



Moldova — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[officially known as Republic of Moldova]

07/09/1940 Start Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]: Moldova was occupied by the Russian Empire several times between 1711 and 1812. On 05/18/1812 the Russian Empire was allowed to annex the region of Bessarabia by the Treaty of Bucharest.¹ The rest of Moldova, together with Wallachia, formed Romania on 01/24/1859, known as the Unification of the Romanian Principalities.² By the Treaty of Berlin, Romania was internationally recognized on 07/13/1878 and South Bessarabia was returned to the Russian Empire, after the region fell under Moldavan rule in the course of the Crimean War 1856.³ On 10/12/1924, the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee accepted the creation of the Autonomous Moldavian Socialist Soviet Republic as a part of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR).⁴ In the part of Moldova, which was part of the Kingdom of Romania, women who met certain qualifications were allowed to vote in local elections, starting in 1929. After the Constitution of 1938, voting rights were extended to women for general elections by the Electoral Law in 1939.⁵ Until 08/02/1940 Moldova was part of the Ukrainian SSR as the Moldavan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.⁶ After an agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union in the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1939, the Soviet Union issued an ultimatum to the Romanian government to cede the territories of Bessarabia and Northern Bukowina on 06/26/1940, which the Romanian government accepted two days later.⁷ On 07/09/1940, the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was officially formed. Equal voting rights were granted to men and women.⁸ The Soviet regime immediately reorganized the territory, nationalizing land, industry, and resources. Forced collectivization of agriculture and Russification policies followed, including the imposition of the Cyrillic alphabet for „Moldavian“ and the promotion of Russian and Ukrainian settlers, especially in the region east of the Dniester (Transnistria). Moldova’s position as a former Romanian region led to the Soviets enforcing a cultural and linguistic separation from Romania. Russification and the promotion of Slavic minorities into positions of authority, as well as economic integration into the Soviet system, further differentiated Moldova from its western neighbor.⁹ The Communist Party of Moldavia (PCM) was the sole ruling institution, with actual authority resting in party leadership subordinate to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow. Leadership roles typically went to officials loyal to Moscow or of non-Moldovan origin, fostering an alienation between rulers and the local population.¹⁰ Mass arrests, executions, and deportations occurred especially during Stalin’s rule and the immediate postwar period. The two largest deportations took place in 06/12&13/1941 and 07/06/1949, affecting tens of thousands accused of nationalism, collaboration, or resisting collectivization. Repression gradually subsided after Stalin’s death, but continued at lower levels through intimidation and control mechanisms.¹¹ Organized resistance to Soviet power was most visible during World War II and the immediate postwar years, when Moldovan and Romanian partisans operated behind Axis and Soviet lines, though most anti-Soviet resistance was quickly crushed and marginal under Soviet rule.¹² Moldova underwent a large-scale demographic change due to resettlement policies, and heavy repression accompanied Russification policies. Late Soviet policies of glasnost allowed national revival and strengthened links to Romania, helping fuel Moldova’s push for independence in 1990.¹³ LIED and V-Dem do not provide data for Moldova before 1990.

04/17/1990 End Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]/Start Electoral Democracy: Free and semi-competitive elections to the Supreme Soviet took place on this date, paving the way to the declaration of independence, following the failed coup of communist hardliners against Gorbachev in August 1991. Mircea Snegur was elected as first president of Moldova by the Supreme Soviet on 03/09/1990. Since the Communist Party of Moldavia stayed in power with the majority in the Supreme Soviet and Snegur as president, but considering the liberalization in the electoral process and ambitions towards independence from the Soviet Union, we code this regime change event as a strategic (liberal and/or democratic) restructuring. The election was marred by boycotts of the opposition over his stance against reunification with Romania and of separatists in the Gagauz and Transnistria region over a perceived threat of discrimination on ethnic and linguistic grounds, particularly the latter (Neukirch 2010).¹⁴ Only LIED classifies a regime change in 1994 from a multiparty autocracy to an electoral democracy. We agree with LIED that the quality of the elections and therefore the nature of the regime differed in 1990 and 1994. However, we see no evidence of such serious shortcomings in the electoral process that would justify a classification as an electoral autocracy. In October 1993, the Supreme Soviet of Moldova, which had been elected in 1990, consented to conduct early parliamentary elections. These elections took place in 1994. Throughout 1993, over 20 parties and political movements registered, marking the first election since the declaration of independence in 1991. On 07/21/2000, the Parliament adopted an amendment to the Constitution, transforming Moldova from a presidential to a parliamentary republic. After the parliamentary elections on 04/06/2009, the opposition accused the government of electoral fraud, which could not be substantiated with evidence from the OSCE election observation. Nonetheless, new elections were held on 07/29/2009, whereby the Communist Party lost power to the Alliance for European Integration.¹⁵ On 06/07/2019 following the parliamentary elections on 02/24/2019, the Socialist Party and the ACUM bloc agreed to form a coalition. The Constitutional Court declared the government illegitimate on 06/07/2019 because the legal deadline for the formation of a government had passed by one day. Subsequently, Moldova had two governments, the outgoing administration refused to leave, and Moldova was in a state of a constitutional crisis.¹⁶ However, on 06/15/2019, former prime minister Pavel Filip resigned in response to international pressure and mass protests, and the new government, a coalition of the pro-Russian Socialist party and the pro-Western Now Platform party, was formed with Maia Sandu as prime minister. Due to the shortness of the constitutional crisis and the resolution in accordance with democratic procedures the event is not counted as a democratic breakdown. On 11/12/2019, Sandu lost a no-confidence vote on and was replaced by Ion Chicu, but immediately won the presidential elections on 11/15/2019.¹⁷ On 06/23/2022, Moldova obtained European Union (EU) candidacy status.¹⁸ The presidential election on 10/20/2024, with a run-off on 11/03/2024, was framed as a fundamental choice between a pro-Western and a pro-Russian future, held alongside a referendum on EU membership. The election was marred by significant Russian interference, including alleged multimillion-dollar vote-buying schemes and coordinated bomb threats aimed at disrupting voting by the diaspora. Despite these efforts to destabilize the election, incumbent President Maia Sandu, who is pro-European, secured reelection in the runoff with 55.35% of the vote, defeating her pro-Russian opponent, Alexandr Stoianoglo.¹⁹ Since gaining independence in 1991, Moldova has consistently been categorized as partly free by FH. While the electoral system is deemed competitive and allows for regular changes in government, oligarchs wield significant influence in Moldovan politics. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. According to LIED the country held competitive election, except for the first three years of independence. Furthermore, V-Dem's CEI scores ambiguous cleanliness between 1990 and 1993, 2005 to 2010 and 2017 and 2018. For the remaining years, somewhat cleanliness is achieved. Regarding the overall election conditions, they were somewhat free and fair from 1991 to 2004, 2009 to 2015 and 2019 and 2020. Otherwise, ambiguous election conditions are stated (V-Dem EF&FI). Moreover, there are notable deficiencies in judicial independence and press freedom, both susceptible to political interference. Corruption remains a pervasive issue, impeding government functionality. Despite these challenges, civil liberties are generally respected.²⁰ Furthermore, political liberties were absent for the entire time according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI scores them

as somewhat present from 1991 to 2009 and from 2015 to 2018. The remaining years, the political liberties are classified as present based on this indicator. From 1991 to 1993, based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive encountered substantial institutional limitations on power. Since 1994, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust between 1995-2009, in 2016 and between 2018-2019 and otherwise robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate from 1990-1997, comprehensive between 2010-2016 and 2022-2023, and otherwise robust. Moldova has been included by FH since 1991. From 1991 to 1995, it scored between 8 and 10, which is interpreted as partly free and corresponds to our category rather not free. From 1996 onwards, with the exception of 2008 (score 8), scores between 6 and 7 are achieved, which is also considered partly free and is interpreted as rather free in our framework.

Electoral Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Büscher 2002, Crowther 1997, Dawisha/Parrott 1997, Way 2005)

Notes

- ¹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Bucharest-1812>; <https://www.britannica.com/place/Moldova/History>
- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Romania
- ³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bessarabia>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Romania
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moldavian_Autonomous_Soviet_Socialist_Republic
- ⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moldova>
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moldavian_Autonomous_Soviet_Socialist_Republic
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moldavian_Soviet_Socialist_Republic#Establishment
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage
- ⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Moldova/History>
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_of_Moldavia
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_deportations_from_Bessarabia_and_Northern_Bukovina
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moldovan_resistance_during_World_War_II
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Moldova
- ¹⁴ <https://countrystudies.us/moldova/7.htm>; <https://countrystudies.us/moldova/9.htm>; <https://countrystudies.us/moldova/8.htm>
- ¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Moldova
- ¹⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/14/world/europe/moldova-new-government.html>
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Moldova
- ¹⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/moldova/nations-transit/2023>
- ¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Moldovan_presidential_election
- ²⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/moldova/freedom-world/2023>

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