposed to new knowledge, ideas, and institutions. International migration can therefore change individuals' attitudes and beliefs, including political preferences. Indeed, sociologists and other social scientists have shown that living abroad can be a transformative experience for the migrant.¹ Less attention has been paid, however, to how these experiences

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¹See Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner (1991); Berry (1997); Levitt (1998); Careja and Emmenegger (2012); and Cameron et al. (2015). Relatedly, Clingsmith et al. (2009) study the social consequences of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. They find that this relatively short migration experience leads to a persistent change towards more religious tolerance in Pakistani pilgrims' attitudes, beliefs, and practices at home. Value transfers as a result of international migration have also been documented with regard to fertility behavior (Fargues 2007; Beine, Docquier, and Schiff 2013; and Daudin, Franck, and Rapoport 2016).

spill over to migrants' home communities and affect the political behavior of those who stay behind.²

This paper investigates the effect of labor migration on democratization and voting behavior of those who remain in the country of origin. It builds on the idea that migrants absorb new political norms, practices, and information while abroad, which they then transmit to their home communities. Such political spillovers have the potential to change political preferences and strengthen the constituency for political change, especially in regions where information acquisition is difficult or costly. Hence, in a globalized world with cheap communication and travel, emigration may no longer imply that migrants lose their option to "voice" at home (Hirschman 1970).³ Instead, international labor migration can be an important catalyst of democratization in migrant-sending countries, especially if migration is directed towards advanced democracies.

To analyze the effects of emigration on political outcomes and attitudes at home, we take advantage of the quasi-experimental setting that was generated by the collapse of the Soviet Union. We combine census, election, and survey data to test whether communities with emigration to democratic countries experience an increase in political support for more democratic and liberal parties. We find that migration can trigger significant changes in the voting behavior and political attitudes of relatives, friends, and other members of migrants' home-based networks.

This paper adds a new perspective to the literature on institutions and culture, which finds that institutions have profound effects on people's political preferences (Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln 2007, Aghion et al. 2010, and Fuchs-Schündeln and Schündeln 2015); and the relationship between institutions and culture is slow moving (Spolaore and Wacziarg 2013, Alesina and Giuliano 2015). Our contribution is to show that even indirect exposure to institutions, social norms, and information—through contacts with migrants—can shape political preferences and institutional outcomes in the country of origin.

Our analysis focuses on the case of Moldova, a former Soviet Republic that has seen a remarkable transition towards democracy over the past 20 years. During communism and the years after independence in 1991, the country was largely closed off from Western influence and ruled by parties that were opposed to Western values and institutions. In 2001, the Communist Party returned to power, drawing Moldova closer to Russia. Yet, after one decade of large-scale emigration to the West, a coalition of pro-democracy and pro-European parties took over

²In economics there is a large related literature showing that migration flows and diaspora networks promote the exchange of goods, capital, and ideas. Gould (1994), Rauch and Trindade (2002), and Parsons and Vézina (2014) show that migrant networks reduce information asymmetries and foster bilateral trade. Kerr (2008) illustrates how migrant networks facilitate the diffusion of innovation. Burchardi and Hassan (2013) show that social ties to East German households facilitated regional economic development in West Germany after Germany's reunification. Hornung (2014) studies the human capital externalities from Huguenot immigration to Prussia, while Moser, Voena, and Waldinger (2014) study the externalities of the mass departure of Jewish scientists from Nazi Germany to the United States.

³Hirschman illustrated his theory using the example of East Germany. His conclusion was that the emigration waves of the 1950s and 1960s had weakened the reformist voices, eventually strengthening the repressive communist regime (see also Hirschman 1993). Similar analyses have been proposed with regard to autocratic regimes such as Cuba, or for countries such as Mexico, where emigration served as a safety valve, relaxing domestic pressure to reform, and thus, delaying social and political change. See Hansen (1988) on Mexico and Colomer (2000) on Cuba.

in 2009. The “Alliance for European Integration” changed the political path of Moldova, making the country a poster child for economic and political reforms in the region, with rapid improvements in civil liberties and press freedom. This political development culminated in the ratification of an association agreement with the European Union in 2014.⁴ We posit that exposure to Western political values and practices through emigration played a critical role in bringing about political and democratic change in Moldova.

Moldova shares many traits with other developing countries, but provides a unique laboratory to identify the political spillover effects of labor migration. First and foremost—and unlike most migrant-sending countries—Moldova has two main migration corridors to destinations with very different democratic traditions and political ideologies. About 40 percent of emigrants have left for democratic countries in Western Europe, while 60 percent have gone to work in less democratic countries in the East, particularly Russia. This divergence allows us to identify destination-specific political spillovers, as migrants to Western Europe arguably transmit different information and norms than migrants to Russia.

Our identification strategy relies on the quasi-experimental setting under which the episode of emigration we analyze took place. There was hardly any emigration out of Moldova before the Russian financial crisis of 1998. Within just a few years after the crisis, more than 300,000 Moldovans left the country. We document that Moldova is a relatively homogeneous country and that the direction of migration flows (west versus east) varies greatly across observationally similar communities. No systematic spatial pattern exists once we control for premigration community characteristics, particularly for factors driving the destination choice of the first migrants who departed at the end of the 1990s.

Our main challenge is that migrants’ destination choices could have been driven by political preferences, or by a confounder that drives both migration and voting patterns. Political self-selection at the individual level (Hirschman’s “exit effect”) is unlikely to explain a negative relationship between westward migration and the share of votes for the Communist Party (our main dependent variable). If anything, the departure of liberal-minded voters to the West should increase, not decrease, the share of votes for the Communist Party in a given community. Political self-selection at the community level (i.e., communities that have characteristics that make them both more likely to send migrants to Western Europe and to vote against the Communist Party) is a more serious issue.

To address this problem, we control for electoral preferences before migration started and effectively analyze the change in Communist votes between 1998 and 2009. We can therefore rule out any time-constant confounder including time-constant electoral preferences. In this sense, our strategy is akin to a differences-in-differences approach, since we explain changes in Communist votes by changes in the prevalence of migration to the West and East. We also show that,

⁴During a speech in the German Bundestag in November 2013, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, “In spite of some domestic turmoil, the Republic of Moldova has perhaps demonstrated the greatest political will of all Eastern partners to adopt and implement reforms.”

conditional on community characteristics, premigration electoral preferences cannot explain the direction of migration flows to the West or East.

To deal with time-varying confounders, we adopt a stepwise identification strategy. First, we control for a wide range of premigration community characteristics, in particular for the drivers of early emigration to the West and East as well as for local economic shocks as measured by satellite data on nighttime light intensity. Second, to address spatially concentrated confounders, we show that our point estimates are fully robust to including fixed effects for increasingly smaller geographical areas. This strategy helps to rule out a wide range of alternative explanations such as economic and political shocks, social networks, or historical ties through trade or culture, as long as these would affect neighboring communities in a similar way. Third, we show that communities with westward and eastward migration followed the same trends in electoral preferences around the time and a few years after migration had started. The effects only become pronounced in 2009, which coincides with a steep increase in the volume of international phone calls to Moldova after 2005. Fourth, we show that other community characteristics do not have a similar trend in the relationship with Communist votes as migration.

We find a large and robust effect of migration patterns on electoral preferences and outcomes. A 1 percentage point increase in the community prevalence of westward migration (measured using data from the 2004 population census) reduces the Communist vote share in the elections of 2009 by about 0.6 percentage points. This result is remarkable as it suggests that the exit effect (the departure of liberal-minded voters) is more than offset by political spillovers from abroad. Our counterfactual simulations suggest that westward migration significantly contributed to putting an end to the Communists' rule in the elections of 2009.

We also provide suggestive evidence that the effect of emigration works through information transmission and cultural diffusion channels. The effect of westward migration is driven by emigration to Western countries with the highest democratic standards, not emigration to Western countries with less than perfect democracies such as Italy or Romania. This is in spite of the fact that across Western destinations Moldovan migrants are very homogeneous in terms of education, age, occupations, and the amount of monetary remittances sent. Therefore, differences in the selectivity of migrants with regard to their socioeconomic characteristics cannot explain our differential effects across Western destinations.

In addition, we complement our community-level analysis with an individual-level analysis using data from two sources: a political opinion survey with direct information on individual preferences on sociopolitical issues, and an exit poll survey conducted during the elections of 2010, which included a migration module that we commissioned for this study. The results from the former show that the observed change in electoral outcomes is accompanied by a change in political preferences on other dimensions. The results from the latter show evidence of both intra-household and inter-household spillovers of political preferences. This evidence further supports our interpretation in terms of information transmission and cultural diffusion channels.

The paper relates to a small body of work on the link between emigration and politics. One strand of the literature uses cross-country comparisons and finds that

emigration to more democratic countries promotes democracy and improves institutional quality at home (Spilimbergo 2009, Docquier et al. 2016). These studies, however, cannot disentangle the role of various potential channels through which emigration may affect home country institutions. Another strand of the literature uses micro data, but has difficulty properly addressing endogeneity. These studies focus on countries with one single destination or countries with long traditions of emigration (see Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010 and Pfütze 2012 on Mexico; Batista and Vicente 2011 on Cape Verde; and Chauvet and Mercier 2014 on Mali), which makes it impossible to control for premigration political conditions and isolate the transfer of political information and norms from other migration-related effects.

I. Moldova as an Ideal Case Study

A. Political Background

Moldova is a formal parliamentary democracy. The country gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and has been politically stable apart from a four-month war on the breakaway region of Transnistria in 1992.⁵ Between independence and 2013, the country saw seven parliamentary elections: 1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2009 (April and July), and 2010.

Shortly after independence, the Communist Party was banned. Nevertheless, state-oriented parties, in particular the Socialist Party and the Agrarian Party, firmly dominated politics in the mid-1990s. The Communist Party was allowed to reenter the political stage at the end of the 1990s. After the economic hardship that followed the Russian financial crisis of 1998, the Communists won a landslide victory in the snap elections of 2001 by promising a strong hand and Soviet-era living standards. In the years that followed, Moldova's Freedom House scores worsened, the judiciary lost parts of its independence, and the freedom of the press gradually eroded (Quinlan 2004). Despite some reforms and the adoption of a new, more EU-friendly foreign policy agenda in the mid-2000s, the Communist Party remained a largely nationalist and state-centered formation, nostalgic of Soviet times. The elections of 2009 and 2010 marked a watershed in Moldova's political history. In April 2009, the Communist Party failed to win the three-fifths parliamentary majority necessary to elect the country's president. Following allegations of vote fraud, antigovernment protestors took to the streets, looted the parliament, and raised flags of the European Union on several government buildings. Without a presidential majority in parliament, new elections were held in July 2009 that saw the victory of the "Alliance for European Integration," a liberal four-party coalition. Because the Alliance also lacked a presidential majority, another election was held in November 2010, resulting in further losses for the Communist Party.

In the years that followed, the Alliance has consolidated its power, elected a president, and started to implement economic and political reforms. A recent progress report by the European Commission (2012) highlights that Moldova has improved

⁵Transnistria is a small strip of land to the east of the Dniester River, which is now effectively a Russian protectorate. It is excluded from our empirical analysis.

in many areas, including institutional quality, freedom of the press, and investment climate.⁶ The country also topped the list of reformers in the World Bank's "Doing Business" Report 2012, and most recently, in June 2014, signed a far-reaching association agreement with the European Union. In line with political scientists (Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu 2009, Marandici 2010, and Crowther 2011), we therefore interpret voting against the Communist Party (i.e., for a liberal opposition party) as voting for political and democratic change. That said, it should be noted that by no means are all members of the "Alliance for European Integration" dedicated reformers and genuinely embrace democratic values. Despite the recent improvements in institutional quality, corruption remains widespread and Moldova still has a long way to go before becoming a full democracy.

As we detail below, two factors make Moldova a particularly well-suited case study from our perspective. First, large-scale migration started only after 1998, and migrants leave for two sets of destinations with very different democratic traditions and political ideologies. We take advantage of this pattern to identify destination-specific effects of emigration. Second, Moldovans had very limited access to information from the West before emigration took place, and continued to have restricted access to Western media until the late 2000s. This setting makes informational spillovers from abroad an important potential channel for the observed changes in the preferences of the Moldovan electorate.

B. The Russian Crisis of 1998 as a Natural Experiment

Moldova's emigration took off only after 1998, when the country was severely and unexpectedly hit by the Russian financial crisis.⁷ As a result of the crisis, Moldova's currency depreciated sharply, agricultural exports froze, and output fell by 32.5 percent year-on-year (Radziwiłł, Scerbatchi, and Zaman 1999). All parts of the population were adversely affected, and Moldovans started to emigrate in large numbers. Indeed, the Russian financial crisis hit Moldova more severely than Russia itself. Russia started with a much higher gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and recovered quickly, with strong economic growth in 1999 and the years thereafter. Moldova's economy, however, was still shrinking in 1999 and grew only modestly in 2000. As a result, working abroad, including in Russia, became attractive for many Moldovans.

The shift from low (virtually zero) migration prevalence to high migration prevalence is apparent from Figure 1, which is based on data from the Moldovan Labor Force Survey available from 1999 onward. Immigration figures from destination

⁶A 2011 Freedom House report stated that "Moldova's civil liberties rating improved from 4 to 3 due to a more balanced and diverse media environment, a reduction in government hostility toward civil society groups, and a lack of interference with political gatherings." (<http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/moldova>). Moldova's press freedom score, as reported by Reporters Without Borders, also increased—from 22 in 2008, ranked 98 worldwide, to 16 in 2011, ranked 53 worldwide. This gives Moldova the best position among all post-Soviet states outside of the European Union (http://en.rsf.org/spip.php?page=classement&id_rubrique=1043).

⁷It should be noted, however, that large parts of Moldova's Jewish community emigrated to Israel, the United States, and Germany directly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Jewish migrants left permanently with their families and did not maintain strong ties with Moldova. This small wave of emigration, therefore, differs substantially from the subsequent waves of labor migration that started in the late 1990s (Moșneaga and Corbu-Drumea 2006).

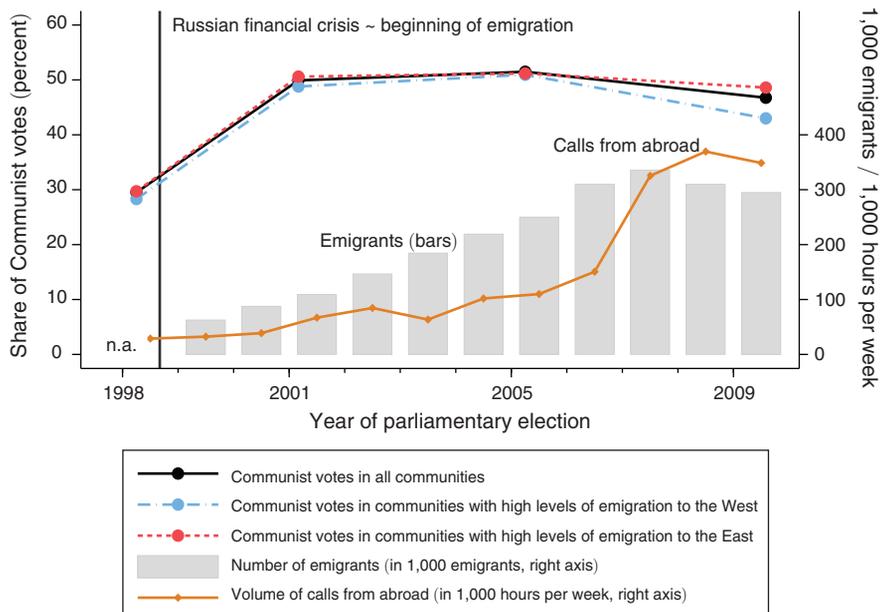


FIGURE 1. COMMUNIST VOTES, NUMBER OF EMIGRANTS IN STOCKS, AND VOLUME OF CALLS FROM ABROAD TO MOLDOVA, 1998–2009

Notes: The black line shows the unweighted average share of Communist votes across all communities. The solid and dashed gray lines show how communities with high levels of emigration to the West and communities with high levels of emigration to the East deviate from the overall trend. We plot residual shares of Communist votes controlling for the same set of premigration community-level variables as our baseline specification (see column 3 of Table A4 in the online Appendix) apart from the 1998 election results. Communities with high levels of emigration to the West (East) are defined as having an above median prevalence of westward (eastward) migration and above 50 percent share of westward (eastward) migrants among all migrants. Bars show the overall number of emigrants in stocks (in thousands). Data come from yearly waves of the Moldovan Labor Force Survey. Pre-2006 numbers of emigrants are adjusted to account for a change in the sampling method of the Moldovan Labor Force Survey. Data on emigration from Moldova before 1999 are not available. The first wave of the Moldovan Labor Force Survey was conducted in 1999, just after the unexpected Russian financial crisis hit Moldova in late 1998 and triggered the first big wave of emigration. Information on destination countries is not available in pre-2006 waves. The same trend in the number of migrants is observable using data on Moldovan immigrants from major destination countries. In 1998, for example, only 15 Moldovan immigrants were registered in Italy. This number increased to 40,000 by 2004. A similar explosive growth in Moldovan immigration occurred in other popular destination countries such as Greece, Portugal, and Spain (see footnote 8 for sources and more details). The line segmented with diamonds shows the volume of international calls to Moldova (in 1,000 hours per week) using the International Traffic Database compiled by Telegeography.

countries confirm that Moldova had very little out-migration throughout the 1990s. As of 1998, for example, only 15 Moldovan immigrants were registered in Italy, but this number increased to 40,000 by 2004. A similar explosive growth in Moldovan immigration occurred in other popular destination countries such as Greece, Portugal, and Spain.⁸ By 2009, more than 300,000 Moldovans had left the country on a temporary

⁸ As of 1998, the number of Moldovan residents in Portugal, Greece, and Spain was virtually zero (given as 0, 944, and 96, respectively), but increased drastically afterwards. Data for Italy is from the Ministero Dell'Interno, for Portugal from the Instituto Nacional de Estatistica, for Greece from the Hellenic Statistical Authority, and for Spain from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For Russia, no statistics on Moldovan immigration are available.

or permanent basis, out of a population of 3.6 million (Luecke, Mahmoud, and Steinmayr 2009).⁹

Whether migrants from a given community leave for the West or the East largely depends on the destination choice made by the first migrants from that community. This is because migrant networks induce a high degree of path dependency in migration flows by providing information on jobs abroad and lowering the costs of migration for subsequent migrants. As a result, migrants from a specific origin tend to cluster at specific destinations (Munshi 2003, McKenzie and Rapoport 2010). This observation also holds for Moldova, where local migrant networks are a main driver of individual migration decisions (Görlich and Trebesch 2008).

Two factors primarily influenced the destination choice of the first migrants. The first factor was access to ethnic networks (Krause 2000, Moşneaga 2009). Russian and Gagauz minorities in a community facilitated the departure to Russia and Turkey, while ethnic Moldovans could draw on Romanian ancestry and successfully apply for a Romanian passport, which considerably eased departure toward Western Europe. The second factor was the web of personal contacts that resulted from trading across the Moldovan-Romanian border (Sandu et al. 2006). The Romanian border had been closed during Soviet times and its opening in the early 1990s offered ample arbitrage opportunities. The resulting “shuttle trade” flourished and gave Moldovan merchants access to a growing network of Romanian migrants who were working in Western Europe (Michalon 2009, Arambaşa 2009). Online Appendix 1 shows supporting evidence and analyzes the determinants of migration patterns in detail.

For identification, we exploit the fact that migration patterns vary greatly across observationally similar and neighboring communities. There is little variation in economic activity across communities and most areas focus on agricultural production according to data from the Moldovan Ministry of Economy and Trade. The main reason for this similarity is that Moldova is small (about the size of Maryland) and was planned to be a rural economy with no industrial capacity during Soviet times. Moldova’s only industrial activities are located in the breakaway region of Transnistria, which is not included in our sample.

Figures 2 and 3 show the distribution of overall migration prevalence and the share of westward migrants among all migrants. While there is some spatial clustering of observed migration patterns (Figure 2), no systematic spatial pattern exists for the residual variation that is left after controlling for observable premigration community characteristics (which are described in Section IIIA), in particular, the factors that drove the destination choice of the first migrants (Figure 3). This finding is consistent with the idea that, conditional on observables, migrant networks introduce a considerable quasi-experimental component in the direction of migration flows. Migrant networks can cause small differences in premigration community characteristics, unrelated to levels or trends in electoral preferences, to bring about large differences in migration patterns.

⁹In comparison, internal migration is much less widespread. According to the 2004 population census, only 6 percent of the population changed their residence within Moldova in the five-year period prior to the census. The vast majority of them moved to Chisinau or Balti, the only two major cities in the country.

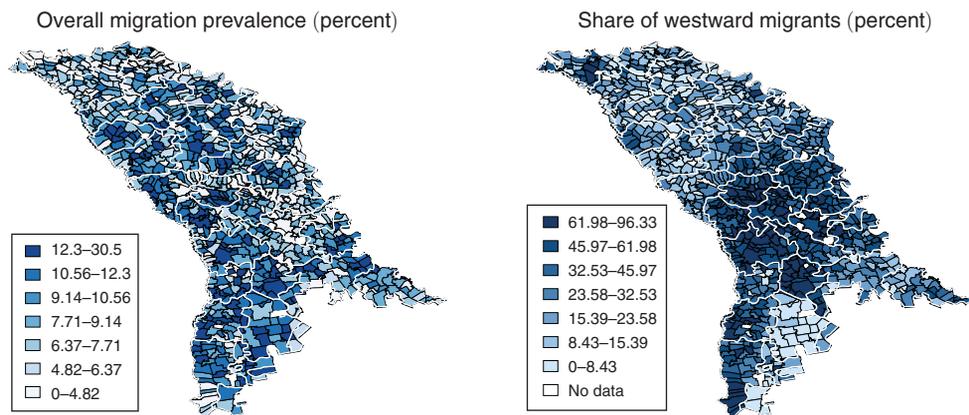


FIGURE 2. OBSERVED SPATIAL PATTERNS OF EMIGRATION FROM MOLDOVA: OVERALL MIGRATION PREVALENCE AND SHARE OF WESTWARD MIGRATION ACROSS COMMUNITIES

Notes: This figure shows a map of the observed overall migration prevalence (left panel) and the share of westward migrants (right panel) across Moldovan communities, based on the 2004 population census. Overall migration prevalence is the share of migrants as a percent of the total population. The share of westward migrants is measured as a percent of all migrants in the community. District borders are drawn in white.

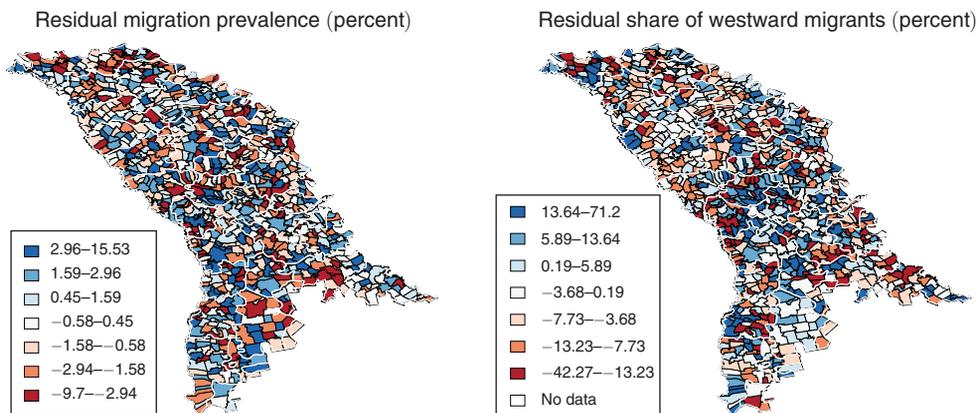


FIGURE 3. RESIDUAL VARIATION IN SPATIAL PATTERNS OF EMIGRATION FROM MOLDOVA

Notes: This figure shows a map of the residual variation in emigration patterns across Moldovan communities after controlling for the full set of community-level variables of our baseline specification (column 3 of Table A4 in the online Appendix). The left panel shows residuals from a regression using overall migration prevalence as the dependent variable (column 1 of Table A3 in the online Appendix). The right panel shows residuals from a regression using the share of westward migrants as the dependent variable (column 2 of Table A3 in the online Appendix).

C. Emigration and Access to Information from the West

Recent research has documented the importance of media access for electoral outcomes. DellaVigna and Gentzkow (2010) conclude that access to a diverse set of news media can have a substantial effect on election results. Enikolopov, Petrova, and Zhuravskaya (2011) find that access to an independent TV channel in Russia

reduced the vote share of Vladimir Putin's ruling party by 8 percentage points. In the context of Moldova, we find that information transmitted through migrants can also have large effects on electoral preferences and be an additional vector of democratization.

During Soviet times, Moldova was virtually cut off from the rest of the world and had little exchange through migration, travel, media, or books. Moldovans were exposed to decades of anticapitalist, anti-Western propaganda. Even after 1991, they had only limited access to free media, in particular with regard to television, by far the most important source of information. Internet, radio, and print media played only a subordinate role (Gotisan et al. 2008).¹⁰ Moldovans received no terrestrial signal of Western TV and the three main television channels (Moldova 1, NIT, and Prime TV) were state-controlled throughout the 2000s. These channels did not provide independent coverage and focused on countries of the former Soviet Union, while the few small opposition channels were subject to continuous intimidation by the government (Independent Journalism Center 2009). Until today, "Vremya," a direct successor of the main news show of the USSR, remains the most popular news show in Moldova (Gotisan et al. 2012). As a result, large parts of Moldova's population have not had access to unbiased information (IDIS Viitorul 2008). In 2005, only 15 percent of respondents agreed to the statement that "media are free [...] with no government censorship" according to the Moldovan Political Barometer.

At the same time, all available evidence suggests that information transmitted by migrants became increasingly important during the period of this study. Based on a nationally representative sample of 4,000 households, Lueck, Mahmoud, and Steinmayr (2009) report that more than 90 percent of emigrants in 2008 communicated with their families at least once a month, and more than two-thirds of them even at least once a week. Virtually all migrants (97 percent) used the phone, while email or internet telephony played no important role until after 2010. The patterns of communication are very similar for migrants to the West and migrants to the East. Figure 1 shows that the volume of calls from abroad to Moldova steadily increased with the number of migrants until 2006, but skyrocketed afterwards.¹¹

¹⁰Seventy-one percent of respondents in the 2005 Moldovan Political Barometer stated that television was their main source of political information; 50 percent also stated that television was the source they trusted most (Open Source Center 2008). Internet usage has been negligible until very recently. In 2008, only 3 percent of the population had access to the internet, most of them living in the capital Chisinau (Gotisan et al. 2012).

¹¹From 2006 to 2007 alone, the volume of international calls more than doubled. The steep increase is likely due to the large reduction in international calling rates and the quick spread of mobile telephony. According to World Bank data in the WDI and the ICT Handbook, the increase in the volume of international calls between 2004 and 2008 coincides with an increase in mobile cellular subscriptions from 21 per 100 people in 2004 to 67 in 2008 and a more than 50 percent drop in international calling rates. The growth in cross-border telephony is particularly large for main migrant destination countries such as Italy. According to the few bilateral data available from Telegeography, calls from Italy to Moldova increased from close to 0 in 1998 to 150 million minutes in 2009. This is equivalent to almost 3,000 minutes per migrant in Italy per year, or around 60 minutes per week on average. In addition, migrants visit their families in Moldova on average twice a year (Luecke, Mahmoud, and Steinmayr 2009).

II. Descriptive Evidence

A. Data and Stylized Facts

Our main outcome variable is the share of Communist votes in the parliamentary election of July 2009, which marked the fall of the Communist government. The main unit of analysis is the community, and we consider all Moldovan communities except those in the breakaway region of Transnistria for which no data is available. Communities are typically small and rural, with an average population size of 3,793 inhabitants (median of 2,126 inhabitants). Only 45 out of the 848 communities in our sample are classified as urban. Vote shares at the community level are based on official election results as documented by the Central Election Commission.¹² We only consider votes cast by the resident population in Moldova and exclude the few out-of-country votes cast by migrants in Moldovan embassies and consulates abroad.¹³ The electorate votes for political parties, not individual candidates. Parties publish the list with the names of their 103 candidates in advance (the parliament has 101 seats, two candidates are in reserve). The candidates are the same across communities and a member of parliament does not represent a specific territorial constituency.

The main explanatory variables are the prevalence of emigration to the West and East, which are measured as the share of westward and eastward migrants in the total population of each community (in percent). Information on emigration comes from the 2004 population census, which is one of the very few censuses worldwide with detailed information on individuals who are temporarily or permanently absent and reside abroad. Absent persons include individuals who may have lived abroad for several years as long as they had maintained family relations with the household of origin. As it was highly unusual for entire families to emigrate in the early 2000s (Luecke, Mahmoud, and Steinmayr 2009), remaining household members could provide information on migrants abroad. The census should therefore give an accurate picture of migration patterns up to 2004.

We classify destination countries as West or East based on their democracy levels. Countries with a Polity IV score higher than Moldova's are defined as Western countries. Countries with a score lower or equal to Moldova's are defined as Eastern countries (see online Appendix 3 for different definitions of the West and East). This classification closely reflects destination countries' geographical position relative to Moldova, hence the terms West and East. The most important destinations in the West are Italy (mostly Northern Italy, see Lücke, Barsbai, and Pinger 2007) and other Roman-language countries; the most important destination in the East is by far Russia (see Table A1 in the online Appendix).

¹²There have been no reports of grave irregularities during Moldovan parliamentary elections (Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) 1998, 2001, 2005, 2009), but we cannot fully dismiss the possibility of minor vote fraud. However, for vote fraud to explain our findings, the Communists should have been less able to manipulate votes in communities with westward migration and more able to do so in communities with eastward migration. This assertion would only strengthen the case that emigration affects political preferences.

¹³In the parliamentary election of July 2009, only 17,544 migrants participated in out-of-country voting. As out-of-country votes are listed separately, we can exclude them for our analysis.

Figure 4 plots migration prevalence in 2004 against the share of Communist votes in the parliamentary election of July 2009. There is no systematic relationship between overall migration and Communist votes at the community level (panel A). But the picture looks different once we distinguish between emigration to the West and East. The share of Communist votes decreases with the level of westward migration (panel B) and increases with the level of eastward migration (panel C).

Figure 1 shows the evolution of Communist votes for different types of communities over the parliamentary elections of 1998, 2001, 2005, and July 2009. The black solid line shows the trend over all communities. The solid and dashed gray lines show the trend for communities with high levels of emigration to the West and to the East. Conditional on observable premigration community characteristics, there are hardly any initial differences in the share of Communist votes in 1998 between the different types of communities. Over the period 1998–2005, which marks the first years of emigration from Moldova, the different types of communities follow virtually the same trend. Following the Russian financial crisis, the Communist Party massively increased its vote share from 1998 to 2001 and then modestly from 2001 to 2005. Trends only begin to diverge between 2005 and 2009. While there is an overall decrease in Communist votes, the decrease is particularly large in communities with westward migration and only small in communities with eastward migration. Strikingly, trends diverge at a time when the volume of calls from abroad to Moldova experienced a more than threefold increase between 2005 and 2009. This timing is consistent with our argument that migrants transmit new information to their home communities.

B. Anecdotal Evidence from Qualitative Interviews

To inform our understanding of the mechanisms at work, we conducted a series of nonstructured interviews with return migrants and political observers in Moldova as well as with Moldovan migrants currently living in Western Europe. We asked what kind of information on politics and institutions migrants shared with their family and friends in Moldova and whether such information transfers mattered.

The general lesson from these interviews is that many migrants in the West perceived themselves as “teaching” their family and friends on how Western Europe “works.” Many interviewees portrayed those left behind as politically indifferent and uninformed, particularly those who resided in poor rural areas. Several migrants stated that they had made outright electoral recommendations to those they talked to back home. For example, one migrant in Italy told us that she had intentionally called up her family and neighbors before the July 2009 elections telling them not to be deceived by electoral gifts from Communist campaigners such as vodka or sacks of potatoes.

Corruption was one of the main political issues mentioned. Migrants told us that living in Western Europe had made them less likely to tolerate corruption and that they had encouraged their peers in Moldova not to pay bribes¹⁴ and to support

¹⁴ Similarly, Kubal (2015) documents that migrants who have returned from Western Europe to Ukraine partly adopt socio-legal practices from their destination countries and transmit them to their families.

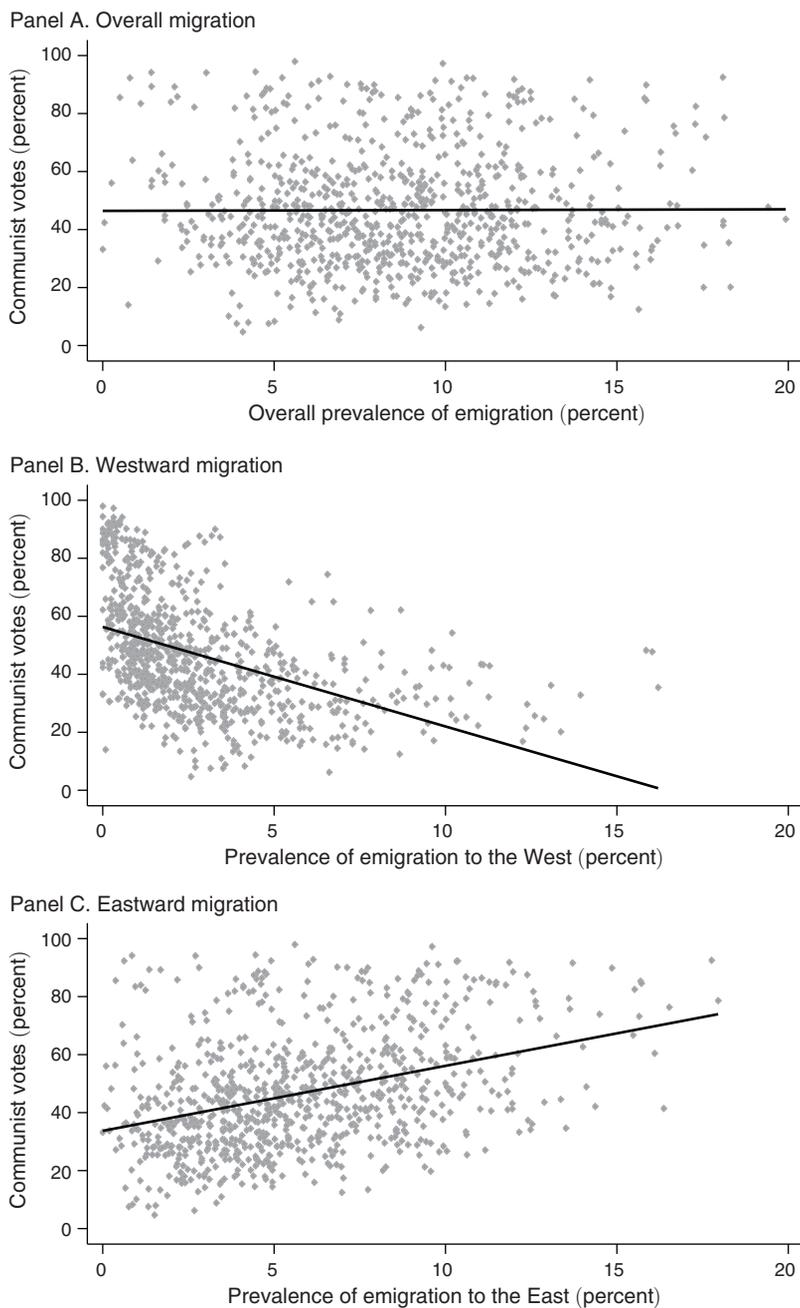


FIGURE 4. EMIGRATION IN 2004 AND SHARE OF COMMUNIST VOTES IN JULY 2009 ACROSS COMMUNITIES

Notes: The figure shows the relationship between overall migration prevalence (panel A), migration prevalence to the West (panel B), migration prevalence to the East (panel C), and the share of Communist votes across 848 Moldovan communities. The horizontal axis measures the share of migrants as a percent of the total population (based on the 2004 population census). The vertical axis measures the share of Communist votes in the parliamentary elections of July 2009 (based on official election results). We only include votes cast in Moldova. Votes cast by migrants abroad are excluded.

parties with an anticorruption agenda instead. Several migrants reported that they had communicated a broad “vision of Europe” and of modern societies, emphasizing positive characteristics such as economic prosperity, entrepreneurship, and the free movement of people (due to the Schengen area). We could not uncover evidence for strategic voting. No interviewee alluded to the idea that visa access or temporary work permits had played a role in their political preferences or vote recommendations. In sum, the qualitative interviews strongly suggest that information transmitted by migrants in the West may have played an important role in voting decisions in communities with an uninformed electorate.

III. Empirical Strategy

A. Basic Specification

Our basic empirical specification to estimate the relationship between migration patterns and Communist votes is

$$(1) \quad Communist_{ij2009} = \alpha + \beta West_{ij2004} + \gamma East_{ij2004} \\ + \mathbf{PremigrationVotes}_{ij}'\delta + \mathbf{X}_{ij}'\lambda + \mu_j + \varepsilon_{ij},$$

where i indexes communities and j districts. The dependent variable is the share of votes for the Communist Party in the parliamentary election of July 2009. $West_{ij2004}$ and $East_{ij2004}$ denote the share of a community’s population that has emigrated to the West and to the East as measured by the population census in 2004. As there was barely any emigration from Moldova before the Russian financial crisis of 1998, $West_{ij2004}$ and $East_{ij2004}$ can also be interpreted as changes in the prevalence of migration between 1998 and 2004. **PremigrationVotes** $_{ij}$ is one of our most important control variables. It captures the electoral preferences of each community before migration took off. For the parliamentary elections of both 1994 and 1998, we control for the vote share of the four major parties including the vote share of the Communist Party. In the sense that we explain changes in Communist votes by changes in the prevalence of migration to the West and East, our estimation strategy is akin to a differences-in-differences approach.

\mathbf{X}_{ij} is a vector of community characteristics. We use census data to control for population size, age structure, and the skill level and distribution of the adult population.¹⁵ Most importantly, we also control for the main drivers of the destination choice made by the first migrants after independence: access to ethnic networks and distance to the Romanian border. Specifically, we use the population shares of the four most important ethnic minorities (Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz, and Bulgarians, with Moldovans being the reference category) as well as the degree of

¹⁵ All demographic data come from the population census in 2004. They are measured for the original overall population including migrants. Therefore, our demographic variables are representative and not affected by emigration. In theory, emigration may have affected enrollment of children in schools. In practice, however, emigration should not have had any meaningful effect on overall educational attainment in 2004—just five years after migration took off in Moldova.

ethnic fractionalization. As ethnic composition may have affected the evolution of electoral preferences, too, we also include squared terms of the different ethnicities' population shares.¹⁶ Distance to the Romanian border is measured by the distance to the nearest Moldovan-Romanian border crossing that was open in 1998. We also include a dummy for district capitals and a dummy for the capital Chisinau and the city of Balti. These two cities are the only major cities and home to virtually all universities located in Moldova. As a proxy for remoteness, we use a community's distance to the district capital, the economic and political center of a district.

μ is a vector of district-level fixed effects, which eliminate any time-varying (and time-constant) heterogeneity at the district level. Moldovan districts are very small and follow the same boundaries as the former regional administrative units of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (*raions*).¹⁷

Our main coefficients of interest are β and γ . In accordance with destination-specific transfers of information and norms, we expect β , the coefficient of westward migration, to be negative and γ , the coefficient of eastward migration, to be positive. However, we expect the relationship between eastward migration and Communist votes to be weaker than for westward migration, as the sociopolitical environment of Moldova is more similar to the East than to the West. We estimate the model with ordinary least squares and cluster standard errors at the district level to account for the fact that election results of communities in the same district are likely to be correlated.

B. Political Self-Selection

To arrive at causal estimates, the ideal experiment would randomize who migrates and to which destination. The coefficients of westward and eastward migration would then provide unbiased and causal estimates of destination-specific political spillovers on those who stay behind. Such an experiment is, however, practically infeasible. To deal with the observational nature of our data, we therefore need to address the issue that those who migrate arguably differ in their electoral preferences from those who stay behind. At the same time, migrants to the West may differ in their electoral preferences from migrants to the East. To understand the implications of political self-selection, we distinguish between selection at the level of individuals and communities.

At the level of individuals, political self-selection refers to the exit effect described by Hirschman (1970). If migrants are relatively less supportive of the Communist Party than the average voter in a community, their departure will increase the Communist vote share in that community (as the local electorate would lose opposition voters). The increase in Communist votes will be particularly strong if liberal

¹⁶ According to the census, language patterns closely follow ethnic patterns. By controlling for ethnicity, we therefore also control for knowledge of (foreign) languages.

¹⁷ There are 35 districts (excluding the breakaway region of Transnistria). The average district covers only 967 square kilometers (373 square miles) and is home to 26 communities. In Soviet times, raions were the basic territorial unit around which economic life was organized. We expect many transformations that have occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union to affect communities within districts in a similar way. District-level fixed effects should also account for geographical features such as proximity of certain districts to the border with Romania and Ukraine, which may be subject to cross-border spillovers not related to migration.

opinion leaders who affect electoral preferences of other community members leave the country. The exit effect would hence drive the coefficients of westward and eastward migration upward because they will capture both political spillovers on those who stay behind and the exit of opposition voters from the electorate. By contrast, if migrants are relatively more supportive of the Communist Party than the average voter, their departure will decrease the Communist vote share and drive the coefficients of westward and eastward migration downward.

We cannot observe how migrants would have voted in the parliamentary election of July 2009 had they not migrated. Depending on how migrants are politically self-selected, the coefficients therefore provide a biased estimate of political spillovers.¹⁸

What do we know about the political self-selection of Moldovan migrants? First, emigration from Moldova is typically motivated by economic, not political considerations (Lücke, Barsbai, and Pinger 2007). Second, migrants share the demographic profile of the typical opposition voter. The average migrant is 35 years old, much younger than the average Communist voter (48 years) and close to the average age of opposition voters (40 years). Moreover, more than 60 percent of migrants have completed more than secondary education, compared to 65 percent among opposition voters and only 48 percent among Communist Party voters.¹⁹ Migrants leaving for the West are younger and more educated than the average migrant (Lücke, Barsbai, and Pinger 2007), and thus have a socioeconomic profile that makes them particularly unlikely to support the Communists. Third, the share of Communist votes cast by migrants at Moldova's embassies abroad was only 12 percent in 2005, much lower than the overall Communist vote share of 46 percent.²⁰ At least for westward migration, it is therefore reasonable to conclude that the exit effect runs in the opposite direction of political spillovers from abroad. The coefficient of westward migration should hence be considered a conservative estimate of political spillovers.

At the community level, political self-selection of migrants is a more serious concern. It is possible that individuals from more liberal-minded communities migrate to the West, while individuals from more Communist-oriented communities migrate to the East. The migration coefficients would then simply reflect reverse causality.

To address this problem, we exploit the fact that there was hardly any emigration before 1999. We can control for the premigration electoral preferences of each community by using the results from the parliamentary elections of 1994 and 1998, which were the first national elections after Moldova's independence in 1991. Both elections were widely regarded as free and fair (OSCE 1998). The parliamentary election of 1998 took place just a few months before the unexpected Russian

¹⁸Gugushvili (2011) finds that individuals in the former Soviet republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are more likely to move to Western Europe when they are dissatisfied with the democratic development of their home country.

¹⁹Migrants' demographic characteristics come from the 2008 Labor Force Survey. The demographic characteristics of Communist and opposition voters come from the official exit poll of the parliamentary election of July 2009.

²⁰Similarly, in July 2009, the share of Communist votes among migrant votes was 9 percent compared to an overall share of 45 percent. No data is available for the parliamentary election of 2001. Only few Moldovans residing abroad cast their vote. The results are therefore unlikely to be representative of the migrant population.

financial crisis hit Moldova and triggered the first wave of emigration. For each of the parliamentary elections of 1994 and 1998, we control for the vote share of the four major parties.²¹ The share of Communist votes in 1998 and 2009 is highly correlated (the correlation coefficient is 0.74). The large persistence suggests that premigration electoral preferences are a meaningful measure of a community's general electoral preferences. We also include the voter turnout in 1998 as a proxy for the general interest in politics (information on voter turnout in 1994 is not available at the community level). By conditioning on premigration election results, we effectively analyze the change in Communist votes between 1998 and 2009. Hence, we can rule out that time-constant electoral preferences explain the relationship between migration and voting patterns.²²

We find little evidence for political self-selection of migrants at the community level. In line with Figure 1, Table A3 in the online Appendix shows that, conditional on observable community characteristics, premigration electoral preferences are *not* systematically associated with the size and direction of migrant flows at the community level.

IV. Results

A. Migration Patterns and Electoral Preferences

Table 1 summarizes the main results (for full regression results see Table A4 in the online Appendix). The first three columns investigate the relationship between migration patterns and Communist votes in the parliamentary election of July 2009. The columns gradually expand the set of control variables and check the robustness of our results against potentially important confounders.

Column 1 of Table 1 controls for community heterogeneity in terms of size and location, as well as demographic and ethnic composition. The results are suggestive of destination-specific political spillovers. Communities with westward migration vote significantly less for the Communist Party. The departure of 1 percent of the community population to the West is associated with a decrease in the share of Communist votes by about 0.7 percentage points. This result is remarkable as it implies that the departure of a (presumably) largely non-Communist electorate to the West, which would increase the share of Communist votes through the exit effect, is more than offset by political spillovers from abroad. We find the opposite, but weaker association for emigration to the East. A 1 percentage point increase in the prevalence of eastward migration increases the share of Communist votes by about 0.4 percentage points.²³

²¹In both elections, more than 70 percent of the electorate cast their vote and the four major parties accounted for more than 75 percent of all votes. We should therefore capture the broad spectrum of premigration electoral preferences.

²²Note that in an econometric sense, this is only true if we estimate our specification in first differences as we do in our robustness checks in online Appendix 3. To capture more heterogeneity of initial political preferences, however, our main specification conditions not only on the share of Communist votes but also on the vote share of other parties.

²³Our estimates of the relationship between migration patterns in 2004 and Communist votes in 2009 may be biased upward as we attribute the effects to the migration prevalence in 2004, which was about 26 percent lower than

TABLE 1—MIGRATION PATTERNS AND RESULTS OF THE JULY 2009 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

	Share of votes for the Communist party (percent)				Share of votes for opposition parties (percent)			
	Basic controls (1)	Plus pre-migration election results (2)	Plus nighttime light (full model) (3)	Heterogeneity within the West (4)	Liberal Democratic party (5)	Liberal party (6)	Democratic party (7)	Party Alliance Our Moldova (8)
Prevalence of emigration to the West (percent)	-0.70 (0.20)	-0.63 (0.18)	-0.63 (0.18)		0.40 (0.13)	0.24 (0.11)	0.08 (0.12)	-0.16 (0.15)
Prevalence of emigration to the East (percent)	0.44 (0.17)	0.39 (0.16)	0.39 (0.16)	0.39 (0.16)	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.17 (0.07)	-0.07 (0.08)	-0.01 (0.11)
Prevalence of emigration to flawed Western democracies (percent)				-0.33 (0.22)				
Prevalence of emigration to full Western democracies (percent)				-1.32 (0.36)				
Basic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Premigration election results	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nighttime light	—	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	848	848	848	848	848	848	848	848
R ²	0.78	0.82	0.82	0.82	0.56	0.66	0.42	0.37

Notes: The table reports OLS estimates for 848 Moldovan communities. The dependent variables are the vote shares of different parties in the July 2009 parliamentary election at the community level (in percent). The set of basic controls includes community-level variables capturing population size, age structure, ethnic composition, skill level, and distribution of the population, a dummy for district capitals and the cities of Chisinau and Balti, the distance to the district capital, and the next Romanian border crossing. Table A4 in the online Appendix shows the full regression results. Standard errors clustered at the district level are in parentheses. Column 4 distinguishes between full and flawed democracies within Western destinations based on the classification provided by the Economist Intelligence Unit's index of democracy of 2006 (the index is not available for earlier years). Full Western democracies include Portugal, Greece, Spain, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Great Britain, Ireland, the United States, Belgium, Austria, Canada, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Flawed Western democracies include Italy, Romania, Israel, Cyprus, Bulgaria, and Poland. Moldova is also classified as a flawed democracy.

Column 2 of Table 1 additionally controls for premigration election results. The results of the parliamentary elections of the 1990s are an important predictor of election results in 2009. Yet, they barely affect the size and significance of the coefficients of westward and eastward migration. This finding is consistent with the previous finding that premigration election results cannot predict migration patterns. Thus, political self-selection at the community level or a time-constant confounder in general does not explain the association between migrants' destinations and Communist votes.

Column 3 of Table 1 adds community-specific measures of economic shocks over the course of the 1990s. Our concern is that differential intensity of economic shocks could create spurious correlation between migration and voting patterns. For example, it could be that households in communities hit hardest by the crisis could only afford to send migrants to the East, while at the same time asking for more redistribution through voting for the Communist Party. In contrast, it is possible that households in communities with lower intensity shocks could afford to finance more

in 2009. If we rescale the coefficients accordingly, the coefficient of westward migration is reduced to -0.52 and the coefficient of eastward migration to 0.33. However, the true bias is likely to be smaller because the magnitude of the marginal effect of emigration on Communist votes decreases with the level of emigration (see Section VB).

costly migration to the West, while at the same time opposing more redistribution by voting against the communists. In the absence of economic data at the community level for the 1990s and early 2000s, we rely on satellite data on nighttime light intensity. Light intensity, as measured from outer space, is a meaningful proxy for local economic activity on the ground, as almost all consumption and production activities at night require lights (Henderson, Storeygard, and Weil 2012). Using high resolution satellite images from the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program's Operational Linescan System, we measure the average light intensity on the administrative territory of each community. We take this measure for 1992, the first year for which satellite images are available, and 1999, the year following the Russian financial crisis. The difference in light intensity between 1992 and 1999 proxies the severity of a community's economic shock caused by the economic transition after Moldova's independence in 1991 and the Russian financial crisis.²⁴

This is our preferred specification, and we continue to use it as the baseline specification in the rest of the paper. Both migration coefficients remain stable. Hence, economic shocks are unlikely to confound the effect of migration patterns on Communist votes.

As discussed above, the migration coefficients reflect the sum of the exit effect of migrants from the electorate and political spillovers on those who stay behind. For westward migration, these two effects likely go in opposite directions, making us underestimate the size of political spillovers from the West. As we explain in detail in online Appendix 2, we can estimate bounds for the effect of political spillovers by making assumptions on how migrants would have voted had they stayed in Moldova. If we assume that all westward migrants would have been opposition voters, the emigration of 1 percent of a community's population to the West reduces the share of Communist votes *among those who stay behind* by 1.11 percentage points. Even this estimate may still be biased downward as we assume that liberal-minded migrants would not have influenced the electoral preferences of other community members before their departure. Our baseline coefficient of westward migration should therefore be interpreted as a conservative estimate of the political spillovers from westward migration. Online Appendix 2 presents detailed results on the potential size of political spillovers for different assumptions on the voting behavior of westward and eastward migrants.

If political spillovers operate through the transfer of information and norms, they should rise with the level of democracy abroad even within the West. There is very little variation within the West in the Polity IV score, which we use to define Western and Eastern destinations. We therefore rely on the Economist Intelligence Unit's

²⁴Figure A1 in the online Appendix shows the drastic changes in nighttime light. In 1992, many parts of the country were well-lit at night. By 1999, however, most Moldovan communities had become dark. Over the same period, Moldova's GDP had fallen by 40 percent. Table A3 in the online Appendix shows that the adverse economic shocks of the 1990s indeed pushed many Moldovans abroad. Communities with a reduction in nighttime light intensity between 1992 and 1999 had a significantly higher prevalence of emigration in 2004. Importantly, however, economic shocks cannot explain the direction of migration flows to the West or the East. We also find that communities that experienced a steeper economic decline during the 1990s were more likely to vote for the Communist Party in the parliamentary election of 2001 (results available upon request). Finally, Table A5 in the online Appendix demonstrates that nighttime light intensity is indeed a good proxy for economic activity at the community level. Light intensity is a highly significant predictor of local per capita tax revenues, unemployment rates, and the per capita number of shops in 2009, a year for which economic indicators at the community level are available.

index of democracy that allows for distinguishing between “full” and “flawed” Western democracies (see Kekic 2006 for details). Flawed Western democracies include Italy, Romania, Israel, Cyprus, Bulgaria, and Poland. As column 4 of Table 1 shows, the effect of westward migration is driven by emigration to full, not flawed Western democracies. A 1 percentage point increase in emigration to full Western democracies reduces Communist votes by about 1.3 percentage points. The equivalent marginal effect for emigration to flawed Western democracies is -0.33 and not significant. Hence, even within the West, our evidence is consistent with the transfer of democratic information and norms.

These results are important because they address potential concerns regarding the selection of migrants. As Table A7 in the online Appendix shows, Moldovan migrants to the West tend to be more educated, older, and female, and they remit higher amounts of money than migrants to the East. However, there are hardly any differences in the characteristics between migrants to full and migrants to flawed Western democracies. The distribution of skills, age, and remittances is essentially the same. In addition, the distribution of Moldovan migrants across sectors and occupations is very similar within Western destinations (Biroul Național de Statistică 2009). The only observable difference is that relatively more women migrate to flawed democracies, which is due to the fact that Italy is a particularly popular destination for women. Differences in migrant characteristics are therefore unlikely to explain the heterogeneous effects within the West.

The remaining columns of Table 1 show the relationship between migration patterns and vote shares of the four opposition parties that jointly formed the ruling coalition after the elections. The Liberal Democratic Party and the Liberal Party win votes in communities with westward migration. The Liberal Party attracts considerably fewer votes in communities with eastward migration. Votes for the other two parties are not significantly associated with migration patterns.

In online Appendix 3, we perform a number of robustness checks. We show that our results are robust to the inclusion of additional control variables such as the demographic characteristics of migrants or foreign language skills of the population, alternative econometric specifications such as estimation in first differences (community fixed effects), and alternative definitions of the West.

B. Testing for Time-Varying Unobserved Confounders

A remaining challenge for causal interpretation is an unobserved time-varying confounder. Such a confounder must work at the subdistrict level as the district fixed effects already wipe out any unobserved shock at the district level. In addition, the stability of the migration coefficients across columns 1 to 3 of Table 1 implies that a confounder must be much more strongly associated with migration and voting patterns in the 2000s than election results and economic shocks in the 1990s. We assess this possibility in two tests.

Migration Patterns and Electoral Preferences over Time.—The first test for time-varying unobserved heterogeneity investigates the relationship between Communist votes and migration patterns over time. The first part of Table 2

TABLE 2—MIGRATION PATTERNS AND COMMUNIST VOTES OVER TIME, 2001–2010

	Share of Communist votes in parliamentary elections (percent)					Communist mayor (dummy)		
			April	July				
	2001	2005	2009	2009	2010	1999	2003	2007
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Prevalence of emigration to the West (percent)	−0.30 (0.30)	−0.18 (0.34)	−0.40 (0.20)	−0.63 (0.18)	−0.85 (0.17)	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.02 (0.01)
Prevalence of emigration to the East (percent)	0.00 (0.14)	−0.13 (0.16)	0.27 (0.14)	0.39 (0.16)	0.20 (0.20)	0.00 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Full set of controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	848	848	848	848	848	822	848	848
R^2	0.79	0.52	0.68	0.82	0.82	0.22	0.19	0.18

Notes: The table reports OLS estimates for 848 Moldovan communities. The dependent variables are the vote shares of the Communist Party in the parliamentary elections between 2001 and 2010 at the community level (in percent) (columns 1–5) and a binary indicator for whether a Communist mayor was elected in the municipal elections of 1999, 2003, and 2007 (columns 6–8). The full set of controls includes community-level variables capturing population size, age structure, ethnic composition, skill level, and distribution of the population, a dummy for district capitals and the cities of Chisinau and Balti, the distance to the district capital and the next Romanian border crossing, as well as premigration election results and night-light intensity. Standard errors, clustered at the district level, are in parentheses.

examines the relationship between migration patterns and Communist votes in all parliamentary elections since 2001. Of particular interest is the parliamentary election of 2001. It was the first parliamentary election after the Russian financial crisis, which triggered the departure of the first migrants, and the election that brought the Communist Party back to power. In 2001, the level of emigration was still low (see Figure 1) and most of the migrants captured in the census in 2004 had not left yet. Hence, if it is migration and not a confounder that drives our result, there should be no association between Communist votes in 2001 and migration patterns in 2004.

Column 1 of Table 2 shows that migration patterns in 2004 are indeed not significantly associated with Communist votes in 2001. In line with Figure 1, this finding strengthens the common trend assumption of our identification strategy. It also suggests that the destination choice of the first migrants, which laid the basis for the migration patterns in 2004, was not systematically related with the evolution of electoral preferences in the aftermath of the Russian financial crisis.

Migration patterns are not significantly related to Communist votes in 2005 either (column 2 of Table 2), although the level of emigration was already high. Two reasons may explain this result. First, the intensity of communication between migrants and their families and friends in Moldova was still low as suggested by the volume of international calls to Moldova (see Figure 1). Between 2005 and 2009, however, the volume of international calls increased by more than three times. The fall in communication costs during that period likely increased communication and information flows from abroad. Second, the 2005 result does not necessarily indicate the absence of political spillovers. As explained above, the migration coefficients reflect both the exit effect and destination-specific political spillovers. For westward migration, these two effects arguably go in opposite directions. Hence, political spillovers

may well have been present in 2005 but not yet large enough to overcompensate for the exit effect. Indeed, if one neutralizes the exit effect by assuming that all westward migrants would have voted for opposition parties (see online Appendix 2 for details on the methodology), the coefficient of westward migration becomes significantly negative and its magnitude increases from -0.18 to -1.10 .

Only in the more recent elections of 2009 and 2010 are migration patterns significantly associated with voting behavior (columns 3–5 of Table 2). The coefficient (and marginal effect) of westward migration becomes larger over time, rising from -0.40 in April 2009 to -0.85 in November 2010. This result is consistent with the qualitative evidence presented above that migrants in the West increasingly raised their voice after the disputed elections in April 2009, which marked the political deadlock between the Communist Party and the opposition, and encouraged their families and friends in Moldova to vote for the more democratic opposition parties. Similarly, the coefficient of eastward migration slightly increases from 0.27 in April 2009 to 0.39 in July 2009. However, it is no longer significantly different from zero in November 2010. Thus, if there were political spillovers from eastward migration, they appear to be weaker and unstable.

The second part of Table 2 goes beyond parliamentary elections and looks at Communist votes in local elections over the period 1999–2007. The municipal election of 1999 is particularly suitable to test for the existence of a confounder as it took place in the immediate aftermath of the Russian financial crisis, just when the first migrants left Moldova. The set of explanatory variables is the same as in our baseline regression. However, as vote shares are not available, the dependent variable is a dummy indicating whether a Communist mayor was elected. Results from a linear probability model strongly suggest that there were no initial differences in electoral preferences between communities with different subsequent migration patterns (column 6 of Table 2). The point estimates of both migration coefficients are essentially zero. The same holds true for the municipal elections of 2003, supporting our common trend assumption (column 7 of Table 2). It is only in the local elections of 2007 that communities with westward migration diverge and become less likely to elect a Communist mayor (column 8 of Table 2). A 1 percentage point increase in emigration to the West decreases the probability of electing a Communist mayor by about 2 percentage points. Hence, we observe political spillovers of westward migration already before the global financial crisis of 2008.

We also explore whether other community characteristics show a similar trend to migration, namely no effects on Communist votes in elections before 2009, but large effects in elections after 2009. Finding such a pattern for other community characteristics could point to preexisting differences in latent political preferences, which may develop over time. To assess this possibility, we conduct the following exercise. We summarize the role of all non-migration community characteristics in explaining average Communist vote share over the period 2001–2010 in a single index, which we call a propensity score.²⁵ To do so, we first run a regression of the Communist vote share averaged over the period 2001–2010 on all covariates used in

²⁵We thank Esther Duflo for suggesting this test.

TABLE 3—THE RELATIONSHIP OF MIGRATION PATTERNS AND NON-MIGRATION COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS WITH COMMUNIST VOTES OVER TIME, 2001–2010

	Share of Communist votes in parliamentary elections (percent)				
	2001 (1)	2005 (2)	April 2009 (3)	July 2009 (4)	2010 (5)
Prevalence of emigration to the West (percent)	−0.00 (0.25)	0.21 (0.20)	−0.30 (0.14)	−0.65 (0.14)	−0.78 (0.17)
Prevalence of emigration to the East (percent)	0.06 (0.19)	−0.45 (0.28)	0.07 (0.14)	0.45 (0.15)	0.33 (0.14)
Propensity score	1.08 (0.04)	0.57 (0.06)	0.88 (0.03)	1.18 (0.03)	1.13 (0.03)
Constant	−2.60 (2.95)	26.16 (3.03)	11.44 (2.16)	−11.18 (1.84)	−14.33 (1.95)
District fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	848	848	848	848	848
R^2	0.69	0.28	0.63	0.79	0.78

Notes: The table reports OLS estimates for 848 Moldovan communities. The dependent variables are the vote shares of the Communist Party in the parliamentary elections between 2001 and 2010 at the community level (in percent). These results correspond to the results in Table 2. The propensity score summarizes the role of all non-migration community characteristics in explaining average Communist vote shares over the period 2001–2010. To construct it, we first run a regression of the Communist vote share averaged over the period 2001–2010 on all covariates used in our baseline specification (column 3 of Table 1) except the prevalence of emigration to the West and East. We then define the propensity score as the prediction from this regression. Standard errors, clustered at the district level, are in parentheses.

our baseline specification except the prevalence of emigration to the West and East. We then define the propensity score as the prediction from this regression. As a final step, we estimate the relationship between migration patterns and the propensity score with Communist votes over time.

Table 3 summarizes the results. The coefficients of the propensity score are relatively stable over time, which indicates that the relationship between non-migration community characteristics and Communist votes does not change much over this period. In contrast, the migration variables see a clear time trend, with a large increase in both the size and the significance of coefficients between 2001 and 2009/2010. This evidence suggests that an accentuation of political preferences due to preexisting differences in other community characteristics does not drive our result.

Overall, the findings reported in Tables 2 and 3 further limit the range of potentially relevant confounders. Any remaining confounder must have affected migration patterns well before 2004 and electoral preferences only thereafter with a lag of several years.

Spatially Concentrated Time-Varying Confounders.—The second test for time-varying unobserved heterogeneity builds on the idea that an unobserved confounder would likely be spatially concentrated and affect neighboring communities in a similar way. Indeed, spatial clustering has been observed for changes in political variables such as electoral preferences (e.g., Kim, Elliott, and Wang 2003), as well as for changes in economic variables such as unemployment rates (e.g., Overman

and Puga 2002). Local fixed effects should at least partially capture a spatially concentrated confounder and thus reduce the size of the migration coefficients. The smaller the geographical area of the local fixed effects, the more this should take effect. In the absence of such a confounder, however, local fixed effects should not significantly affect the size of the coefficients.

To test these implications, we introduce local fixed effects that are based on a geographical grid of quadratic cells and are much finer than the district-level fixed effects. We start with cells sized 30×30 kilometers (km) (18.6×18.6 miles (mi)) and then reduce the cell size to 15×15 km (9.3×9.3 mi). This procedure increases the number of local fixed effects from 35 with district fixed effects to 52 using 30×30 km cells and 162 using 15×15 km cells. The average number of communities in each cell is 16 using 30×30 km cells and five using 15×15 km cells. Figure A2 in the online Appendix illustrates the different resolutions of the grid on a map of Moldovan districts. The finer the grid, the more unobserved (time-varying and time-invariant) heterogeneity we expect to capture. Compared to our baseline specification, the grid should make communities more comparable in terms of local labor markets and economic shocks, political movements and exposure to political campaigns, access to and influence from social networks including early migrant networks, exposure to weather fluctuations or natural disasters, and local reception of different media channels. To deal with the arbitrary boundaries created by the grid, we shift the grid by random distances and iterate the analysis 100 times.

Table A9 in the online Appendix reports the coefficients and standard errors of the first iteration, as well as the average coefficient over the 100 iterations for the two grid resolutions. The coefficients of both westward and eastward migration are remarkably robust to the use of fixed effects for grid cells. The average size of the coefficients drops only slightly. We use a simple *t*-test to compare the differences between the estimated coefficients of westward migration to the baseline coefficient of -0.63 (column 3 of Table 1). In none of the 200 total iterations can we reject the hypothesis that the difference is significantly different from zero. It is particularly remarkable that the size of the estimated coefficients is completely robust to increasing the grid resolution from 30×30 km to 15×15 km cells. For eastward migration, only 9 of the 200 estimated coefficients are significantly different from the baseline coefficient. We are therefore confident that the coefficients of westward and eastward migration are not biased by a spatially concentrated confounder.

C. How Large Is the Effect?

To better understand the quantitative importance of our results, this subsection performs a simple counterfactual analysis of the effects of emigration on election results in July 2009. Our back-of-the-envelope calculations are based on the point estimates from the baseline specification (column 3 of Table 1). For simplicity, we assume that migrants would have had the same electoral preferences and voter turnout as their home communities.

Table A10 in the online Appendix presents the observed and counterfactual nationwide shares of Communist votes and the resulting changes in the number of parliamentary seats for different scenarios. The first part of the counterfactual analysis

holds the level of migration constant, but changes the direction of migration flows. We first assume that all migrants to the West had migrated to the East instead. The Communist Party would have won an additional vote share of 3 percentage points. With 51 out of 101 seats, it would have gained the absolute majority in parliament, so there would have been no change in government. We find the opposite result if all migrants to the East had migrated to the West instead. The migrant population in the West would have tripled, stripping the Communist Party of even more votes (5 percentage points less) and resulting in a landslide victory for the opposition.

The second part of the counterfactual analysis changes the level of migration flows. We first examine the case with no migration to the West and unchanged migration to the East. The Communist Party would have gained 2 percentage points more votes and only been one seat short of staying in power. We find the opposite result for the case with no migration to the East and unchanged migration to the West. The Communist Party would have lost about 2 percentage points of votes.

These counterfactual results suggest that the political consequences of emigration have considerably contributed to the end of Communist rule in Moldova in 2009.²⁶

V. What Explains Political Spillovers from Emigration?

In this section, we provide suggestive evidence that the political spillovers from westward migration are the result of transfers of information and norms from abroad. We also rule out three alternative explanations: strategic voting, monetary remittances, and return migration.

A. *Transfer of Information and Norms*

As shown above, the effect of westward migration is driven by emigration to full Western democracies, not flawed Western democracies. This result offers strong evidence in favor of information and norms transfers, as such transfers should increase with the level of democracy abroad.

Table 4 examines other dimensions of effect heterogeneity. First, we exclude the 45 urban localities from the sample, which increases the coefficient of westward migration in absolute size to -0.70 (column 1 of Table 4). Second, we split our sample at the median of the share of the population that was older than 21 years when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and at the median of the share of the population with higher education. The effect of westward migration on Communist votes is larger in older and less educated communities (columns 2–5 of Table 4). Overall, we observe that the effect is strongest for populations that were least likely to have been exposed to information and norms from the West.

As a more direct test for the transfer of information and norms, we analyze whether westward migration also changes sociopolitical views, in addition to

²⁶It is important to emphasize that we do not consider general equilibrium effects such as the effect of emigration on the political system. For example, the political platform of the Communist Party (or other parties) may have responded to migration-induced changes in the electoral preferences of the median voter. To the extent that the Communist Party has made its political platform more liberal in response to such changes, our partial equilibrium analysis is likely to underestimate the overall political effects of emigration to the West.

TABLE 4—HETEROGENEITY OF THE EFFECT OF MIGRATION PATTERNS ON COMMUNIST VOTES

	Only rural communities	By share of population who grew up in the Soviet Union (were older than 21 years in 1991)		By share of population with higher education		Nonlinear specification
		Below median	Above median	Below median	Above median	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Prevalence of emigration to the West (percent)	-0.70 (0.18)	-0.37 (0.23)	-0.89 (0.31)	-0.66 (0.19)	-0.41 (0.25)	-1.29 (0.49)
Prevalence of emigration to the East (percent)	0.49 (0.14)	0.75 (0.21)	0.08 (0.19)	0.52 (0.23)	0.32 (0.25)	0.93 (0.32)
(Prevalence of emigration to the West) ²						0.05 (0.03)
(Prevalence of emigration to the East) ²						-0.03 (0.02)
Full set of controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	803	424	424	424	424	848
R ²	0.82	0.81	0.82	0.78	0.87	0.82

Notes: The table reports OLS estimates. The dependent variable is the vote share of the Communist Party in the July 2009 parliamentary election at the community level (in percent). Column 1 excludes the few urban communities from the sample and is based on only 803 communities. For columns 2 and 3 as well as 4 and 5, the total sample is split at the median of the respective variable. The full set of controls includes community-level variables capturing population size, age structure, ethnic composition, skill level, and distribution of the population, a dummy for district capitals and the cities of Chisinau and Balti, the distance to the district capital and the next Romanian border crossing, as well as premigration election results and night-light intensity. Standard errors, clustered at the district level, are in parentheses.

electoral preferences. We draw on data from the Moldovan Political Barometer, a nationally representative public opinion poll that has been conducted biannually since 2001. To exploit the time dimension, we pool all waves conducted before the government changed in July 2009 that record the location of each interview. This leaves us with eight waves, conducted between April 2002 and March 2009. These years span almost the entire period during which the Communist Party was back in power. The sample includes 8,350 individuals from 321 different communities. Our outcomes are based on five politics-related questions that have been repeatedly asked over the years: whether an individual is satisfied with life in general, has trust in the government, has trust in local media, would like the state to play an increased role to improve socioeconomic conditions, and would vote for the Communist Party should there be elections next Sunday.

We estimate an individual's views with a linear probability model controlling for sex, age, education, and ethnicity, as well as the same set of community-level variables including district-level fixed effects as in the baseline specification. To capture the change in views over time and the steep increase in the volume of calls from abroad after 2006, we introduce an interaction term between westward/eastward migration and a dummy indicating whether an interview was conducted in the period after 2006.

TABLE 5—MIGRATION PATTERNS AND INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL PREFERENCES OVER TIME, 2002–2009

	Vote for the Communist Party (1)	Satisfied with life in general (2)	Trust in government (3)	Trust in local media (4)	In favor of government intervention in the economy (5)	Would vote in elections (6)
Prevalence of emigration to the West (percent)	0.009 (0.005)	0.005 (0.004)	0.012 (0.005)	0.006 (0.005)	−0.004 (0.005)	0.011 (0.008)
Prevalence of emigration to the East (percent)	−0.004 (0.004)	−0.004 (0.003)	−0.006 (0.004)	−0.001 (0.005)	−0.000 (0.003)	−0.007 (0.006)
Period after 2006	0.011 (0.030)	0.067 (0.029)	−0.062 (0.039)	0.092 (0.054)	−0.082 (0.030)	0.077 (0.055)
Prevalence of emigration to the West × period after 2006	−0.019 (0.007)	−0.018 (0.004)	−0.014 (0.008)	−0.022 (0.007)	0.001 (0.007)	−0.011 (0.011)
Prevalence of emigration to the East × period after 2006	−0.001 (0.005)	−0.001 (0.004)	0.000 (0.005)	−0.009 (0.008)	0.012 (0.004)	0.005 (0.006)
Individual characteristics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Community characteristics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	5,480	8,350	8,350	8,350	8,350	8,350
R ²	0.14	0.03	0.09	0.05	0.03	0.07

Notes: The table reports OLS estimates for 8,350 individuals using data from several rounds of the Moldovan Political Barometer, a regular public opinion poll on sociopolitical issues. The sample is based on a pooled cross-section of all rounds conducted between April 2002 and March 2009. The dependent variables are whether an individual would have voted for the Communist Party should there be elections next Sunday (column 1), is satisfied with life in general (column 2), has trust in the government (column 3), has trust in local media (column 4), would like the state to play an increased role to improve socioeconomic conditions (column 5), and would vote should there be elections next Sunday (column 6). The set of individual characteristics includes age, sex, education level, and ethnicity. The set of community characteristics includes variables capturing population size, age structure, ethnic composition, skill level and distribution of the population, a dummy for district capitals and the cities of Chisinau and Balti, the distance to the district capital and the next Romanian border crossing, as well as premigration election results and night-light intensity. Marginal effects from a probit model are very similar and available upon request. Standard errors, clustered at the community level, are in parentheses.

Table 5 shows that individuals from communities with different migration patterns change their views in different ways after 2006. Relative to individuals from communities with eastward migration, individuals from communities with westward migration become less satisfied with life, put less trust in the government and local media, and are less in favor of state intervention. These effects are consistent with the argument that the transfer of information and norms changes the reference point of those who stay behind and ultimately affects their political preferences. We also reproduce our main result. Those who live in communities with westward migration are less likely to vote Communist after 2006.

The results from the public opinion poll are important because they are based on a representative sample of the adult population, not on a sample of active voters. This suggests that the relationship between westward migration and voting patterns works through changes in electoral preferences and not through changes in the incentives of individuals with given electoral preferences to cast their vote. This conclusion can also be drawn from column 6 of Table 5, showing that individuals

from communities with westward migration do not change their propensity to vote over the years.²⁷

B. *Strategic Voting*

Political spillovers could also be the result of strategic voting. Irrespective of their political convictions, voters may change their voting behavior to strategically support a party that is more likely to protect their migrant relatives abroad and the flow of remittances. Communities with migrants in the West may then vote for the Alliance of European Integration because these parties are more likely to seek integration with Western Europe, possibly easing visa requirements and lowering the costs of sending remittances. By contrast, communities with migrants in the East may vote for the Communist Party to secure good relations between Moldova and Russia.

Our previous result on differential effects within the West provides strong evidence against strategic voting. In case of strategic voting, communities with migrants in full Western democracies should have the same electoral preferences as communities with migrants in flawed Western democracies. This is especially so as there are hardly any differences in migrant characteristics, including the amount of remittances within the West (see Table A7 in the online Appendix). Yet, and inconsistent with strategic voting, only communities with migrants in full Western democracies vote significantly less for the Communist Party. The previous results from the public opinion poll (Table 5) are not consistent with strategic voting either. They clearly indicate that westward migration is also associated with changes in sociopolitical views, not only electoral preferences.

The curvature of the relationship between migration and voting patterns offers another way to test for strategic voting. The desire to protect migrants should increase, at least proportionally, with the level of migration and the resulting dependency on remittances flows. We test this prediction in column 6 of Table 4 by adding squared terms of the prevalence of westward and eastward migration to our baseline specification. However, the magnitude of the marginal effect of emigration on Communist votes decreases with the level of emigration. Again, this result points to the transfer of information and norms as a relevant transmission channel: as more and more migrants leave for a given destination, an additional migrant should be less likely to transfer new information and norms.

C. *Monetary Remittances*

Monetary remittances represent another potential transmission channel. Remittances can affect political preferences because they increase the disposable income of recipient households and also change income inequality.

²⁷ We also investigate the relationship between voter turnout and migration patterns at the community level. Column 1 of Table A11 in the online Appendix regresses the voter turnout in the parliamentary elections of July 2009 on westward and eastward migration using our baseline specification. Both types of migration are associated with a significant reduction in voter turnout, reflecting the absence of migrants from the electorate. Migrants are typically not registered and therefore remain on voter lists. Column 2 of Table A11 shows that our main results are robust to controlling for voter turnout in the election of July 2009.

Our result on differential effects within the West is a strong argument against monetary remittances as a relevant transmission channel. Both the incidence of migration, as measured by the socioeconomic characteristics of migrants and the level of remittances, are very similar across Western destinations (see Table A7 in the online Appendix). Monetary remittances from the West should thus have no differential effects on income and income inequality, irrespective of whether they originate from full or flawed Western democracies.

Likewise, monetary remittances are unlikely to account for the differential effects of westward and eastward migration. To explain our main result, remittances from the East should increase and remittances from the West should decrease support for the Communist Party. With respect to income, we cannot think of a plausible reason why remittances should have a non-monotonic relationship with Communist votes. Of course, there may be differences in consumption patterns and endowment levels between households with a migrant in the East and households with a migrant in the West. However, these differences cannot explain why remittance from the West would have the *opposite* income effect than remittances from the East. With respect to income inequality, the Communists should gain, not lose, votes in communities with westward migration. This is because Moldovan migrants in Western Europe remit, on average, about 50 percent more money than migrants in Russia (Lücke, Barbai, and Pinger 2007). Moreover, migrating to the West is costly, mainly due to visa restrictions, and was therefore more widespread among initially richer households.²⁸ As a result, remittances from the West should have made relatively rich households richer, increasing income inequality and the demand for redistribution by the majority of voters without a migrant abroad. The Communist Party, which favors redistributive policies, should then have become more popular in communities with westward migration—which is exactly the opposite of what political spillovers would predict.

D. Return Migration

We finally consider return migration as a potential transmission channel. To address this possibility, we commissioned two questions in an exit poll of the parliamentary election of November 2010. Individuals were asked whether they themselves had ever lived abroad for at least three months since 1991 and, if so, where, and whether family members had ever lived abroad and, if so, where. We are thus able to distinguish between return migrants and nonmigrants in the electorate.

The exit poll was conducted with 7,344 individuals in 71 communities.²⁹ Due to time constraints the exit poll only distinguished between destinations in the European Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States (an association of former Soviet republics including Russia), and the rest of the world. We classify the European Union as West and the two remaining regions as East.

²⁸ By contrast, eastward migration is cheap and accessible to poorer households as would-be migrants can relocate without a visa and only need to board a train to Russia (Lücke, Barsbai, and Pinger 2007).

²⁹ Respondents were asked to tick the party they had voted for in a private cabin and drop the questionnaire in a box. The results should therefore not be manipulated or biased because of revealed electoral preferences.

TABLE 6—INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL MIGRATION PATTERNS AND COMMUNIST VOTES IN 2010 (*exit poll*)

	Individual controls (1)	Plus community fixed effects (2)	Only individuals with family in the West (3)	Only individuals with family in the East (4)	Only nonmigrants without family abroad (5)
Returned emigrant from the West	-0.087 (0.014)	-0.068 (0.014)			
Returned emigrant from the East	0.014 (0.016)	0.010 (0.014)			
With close family member in the West	-0.121 (0.013)	-0.079 (0.016)			
With close family member in the East	0.007 (0.015)	0.001 (0.013)			
With close family members in both the West and East	-0.077 (0.012)	-0.072 (0.013)			
Prevalence of emigration to the West (percent)			-0.013 (0.010)	-0.031 (0.006)	-0.021 (0.007)
Prevalence of emigration to the East (percent)			0.014 (0.009)	0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.005)
Individual characteristics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Community fixed effects	—	Yes	—	—	—
Observations	7,344	7,344	1,194	2,327	3,051
R ²	0.18	0.22	0.17	0.21	0.21

Notes: The table reports OLS estimates for 7,344 individuals using data from an exit poll conducted during the parliamentary election of November 2010. The dependent variable is a binary variable indicating whether an individual voted for the Communist Party. The set of individual characteristics includes age, sex, education level, and ethnicity. The set of community characteristics includes variables capturing population size, age structure, ethnic composition, skill level and distribution of the population, a dummy for district capitals and the cities of Chisinau and Balti, the distance to the district capital and the next Romanian border crossing, as well as premigration election results and night-light intensity. Marginal effects from a probit model are very similar and are available upon request. Standard errors, clustered at the community level, are in parentheses.

We estimate an individual's decision to vote for the Communist Party using a linear probability model. Table 6 summarizes the results. Column 1 controls for an individual's sex, age, education, and ethnicity. Column 2 adds community fixed effects to capture unobserved heterogeneity between communities.

Returnees from the West are 7 percentage points less likely to vote for the Communist Party than individuals who have not been abroad. Returnees from the East, however, do not vote differently. The findings are almost identical for individuals with a family member abroad. Individuals with a family member in the West are 8 percentage points less likely to vote Communist. The magnitude of this association is comparable to the association between higher education and voting Communist. We find no significant association between having a family member in the East and Communist votes.³⁰

We also use the exit poll to look at the relationship between a community's migration prevalence and Communist votes for the subsamples of individuals with a family member in the West, individuals with a family member in the East, and nonmigrant individuals with no family member abroad. If political spillovers from

³⁰Likewise, our community-level analysis does not find a significant association between eastward migration and Communist votes in the parliamentary election of November 2010 (column 5 of Table 2).

westward migration indeed operate through the transfer of information and norms, community-level exposure to the West should be less informative for individuals with family in the West (as they would receive this information directly from their migrants) and more informative for individuals with family in the East or no family abroad. Indeed, the community prevalence of westward migration is not significantly associated with Communist votes for the former group (column 3 of Table 6), but negatively and significantly with the latter two groups (columns 4 and 5 of Table 6).

These results provide suggestive evidence that the observed relationship between westward migration and Communist votes is due to spillovers on nonmigrants rather than the return of migrants to the electorate.

VI. Conclusion

The international circulation of knowledge and ideas is not restricted to the technological realm. Rather, social norms and political preferences also diffuse internationally and such diffusion is magnified by the cross-border movement of people. In a recent essay, Rodrik (2014) noted that “perhaps the single most important source of ideas and policy innovation are practices that prevail elsewhere” and used the concept of “emulation” to qualify the process of their international diffusion.

In Rodrik’s words, this paper suggests that migrants can be an important vector of such emulation, especially in a globalized context with democratized access to communication and travel. Using administrative and individual survey data from Moldova, a former Soviet Republic, we document a significant and robust negative effect of emigration to the West on the share of votes for the Communist Party in the Moldovan elections of 2009–2010. Counterfactual simulations suggest that emigration to the West significantly contributed to bringing down the last ruling Communist government in Europe, 20 years after the fall of the Berlin wall. The results appear to be driven by emigration to the subset of European countries with the highest democratic standards.

Obviously, there have been instances in recent history where emigration to Western democracies did not bring a democratic dividend to the home countries, at least not yet. Decades of Cuban immigration to the United States or of Iranian immigration to the West arguably did little to promote democracy in Cuba or Iran. The factors that explain the democratic effects of emigration may have to do with the extent to which migrants can retain close ties and freely communicate with their home communities, as suggested in this paper, but also, possibly, with the cultural distance between home and host countries, the degree of social integration of immigrants in the host societies, or with the circumstances that led to emigration in the first place. For all these reasons, the Moldovan experience may not be representative of the experiences of all developing countries witnessing emigration. However, Moldova is a typical example of a newly founded state that is torn between two opposing political and economic systems, Russia and the European Union, a choice also faced by other former Eastern Bloc countries such as Belarus, Georgia, Serbia, or Ukraine. History has seen many similar critical junctures that changed the path of institutional development (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, Aidt and Franck 2015).

We conclude that migration may have become an increasingly important factor affecting the economic and political trajectory of nations. In this sense—and to give Albert Hirschman the last word—exit and voice could well be complementary in bringing political change and jointly contribute to the global diffusion of democracy.

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