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Freedom House

Freedom in the World 2022 - Moldova

Partly Free

62

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 27 / 40[Civil Liberties](#) 35 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

61 / 100 Partly Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Note

The numerical scores and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Transnistria, which is examined in a separate report. *Freedom in the World* reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Disputed territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain criteria, including boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the report methodology and FAQ.

Overview

Moldova has a competitive electoral environment, and freedoms of assembly, speech, and religion are mostly protected. Nonetheless, pervasive corruption in the government sector, links between major political figures and powerful economic interests, as well as critical deficiencies in the justice sector and the rule of law continue to hamper democratic governance.

Key Developments in 2021

- In April, President Maia Sandu dissolved Parliament after a protracted disagreement between key political parties and the Constitutional Court. Snap parliamentary elections were held in July, resulting in the election of a stable parliamentary majority led by the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) under Prime Minister Natalia Gavriluta.
- The COVID-19 pandemic remained a serious health concern throughout the year; more than 230,000 cases and over 7,000 deaths were recorded between January and December.
- In December, the Council of Europe's Venice Commission cautioned the government about proposed legislation aimed at reducing corruption in the country's highest courts, finding that the amendments did not establish actionable measures that would increase confidence in judicial integrity or enhance public trust in the judiciary.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

The president is elected by direct popular vote for up to two consecutive four-year terms. If no candidate receives more than 50 percent of the votes in the first round, the two leading candidates compete in a second round. Former premier Maia Sandu of the PAS defeated incumbent president Igor Dodon in the two-round November 2020 contest. Sandu won 57.7 percent of the second-round vote, while Dodon won 42.3 percent. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) observers called the election competitive, but reported that electoral authorities did not investigate allegations of first-round irregularities.

A prime minister nominated by the president and confirmed by Parliament holds most executive authority. Following snap parliamentary elections in July 2021, Natalia Gavriluta of the PAS was confirmed as prime minister in August. The election was generally regarded to be free and fair.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 3 / 4

Voters elect the 101-seat unicameral Parliament to four-year terms. In February 2019, Moldova held its first parliamentary elections using a mixed electoral system, under which 51 lawmakers were elected in single-member constituencies through the first-past-the-post system and 50 were elected through proportional representation from closed party lists in one national constituency.

In April 2021, the Constitutional Court found sufficient grounds to allow Sandu to dissolve the incumbent Parliament following the December 2020 resignation of former prime minister Ion Chicu. Snap elections were held in July 2021, and saw the PAS win 63 parliamentary seats, constituting a majority. In addition to the PAS majority, one electoral bloc and one party are represented in Parliament: the Electoral Bloc of Communists and Socialists with 32 seats, and the Eurosceptic Sor Party with 6 seats.

OSCE observers considered the elections well administered, competitive, and largely respectful of fundamental freedoms, but noted the negative impact that media bias, a lack of effective campaign finance oversight, inadequate legal frameworks for electoral dispute resolution, and weak judicial independence had on impartiality and trust in the electoral process.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant 3 / 4 election management bodies?

The July 2021 parliamentary elections marked a return to an electoral system based on proportional representation, and saw fewer irregularities than in the February 2019 parliamentary elections, which had been administered using a mixed system featuring both single-member constituencies and seats allocated proportionally by party lists.

The OSCE election observation mission found the legal framework governing the 2021 elections to be in line with international good practice, and commended the implementation of key revisions, including lowering thresholds for party registration and strengthening the gender quota for candidate lists, in line with previous recommendations. However, the mission recommended further improvements to the legislation, including to the framework on the complaints and appeals process and campaign finance oversight.

Both lower-level electoral commissions and the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) performed well overall in the July 2021 elections, and the election administration was generally considered trustworthy, according to the OSCE election observation mission. However, key decisions made by the CEC appeared to follow partisan lines, including decisions regarding the number of polling stations to be established abroad and for voters residing in Transnistria, as well as on issues of voter transportation.

While confidence in electoral administration improved in 2021, the CEC continues to face allegations of improper conduct, including the exclusion of the opposition from the CEC leadership selection process and irregular interference in local elections.

Score Change: The score improved from 2 to 3 because the July parliamentary elections were administered under a reformed legal framework and featured fewer irregularities than in previous years.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these 3 / 4 competing parties or groupings?

Political party legislation in Moldova is generally liberal, but does include restrictions.

In February 2020, the Constitutional Court ruled that the requirement for parties seeking registration to enlist a minimum of 4,000 members coming from at least half of Moldovan districts was unconstitutional, and ordered Parliament to revise the Law on Political Parties. Parliament amended the legislation in July 2020, reducing the minimum number of party members to 1,000 and removing the requirement for members to represent at least half of Moldovan districts.

Following the adoption of these amendments, 20 political parties, 2 electoral blocs and an independent candidate ran in the July 2021 parliamentary elections, representing a significant increase in participating parties compared to the previous election. However, though requirements for legal party registration have been eased, the amended party-registration restrictions still disproportionately affect regional, municipal, and local parties, as well as parties representing geographically concentrated ethnolinguistic minorities (for example, Gagauzians and Bulgarians).

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 4 / 4

Opposition parties have a strong presence in Parliament and other elected offices, and can gain support through elections.

Following the July 2021 snap parliamentary elections, the PAS, formerly an opposition party, gained a majority in Parliament, returning the Socialist Party to opposition status.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 2 / 4

Oligarchs and business interests strongly influence and corrupt national and local political institutions, undermining political accountability.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 3 / 4

Women and members of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups do not face direct legal barriers to political participation, though representation of women, people with disabilities, and members of the Romany minority has historically been low. However, despite social and historical obstacles, several members of Moldova's ethnic minorities, including Gagauzian, Bulgarian, and Roma hold parliamentary seats, and women's participation in Parliament and in high level political positions has significantly increased in recent years.

The president, prime minister, and head of the CEC are all women, and in 2021, 40 women gained seats in Parliament, setting a new national record. Women now comprise 40 percent of the legislative body, in line with the qualified gender quota adopted by Moldova's Parliament in 2016, which mandates that women must make up a minimum of 40 percent of every party's candidates and of cabinet nominees.

LGBT+ people organize and advocate for equal rights, but are discouraged from political engagement due to harassment.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 3 / 4

Since the appointment of a new government under the leadership of Natalia Gavrilita in July 2021, governmental policies have generally been determined at the legislative level. However, despite holding a nonexecutive, nonpartisan office, President Sandu actively participates in policy setting and public administration processes.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

Corruption remains entrenched in all levels of government, and existing anticorruption laws are inadequately enforced. Moldova is still recovering from a 2014 banking scandal, in which \$1 billion was stolen. In 2016, former prime minister Vlad Filat received a nine-year prison sentence in connection with the scandal, but was conditionally paroled in December 2019. Two key actors in the fraud, oligarchs Vladimir Plahotniuc and Ilan Șor, left Moldova in 2019, and attempts at securing their extradition have been repeatedly frustrated.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 1 / 4

Although the government formed in July 2021 appears to be more transparent than its predecessors, serious issues, including the late publication of plans, draft policies, and bills for consultation, persist. Efforts to transparently appoint public officials have been marred by procedural failures and allegations of political bias.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 2 / 4

The media environment is dominated by outlets connected to political parties and oligarchs. With few exceptions, nationally broadcasting television stations are owned by people affiliated with political parties. Reporters have previously faced difficulty accessing publicly important information and threats of legal action from public figures and politicians.

In September 2021, public trust in media independence was further undermined when Natalia Morari, a well-known investigative journalist and cofounder of the nonprofit television network TV8, was discovered to be involved in a personal relationship with Veaceslav Platon, a wealthy businessman who has been charged with a wide range of financial crimes.

Legal changes made to the Code of Audiovisual Media Services in November and December 2021 allowed Parliament to establish control over the public broadcaster Teleradio-Moldova and to restructure the Audiovisual Council with three appointees from Parliament, two civil society appointees, one presidential appointee, and one governmental appointee. These amendments drew criticism from Moldova’s National Anticorruption Center (NAC) and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) on the grounds that such changes compromise media independence and encourage politicization of the media.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 3 / 4

While the constitution proclaims religious freedom and separation of state from religion, the law also provides special status to the Moldovan Orthodox Church. Orthodox symbols have been placed in public institutions, and Orthodox churches are sometimes present within public hospitals and some schools.

In June 2021, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that the government had violated the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), to which it is a signatory, in ordering the dissolution of the Falun Gong religious organization in Moldova and banning its symbol, which is known as the *Falun*.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 3 / 4

Academic freedom is generally respected in Moldova. However, the Orthodox Church strongly indoctrinates the Moldovan educational system, with educational officials at all levels frequently promoting the church and Orthodox beliefs.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4 / 4

Individuals are generally able to engage in discussions of a political nature without fear of retribution.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 3 / 4

Freedom of assembly is constitutionally guaranteed and mostly upheld in practice. While some COVID-19-related limitations remained in place throughout 2021, public gatherings, including opposition protests, were generally permitted.

However, past instances of police violence and politically motivated arrests have at times infringed upon individuals’ right to freely assemble. In September 2021, the European Court of Human Rights ordered Moldova to pay damages to members of the Petrenco group, associates of opposition politician Grigore Petrenco who were detained following a 2015 opposition rally and prohibited from attending future public gatherings, finding that the group’s right to freely assemble had been unlawfully restricted. And in July 2020, during a veterans’ protest, several participants were arrested and beaten by security forces in front of the Parliament building in Chișinău.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 3 / 4

The nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector is active and largely operates without undue restriction.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 2 / 4

Trade unions do not encounter major obstacles in Moldova. However, trade unions are not active or visible, and do not play an active role in protecting workers’ rights.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 1 / 4

Moldova’s judicial branch continues to be highly susceptible to political pressures that hamper its independence, and judicial appointment processes lack transparency.

In October 2021, General Prosecutor Alexandr Stoianoglo was arrested on charges relating to corruption and abuse of power. After his arrest and removal from office, Stoianoglo suggested that the decision to levy these charges against him was politically motivated, though PAS officials deny that allegation.

In December, the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission issued an opinion on amendments made to the legal procedures used to select administrative officials for the judiciary, including the Superior Council of Prosecutors, Moldova’s supreme prosecutorial governance body. The commission found that the amendments did not provide actionable measures that would increase confidence in judicial integrity or enhance public trust in the judiciary.

F2 0-4 pts**Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1 / 4**

Due process rights are poorly upheld in the Moldovan justice system. Lengthy pretrial detentions are common.

A criminal trial against Ilan Șor, who was accused of involvement in the 2014 banking scandal and fled Moldova in 2019, is still ongoing, but court hearings have been repeatedly postponed.

In September 2021, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Moldova had violated the ECHR in the arbitrary detention of seven Moldovan nationals known as the Petrenco group following an opposition rally in 2015. The court also ruled that five of the group members had been unlawfully restricted in their right to freely assemble.

F3 0-4 pts**Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 2 / 4**

Prisoners and detainees face maltreatment and torture, and those who engage in such behavior face little consequence. Individuals responsible for 2009 acts of torture and maltreatment against postelection protesters remain largely uninvestigated and unsentenced. Those involved in the case of Andrei Braguța, who died in police custody in 2017 after a traffic violation, have not yet been adequately sentenced.

Overcrowding and inhumane conditions are common in Moldovan prisons. Health care in pretrial and penitentiary institutions remains poor. COVID-19 clusters were identified in some of these facilities as the pandemic progressed.

F4 0-4 pts**Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 2 / 4**

The 2012 Moldovan Law on Ensuring Equality provides a framework for preventing and addressing discrimination. The law's main operational body, the Equality Council, has been praised for effective work and principled stance on difficult and complex discrimination issues, but has been underfunded by successive governments.

Women, persons with disabilities, Roma people, linguistic minorities, Muslims and other non-Orthodox believers, people of African and Asian descent, older persons, and LGBT+ people often face employment discrimination. Some of these groups also face discrimination in education, housing, and public service. Hate speech against minority groups is often promoted by some media outlets and public figures.

Schools and universities generally do not provide education in the Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian, or Romani languages. Low-quality public schools in the south, populated by many Gagauzians and Bulgarians, often fail to prepare graduates for admission to Romanian-language universities.

In June 2021, a violent conflict broke out between the Romany community and the non-Romany population in the town of Otaci; after several days of unrest, which had allegedly gone unchecked by local police, an intervention by Moldovan special forces was able to restore peace. The Belgium-based European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) has requested that Moldovan authorities carry out an impartial investigation into the conflict, noting possible racial motivations for the violence.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights**G1 0-4 pts****Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, 3 / employment, or education? 4**

The law protects freedom of internal movement and foreign travel, and the government generally respects these rights. There are no formal restrictions on the right to change one's place of employment or education, but bribery is not uncommon in educational institutions. Travel to Transnistria is subject to checks by the de facto territorial authorities.

While Moldovan authorities issued largely proportional COVID-19-related movement restrictions, large fines were sometimes issued for those who violated them.

G2 0-4 pts**Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without 2 / undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4**

Although Moldovan law guarantees property rights, they are undermined by a weak and corrupt judiciary. Widespread corruption affects fair competition and normal business activity. Allies of powerful individuals have been accused of benefiting economically from selective enforcement of business regulations. Some businesses also reported receiving arbitrary COVID-19-related fines.

G3 0-4 pts**Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, 2 / protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 4**

Most personal social freedoms are protected, but domestic violence and sexual abuse are common. A 2016 report by several Moldovan NGOs found that more than 63 percent of women and girls over the age of 15 had experienced some form of gender-based violence in their lifetime, while over 20 percent of men admitted to having had

nonconsensual sex with a woman. Domestic and gender-based violence laws are inadequately enforced, and abuses that do not result in significant injury are subject only to administrative penalties. Local groups reported an increase in violence against women during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

Country:
Moldova, Republic

Sexual harassment in the workplace remains common, and such incidents are inadequately addressed.

Source:

[Freedom House](#) In October 2021, the Moldovan Parliament ratified the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women.

Original link:

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/moldova/freedom-world/2022> Neither marriage nor civil unions for same-sex couples are legally recognized.

G4 0-4 pts

Document type:

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 2 / 4

Periodical Report

Due to weak labor rights protection and enforcement by authorities and trade unions, reports of exploitative labor practices including long work hours, low wages, and fully or partially undocumented work or wages, are common.

Language: English
The general population, women, and Roma are especially vulnerable to these practices. Regulations meant to prevent exploitative or unsafe working conditions remain poorly enforced. Human trafficking remains a problem, although authorities do attempt to prosecute traffickers.

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