Contemporary Attitudes and Beliefs in Transdniestria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia: A Preliminary Analysis of Survey Data

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Unrecognized “de facto” states are secessionist regions that have established internal territorial sovereignty but lack widespread recognition & legitimacy as states in the international system.
“De facto” States (TMR, Abkhazia, S Ossetia) Compared

**Similarities**

- Similar origins: counter-mobilization to nationalizing projects
- Similar unrecognized status for majority of international community
- Similar in external accusations of domestic ‘illegality’
- Similar relative state-building successes
- Russian sphere of influence: therefore, symbolic objects (“pawns”) in geopolitics for other countries

**Differences**

- Historical polities with different status in Soviet times.
- Different titular regional embeddedness.
- Different histories/geographies of wartime violence.
- Different return/property legacies.
- Different patron-client relationships.
- Different border contexts
Aims of the Unrecognized “de facto” States Project:

1. What geopolitical conditions produce partly-recognized states?
2. How do partly and unrecognized ‘de facto’ states endure?
3. How successful are the ‘de facto’ states in state-making and negotiating complex national relations?
4. What is the impact of the Kosovo precedent on the legitimacy of the Russian-backed Eurasian “de facto” states?

Survey Data:

- **Surveys**: Representative samples (500 in South Ossetia, 1000 in Moldova, TMR, Abkhazia, Kosovo and 1600 in Georgia) with approx. 130 questions in each (more than 85% of the questions standardized across 6 samples)
- **Categories of Questions on the Questionnaire**:
  - Socio-demographic/wellbeing
  - Internal legitimacy/state-building
  - Group relations and inter-group attitudes
  - External relations
  - Identities
  - Mobility and Connectedness
  - Geopolitical knowledge
  - Place and culture meanings
Public Opinion Survey in Abkhazia, late-March-early April 2010
1000 respondents; 1463 contacts (68% response rate); margin of error 4% in 53 locations

Exact proportionate distribution by Sukhum(i) city and the rayoni within Abkhazia: in Russian with translation help in Gal(i) district (predominantly Georgian/Mingrelian)

**Composition of the survey respondents:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic (national) group</th>
<th>Ratio in the sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abkhaz</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenians</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgians</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mingrelians</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgian and Mingrelian</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/Hard to say</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dropped 70 surveys for this presentation because of interviewers doubts about honesty of responses (26) and mixed —”hard to say” nationality answer (44)

Georgian on slides = those who self-classified as Georgian, Georgian & Mingrelian, and Mingrelian
## Distribution of the sample by city and rayoni in Abkhazia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region &amp; Type of settlement</th>
<th>Official 2003 census data</th>
<th>Corrected data</th>
<th>% of Population</th>
<th>Sample distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABKHAZIA</td>
<td>215567</td>
<td>225567</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gagra rayon</td>
<td>36691</td>
<td>36691</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gadauta rayon</td>
<td>35930</td>
<td>30275</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sukhum(i) rayon</td>
<td>11895</td>
<td>11895</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sukhum(i) city</td>
<td>44690</td>
<td>44690</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulrypsh rayon</td>
<td>17477</td>
<td>17477</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ochamchira rayon</td>
<td>24972</td>
<td>21788</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tkuarchal rayon</td>
<td>14735</td>
<td>18843</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gal(i) rayon</td>
<td>29177</td>
<td>43908</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q. Look at the card and say how you would rate your family’s income level?
1. We can purchase all that we need, 2. We can purchase all we need except for durable goods, 3. We have enough money only for food, 4. We do not have enough money to provide food, 8 Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N = 930 in 57 locations.
Standard of Living Question:
Comparing the economic situation in Georgia and Abkhazia?
Abkhazia Sample April 2010 – % by Nationality

Q. How do you compare the economic situation in Abkhazia and Georgia?
1. It’s much better in Abkhazia than in Georgia, 2. It’s better in Abkhazia than in Georgia, 3. It’s about the same,
Q. Here where you currently live, during the past year, have you been discriminated against because of your nationality or religion?  1. Yes, often, 2. Yes, sometimes, 3. Rarely, 4. Never, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer.  N= 930 in 57 locations.
Identity Question
Pride in the Ethnic Group (Nation)
Abkhazia Sample April 2010 - % by Nationality

Q. To what extent do you feel proud to be a member of your ethnic group, your people?
Q. Which political system do you think is better?
State-building Question
Direction of the Country – Right or Wrong
Abkhazia Sample April 2010 - % by Nationality

Q. In your opinion, are things in the country moving in the right or the wrong direction? 1. Generally in the right direction, 2. Generally in the wrong direction 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations.
Q. Could you say whether or not you trust the Abkhaz police?
Q. What do you think: do residents of Abkhazia who are not Abkhazians have an opportunity to have well-paid jobs and to take up significant posts? 1. Definitely yes, 2. Probably yes, 3. Probably no, 4. Definitely no, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer.  N= 930 in 57 locations.
Q. The Abkhaz government has recently agreed to place a Russian military base on the Abkhazian territory. Do you support or oppose this decision? 1. Strongly support, 2. Mostly support, 3. Neither support or oppose, 4. Mostly oppose, 5. Strongly oppose, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N=930 in 57 locations
Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Among those displaced by the war, there are people who should not be allowed to come back to Abkhazia? 1. Strongly agree, 2. Mostly agree, 3. Mostly disagree, 5. Strongly disagree, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer.  N= 930 in 57 locations.
Q. Would you be willing to accept the full return of Georgian refugees to Abkhazia in return for Abkhazia’s recognition as a state by the West and the rest of the international community?  1. Yes, 2. No, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N=930 in 57 locations.

Q. In your opinion, what should be the future status of Abkhazia?
1. Abkhazia should be part of the Russian Federation,
2. Abkhazia should be part of Georgia,
3. Abkhazia should remain an independent state,
4. Difficult to say,
5. Refuse to answer.

N = 930 in 57 locations.
Georgians who choose “Abkhazia should remain Independent” as the political option

Are more likely to be in “excellent” or “normal” mood.

Are more likely to think that the country is heading in the “right direction.

Are more likely to think that “the current system in Abkhazia” is the best political system.

Are more likely to have higher levels of “general trust”

Are more likely to say they voted for President Bagapsh (only a small number did)

Survey responses are not related to
Gender
Age
Interviewer Rating of Honesty of Responses
Purchasing Power of the Respondent
Conclusions

The single most significant predictor of survey attitudes in Abkhazia is a person’s declared nationality.

Experience of displacement is also a powerful predictor; this overlaps a great deal with Georgian nationality.....

.....which overlaps with the Gal(i) district, which is a very distinctive space in Abkhazia.

Neither gender nor age (Soviet versus post-Soviet generation) are significant predictors of particular attitudes within or across nationalities.

Amongst Georgians there are consistently higher rates of “hard to say” and “refuse to answer” responses.

Abkhazia remains a divided society; the majority non-Georgian population are relatively contented and irreconcilable to Georgia and to large scale population returns.