

Moldova

62
/100

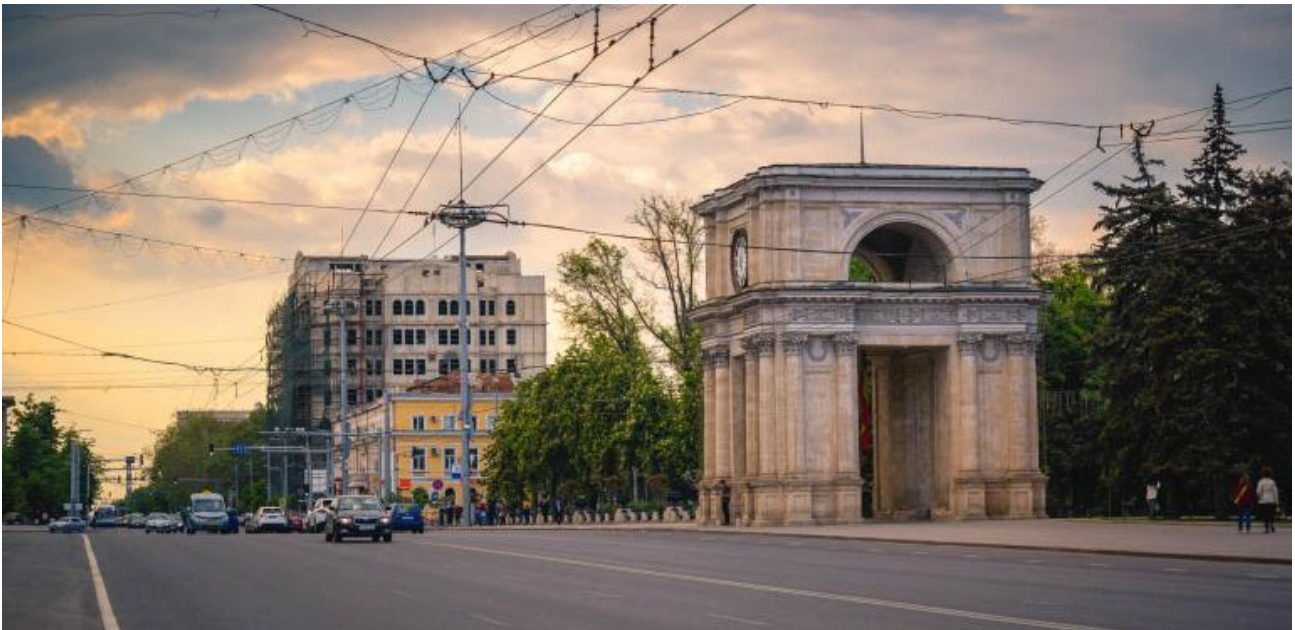
PARTLY FREE

<u>Political Rights</u>	27 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	35 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

62 /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, links between major political figures and powerful economic interests, and critical deficiencies in the justice sector and the rule of law all continue to hamper democratic governance.

Key Developments in 2022

- In May, former president Igor Dodon was placed under house arrest due to corruption allegations. In October, prosecutors alleged that then president Dodon had accepted funds from politically powerful business magnate Vladimir Plahotniuc in 2019; in return, Dodon was to intercede on Plahotniuc's behalf regarding criminal cases filed in Russia. Dodon was freed from house arrest in November but was ordered to remain in Moldova.
- In October, the United States imposed sanctions on Plahotniuc and Ilan Șor, who were implicated in the 2014 theft of \$1 billion from three banks; the US Treasury Department cited corruption allegations against Plahotniuc as well as Șor's efforts to advance Moscow's interests in Moldova. The United Kingdom issued similar sanctions in December.
- Moldovan authorities restricted access to Russian media during the year, as the Russian regime waged its war against Ukraine. In June, President Maia Sandu promulgated a law that banned the broadcast of Russian television news programming in Moldova. In December, media regulators suspended the licenses of six television stations associated with Ilan Șor, asserting that they were disseminating false information about the war.

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 prime minister Maia Sandu of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) defeated incumbent president Igor Dodon in the two-round November 2020 contest. Sandu won 57.7 percent in the second round, 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. Natalia Gavriluța of the PAS was confirmed as prime minister in August 2021, a month after snap parliamentary polls.

A2 0-4 pts

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

3 / 4

Voters elect members of the 101-seat unicameral Parliament to serve four-year terms. Under the current electoral system, all lawmakers are elected through proportional representation from closed party lists or as independents.

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. The PAS won 63 seats in the July 2021 snap polls. The Electoral Bloc of Communists and Socialists, which included the Socialist Party

(PSRM) and the Communist Party, won 32. The Euroskeptic and pro-Russian Șor Party won 6.

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 election management bodies?

3/4

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

OSCE observers found the legal framework governing the 2021 elections to be in line with international good practice; they also commended the implementation of key revisions, including lower thresholds for party registration and stronger gender quotas for candidate lists, in line with previous recommendations.

Both lower-level electoral commissions and the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) performed well in the July 2021 elections. OSCE observers reported that the election administration was generally considered trustworthy. 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 voter transportation.

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

Moldovan authorities drafted a new electoral code in 2022, intending to finalize it before the local elections due in October 2023. While the PAS majority in Parliament

supported the draft in its July 2022 first reading, the opposition criticized some of its provisions, including the envisioned selection process for CEC members. In an October report, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe (CoE) offered several recommendations, including changes to the envisioned dismissal process for CEC members. The local assembly in the Gagauzia region threatened to boycott any elections held under the draft code, which it said would effectively limit the region's autonomy. The electoral code, which was revised before final passage, was ultimately adopted in December.

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 competing parties or groupings?

3/4

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

Under the Law on Political Parties, which was amended in 2020, parties seeking registration must enlist 1,000 members. The law had required parties to enlist 4,000 members from at least half of all districts, but the Supreme Court ruled that obligation unconstitutional in 2020, prompting its revision. Following the adoption of these amendments, 20 political parties, two electoral blocs, and one independent candidate ran in the July 2021 parliamentary elections, representing a significant increase in participating parties compared with the previous elections.

However, the amended party-registration restrictions still disproportionately affect regional, municipal, and local parties, as well as parties representing geographically concentrated ethnolinguistic minority populations (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 parliamentary elections, the then opposition PAS formed a parliamentary majority, relegating the previously governing PSRM 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

Politically powerful business magnates—known as oligarchs—and foreign actors strongly influence Moldovan politics at the national and local levels, undermining accountability to voters. The Russian regime in particular has been accused of influencing Moldovan affairs through the oligarchs Vladimir Plahotniuc and Ilan Șor.

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. Several members of Moldova's ethnic minorities, including Gagauzians, Bulgarians, and Roma, hold parliamentary seats, and women's representation in Parliament and in high-level government positions has significantly increased in recent years.

The current president and prime minister are both women. In 2021, 40 women gained seats in Parliament, setting a new national record; 39 remained in Parliament as of December 2022.

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 Gavrilița government's 2021 appointment, policies have generally been determined by elected legislative and executive officials. However, key decisions have also been made by the extraordinary Commission for Exceptional Situations (CSE) after the government declared a state of emergency in response to the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The state of emergency remained in effect at year's end.

Despite holding a nonpartisan office with few executive powers, President Sandu actively participates in policymaking.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

1/4

Corruption remains widespread, and anticorruption reform efforts have not yielded results. In a January 2022 report, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted that many aspects of the government's 2017–20 anticorruption strategy remained unfulfilled by the end of 2020.

Moldova is still recovering from a 2014 banking scandal in which \$1 billion was stolen from three banks. Plahotniuc and Șor, key actors in the affair, left Moldova in 2019, and judicial proceedings regarding their role have stalled. In October 2022, the United States imposed sanctions on both men, citing Plahotniuc's corruption and Șor's efforts to advance Moscow's interests in Moldova. The United Kingdom imposed similar sanctions against the two in December.

In May 2022, former president Dodon was arrested and placed under house arrest due to corruption allegations. In October, prosecutors accused him of accepting funding

for the PSRM from Plahotniuc in 2019; in return for the funds, Dodon was to intercede on Plahotniuc's behalf regarding criminal cases filed in Russia. Dodon, who rejected the accusations, was freed from house arrest in November but was ordered not to leave Moldova for 60 days. By November, former Parliament speaker Zinaida Greceanîi and lawmaker Corneliu Furculiță, both of the PSRM, had also been implicated in the case.

In November 2022, the RISE Moldova news outlet reported that Dodon had received funds from businessmen associated with the Kremlin between October 2021 and April 2022. Dodon denied the allegations.

In July 2022, prosecutors and the National Anticorruption Center raided the offices of the Șor Party, which was accused of accepting funds from criminal actors. Șor Party vice president Marina Tauber was detained and remained under house arrest as of October.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

1 / 4

Although the PAS government appears to be more transparent than its predecessors, serious issues persist, including the late publication of plans, draft policies, budgets, and bills for consultation. 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

Many sectors of the media industry continue to be 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 face difficulty accessing important information in the public interest and are subject to threats of legal action from politicians and other public figures. In July 2022, for example, Jurnal TV founder Val Butnaru was fined and barred from holding leadership posts at television or radio outlets for six months after he was found guilty of slander. Butnaru was accused of the offense by the Buiucani Police Inspectorate in 2021 after he reported on police officers' involvement in a smuggling operation.

Concerns over the independence of the Audiovisual Council (CA), Moldova's media regulator, have surfaced in recent years. Parliament amended the audiovisual-services code in 2021, making it easier to dismiss CA members. In a 2021 report, the OSCE noted that the amended code increased parliamentary control over the CA and the public broadcaster, TeleRadio-Moldova.

Moldovan authorities restricted access to Russian media after Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022. In June, President Sandu promulgated the Informational Security Law, which banned Russian television news programming from being broadcast in Moldova. Under the law, 50 percent of television content must be sourced from European Union member states, the United States, and countries that ratified the European Convention on Transfrontier Television.

The Intelligence and Security Service (SIS) used emergency powers to block two websites later in 2022, stating that the websites spread false information and incited hatred with their content. In December, the CSE suspended the licenses of six television stations after the CA said they offered inaccurate information on the war. All six are owned by or otherwise tied to Ilan Șor.

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 guarantees religious freedom and separation of the 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.

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. However, the Orthodox Church has strong influence over the educational system, with education officials at all levels frequently promoting the church and Orthodox beliefs.

In July 2022, the government announced plans to merge higher-education institutions, which it said would improve their standards and competitiveness. Staff and students at institutions that would be merged criticized the proposal, saying it was not transparently discussed with them.

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.

In November 2022, legislators introduced a bill that would allow the SIS to intercept mail and phone communications and engage in surveillance outside of a criminal investigation.

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.

In September 2022, the Șor Party began staging antigovernment protests in Chișinău. Some of the demonstrators admitted that they were paid for their participation. In October, Sandu called on the government to give more powers to law enforcement to address the protests, saying that participants were trying to destabilize the country to benefit Moscow. In November, police arrested eight people who allegedly recruited individuals on behalf of the Șor Party to incite riots.

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 restrictions.

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 effective role in protecting workers' rights.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?

1/4

Moldova's judicial branch is highly susceptible to political influences that hamper its independence. Judicial appointment processes lack transparency. In a February 2022 report, the CoE's Group of States against Corruption said that Moldova did not implement its previous recommendations for judicial reform.

In June 2022, local media outlets reported that President Sandu had rejected the candidacies of 13 individuals recommended by the Superior Council of Magistracy (CSM) for extended terms as judges. The president's office cited disciplinary issues involving some of the candidates. In October, Sandu accepted 14 other CSM candidates.

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 judicial processes are common, and judges face heavy caseloads. Moldovans at times seek speedier redress at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

In October 2021, Prosecutor General Alexandr Stoianoglo was arrested on charges relating to corruption and abuse of power. In June 2022, the ECtHR shared complaints lodged with the government by Stoianoglo, who said he was illegally arrested and was suspended from his post for political reasons. In a September statement, the Justice Ministry maintained that the government did not violate the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in its treatment of Stoianoglo.

A criminal trial against Ilan Șor, who was accused of involvement in the 2014 banking scandal and fled Moldova in 2019, was still ongoing at the end of 2022, and court hearings have been repeatedly postponed.

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 the officials responsible for such abuses generally enjoy impunity. The perpetrators of acts of torture and maltreatment against postelection protesters in 2009 remain largely uninvestigated and unpunished. 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.

In March 2022, the ECtHR ruled that Moldova had violated the ECHR in its treatment of the late Serghei Cosovan, a businessman who received a prison term in 2018 and fell gravely ill while in detention. Cosovan was released from prison in 2019 and died in 2021 due to his illness.

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 its effective work and principled stances on complex discrimination issues, but it has been underfunded by successive governments.

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

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

Moldova hosted 96,000 Ukrainian refugees as of November 2022. While the country has largely welcomed these refugees, the Roma among them have faced mistreatment and discrimination. In April, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) reported that Romany refugees were placed in segregated housing with poor living conditions. In May, Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted that Roma were sometimes denied access to publicly run facilities. In August, a group of Romany refugees were tear-gassed by security personnel after an altercation at a canteen. The ERRC filed a complaint with prosecutors and the Equality Council over the incident in October, prompting a criminal investigation.

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, employment, or education?

3/4

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 common in educational institutions. Travel to Transnistria is subject to checks by the de facto territorial authorities.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

2/4

Although Moldovan law guarantees property rights, they are undermined by a weak and corrupt judiciary. Widespread corruption also affects fair competition and normal business activity. Allies of powerful individuals have been accused of benefiting economically from selective enforcement of business regulations.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

2/4

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. Abuses that do not result in significant injury are subject only to administrative penalties.

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

In 2021, Parliament ratified the CoE's Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women.

Child marriages are reported in the Romany community. Neither marriage nor civil unions for same-sex couples are legally recognized.

G4 0-4 pts

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

2/4

Due to weak protection of labor rights 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. The rural population, women, and Roma are especially vulnerable to these practices. Regulations meant to prevent exploitative or unsafe working conditions are poorly enforced. Human trafficking remains a problem, though the authorities do attempt to prosecute traffickers.



On Moldova

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