Representation and Democracy in Eurasia's Unrecognized States: The Case of Transnistria

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Abstract: Focusing on Transnistria, the relationship between implementing a secessionist agenda and building democracies in Eurasia's de facto states is explored. Grounded in longitudinal comparison of parliamentary representation patterns in Transnistria, the "black box" of domestic politics is opened up to illustrate the contested nature of secessionist policies within de facto states. Critical examination of the validity of elites' claims of a genuine democratic mandate to pursue secessionist policies highlights the need to question tendencies to take for granted societal endorsement of the secessionist policies advocated by the elites of de facto states.

Like the majority of modern states, non-recognized or *de facto* states are governed indirectly through elected representatives who are entrusted with the task of carrying out most of the functions of government. Issues of representation are central to understanding modern polities and therefore have generated substantial academic interest with regard to the identity and performance of representatives across different political systems and geographic regions (Cotta and Best, 2007; Norris and Franklin, 1997; Smyth, 2006). Non-recognized states have largely been spared such detailed scrutiny of their domestic politics and patterns of representation

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even though these states' requests for recognition increasingly draw on claims to democratically-secured, genuine representation.

Claims of democratic representation are, of course, not the only grounds on which non-recognized states build the case for their legitimacy. As a number of recent accounts argue, non-recognized states in the former Soviet space managed to secure the provision of public goods at levels that were not substantially lower than those of metropolitan states (King, 2001; Protsyk, 2006). In addition to providing pensions and operating hospitals, non-recognized states have also achieved some success in constructing new identities for their regions, and these are promoted relentlessly through school curricula and the media (Kolstø, 2006; Troebst, 2004, 2005). Nevertheless, claims that their political systems are democratic and that patterns of representation are genuine are accorded a special place amongst the arguments *de facto* states use to justify their increasingly assertive quest for recognition (Moore, 1998; Coppieters and Sakwa, 2003).

There are a number of reasons why issues of representation remain largely unexplored in the literature on non-recognized states. The closed nature of these regimes and the lack of relevant and reliable data contribute to the paucity of research in this area; as noted by one student of these regimes: "Eurasia's de facto countries are informational black holes" (King, 2001). An additional reason is a productive but restrictive preoccupation with the dynamics of interactions between metropolitan states and secession-seeking regions. Discussion of these interactions often entails simplifying assumptions about the homogeneous nature of the elites representing secessionist entities. This discussion also focuses on various aspects of power sharing between metropolitan and secessionist elites (Roeder and Rothchild, 2005; Weller and Metzger, 2008; Norris, 2007; Wimmer et al., 2004).

This article problematizes the issue of the homogeneity of elite preferences and societal consensus in support of secessionist policies. In doing so, it relies on examining patterns of political representation in Transnistria. The article argues that exploring the ethnic, socio-demographic, and occupational characteristics of elites provides insight into both the sources of their preferences for secessionist policies and the mechanisms of elite selection in hybrid political regimes. It claims that persistent restrictions on political participation and contestation shape the patterns of political representation, in particular, by minimizing the possibility that political entrepreneurs with a policy agenda that differs from the incumbent's can win political office and consolidate societal support for policies other than secession.

Focusing on secessionist regimes' political mechanisms of reproduction has important implications for how we think about the politics of secession in a comparative perspective. It highlights the need to explain how interests are articulated and policies are formulated in the arena of domestic politics. It requires examining the motivations of various institutional and political actors that operate inside these regions. The

argument proposed here can inform our understanding of how hybrid political regimes function elsewhere. In particular, the author's preliminary research indicates that Georgia's breakaway regions have used similar strategies for manipulating political process and limiting political competition (Two NGO Representatives, 2008).

The article examines the composition of the Transnistrian political elite in the period when the Soviet Union was disintegrating and during *de facto* independence. It identifies systematic patterns of under-representation of important ethnic and social groups. These groups are the ones with the largest stake in resolving the conflict—which is currently "frozen"—through some form of coexistence with Moldova under the rubric of a common state. The article argues that under-representation of these groups has been translated into a lack of articulated policy alternatives which, given certain underlying characteristics of the Transnistrian conflict, should have been present in the public domain. The fact that secessionist policy objectives remain unchallenged within Transnistrian society is interpreted as a consequence of the limits imposed on political contestation.[2]

By refusing to treat separatist groups as unitary actors, the analysis proposed here challenges dominant explanations of the region's commitment to secession. Transnistria is an example of a multiethnic region. The high level of ethnic heterogeneity in the region led a number of scholars to search for an explanation of the secessionist phenomena in terms of the existence of a strong regional identity. "Politicized regionalism" is a term frequently invoked in accounts of Transnistria's secession from Moldova (Kolstø and Malgin, 1998; Kolstø and Melberg, 2002). This article provides grounds for questioning the existence of broad regional consensus for the elites' initial decision to escalate confrontation with the central government and especially for their later policies that sought to resolve the long-standing conflict through the pursuit of unconditional independence.

The article also highlights the restrictive nature of partial or incomplete democratization and its effects on the nature of the secessionist region's late communist and post-communist transition. In this sense, it builds on the comparative literature's findings that point to the tendency of secessionist regimes to limit democracy (Roeder, 2007; Bunce, 1999). It, however, extends this argument to a region with no immediate pre-secession history of autonomous institutions. The political evolution of the Transnistrian regime is conceptualized in this article as a case of managed or restricted pluralism. This concept is commonly and fruitfully used to describe practices in many hybrid regimes in the former Soviet region (Hale, 2005; Way, 2005). What a focus on legislative representation adds to this latter body of literature is a detailed analysis of how political recruit-

[2]Discussion of numerous international initiatives for resolving the Transnistrian conflict through some form of a power sharing agreement can be found in Coppieters (2004) and Roper (2004).

ment is managed in these systems, and what consequences these mechanisms of elite selection can have for the overall functioning of the regime.

Before embarking upon analysis of the data—much of which comes from longitudinal comparison of patterns of parliamentary representation in Transnistria—it is important to stress that the workings of legislative institutions in Transnistria reflect the sophisticated nature of contemporary non-democratic regimes. The functioning of parliament and relevant elections are meaningful political processes, both of which contain some elements of contestation and institutional rivalry. A notable illustration can be found in the May 2005 constitutional reform draft prepared by a group of parliamentary deputies. The draft envisaged the transfer of considerable power from the Transnistrian president to the parliament, and addressed issues such as the rules for forming the cabinet and constitutional court formation, the introduction of the office of prime minister, and the legislative powers of the president. Although the draft was not passed, it was widely considered to be a serious challenge to the existing presidential system and a direct attack on the local "guarantor of stability," Transnistria's President Smirnov (A. Radchenko in *IA REGNUM Novosti*, May 5, 2009, http://pda.regnum.ru/news/1159682.html). In short, the regional parliament is the main forum in which the pluralist dynamics of the Transnistrian political system play themselves out.

This article begins with a discussion of the ethnic dimension of political representation. Ethnicity, along with certain other demographic characteristics of the Transnistrian parliamentary elites, is analyzed in terms of its effect on the motivation of elites to initiate and sustain policies of secession. The characteristics of elites and of the wider population are compared, and the possibility of decoupling the preferences of politicians from the preferences of societal groups is explored. The next section of the article discusses the complex political nature of the Transnistrian regime. This regime combines elements of genuine political competition with severe restrictions on the ability of opposition candidates to gain representation in parliament and to articulate policy alternatives to the pursuit of full independence. The final section examines the nature of the parliamentary alliance that serves as the main source of support for the Transnistrian regime. In doing so, the section sheds additional light on mechanisms which ensure that various types of political actors comply with the regime's secessionist course.

ETHNIC REPRESENTATION AND ETHNIC ELITE PREFERENCES

Elites are a part of the story in all major accounts of ethnic mobilization in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet transition. The extent to which the elites mattered, however, is a matter of substantial disagreement in this literature (Roeder, 2007; Bunce, 1999; Beissinger, 2002; Gorenburg,

2003). An examination of the ethnic composition and social identity of political elites in Transnistria allows us to construct an account of Transnistrian secessionism that differs from the one put forward by the "politicized regionalism" argument. The latter suggests the existence of inter-ethnic group solidarity and wide societal support for the Transnistrian elites' pursuit of secessionist policies (Kolstø and Malgin, 1998; Kolstø and Melberg, 2002). Support for these policies on the part of two of the three major ethnic groups in Transnistria—the Russians and Ukrainians—can be grounded logically (but should not be automatically assumed) in public fears about the nationalizing Moldovan state.[3] However, explaining the willingness of ethnic Moldovans, the largest ethnic group in Transnistria, to support secession from their ethnic kin group in Moldova is more problematic. In the Transnistrian case, initial mobilization in support of secession was driven by the Moldovan language laws and fears of linguistic discrimination rather than by any considerations of perceived economic benefits (Büscher, 2008; Aklaev, 1999). High levels of Moldovan (Romanian) language retention by ethnic Moldovans in Transnistria make attributing secessionist preferences to this segment of population rather unconvincing.[4]

Although it is generally accepted that Moldovans are the largest ethnic group in Transnistria, their exact number is a contentious political issue. There are substantial differences in the ways in which the central Moldovan authorities and the authorities of the breakaway region interpret the 1989 census data on the ethnic composition of Transnistria. The 2004 census conducted by the Transnistrian authorities produced new figures that were also disputed. Nevertheless, these data sources all indicate that ethnic Moldovans have a plurality in the region. It is safe to assume that the share of ethnic Moldovans in the Transnistrian population at the beginning of the 1990s was somewhere between 33.8 percent and 39.9 percent, the estimates of the Transnistrian and Moldovan authorities, respectively.[5]

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[3]Survey data on public support for independence, as well as results of numerous referendums on this issue are considered unreliable by both the international community and local politicians. For an academic discussion of this issue, see Kolstø and Melberg (2002). In an interview with the author, a city council deputy from a Transnistrian city claimed that results of opinion polls and referendums are doctored by the executive government. She claimed that no one has a good understanding of what people really think about pursuing the goals of independence (City Council Deputy, 2006).

[4]On the characteristics of the ethnic Moldovan population in Transnistria, see Dima (2001).

[5]The results of the 1989 all-Union census translate to the following percentages of major ethnic groups in Transnistria: Moldovans account for 39.9 percent of the population in Transnistria, Ukrainians make up 28.3 percent, and the Russians constitute 25.5 percent (Goskomstat, 1990).The Transnistrian authorities claim that the 1989 census figures are not accurate because they included populations from a large number of right-bank settlements, which were a part of the left-bank administrative districts at the time of the 1989 census, but these have remained under the control of the Moldovan central government since 1990 (Babilunga et al., 2003).

Table 1. The Ethnic Composition of the Transnistrian Parliament by Parliamentary Terms (in percentages)[a]

	Population estimates (in percentages)[b]	Parliamentary term				
		1990–1995	1995–2000	2000–2005	2005–2010	Totals
Moldovans	33.8	18.75	24.29	23.81[c]	25.6[c]	22.83[c]
Non-Moldovans				76.19[c]	74.4c	77.06[c]
Russians	28.7	40.63	27.14			
Ukrainians	28.8	34.38	38.57			
Bulgarians	2.1	1.56	7.14			
Gagauzians	0.7	1.56	1.43			
Other	5.9	3.12	1.43			
Totals	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of deputies		64	70	42	43	219

[a]*Source:* Author's calculations from Marakutsa (2000), *Pridnestrov'ye* (December 21, 2000) and the official website of the Supreme Soviet of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (www.vspmr.org). The source for population estimates is Babilunga et al. (2003).
[b]Population estimates are for 1989.
[c]An estimated number based on a sum of self-reported ethnic data by the deputies plus the last name–based estimates of Moldovan ethnicity for deputies with no reported ethnicity. For the 2000–2005 and 2005–2010 parliaments, ethnicity was estimated for 20 and 21 deputies, respectively.

An examination of the presence of ethnic Moldovans in the parliamentary ranks suggests that they were consistently under-represented throughout the entire course of the secessionist conflict. Table 1 compares the ethnic composition of the Transnistrian population with the ethnic composition of consecutive Transnistrian parliaments. The table combines data on ethnic affiliation, as reported by the parliamentary deputies themselves in various published sources, with the author's estimates of ethnicity for deputies for whom no information relating to ethnic affiliation was available.[6] For the figures on ethnic composition of the population, the table uses the

[6]The table results for the 1990–1995 and 1995–2000 terms are based entirely on self-reported data by the deputies. The results for the 2000–2005 and the 2005–2010 terms include both the self-reported and the author's estimates. The number of parliamentary seats was reduced to 43 prior to the 2000 parliamentary elections. No deputy was elected in one of the 43 districts in the 2000 elections. The table reports only the aggregate share of deputies with an ethnic background other than Moldovan in the last two parliamentary terms. This is due to difficulties in differentiating among Slavic ethnic backgrounds of deputies with no reported ethnicity. A name-based algorithm was used to identify ethnic Moldovans.

Transnistrian official data, which gives the most conservative estimates of the share of ethnic Moldovans in the Transnistrian population.

The data reveals that ethnic Moldovans were under-represented in all parliamentary terms. The two other largest ethnic groups—the Russians and Ukrainians—were, on average, over-represented in the Transnistrian parliament. As Table 1 shows, the percentage of ethnic Moldovans in the parliament varied throughout the post-communist period from 18.75 percent to 25.6 percent. The percentage of Moldovans was lowest (18.75 percent) in the first parliament, which means that the share of ethnic Moldovans in that parliamentary term was about half the share of ethnic Moldovans in the population

The very high degree of under-representation of the Moldovans during the first term of the Transnistrian parliament is especially important if one takes into account the role of parliament in the dynamics of the secessionist conflict. The first parliament presided over the initial period of implementation of the secessionist agenda and over the progressive escalation of the confrontation between the region and the metropolitan state that led to armed conflict in the spring/summer of 1992.[7] The data in Table 1 indicate that during those times there were relatively few ethnic Moldovan parliamentary representatives who could claim to speak on behalf of the group with objectively the most to lose as a result of separation from Moldova.

An exploration of the social profiles of those few parliamentarians who were of ethnic Moldovan origin provides further insight into why there was so little representation of voices opposing secession in the Transnistrian parliament. The ethnic Moldovans in the first Transnistrian parliament came predominantly from one social stratum. Eight out of the 12 ethnic Moldovans in the first Transnistrian parliament belonged to the Soviet administrative, party, or economic elite. Only four ethnic Moldovan deputies could be considered not to have a considerable stake in the preservation of the old regime.[8]

The case of Grigoriy Marakutsa, who held the post of speaker in the Transnistrian parliament for three consecutive terms, illustrates the dominant social background of most ethnic Moldovan deputies in the Transnistrian parliament. A former Communist Party secretary in one of the territorial districts in Transnistria, he sided with the secessionist leadership and was elected late in 1990 as the parliamentary speaker, which is officially the second-highest government office in the *de facto* Transnistrian state. Over many years of his incumbency, Marakutsa frequently spoke on behalf of ethnic Moldovans and became a symbol of ethnic Moldovan participation in the formation of a secessionist regime.

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[7]For a detailed description of the dynamics of the conflict during that period, see Kaufman and Bowers (1998), Chinn and Roper (1995), and Aklaev (1999).

[8]Author's calculations from biographies of deputies published in Marakutsa (2000).

When the Soviet Union was disintegrating, the support of old communist apparatchiks (like Marakutsa) for secessionist policies was a rational personal strategy for many members of the ethnic Moldovan elite in Transnistria. It gave them an opportunity to preserve their elite status after anti-communist forces had gained control of the central Moldovan government in the aftermath of the USSR republican elections in the spring of 1990. Siding with the separatists was a way to avoid losing their positions and privileges, which is what happened to the communist *nomenklatura* in Moldova proper in the early 1990s. For many members of the old ethnic Moldovan elites in the Transnistrian region, considerations of elite status and ideological preferences for preserving the Soviet system far outweighed the potential benefits of maintaining ties with the metropolitan state controlled by the members of their ethnic kin group. Once the choice to support secession had been made, this group of Soviet *nomenklatura* became "locked into" the positions of the ethnic Moldovan group's leadership throughout the post-communist period, as the length of Marakutsa's tenure as a parliamentary speaker illustrates.

The under-representation of ethnic Moldovans indicated in Table 1 is rooted in a number of factors. One set of factors has to do with electoral system and settlement patterns. The Transnistrian choice of a single-member district (SMD) formula can be seen as contributing to the dilution of the demographic power of the group. The detailed data for the disputed 2004 Transnistrian census, which would make it possible to estimate the ethnic composition of electoral districts, is, unfortunately, not available. Some very limited observations about the nature of current districts, whose size is based on the ten thousand-voter average, can be made on the basis of aggregate ethnic composition data for the 1989 Soviet census.[9] The share of ethnic Moldovans in the three largest cities in Transnistria, where 27 out of 43 electoral districts are located—Tiraspol, Bendery, and Rybnitsa (including the Rybnitsa *rayon*)—varied between 18 and 33 percent. Given an ethnically mixed pattern of residence in these cities, ethnic Moldovans probably constitute a minority in all or almost all of these districts. The remaining 16 electoral districts cover the predominantly rural administrative regions of Camenca, Grigoriopol, Dubosary (including the town of Dubosary), and Slobozia. The share of ethnic Moldovan in these four regions varied between 43 and 68 percent, suggesting that ethnic Moldovans, who generally enjoyed lower educational attainment and social status, had to compete in ethnically mixed districts.[10]

[9]All ethnicity-related numbers in this paragraph are the result of author's calculations. These calculations are based on the *rayon*-level data from the 1989 census, which was provided by the Institute of Philosophy, Sociology, and Political Science of the Moldovan Academy of Sciences.

[10]The candidate data released by the Transnistrian authorities does not provide information on ethnic affiliation. This data can only be used as an indicator of the general competitiveness of electoral races and therefore is discussed in the second section of the article.

Table 2. The Birthplace of Deputies in the 2005–2010 Transnistrian Parliament[a]

Birthplace	Number	Percentage
Right Bank Moldova	5	11.6
Transnistria	13	30.2
Russia	9	23.3
Ukraine	8	18.6
Other	4	9.3
No data	3	7.0
Totals	43	11.6

[a]*Source:* Author's calculations from the official website of the Supreme Soviet of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (www.vspmr.org).

The second factor contributing to under-representation of ethnic Moldovans is a set of practices that limited political competition, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section of the article. Politicians from the ethnic Moldovan community posed the most credible challenge to the secessionist agenda pursued by regional authorities. As a result, the authorities' efforts to restrict political activity and to deny or deter the entrance of political opponents into the political process were directed in particular against potential challengers from the ethnic Moldovan community. This decreased the ability of members of this ethnic group to gain parliamentary seats and diminished the group's chances of securing proportional representation in the political institutions of the non-recognized state.

Other types of constituencies could also claim under-representation in the Transnistrian case. In the context of our discussion of the differences in the composition of the elite and of society in general, data on the birthplaces of parliamentary deputies can provide useful information on ways in which elites belong to a territory and its population, in particular, modes of belonging that do not depend on membership in an ethnic group. In the case of the Transnistrian parliament, such data was available in relatively complete form only for the 2005–2010 parliamentary term.

As the above table indicates, less than a third of the deputies were born in Transnistria. This is a very small percentage given the importance of community entrenchment for elected representatives, especially in societies that use the SMD electoral formula. The limited local connection of non-native deputies is further underscored by data indicating the location of the institutions where they received their higher education. Of the 21 deputies born outside Transnistria or Moldova proper, only two received their higher education in Transnistria, and another three did so

in Moldova. The rest studied at universities located in other parts of the former Soviet Union.

Data on the percentage of the non-native population in Transnistria is not available. Transnistrian urban centers experienced significant immigration during the Soviet period. The Soviet administrative elite in Transnistria was recruited throughout the Soviet Union.[11] However, the bulk of immigration into Transnistrian cities was made up of rural migration to urban centers from the local countryside.[12] Thus, the extremely high proportion of deputies born outside the region suggests that people born in Transnistria were significantly under-represented in the Transnistrian parliament. "Outsider" interest in preserving a common state with Moldova could legitimately be assumed to be lower than that of groups native to the region.

Both ethnic Moldovans and "natives" from other ethnic communities have extensive personal ties to Moldova. The long-established Ukrainian and Russian communities in Transnistria have large networks of relatives in the northern and central parts of Moldova, where Slavic groups have also traditionally resided (King, 2000). The strength of these kin ties and the long history of peaceful co-existence between the different ethnic groups in Moldova contributed to the persistence of positive views on the state of inter-ethnic relations between the members of all major ethnic groups. This remained the case both in Transnistria and in Moldova proper even after the secessionist conflict led to a period of military engagements and a substantial number of casualties across the board in the spring of 1992. As indicated by extensive fieldwork conducted in Moldova and Transnistria in the second half of the 1990s, personal experience of inter-ethnic conflict was virtually missing from the experience of members of all ethnic groups (Kolstø and Melberg, 2002).[13]

Finally, the degree to which a separate regional identity in Transnistria was entrenched at the beginning of the transition should not be overestimated. Comparative literature on secessionist conflicts points to the critical importance of institutional frameworks in fostering such identities and building public support for secession (Roeder, 2007; Bunce, 1999). Thus, it is important to note that the Transnistrian region in its current shape became part of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1940 and

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[11]Regrettably, one of the classical studies of the Soviet elite, the study of elites in the city of Tiraspol, which is now the capital of the *de facto* state, has no information on ethnic characteristics or birthplaces of the members of elite groups whose social and occupational background this study meticulously researched. From today's perspective, this is, of course, a glaring omission in an otherwise extremely thorough study (Hill, 1977). Issues of the ethnic composition of elites in the pre–World War II period are addressed in King (1998).

[12]One study estimates that between 1959 and 1989 more than 50 percent and up to three-quarters of the new urban residents in Moldova came from the local countryside (Dima, 2001).

[13]Inter-ethnic attitudes were reported to be more conflict-prone in the early 1990s (Crowther, 1998, 1996).

it had no institutionalized autonomy throughout the subsequent Soviet period.[14]

Overall, the ethnic composition of the Transnistrian region, the existence of strong kin ties between all major ethnic groups in Transnistria and Moldova, and the peaceful nature of inter-ethnic coexistence suggest that societal preferences with regard to the issue of secession might have been different from the preferences of incumbent Transnistrian elites. These elites, as the preceding discussion suggests, gave strong support to the radical secessionist agenda in the early 1990s.

Pluralist political systems do, of course, provide a mechanism for resolving this type of conflict between different preference schedules and for ensuring alignment in the positions of societal groups and their representatives. In an open democratic environment, one would have expected the emergence of political entrepreneurs who appealed to the interests of segments of the Transnistrian population with a stake in reconciliation and the maintenance of a common state. The efforts of these entrepreneurs should have been assisted by decisions on the part of the secessionist regime in a number of policy areas. For example, the decision of the Transnistrian authorities to continue to use the Soviet-era Cyrillic script for the Romanian language (even though Moldova had switched to the Latin script in 1989) clearly placed the Moldovan youth, which was interested in educational and job opportunities in Moldova and Romania, at a disadvantage (Roper, 2005). The next section of the article addresses the question of why these political entrepreneurs failed to articulate alternative policies and to secure constituency support for their political aspirations.

POLITICAL CONTESTATION AND ELITE TURNOVER

The study of political regimes that fall on the continuum between democratic and authoritarian systems has received a lot of attention in literature on the post-communist transition (Hale, 2005; Way, 2005; Bunce, 2003; McFaul and Stoner-Weiss, 2005; Fish, 2005). Discussion of the exact nature of these regimes is part of a more general debate in comparative politics about the character of intermediate-type regimes found in different regions across the world. The issue of whether these systems should be conceptualized as a new type of authoritarian regime, as hybrid regimes, or as defective democracies still generates a great deal of disagreement. However, this literature has already improved our understanding of

[14]Transnistria was a part of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic that existed within the administrative framework of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic between 1924 and 1940. This fact, while a crucial part of a regional identity narrative currently constructed in Transnistria, signifies a rather distant historical experience with important but limited consequences for the secessionist dynamics of the 1990s. On identity construction, see Troebst (2005).

various practices of limiting political contestation and participation employed by intermediate-type regimes.[15]

The Transnistrian regime is not original in the way it handles political competition and it has employed many of the practices described in the literature on intermediate political regimes. These include selective law enforcement, the arbitrary application of administrative norms and regulations, the use of state ownership as a means of exerting political influence, the politicization of government bureaucracy, and the management of state-run enterprises. As in other cases, these practices are sanctioned by political leaders in control of the executive. They are intended to provide incumbents with a built-in advantage in different political arenas and to limit the ability of the opposition to contest those in power, above all, in the electoral field.

The measures used against the Transnistrian opposition varied in their repressiveness. The most radical critics of secessionism were framed as posing a threat to state security. For example, the so-called Ilaşcu group, which included four ethnic Moldovans who were especially active and vocal in their opposition to secessionist policies, were imprisoned for 12 to 15 years in 1992.[16] The Transnistrian security apparatus has become notorious in the region and it is routinely used as an instrument to intimidate those who opposed the Transnistrian leadership's secessionist course. Repressive measures may be contributing to the inability of the regime's opponents to mount any extra-institutional movement that would challenge the secessionists' objectives.

Opposition activists whose position was less radical and who tended to come from the Slavic population of the region have routinely claimed that law enforcement and regulatory authorities were harassing their offices, organizations, and media outlets.[17] For example, during the 2000–2005 parliamentary term, a deputy of the Transnistrian parliament, Aleksandr Radchenko, was accused of cooperating with the Moldovan authorities and faced a recall campaign orchestrated by the pro-government groups. In the 2005 parliamentary campaign, he and another candidate were branded as traitors who were collaborating with the Moldovan authorities (N. Buchacki in *Nezavisimaya Moldova*, December 28, 2005). Opposition candidates generally stress their inability to campaign effectively during elections and they accuse the authorities of outright electoral fraud (Transnistrian Journalist, 2005). Intimidation is practiced even against the regime's prominent members when the latter are suspected of

[15]A useful summary of these findings is provided, for example, by Schedler (2006).

[16]The case of their leader, Ilie Ilaşcu, went to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The ECHR ruled in 2004 that the authorities had infringed on the human rights (as defined by the European Convention on Human Rights) of Ilie Ilaşcu and the other three people arrested by the Transnistrian government.

[17]The nature of the tightly controlled media is discussed, for example, in Grigoriy Volovoy (2001).

taking conciliatory positions vis-à-vis the Moldovan government (Moldovan Member of the Joint Constitutional Commission (JCC), 2003).[18]

Attempts by opposition groups to contest policies were also undermined by the ability of the authorities to delay institutionalization of political parties. While discussion of political contestation in intermediate regimes usually focuses on electoral arena struggles between opposition parties and authorities (Schedler, 2006), the Transnistrian regime was able to maintain a situation in which authorities had to deal with individuals or dispersed opposition groups rather than with large, well-managed political organizations. Prior to the 2000 parliamentary elections, for example, a number of leading candidates of a newly formed civic movement, "Unity," were disqualified from participating in the elections. Although the movement was taking an explicitly pro-Russian position, the authorities perceived the independent stance of its leaders as a threat (D. Krechetov in *Novaya gazeta* [Bendery], December 9, 2000). As late as the end of 2005, only two organizations were officially registered as political parties in Transnistria. Neither of them had any substantial influence over political life in the region.[19] Both the Soviet legacy of the absence of competitive party politics and authorities' maintenance of a SMD electoral system for all parliamentary elections held in the region contributed to the underdevelopment of political parties.

Throughout the entire post-communist period, most of the candidates for parliamentary office in Transnistria ran as independents, which greatly strengthened the leverage of the authorities in discriminating against undesired candidates. The latter lacked the organization to prepare and run campaigns and, of equal importance, they did not have the organization to defend campaign results from falsification. The image of a level playing field where different political entrepreneurs are free to articulate their political agendas and seek popular support for these agendas is clearly not applicable to the Transnistrian case.

Yet the Transnistrian regime is far from being a "closed" autocracy. Instead, it illustrates the complexities involved in analyzing and categorizing intermediate regimes. Interventions in the electoral process have been selective and have been largely intended to exclude the possibility of effective participation by those candidates who posed a direct challenge to the regime's secessionist course and its survival. At the same time, in their efforts to provide mechanisms for elite accountability and to strengthen the legitimacy of the regime in the eyes of domestic and international

[18]The JCC was established in 2003 to negotiate a constitutional deal for Moldova's reunification. The head of the Transnistrian delegation to the JCC allegedly faced picket lines in front of his residence whenever announcements of progress in the negotiations were reported.

[19]Both "old" political parties had the word "communist" in their title and differed primarily in terms of their opposition/pro-government stand vis-à-vis the Transnistrian authorities. See Safonov (2005).

Table 3. Incumbency Rates in the Transnistrian Parliament[a]

		Parliamentary term				
		1990–1995	1995–2000	2000–2005	2005–2010	Average for 1995–2010
Newcomer	Percentage	100	84.29	73.81	39.54	69.03
	Number	64	59	31	17	107
Incumbent	Percentage	0	15.71	26.19	60.46	30.87
	Number	0	11	11	26	48
Totals	Percentage	100	100	100	100	100
	Number	64	70	42	43	155

[a]*Source:* Author's calculations from Marakutsa (2000); *Pridnestrov'ye* (December 21, 2000); and the official website of the Supreme Soviet of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (www.vspmr.org).

audiences, the authorities chose to allow a substantial degree of pluralist electoral competition.

Multi-candidate electoral races in each of the territorial districts, free air time for candidates, debates between candidates running in the same district, which were broadcast in the media, and the presence of international observers from a particular group of countries sympathetic to the regime have all become hallmarks of parliamentary campaigns in Transnistria. In the 2000 and 2005 elections, 238 and 209 candidates, respectively, contested 43 parliamentary seats, with the vast majority of races having at least two candidates and many races having more than five candidates. The electoral legislation of the region contains a detailed set of rules and procedures as well academic commentaries, all designed to convey the seriousness of the authorities in their approach to organizing elections (Beril, Blagodatskikh, and Galinskiy, 2005).

More importantly, the existence of elements of genuine electoral contestation in the Transnistrian political system, something that regime critics often deny, is reflected in the outcomes of electoral races. The incumbency rate—that is, the percentage of sitting parliamentary deputies who secure re-election—is an outcome that is important in a discussion of political competitiveness. All things being equal, a low incumbency rate might indicate a higher degree of uncertainty about the outcomes of the electoral process and a more competitive political environment. Table 3 presents incumbency data for all parliamentary terms in Transnistria.

As the table indicates, the average incumbency rate for the entire period was low. This average was calculated as the arithmetic mean of incumbency rates for individual parliamentary terms, excluding the 1990–1995 term that followed the founding legislative elections of November 1990. Throughout the post-communist period, less then a third of all sitting

deputies were returned to parliament after the elections. The detailed data on the number of incumbents running for re-election throughout the entire post-communist period is not available. The data for the 2005 elections, in which 38 out of 43 sitting deputies stood for the re-election, suggests, however, that parliamentary careers might be perceived as highly attractive.

In the context of individual parliamentary terms, the incumbency rate was lowest for the second parliament. Only 11 out of 70 deputies in the 1995–2000 parliament had served as members of parliament during the previous term. This translates into a 15.71 percent incumbency rate. The incumbency rate was higher for the 2000–2005 legislature and reached even higher levels for the 2005–2010 parliamentary term. Twenty-six out of 43 deputies in the fourth parliament, or 59.52 percent of all deputies, were also members of parliament during the third term. These findings suggest an upward trend in incumbency rates, which might be due to increased professionalization amongst incumbents and to the regime's improved ability to ensure re-election of its loyal supporters through various legal and illegal mechanisms for influencing the outcomes of individual campaigns.

The last parliamentary elections also saw the introduction of some real elements of party competition. Two so-called civic political movements, which could be seen as prototypes of political parties, were organized prior to the 2005 elections. These movements—"Republic" and "Renewal"—came to dominate the parliamentary campaign. They represented different groups within the ruling elite but were largely united on the core issue of independence.

The continuing reluctance on the part of the authorities to structure the political process along party lines was reflected in their persistent ambiguity with regard to the question of membership of newly elected deputies in these movements. No official information on the political affiliation of individual deputies was provided by parliament in the aftermath of elections, and analysts who follow Transnistrian politics continue to disagree about the number of deputies who belonged to the two movements. The absence of fixed membership provisions could be seen as one of the institutional devices intended to limit the possibility of further intra-elite differentiation and competition. Nevertheless, the role that civic political movements played in the 2005 elections encouraged others to engage in party-building efforts, and, by July 2007, as an editorial in a Tiraspol newspaper indicated, there were already 10 political parties registered in Transnistria (*Pridnestrov'ye*, July 10, 2007, www.pridnestroviedaily.net/gazeta/articles/view.aspx?ArticleID=6792).

The high levels of turnover in the Transnistrian parliament can be contrasted with a high degree of continuity in the executive government. Key positions in the executive, such as those of President of the Republic, Minister for Security, and Minister of Foreign Affairs, have been held by the same individuals throughout the entire post-communist period. President Smirnov, the leader of the secessionist movement from the late 1980s, has been re-elected three times by popular election. Each of the elections

featured between two and four candidates but observers agree that they were multi-candidate only in a nominal sense. In neither of the elections was any other candidate able to gain more than about 10 percent of the vote. On each occasion, the opposition candidates claimed that the elections were unfair and that voting results were rigged. As one opposition politician noted, the stakes in presidential elections were much higher for the authorities than those of any parliamentary race in individual legislative districts, and this led to a much higher rate of manipulation and, allegedly, outright fraud in presidential elections (Opposition Politicians, 2005).

Parliamentary and presidential elections seem to have been used by the authorities of the *de facto* state as a means of addressing the different challenges faced by the regime. The stability and continuity of the executive government, preserved through tight management of presidential elections, were intended to offset, at least partially, the profound uncertainties about the international status of the region and continued elite control of power and property in a legal environment that was not recognized by the international community. The willingness of the authorities to accept a higher degree of openness and contestation in parliamentary races reflects their need to respond to societal pressures for effective political participation and elite accountability.

ELITE SELECTION UNDER THE SYSTEM OF LIMITED POLITICAL PLURALISM

Further insight into the nature of the Transnistrian political system as an example of a hybrid regime can be obtained from examining the occupational profile of parliamentary elites. This reveals that access to parliamentary positions in Transnistria is limited in large part to the representatives of two occupational groups: state bureaucrats and business managers. A coalition of representatives of these two interest groups has been a persistent feature of Transnistrian politics. Due to the competitive character of parliamentary races, there has been some rotation of individuals serving the interests of these groups in parliament. However, as indicated by the data provided below, the nature of this legislative alliance—which controlled the majority of seats in parliament and formed the main base of elite support for the secessionist course—remained constant throughout the post-communist period.

Although the literature on political recruitment has long argued that occupational background is an important factor in explaining both electoral success and the subsequent behavior of elected representatives once in office, there is no consensus on how differences in occupational background should be conceptualized (Patzelt, 2002; Best and Cotta, 2000). The shortcomings of some well-known classifications include the use of non–mutually exclusive coding categories and the lack of clear procedures for

Table 4. Distribution of the Occupational Background of Parliamentary Newcomers, by Parliamentary Terms (in percentages)[a]

	Parliamentary term				
	1990–1995	1995–2000	2000–2005	2005–2010	Totals
Professional	20.31	13.56	6.45	5.88	14.04
Culture and education	4.69	5.08	6.45	11.76	5.85
Business	25.00	44.07	48.39	70.59	40.35
Military and police	6.25	0	3.23	5.88	3.51
Political	10.94	3.39	0	0	5.26
Civil service	29.69	25.42	25.81	0	24.56
Trade	0	1.69	0	0	0.58
Other	0	0	3.23	0	0.58
No data	1.56	0	6.45	0	1.75
Totals	100	100	100	100	100
Number of deputies	64	59	31	17	171

[a]*Source:* Author's calculations from Marakutsa (2000); *Pridnestrov'ye* (December 21, 2000); and the official website of the Supreme Soviet of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (www.vspmr.org).

making coding decisions in situations where a deputy has had several professional or occupational backgrounds. These deficiencies make it difficult to compare occupational background data and to draw descriptive and causal inferences on the basis of that data.[20]

The following analysis is based on a dataset that was constructed using coding procedures that attempt to address these issues of classification. The coding of occupational background, which is presented in Table 4 below, is based on a set of categories that are distinct, are mutually exclusive, and exhaust all possibilities. The job held by a deputy immediately prior to entry into parliament in any given legislative term was used for making coding decisions about occupational background. The information on the last job is more important for the purposes of this analysis than data on formal professional background—that is, whether a person was trained as an engineer or a physician. The latter is often used as an indicator of occupational background in recruitment literature. Although information on formal professional training was also collected for the dataset, it is assumed this information is not as central to the task of uncovering

[20]This problem is evident, for example, in the occupational coding used in Best and Cotta (2000).

the types of resources and connections available to a parliamentary candidate as information relating to the last job held.

The occupational background of deputies with the status of parliamentary newcomer is classified in Table 4 into one of nine categories.[21] As the last column indicates, business managers and civil servants dominate the ranks of parliamentary representatives in Transnistria. Sixty-five percent of all newcomers belong to these two categories. A professional background, which includes such occupations as engineer, lawyer, economist, and physician, is a distant third occupational category. While the distribution of occupational backgrounds in society at large shows a professional background to be the second most frequent category after trade, only 14 percent of newcomers in the parliament were professionals.

The results obtained suggest a particular pattern of occupational composition in the Transnistrian parliament, which neither is representative of the occupational distribution in society as a whole nor is similar to patterns found in established representative democracies. The lack of correspondence between the occupational background of parliamentarians and the distribution of societal occupational characteristics is, of course, a common feature across various national contexts and levels of democratic development. The political selection process favors individuals who come from more advanced occupational categories. Soviet experimentation in this regard proved rather short-lived, as the table's data on trade background reveals. What is much less common in established democracies, however, is the relative weight of the occupational categories found to be most frequent in the Transnistrian context.

A dominant theme in the historical analysis of the occupational backgrounds of members of Western European parliaments is the growing importance of professionals as one of the main sources for political recruitment (Best and Cotta, 2000). Studies of contemporary recruitment practices also point to the importance of professionals. For example, the recent study of the occupational background of legislators in Germany—a country with one of the strongest traditions in research on parliamentary representation—identified a professional background as the most frequent in the German parliament. The same study also reported that only 3.8 percent of the parliamentary deputies elected in the 1994 federal elections had a civil service/public administration background, and only 3.7 percent of the deputies were business managers/employers (Norris and Franklin, 1997).

As Table 4 indicates, a reverse trend can be observed in Transnistria. If consolidation of democracy implies greater access of professionals to positions of representation, then the Transnistrian case is not one of successful democratization. The highest value of the share of professionals

[21]Occupations were classified as follows: professional (lawyers, economists, engineers, physicians), culture and education, business, military and police, political, civil service, nongovernmental, trade (blue-collar workers), other (retired, students).

in parliament was recorded in the first term. This share then declined steadily in all consecutive parliamentary terms. Business managers, on the other hand, proved consistently successful in securing parliamentary representation. Their share grew over time, and in the last parliament, business managers accounted for an astounding 70 percent of all newcomers. The share of members of the administrative apparatus of the *de facto* state (in other words, the civil service) has been consistently high throughout all parliamentary terms, with the exception of the last term.[22] Given that incumbency rates have increased over time, many deputies with civil-service backgrounds who had entered parliament from the state bureaucracy in previous terms were returned to parliament as incumbents for the latest term.

Overall, the data points to the unquestionable dominance of business managers and bureaucrats in the ranks of parliamentary representatives. Although, as mentioned previously, multi-candidate legislative races are the rule in Transnistria and many candidates from various occupational backgrounds routinely take part in electoral contests in each of the legislative districts, the winners are drawn primarily from these two occupational fields. This suggests that membership in one of these two groups, which are numerically small within society at large, provides a candidate with important advantages in the executive-controlled electoral competition.

The results presented in Table 4 also provide further evidence for the earlier observation relating to the marginal effects of parties on the political process in Transnistria. One of the categories of occupational background—political background—was intended to capture the question of whether any of the deputies were engaged in professional political activity prior to entry into parliament. This was defined as full-time occupation of any elected office or full-time employment in a political party. As the table reveals, the 1990–1995 legislature had the highest number of deputies with a professional political background. These were the former Communist Party apparatchiks who won seats in the 1990 elections. There were no deputies with a professional political background in the last two legislative terms, which suggests that no deputy (excluding incumbents) was engaged in politics full-time prior to entering parliament. Professional politicians—who, in modern democracies, are attached to parties, and who are one of the main sources of candidates for elected positions even in new democracies—have been virtually absent from the Transnistrian political scene.

The functioning of the Transnistrian political system is shaped by interest group rather than party-based politics. Business groups and bureaucracies are the key actors in domestic politics of the *de facto* state, not political parties. As argued earlier, both the communist legacy and the deliberate

[22]Prior to the 2005 parliamentary elections, the Transnistrian Constitutional Court imposed restrictions on parliamentarians' ability to combine parliamentary jobs with civil-service careers.

choices of the Transnistrian authorities, especially with respect to electoral laws and party registration issues, contributed to this peculiar structuring of the political system. When examining the Transnistrian experience from a broader comparative perspective, it is useful to note that a political process based on interest groups is not the only way that politics can be organized in secessionist entities. For example, political contestation in Northern Cyprus rests on robust party competition based on programmatic differences and separate control of the individual institutions of a non-recognized state (Kaymak, 2007; Lacher and Kaymak, 2005).

The article's quantitatively-based findings that business managers and civil servants predominate in the ranks of parliamentary representatives, as well as its qualitative data from interviews with Transnistrian politicians and civil society activists, inform the perspective on collective legislative behavior laid out in what follows. The collective preferences of the legislature with regard to basic distributive questions of domestic politics and the goal of securing international recognition of the status of full statehood are shaped by a special type of relationship between the institutions of the *de facto* state and dominant interest groups in parliament. This relationship is based on clientelistic exchanges between executive institutions and the alliance of large businesses and government bureaucracies. State resources and administrative capabilities are used by the executive authorities to help their clients secure access to parliamentary seats. While in parliament, members of these two occupational groups focus on catering to the interests of their groups rather than on delivering public goods, and they concentrate on backing executive attempts to finalize secession rather than on seriously engaging with repeated efforts by the international community to find a common state solution for Moldova and Transnistria.

The preferences of these two interest groups and their reasons for compliance with the *de facto* state's drive for internationally recognized independence might be different. Achieving full statehood is an obvious preference of government bureaucracies and their representatives in parliament. The business community is much more ambivalent about whether continued insistence on achieving independence and the refusal to consider proposals for reintegration with Moldova is the optimal strategy for ensuring growing market capitalization of their businesses and the region's overall economic development. The business community is also dominated by export-oriented industries whose sectoral interests are hurt by the limits that the status of non-recognition imposes on their businesses.[23] Views that challenge the official pro-independence line are not voiced in the business community for reasons similar to those discussed in the earlier analysis of how intermediate types of political regimes limit political competition. As is well documented in the literature on post-

[23]The Transnistrian business community's interests are discussed in a report produced by the Center for Strategic Studies and Reforms (Burla et al., 2005).

communist states, businesses are especially vulnerable to administrative and legal pressures exerted by executive governments operating in an environment where the rule of law is weak (see, for example, Darden, 2008). Threats of sanctions are usually credible, and for business leaders, the costs of advocating and seeking public support for policies alternative to those promoted by a non-democratic state are prohibitive. It has been argued that the Transnistrian republic currently represents a sophisticated version of just such a non-democratic state.

CONCLUSION

This article has sought to put politics back into discussions about territorial secession and state-building. It has emphasized that pursuit of a secessionist agenda can mean that the leadership of a secessionist movement is faced with difficult choices in relation to the adoption of democratic norms and principles. Initiating and, in particular, sustaining a course that moves towards secession is not a policy that necessarily trumps all the alternatives in a democratic setting, especially if the secessionist region has multiple and diverse links to the metropolitan state. The Transnistrian leadership chose to severely restrict political competition in order to consolidate its hold on power and to maintain the appearance of public consensus on the issue of independence. Restrictions on political contestation had numerous consequences, including the artificial narrowing of the range of policy options and political candidates that would otherwise have been available to the Transnistrian population.

The analysis of the Transnistrian case encourages us, in evaluating secessionist claims, to shift our attention from discussing the levels of societal support for the policy of secession to examining the nature of the political process that leads to building such support. While public opinion polls in non-democratic states have many sources of potential bias—including respondents' fears of expressing their true feelings and even outright manipulation of survey responses—this article highlights what, in terms of normative democratic theory, could be considered a cardinal sin for this type of secessionist regime: citizens are denied the right to form their opinion on the basis of the free competition of views and ideas.

Attempting to uncover the nature of the political regime in Transnistria, this article has focused on examining patterns of parliamentary representation. In doing so, it has gone beyond an examination of electoral practices associated with hybrid regimes and has concentrated on a detailed analysis of the representational outcomes produced by the political process. Investigation of patterns of legislative representation could be seen as one element in a broader research agenda for the study of legislatures in transitional societies. Calls for students of democratization to pursue such an agenda have been advanced in recent literature that provides an assessment of comparative democratization research and points to the fact that legislative issues remain relatively unexamined (Geddes, 2003; Fish, 2006).

The detailed examination of demographic, social, and occupational background data on elected representatives offers a number of valuable insights into the political process in transitional societies. It allows us to identify systematic patterns of under-representation and to discuss their potential implications for policy. It provides the basis for generating estimates of elite preferences and for exploring the character of legislative coalitions, especially in societies with weak party systems. It helps us to understand problems of elite responsiveness and the nature of elite compliance with attempts made by the executive government to construct hybrid or non-democratic types of political regimes.

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