

Moldovan Parliamentary Elections: Post-electoral Analysis



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On September 28, 2025, Moldova conducted parliamentary elections amid one of the most aggressive foreign interference efforts to date. Despite Russian-orchestrated vote-buying networks, cyberattacks, and disinformation at an unprecedented level, the pro-European Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) retained its parliamentary majority, and the electoral process remained credible, according to international observers, including the OSCE/ODIHR. This outcome presents both a strategic success story and a cautionary case study: defensive democracies can prevail, but at the expense of legal gray zones, controversial exclusions, and unresolved legitimacy tensions that require urgent attention.

I. Introduction

The September 28, 2025, parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova resulted in the ruling pro-EU Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) retaining control of Parliament, albeit with a narrower majority, following a lengthy struggle against multiple destabilizing challenges. The [overarching threat](#) facing the Moldovan democratic system was Russia's intensified effort to hijack the Moldovan democratic process and divert the country from its pro-European course. To achieve this goal, Moscow and its affiliated actors deployed a wide array of instruments, including direct and covert support of pro-Russian, “sovereignist” and pseudo-European actors; orchestration of social unrest; cyber attacks and extensive informational operations, mainly using online social networks; the use of illicit financial flows for campaigning, systematic voter corruption, and infiltration of the electoral monitoring process.

Moldovan authorities have responded to these challenges with increasing institutional coordination and readiness, demonstrating an enhanced capacity to anticipate and counter hybrid interference. Law enforcement, intelligence, justice, and election-management bodies acted in a concerted manner, supported by a set of legal and regulatory adjustments aimed at closing loopholes exploited in previous elections and aligning national legislation with emerging hybrid-threat realities. These combined actions enabled the state to mitigate a threat that posed a direct challenge to Moldova's democracy. Observers have noted these achievements as an important lesson for other European states facing similar threats. Some of the government's measures, although dictated by the extraordinary character of the threats, were seen as controversial, raising legitimate concerns about proportionality, legality, and democratic oversight. These dilemmas underscore a broader question: how can a defensive democracy effectively protect itself against the increasingly unconstrained and opportunistic tactics employed by the Russian state-sponsored actors to exploit systemic and societal vulnerabilities of open political systems, while effectively maintaining its own legitimacy and adherence to the rule of law?

II. Context Analysis

The context that these elections took place in is marked by several characteristics: polarized society, poor economic situation and an impoverished population facing strong emigration incentives, a war in vicinity, an ongoing process for EU accession, a separatist region to the east, a recent successful referendum establishing European Integration as a strategic priority, promoted by a synergy of pro-European institutions, and persistent information and influence operations conducted by Russia to overturn Moldova's European ambitions and potentially use it to support its military objectives in Ukraine.

The Moldovan **society** is divided along multiple dimensions, with the geopolitical one being the most visible. According to the [most recent Public Opinion Barometer](#), approximately 49.9% of the population

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would choose to join the European Union. In comparison, 26.6% of the population would opt for joining the Russian-managed Eurasian Economic Union. This rift is also visible in Moldovans' electoral preferences, with one part of the Moldovan population having pro-European, Western-oriented political preferences, and another significant share of citizens consistently voting for pro-Russian political parties. Furthermore, [this rift is also a geographical one](#), as evident in the recent Moldovan elections, with a traditionally more pro-EU center and a pro-Russian north and south, as well as the Transnistrian region. Finally, there is the [Moldovan diaspora](#), whose [active participation in Moldovan elections](#), primarily with a pro-EU vote, has been an important counterbalance to the pro-Russian leaning of domestic voters.

Moldova's economy is in a difficult situation, stagnating under the weight of successive crises, severe drought, soaring energy prices, declining exports, and chronic underinvestment. Economic prospects have been moderate, as the country continues to grapple with high poverty, inflation, and structural weaknesses, remaining heavily dependent on foreign assistance. The social impact has been severe, with growing prices for food, goods, and services eroding the population's purchasing power. Although showing mild signs of recovery, Moldova's economy remains fragile, constrained by high living costs, energy price volatility, and slow administrative reforms that limit progress and keep poverty levels high. This leads to a growing dissatisfaction of parts of the population with the authorities in general. Finally, although there is a [decrease](#) in the levels of migration readiness among the general population, Moldovans are still [migrating](#) in high numbers, adding to the already [substantial Moldovan](#) diaspora abroad. The socio-economic pressure amplified citizens' vulnerability to populist and anti-Western messaging. Disinformation actors exploited themes such as poverty, energy insecurity, and perceived elite detachment, framing European integration as a threat to livelihoods rather than a path to stability.

The ***strategic and geopolitical environment*** is shaped simultaneously by the protracted Russian war against Ukraine and by Moldova's accelerated European integration process. On one side, the war in Ukraine has generated a [persistent concern regarding the risks of war spilling over into Moldova](#). Even if this risk is seen as less likely, the Russian Federation might exploit at least two scenarios to advance its goals in Ukraine. The first one refers to the Russian occupation of the Odessa oblast and access to the Transnistrian separatist region in Moldova, to use it in the war against Ukraine. The second scenario refers to a change of the Moldovan authorities to more pro-Russian-leaning ones to provide Russia with leverage in the war against Ukraine.

On the other side, Moldova has [advanced substantially in the process of EU accession](#), advancing from [candidate status in 2022](#) to the formal launch of accession negotiations in 2024, with a declared ambition to [join the EU by 2030](#). The EU has shown growing openness toward Moldova's membership, recognizing both the country's reform efforts and its strategic importance for European stability amid the war in Ukraine. The European Union and its member states expanded both technical and political engagement

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with Moldova. Beyond macro-financial assistance and energy support, Brussels and key capitals deployed election-security missions, cyber-resilience programs, and intensified diplomatic signaling to deter external interference. These measures strengthened Moldova's institutional confidence but also entrenched perceptions among pro-Russian circles that Western partners were "orchestrating" domestic politics, a narrative Moscow actively weaponized. Still, the path to accession remains complex: Russia's hybrid operations, disinformation campaigns, and control over the breakaway Transnistrian region continue to test Moldova's sovereignty and democratic resilience.

Moldova's **domestic political landscape** in the years preceding the 2025 parliamentary elections was defined by a consolidated pro-European alignment across all branches of power. The Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) held a dominant majority in Parliament, supported by a government committed to advancing European integration, and by President Maia Sandu, the party's founder and a central figure in promoting democratic reform and Moldova's Western orientation. This institutional coherence enabled a period of relative policy stability and a clear reform agenda, though it also concentrated political responsibility within a single political bloc, leaving the government exposed to criticism over economic hardship and slow progress in governance reform.

The 2024 presidential elections reaffirmed Maia Sandu's mandate, confirming continued public support for the pro-European course despite growing fatigue among parts of the electorate. Held concurrently with a Constitutional Referendum, these elections resulted in the formal enshrinement of European integration as a strategic objective in Moldova's Constitution, a landmark decision that anchored the country's geopolitical direction in its supreme law. However, both the referendum and the presidential race unfolded in a highly challenging environment, marked by intense Russian interference, disinformation campaigns, and attempts to undermine voter trust and institutional stability. Domestically, persistent challenges, including corruption, weak judicial institutions, and vulnerabilities in the energy sector, continued to weigh on governance performance and public confidence, underscoring the need for sustained reform efforts and ongoing support from European partners.

At the **institutional level**, the cumulative weight of simultaneous reforms, from judicial vetting and anti-corruption enforcement to administrative modernization, generated growing bureaucratic fatigue and occasional public disillusionment. Trust in state institutions remains uneven: relatively high in the Presidency and Central Electoral Commission, but persistently low in Parliament, political parties, and the judiciary. This asymmetry undermines social cohesion and resilience to disinformation, as citizens often rely on informal or external information sources rather than domestic institutions. Civil-society organizations continue to play a stabilizing role by promoting transparency and civic education, yet they themselves have become frequent targets of smear campaigns portraying them as foreign agents.

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Within this context of uneven trust and institutional strain, Moldova's **information and media environment** has become a central arena in the country's struggle to safeguard democracy against persistent Russian-sponsored FIMI operations designed to erode public trust and weaken pro-European sentiment. In recent years, the authorities have closed multiple Russian-linked media outlets, curbing overt propaganda but prompting a migration of disinformation to online platforms such as social networks and encrypted messaging apps, where regulation remains limited. Nevertheless, [the independent media landscape is relatively diverse, with multiple media outlets \(offline and online\) allowing the expression of varied viewpoints](#). Still, many independent media outlets operate under fragile financial conditions, relying heavily on foreign donor support to sustain operations and uphold professional standards. The state has established a funding mechanism to support private media, mainly through support of specific projects rather than operating budgets.

Despite these pressures, the 2024 constitutional and presidential votes, as well as the 2025 parliamentary elections, confirmed the Moldovan public's resilient commitment to the European course, positioning the country as one of the EU's most determined Eastern partners on the path toward full integration.

Taken together, these political, economic, and informational dynamics created a pre-electoral environment of high uncertainty but also high strategic clarity. Moldova entered the 2025 parliamentary race as a frontline state in a broader contest between democratic resilience and foreign authoritarian interference. The stakes extended beyond party politics, touching upon the country's geopolitical orientation, institutional credibility, and the capacity of a small defensive democracy to withstand hybrid pressure while preserving its legitimacy and constitutional order.

III. Analysis of Candidates in the 2025 Parliamentary Elections

The September 28 electoral exercise offered Moldovan voters a wide choice across pro-European, pro-Russian, and centrist political platforms, including several emerging new political projects. At the same time, this is rather a superficial pluralism, given the domination of the PAS party in the "center-right" segment of the Moldovan political spectrum, a fragmented "left" wing, and the inclusion of several nominally pro-European actors suspected of promoting Russian interests in Moldova.

At the start of the electoral period, 39 out of 66 registered political parties were deemed by the CEC as [eligible to participate](#). Most of these parties had met the legal requirements to participate in parliamentary elections. In contrast, others were conditionally included on the list, pending a favorable resolution from the Public Services Agency regarding their compliance with legal requirements, as well as a court decision regarding their dissolution or restriction of activities. The final list of electoral actors registered by the CEC to participate in parliamentary elections [included 23 contenders](#):

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15 political parties, four electoral blocks, and four independent candidates. However, the CEC has subsequently withdrawn from the electoral race two actors. The first one to be [withdrawn](#) was the party “Heart of Moldova” (led by former Governor of Gagauzia, Irina Vlah), a member of an electoral bloc with the Party of Socialists and Party of Communists. A second party [excluded](#) by the CEC on the election day was the party “Moldova Mare” led by Victoria Furtuna, a former anti-corruption prosecutor [associated with the fugitive oligarch Shor](#).

Overall, the 2025 electoral competitors can be grouped into several broad categories: the dominant pro-European governing pole, a consolidated pro-Russian/sovereigntist bloc, a set of smaller reformist and pro-European signaling actors, managerial and localist challengers positioned outside the classical geopolitical divide, and a series of micro-formations targeting narrow identity or issue niches.

Pro-EU governing core. PAS (Action and Solidarity Party) remained the only structurally credible pro-European governing force in these elections. It occupies the dominant system-party niche on the center-right, drawing support from urban professionals, civil servants, students, the diaspora, and risk-averse moderate voters who prioritize EU accession, macroeconomic stability, and institutional reform. Its 2025 platform focused on fiscal discipline, justice reform, energy security, and diaspora inclusion, and positioned PAS not as a movement of ideological mobilization, but as the “responsible manager” of Moldova’s European course. PAS securing an [outright majority of 55 seats](#), consolidates its mandate, but also significantly increases the expectations and scrutiny on delivery, especially in justice, anti-corruption, and economic performance.

Consolidated pro-Russian / sovereigntist pole. The “Patriotic Electoral Bloc” (PSRM, PCRM, alongside affiliated parties such as “Heart of Moldova” and “Future of Moldova”) remained the principal aggregation point for Moldova’s traditional Russia-leaning electorate. This segment is broadly defined by older left-of-center voters, parts of Gagauzia, and Russian-speaking urban peripheries, as well as socially conservative groups primarily motivated by concerns over prices, utility costs, and perceived security risks linked to NATO alignment. Within this bloc, several “new” actors functioned less as ideologically distinct formations and more as actors designed to diversify and extend reach across adjacent sub-segments of the same electorate, an [engineered diversification](#) that preserved the core narrative architecture while multiplying organizational fronts. The bloc entered the campaign under a single umbrella list, which consolidated mobilization efforts on that flank but also inherited reputational liabilities associated with its leadership and candidate selection. Shortly before Election Day, the “Heart of Moldova” party was [barred from participation](#) by the CEC, [acting on a Court of Appeal ruling issued the previous day](#) that restricted the party’s activities for 12 months, following a Justice Ministry request based on searches of party members earlier that month which produced allegations of voter bribery, illegal party financing, and money laundering. Despite these setbacks, the “Patriotic Bloc” remained the primary opposition center of gravity and [secured about 24.26% of votes](#). Its appeal rests less on programmatic economic renewal and more on geopolitical

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orientation, welfare expectations, and a persistent criticism of ruling party actions and skepticism toward Western-led security arrangements.

Reformist pro-European space and alternative competitors to PAS.

Alongside the governing PAS, several smaller pro-European or pro-European signaling actors attempted to capture segments of the reformist electorate. CUB (Coalition for Unity and Welfare) and the “Together” bloc (Party of Change and Green Ecologist Party) primarily appealed to educated urban voters who were supportive of European integration but critical of PAS’s execution capacity and message discipline. Their positioning emphasized technocratic delivery, anti-oligarch safeguards, cost-of-living mitigation, and a greener administrative agenda. In essence, they sought to attract citizens who wanted Europeanization through better state performance rather than through polarization or confrontation. Two independent candidates, Andrei Năstase and Olesea Stamate, attempted to capture a similar reformist-legalist demand, positioning themselves as “non-party” quality alternatives for former or disillusioned PAS sympathizers wary of party structures but still attached to the rule of law and European standards. Their presence signaled a diffusion of pro-European expectations beyond the confines of PAS, even if none of them managed to consolidate a distinct electoral base. Taken together, this segment remained fragmented. These actors did not necessarily threaten PAS structurally, but rather siphoned parts of its natural constituency and kept pressure on the governing party from within the pro-European field.

Managerial and localist challengers outside the geopolitical axis.

A separate group of actors sought to disengage from the classical pro-EU vs pro-Russia cleavage and compete instead on managerial competence, administrative delivery, and proximity to voters. The most prominent of these was the [“Alternativa” bloc](#), that included Chisinau mayor Ion Ceban (MAN), former Prime Minister Ion Chicu (Development and Consolidation Party of Moldova), former prosecutor general Alexandr Stoianoglo and Mark Tkaciuk (Civic Congress). Although appearing as an eclectic alliance, its core figures share political roots going back to the PCRM era, making this configuration less new than its branding implied. Their [message](#) attempted to emulate a pro-European orientation while de-ideologizing politics within a managerial framework: “Europe at home” as a promise of standards, efficiency, and professional public administration, rather than geopolitical confrontation. Their target constituency consisted primarily of urban, technocratic, and public-sector voters who were dissatisfied with PAS’s centralized decision-making style but still supported a rules-based European administrative model.

Localist and decentralization-oriented actors. Another sub-cluster was rooted in territorial identity rather than geopolitical identification. Renato Usatîi’s Our Party preserved a consistent anti-system protest niche, drawing support from frustrated voters who do not identify with mainstream ideological camps and who respond more to anti-establishment positioning than to programmatic platforms. Democracy at Home, though formally signaling a unionist and nominally pro-European position, effectively operated in a similar protest register, relying on high media visibility and anti-corruption

rhetoric rather than institutional depth or programmatic development. Respect Moldova (Marian Lupu) attempted to attract moderate, older voters oriented towards predictability and institutional experience; however, Lupu's historical association with the Democratic Party era continued to limit trust and prevented the party from consolidating a distinct centrist niche. Finally, the League of Cities and Communes ran on the principles of explicit decentralization, fiscal devolution, and municipal autonomy, resonating with local government elites, small-town entrepreneurs, and voters whose primary reference group is the territorial community rather than ideology. However, despite their differentiated appeals at the subnational and protest level, only "Our Party" and "Democracy at Home" crossed the threshold, managing to translate dispersed local influence, issue-specific resonance, or media visibility into a meaningful electoral support at the national level.

Micro-actors and identity niches. Several smaller formations, including AUR, the Liberal Party, the National Moldovan Party, Nation's Unity, Christian-Social Union, Moldovans Alliance, New Historic Option, and Moldova Mare, occupied narrow ideological or identity micro-segments (unionist, libertarian-localist, Christian-social, or nationalist "Greater Moldova" narratives). Individually, these parties lacked the critical mass to shape electoral outcomes significantly. Collectively, however, they contributed to fragmenting the non-PAS electorate and served as potential reservoirs for disaffected voters.

In this configuration, the proliferation of micro-formations functioned less as autonomous political projects and more as parallel distribution channels targeting different grievance clusters and voter niches, thereby increasing redundancy and complicating institutional traceability. As a result, the ballot was characterized by [pluralism](#), yet effective competition remained structurally asymmetric: one consolidated pro-European governing actor faced an opposition field fragmented into multiple sub-centers of mobilization and influence, each pursuing distinct audience segments and strategic narratives rather than forming a coherent alternative pole. [International observer missions](#), [national monitoring organizations](#), and [independent media](#) analysis have consistently pointed out that the electoral competition did not unfold in a neutral risk environment.

Beyond the formal party pluralism visible on the ballot, the campaign was shaped by persistent attempts at foreign interference, opaque financing streams, digitally amplified disinformation campaigns, and cyber pressure on institutions. These elements defined not only the "background noise" of the electoral cycle but the operational field in which actors tried to mobilize voters. Understanding the interplay of these pressures is therefore essential for assessing both the vulnerabilities and the defensive response capacity that the Moldovan state had to deploy before and on the election day.

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IV. Threat Landscape ahead of the 2025 Parliamentary Elections in Moldova

The 2025 parliamentary elections in Moldova unfolded under an unusually dense and multifaceted threat environment. Analysis by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) [described the vote](#) as taking place “amid unprecedented hybrid threats” including illicit financing, disinformation, and cyber-operations. IRI post-electoral [preliminary statement points](#) to the fact that “security concerns and anti-corruption crackdowns shaped the campaign environment”. Similarly, ENEMO’s [statement of initial findings](#) notes that “electoral corruption and illicit funding have posed persistent challenges for public institutions”.

In Moldova’s case, these threats can be grouped into several interlocking clusters: proxy networks and political infiltration, illicit finance and observer manipulation, informational and cyber operations, kinetic or disruptive provocations, and election-day targeted disruptions, all of which operated within a sharply polarized geopolitical setting.

Proxy political networks as vectors of foreign influence. International institutions have consistently [identified](#) Moldova as a priority target of hybrid interference efforts, which combine political instrumentalization, coordinated foreign funding, destabilization efforts in regions such as Gagauzia and Transnistria, and disinformation campaigns and narrative laundering through multiple ideological facades. Such an approach complicated the work of regulators and oversight bodies, as influence was not concentrated in one actor but distributed across multiple channels, increasing plausible deniability and reducing attribution clarity, thereby complicating the preventive efforts of election-management and law enforcement bodies.

The pre-electoral environment in Moldova was shaped by a complex network of proxy political actors that reinforced, replicated, or mimicked Kremlin-aligned narratives while remaining formally integrated into the domestic multiparty architecture. These proxies included overtly pro-Russian forces, sovereignist and anti-liberal actors, and several nominally pro-European formations whose public positioning did not align with their informational or operational behavior.

Illicit financing and parallel campaigning operations. A second critical threat cluster involved illicit funding and the use of parallel campaign structures designed to circumvent Moldovan oversight and reporting rules. Reports ahead of the vote identified a high risk of illegal funding being used for covert campaigning, voter inducement, and bribery. For example, the FIMI-ISAC’s Country Election Risk Assessment (CERA) deemed Moldova’s pre-election risk level as [“high and rising,”](#) citing intensification of influence campaigns and institutional capacity gaps. Hybrid financing vectors appeared to serve multiple functions simultaneously: enabling sustained issue-focused micro-campaigning below formal visibility thresholds; funding informal mobilization networks, especially at the regional

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and sub-regional level; and supporting vote-buying schemes that do not require mass messaging but rely on targeted leverage over vulnerable populations.

The problem was amplified by parallel efforts to overwhelm the electoral management body through an artificially intensified observer accreditation process. The national election commission reportedly faced a large number of accreditation requests from questionable “foreign observer” groups and social media-driven “informal observers” that sought to legitimize narratives of fraud. The phenomenon of “[fake observers](#)” (per ODIHR methodology, not EPDE’s own) undermines public confidence in the electoral process and introduces a hybrid layer of observation and manipulation. This tactic aimed to blur institutional accountability lines, dilute credible observation, and generate competing claims of process integrity.

Cross-cutting enabling structure: the Shor-linked illicit financial ecosystem. Within this threat landscape, the networks linked in public reporting to the [sentenced fugitive oligarch](#) Ilan Shor represented a cross-cutting enabling mechanism. Investigative journalism [documented](#) recurring patterns of structured monthly payments and hierarchical recruiter-to-activist distribution schemes, associated with entities linked to Shor’s political orbit. Other independent reports traced significant amounts in [cryptocurrency transactions](#) across companies connected to Shor-affiliated structures. The role of these networks was systemic: offering liquidity, deniability, and scale, aimed at financing parallel messaging, compensating mobilizers, incentivizing participation in staged protests, and facilitating targeted inducement. Moldova’s Information and Security Service (SIS) repeatedly [warned](#) the public in 2023–2025 about the use of criminal networks as hybrid interference assets aimed at electoral destabilization. While it cannot be demonstrated that such networks were the exclusive or primary vector of Russian operational planning, available public evidence indicates that they formed a critical logistical substrate of hybrid pressure. Their existence forced the authorities to manage pre-electoral security not only as institutional protection of the vote, but as active disruption of transnational illicit efforts with political intent.

Informational and cyber interference. Disinformation and digital interference represented a persistent and adaptive threat vector during the 2025 electoral cycle. Monitoring initiatives have [documented](#) coordinated influence operations aimed at eroding trust in state institutions, delegitimizing the reform agenda, and weakening support for Moldova’s European trajectory. Investigative reporting [revealed](#) networks of websites that mimicked Western media brands, cloned for the purpose of laundering pro-Russian narratives into Moldova’s information space. These narratives were [further amplified](#) on TikTok, Facebook, and Telegram, platforms where there is a growing presence of Moldovan information consumers. A particular emphasis in these narratives was centered on panic-triggering themes, such as “Europe wants to drag Moldova into war” or “EU accession will destroy pensions and living standards.” These narratives targeted sentiments, rather than arguments, and were often tailored for audiences with low digital literacy.

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At the same time, in parallel with attempts of emotional influence, Moldova also faced significant levels of cyber pressure. According to the CEC's official post-electoral [report](#), state institutional websites experienced sustained probing, credential-guessing attempts, and DDoS attacks in the days leading up to Election Day. Although these attacks did not produce systemic operational breakdown, their cumulative effect was strategic: they were designed to inject friction, generate uncertainty, and create conditions in which any minor delay could be politically instrumentalized into claims of sabotage or fraud. In this context, cyber operations functioned not as stand-alone sabotage instruments, but as force multipliers for disinformation and narrative destabilization.

Societal destabilization and kinetic disruption risk. In addition to the threats in the digital realm, Moldova also faced the risk of physical destabilization. [Authorities publicly warned](#) about attempts to stage provocations by Russian-affiliated proxies, coordinate unrest, or incite riots. Just days before the vote, [police detained several individuals](#) allegedly preparing violent actions linked to external coordination. Such events were not marginal anomalies. Allegedly, they were part of a broader hybrid approach in which controlled turbulence, even if limited in scale, would impose security services to spread their capacities thin, thereby fueling narratives that weaken the credibility of institutional performance and sustain a climate of insecurity to be further exploited by anti-system actors.

These kinetic disruption risks were further linked to deliberate attempts to exploit Moldova's socio-economic vulnerabilities or anti-corruption enforcement, blending legitimate social frustration with politically manufactured amplification. This vector did not operate independently of disinformation and cyber operations, but rather served as their complementary physical layer. Visible agitation was intended to provide "evidence" of instability that online actors could then reinsert into social networks as proof of systemic collapse. However, while such escalation pathways existed, they were not fully deployed in 2025. Pre-election reporting referenced [training activities abroad](#), and in late September 2025, authorities detained dozens of individuals in a plot allegedly coordinated from Russia to incite mass riots ahead of the election. PSRM leader Igor Dodon repeatedly [announced](#) that street mobilization would follow if the results were "stolen". However, on election night and the following day, attempts by Socialist-affiliated leaders to trigger protest mobilization, including [staged appearances at the CEC](#) and calls for rallies at Parliament, resulted in only [minimal turnout](#) and failed to escalate beyond symbolic signaling and a face-saving display intended for their electoral base. Earlier, pre-electoral protests mobilization around the conviction of Gagauzia's Bashkan also dissipated without wider traction. In practice, the risks of physical protest activity are an underutilized risk vector, mainly leveraged symbolically and narratively, but not successfully deployed into operational destabilization.

Election-day disruptions and manipulation. On election day itself multiple pressure points were visible but contained: [cyberattacks against election infrastructure](#) (including a [large-scale incident](#) that

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forced the Moldovan Information Technology and Cybersecurity Service (STISC) to temporarily block a major domestic hosting provider that serves government and private websites, to contain the attack), a wave of bomb threats both in-country and at polling stations abroad, and disinformation around bridge closures affecting Transnistrian voters. ODIHR [reports](#) that these incidents caused temporary suspensions and queues but did not derail voting, counting, or tabulation overall. IRI likewise [notes](#) long lines and ballot shortages at some Transnistrian polling stations, as well as bomb threats in six foreign cities, while assessing the general environment as calm and the procedures as orderly. While these pressure points did not escalate into systemic breakdown, they created friction in two strategically sensitive segments: diaspora voting and voters from Transnistria, both of which Russia-linked actors have tried to target, given their high strategic value in Moldova's electoral balance. Given this, it can be inferred that these disruptions were not isolated accidents, but components calibrated within a broader hybrid interference effort.

Geopolitical context as a multiplier. All of the above threats operated within a wider regional environment defined by the war in Ukraine, Russia's persistent influence through Transnistria, and Moldova's accelerated path to EU accession. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [described](#) Moldova's vote as a live test case for Russia's influence operations in Europe, meaning that domestic vulnerabilities were not merely domestic parameters, but entry points for an external actor with a strategic purpose. Thus, Moldova's electoral risks were not only additive; they were externally amplified: receiving resources, coordination, and political intent from outside the country.

V. Moldova's Multi-Layered Defence Strategy against the Hybrid Threats

Moldova's authorities entered 2025 with a clearer picture of the danger and a broader toolkit than in prior cycles. The election remained competitive and orderly despite sustained pressure in the financing, information, and cyberspace spheres, which is a success supported by the findings of international observers.

Legal and regulatory improvements. Ahead of the elections, Moldovan authorities introduced a series of targeted legal adjustments aimed at reducing the operational space for foreign interference, illicit funding, and coordinated disinformation. These changes focused on the practical closure of repeatedly identified loopholes, which had been exploited in prior cycles and documented by both national and international monitors. ODIHR [noted](#) that the revised framework "provided a sound basis for democratic elections" but acknowledged that the new constraints primarily addressed hybrid interference vectors rather than classical electoral administration. In 2024–2025, the Moldovan Parliament adopted amendments that reinforced sanctions for vote-buying, covert campaigning, and unreported financing, particularly through [changes](#) to the Contravention Code and campaign reporting obligations. These measures increased

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deterrence at the micro-transactional level (cash inducements, activist compensation, informal mobilization payments), which had been consistently assessed by civil monitoring as one of the primary operational channels of malign influence. Adjustments to the Audiovisual Code and related media legislation also introduced tighter windows for sanctioning disinformation during regulated campaign periods, enabling the Audiovisual Council to act within accelerated examination deadlines when malign content spikes occurred. Furthermore, according to the CEC post-electoral report, the legal clarifications and enforcement tools introduced prior to the 2025 vote improved the traceability of financial flows and strengthened the capacity to respond to coordinated disinformation, including through partnerships with trusted notifiers and specialized fact-checking mechanisms. However, ODIHR and Venice Commission [opinions](#) stressed the need for continuous calibration to preserve freedom of expression and proportionality, a reminder that defensive democracy, under hybrid pressure, must remain rule-bound to maintain legitimacy.

Disruption of illicit networks and strategic communication. Authorities framed a significant portion of the pre-electoral risk as coming from overt and rebranded pro-Kremlin formations, as well as “sovereignist” and pseudo-pro-European actors. The Security and Intelligence Service (SIS) publicly [briefed](#) on Russia’s sustained involvement in the 2024–2025 cycle, characterizing the intensity as “unprecedented,” and flagged linked funding and mobilization schemes. These briefings served both deterrent and coordination functions across agencies. A defining axis of the authorities’ response was the systematic disruption of enabling networks and financing vectors. The legal framework adopted in 2024–2025 introduced successor-party constraints and expanded sanctioning tools on electoral corruption and illicit financing, and these powers were actively applied in practice. The most visible expression of this was the July 2025 CEC decision to [refuse](#) registration of the Pobeda electoral bloc on grounds related to the formally dissolved Shor Party, citing it as a successor party. In parallel, law enforcement maintained a high-tempo operational posture, conducting [searches](#), seizures, preventive detentions, and issuing fines related to [vote-buying](#) across multiple districts. These actions were not episodic but scaled, designed to raise the cost and lower the predictability of hybrid operations. This proactive posture helped neutralize the logistical continuity of the illicit payment ecosystem that investigative journalism has helped document. The regional dimension also mattered, with several EU states aligning with Chisinau’s efforts to dismantle enabling networks (such as travel or [entry bans for political figures](#) alleged to facilitate malign influence). Such actions consolidated the outlook that actors involved in hybrid operations would face international pushback. Furthermore, the European Parliament explicitly addressed disinformation and cyberattacks targeting Moldova’s elections in its 2025 resolutions, which helped anchor the response within a broader EU policy framework and signaled support for defensive measures.

At the informational level, the Audiovisual Council applied [sanction](#) instruments during the campaign window, while the government, civil society, and [independent fact-checkers](#) ran synchronized debunking efforts during spike events. Importantly, several initiatives shifted

The election remained competitive and orderly despite sustained pressure in the financing, information, and cyberspace spheres, which is a success supported by the findings of international observers.

emphasis from reactive disapproval to narrative competition, generating alternative frames supportive of institutional trust and the EU course, rather than exclusively “chasing the fake.” This dual approach helped ensure that defensive posture did not collapse into purely censorial logic and preserved a degree of pluralism in the informational field. Finally, counter-FIMI messaging was embedded in external signaling: the issue was consistently [internationalized within EU fora](#), which strengthened deterrence, raised reputational costs of engaging in interference, and aligned Moldova’s defensive stance with the European policy environment. At the same time, it is essential to note that European advisory bodies have [encouraged](#) due-process safeguards, issuing a warning that robust counter-disinformation measures can become contentious if poorly justified or unevenly applied.

Strengthening cybersecurity and real-time defense. Election day was marked by sustained DDoS attacks on official resources, including the CEC’s systems. Technical partners [reported](#) 12+ hours of mitigation on September 28, filtering hundreds of millions of malicious requests synchronized with peak reporting windows. Private-sector telemetry and specialized blogs documented the scope, while international press and observers recognized cyber pressure as a defining feature of the campaign. The main result was that services remained operational and core processes (voting, counting, and results consolidation) continued uninterrupted, which can be attributed to the better [preparedness](#) of Moldovan authorities. It is essential to note that, according to [experts](#), Moldovan cyber defense effectiveness relied on pre-agreed playbooks between the CEC, government CERT partners, and contracted providers, which included information sharing and predefined responses.

Preventing physical street provocations and maintaining public order. Security services entered election week [anticipating](#) that attempts at engineered unrest were probable, given prior patterns of hybrid activity and public threats by political actors. In the final days before the vote, police [detained](#) several individuals suspected of preparing coordinated provocations. The Ministry of Interior increased [security](#) measures for the e-day, focusing on sensitive precincts, transport hubs, and institutional buildings, and maintained continuous tactical coordination with the CEC on queue management and crowd control. Additionally, the CEC applied contingency measures such as [relocating](#) several polling sites based on SIS and Police risk signals and issuing tailored guidance to precincts handling left-bank voters. Some observers criticized the timing of these decisions as being too late and potentially restrictive. However, in context, these actions were aimed at balancing physical access with safety considerations, particularly in the Transnistrian security zone where hybrid pressure vectors were most likely to be activated.

Civil society, investigative journalism, and monitoring networks. Beyond formal state institutions, civic actors played a critical buffering role against hybrid interference. Promo-LEX’s nationwide monitoring provided a credible, independent oversight of the electoral process and procedural irregularities. The Coalition for Free and Fair Elections served as the umbrella coordination platform, linking major monitoring NGOs, media, and advocacy groups. It consolidated alerts,

issued joint statements when systemic risks emerged, and amplified evidence-based findings in a unified format that was more difficult for political actors to ignore or discredit. Investigative outlets such as RISE Moldova and CU SENS documented voter inducement practices, crypto-based financial flows, and recruitment chains linked to political influence networks, thereby contributing to attribution clarity and narrowing the informational space for plausible deniability, which also enables faster public signaling and media uptake. Meanwhile, fact-checking and media literacy activities (API's StopFals, WatchDog.md, and affiliated actors) maintained systematic debunks, rapid corrections, and contextual framing throughout the campaign period. While these actors do not possess coercive tools, their cumulative effect was significant: they raised the cost and reputational risk of opaque influence operations, increased transparency around illicit practices, and provided voters and journalists with alternative, evidence-based narratives rather than reactive, fake-chasing responses.

International observation and validation. As in previous electoral cycles, Moldovan authorities invited several international observer missions, including [ODIHR/OSCE](#), [IRI](#), [ENEMO](#), to provide an independent assessment of both the campaign environment and Election Day administration. These missions played a stabilizing role, offering an external, methodologically structured account of what actually occurred, thereby reducing the space for contested narratives and unverifiable claims. Their preliminary statements helped assess the elections, documenting the entire spectrum of pressures, threats, and irregularities throughout the process. This provided an evidence-based baseline against which both domestic and external actors can evaluate institutional responses, the proportionality of countermeasures, and future reforms.

VI. Recommendations for a Resilient Defensive Democracy

Moldova's 2025 parliamentary cycle demonstrates that defensive democracies facing hybrid interference can prevail if they combine legal adaptation, operational coordination, and societal resilience. Several lessons emerge that carry transfer value beyond Moldova.

First, states must periodically review and adjust their legal and regulatory frameworks to reflect ongoing developments of contemporary FIMI tools, especially those operating primarily in digital space. New sanctioning instruments against illicit financing, coordinated foreign political influence, online disinformation, and election-period manipulations should be developed, clearly defined, and aligned with fundamental rights.

Second, defensive success requires real coordination across various institutions, including intelligence agencies, police, prosecutors' offices, courts, financial intelligence units, electoral management bodies, media regulators, and cyber defense entities. Moldova's experience has shown that early warning, shared risk assessment, and

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joint operational setup can contribute to a more effective response to emerging threats.

Third, disruption of illicit financing and covert mobilization networks is central. Hybrid interference does not function without liquidity. Cooperation between FIU, intelligence services, and prosecutors, as well as cross-border cooperation, can help curb illicit money flows and, consequently, the effectiveness of illegal mobilization networks.

Fourth, proactive cyber defense must be treated as an essential public infrastructure function. Election platforms, authentication systems, reporting portals, media regulator infrastructure, and government cloud services require continuous stress-testing and rehearsed playbooks, not only technical patching, to be ready to face growing pressures from malign actors, especially during electoral cycles.

Fifth, strategic communication should not be viewed as a PR accessory, but rather as a crisis-prevention function. Rapid rebuttals, pre-bunking, and proactive narrative development campaigns should be prepared in advance of electoral periods, not assembled reactively during them.

Sixth, civil society and investigative journalism should be recognized as active contributors to resilience. Independent monitoring, fact-checking, data journalism, and election observation coalitions should be supported and encouraged. They strengthen both accountability and public legitimacy of defensive measures.

Finally, direct voter-level resilience matters: open public information campaigns on vote-buying, manipulation risk, and how hybrid destabilization works operationally, help reduce vulnerability.

Together, these actions can shape a defensive architecture that is proportionate, democratically grounded, and replicable. Moldova's 2025 experience demonstrates that a small state under sustained hybrid attack can still protect democratic choice, not necessarily through exceptional measures, but rather through deliberate and properly institutionalized governance.

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Petru Culeac – co-founder and Executive Director of the Moldova Development Institute, a newly established organization dedicated to improving the social, political, and economic landscape in Moldova. With over 15 years of experience in Moldova's non-profit sector, Petru has an in-depth understanding of the country's context and its development agenda as well as extensive organizational management experience. Until 2023, Petru served as Executive Director of Soros Foundation Moldova, a renowned non-profit foundation, part of the Open Society Foundations network, recognized as a key civil society actor in the Republic of Moldova. Under Petru's leadership, the foundation expanded its portfolio and successfully implemented numerous technical assistance projects, including for Moldovan authorities in areas such as anti-corruption, justice reform, elections, and education, as well as emergency response projects at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Previously, Petru worked in areas of democracy promotion, free and fair elections, local development, citizen engagement, and youth activism, successfully cooperating with local and international organizations, such as USAID, Chemonics, East Europe Foundation, and IFC. Petru's academic background includes degrees in Business Management, and European and International Studies.

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