

# RESILIO ACCESS

## Country Report

### Republic of Moldova

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Since gaining independence in 1991, Moldova has struggled to set up independent institutions in a context of pervasive corruption and a compromised judiciary. Moldova had coalition governments after 2009 that proclaimed to be pro-European, but systemic corruption and problems with the judiciary and the rule of law persisted. Moldova signed the Association Agreement and DCFTA in 2014; numerous reforms were passed under EU conditionality, but most were not implemented. These ‘pro-European’ coalitions culminated in the Plahotniuc era from 2015 to 2019, a textbook example of state capture. These years are infamous for ‘Theft of the Century’ high-level corruption, political control of the judiciary and an overall decline in the rule of law.<sup>2</sup> The period saw mass demonstrations versus the corrupt elite against a background of captured media, a hijacked state apparatus and pervasive impunity.

In 2020 Maia Sandu won the presidential election, and in 2021 her Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) won an absolute majority in parliament. PAS came to power promising reforms: eradicating corruption, strengthening the rule of law and the judiciary and pursuing a pro-European agenda. Moldova’s rule of law has improved measurably since then, although improvements remains slow and uneven across institutions. This is also due to a complex political landscape. The PAS government had a highly challenging start with the compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the severe energy crisis of autumn 2021 and Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in winter 2022. The government mostly operated in a crisis-response mode, focusing on its immediate priorities: the massive inflow of Ukrainian refugees, gas and energy shortages, false-flag operations in the Transnistrian region and ongoing national and regional security concerns.

Moldova followed Ukraine’s path in applying for EU membership. It received EU candidate status in June 2022, accompanied by nine specific reform steps.<sup>3</sup> Following a positive assessment, Moldova was invited to open accession talks with the EU in June 2024, and organised a constitutional referendum over joining the EU in October that year. The referendum passed with a narrow result of 50.35 per cent, a close margin that highlighted the significant scale of Russian hybrid interference.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Andrei Lutenco, Mihai Mogildea, and Daniela Vidaicu for their valuable comments on the draft of the text.

<sup>2</sup> “Moldova: US\$1 Billion Disappears from Banks, Thousands Protest in the Capital”, OCCRP, accessed July 28, 2026, <https://www.occrp.org/en/news/moldova-us1-billion-disappears-from-banks-thousands-protest-in-the-capital>.

<sup>3</sup> “Opinion on Moldova’s Application for Membership of the European Union - Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood”, accessed July 28, 2026, [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/opinion-moldovas-application-membership-european-union\\_en](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/opinion-moldovas-application-membership-european-union_en).

Strong Russian interference continued in the parliamentary elections in 2025 in which PAS retained its single-party majority.

Recent years have seen an overall improvement in the fight against corruption, judicial reform and the rule of law; this has resulted in an overall increase in primary institutional resilience, as defined by the RESILIO-ACCESS project. However, the continuous crisis mode has led to a centralisation of power within PAS and to limited public consultation processes. There has also been a divergence between technical progress and domestic perception. While the European Commission Report and OECD Rule of Law report assess an overall improvement, some rule-of-law and corruption indicators from 2025 have begun to slip slightly compared to 2024, specifically the Rule of Law score from the World of Justice Project. Moldova's score in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index decreased from 43 to 42 out of 100 points, ranking the country at 80 out of 182 states covered by the index.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, overall assessments show a clear positive trend since 2019.

Some of the state measures linked to fighting hybrid threats could be assessed as intervening with fundamental democratic freedoms. These include excluding political parties through emergency decrees just days before elections, as with the Sansa party – affiliated with oligarch Ilan Shor – at local elections in 2023. And in 2025 two parties were removed from the electoral list just two days before the parliamentary elections, due to financial irregularities and affiliations with Russia.<sup>5</sup> While the government justified these extraordinary measures by the intense time pressure to respond to asymmetric attacks by Russia and its proxies, these measures did not align with good governance safeguards as they did not allow the eliminated parties to contest the decisions.<sup>6</sup> There is also a constant structural tension between the demand for rapid reforms – particularly those linked to EU accession – and a consultative, inclusive and transparent policy-making process. A monitoring report on the last legislature (2021–2025) showed that only 18 percent of bills underwent public consultation by the Parliament.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Moldova”, Transparency.Org, February 11, 2025, <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/moldova>.

<sup>5</sup> Eugen Uruşciuc, “Partidul Victoriei Furtună, exclus din cursa electorală. Blocul „Alternativa” şi premierul Recean, sancţionaţi de CEC”, Politică, *Radio Europa Liberă*, 19:08:43Z, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/partidul-victoriei-furtuna-exclus-din-cursa-electoral-a-blocul-alternativa-si-premierul-recean-sanctionati-de-cec/33542009.html>.

<sup>6</sup> “Moldova, Parliamentary Elections, 28 September 2025: Final Report | OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights”, February 18, 2026, <https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/662251>.

<sup>7</sup> Monitoring the activity of the Parliament of the XIth Legislature, Promo-Lex Association, <https://promolex.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/sumar-eng-machetat.pdf>.

This dynamic directly feeds into Russian disinformation narratives and creates a climate where media and civil society face growing polarisation. This can occasionally result in self-censorship to avoid being perceived as undermining the state’s pro-European path, while also trying to hold the government to account.

This report focuses on recent developments, particularly since 2021. Because the RESILIO-ACCESS model primarily relies on 2024 data baselines, this paper uses the model’s qualitative factors for reference – but builds upon the most recent 2025 and 2026 data provided by V-Dem, the World Justice Project, Freedom House, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), Transparency International, European Commission reports and semi-structured interviews with local experts in Moldova. Most of the aggregated data excludes the breakaway Transnistrian region due to a lack of access and reliable information from the left bank of the Nistru River.

## **2. Analysis of the country case along the RESILIO-ACCESS model**

### **2.1 Analysis of one of the most important primary resilience resources: Absence of corruption**

Two indicators in the RESILIO-ACCESS data score comparatively well and help explain why the country retains a baseline of rule-of-law resilience despite internal and external challenges. Civil liberties and regime legitimisation both score well – close or above the EU Top 9 average. Civil liberties includes the protection of core freedoms (expression, assembly, belief). Moldova’s relatively strong score reflects a political system that has not resorted to systematic repression to manage dissent. This is also highlighted in Freedom House’s assessment, in which assembly, free speech and religious freedoms score quite high.<sup>8</sup> Regime legitimisation captures the extent to which the current government is perceived as ruling through legitimate constitutional and electoral processes rather than through force or fraud. This is in line with citizens’ perceptions that they can vote for a candidate they prefer and say what they think about the country’s leadership. This also reflects the credibility PAS has built through consecutive competitive elections (2020, 2021, 2024, 2025), each conducted under heavy international scrutiny and monitoring. These two indicators suggest that Moldova’s rule-of-law resilience relies less on well-functioning institutions than on the protection of basic freedoms.

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<sup>8</sup> “Moldova: Freedom in the World 2026 Country Report”, Freedom House, accessed September 9, 2026, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/moldova/freedom-world/2026>.

Despite the strengths of these primary resilience resources, it can be argued that anti-corruption (actually the second lowest-scoring primary resource in the RESILIO-ACCESS data) is the key resource in Moldova's case, as it determines the legitimacy of reforms and trust in institutions and remains one of the key concerns for citizens. It also highlights the need to consolidate state institutions.

Moldova has been shaped by corrupt elites and a governance model that served their own economic interests, with corruption penetrating deeply into the judiciary. The Plahotniuc-era state capture and the 2014 banking fraud scandal deeply undermined trust in institutions. According to polls, corruption has been one of the most consistent public concerns, following the economy and security.<sup>9</sup>

The PAS government, with strong support from the EU and Member States, puts high emphasis on de-oligarchisation, fighting corruption and revamping the judiciary. High-level convictions and the sentencing of Vlad Plahotniuc and Ilan Shor (in absentia) are real achievements for Moldovan democracy. The electoral framework has also been strengthened against electoral corruption, and government measures to address Russian hybrid threats and the use of illicit finances reduced Russian interference in the 2025 elections.<sup>10</sup>

With PAS now in its second mandate with a parliamentary majority, many key positions have been replaced with PAS-appointed figures. A large share of appointments are now political, justified by the need to clean the system. However, cases emerged in 2026 of individuals linked to PAS being appointed despite holding fake diplomas, receiving unjustifiably high compensation<sup>11</sup> or being appointed without the necessary qualifications.<sup>12</sup> While not all cases may have been ill-intentioned, some had been known about for some time – and the issue demonstrated that affiliation with PAS proved a more decisive factor than expertise. This has prompted investigations into public agencies and could significantly impact trust in government and its credibility.

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<sup>9</sup> “Institutul de Politici Publice | Prezentarea Rezultatelor Sondajului Barometrul Opiniei Publice, Septembrie 2025”, accessed July 28, 2026, <https://ipp.md/2025-09/prezentarea-rezultatelor-sondajului-barometrul-opinii-publice-septembrie-2025/#>.

<sup>10</sup> “Moldova, Parliamentary Elections, 28 September 2025”

<sup>11</sup> Victor Mosneag, “Zborul spre șefia Moldatsa, pe aripile unui CV cu informații false: „misiunile secrete” și controversile din jurul lui Dumitru Vangheli”, *Ancheta, Ziarul de Gardă*, June 18, 2026, <https://www.zdg.md/investigatii/ancheta/zborul-spre-sefia-moldatsa-pe-aripile-unui-cv-cu-informatii-false-misiunile-secrete-si-controversele-din-jurul-lui-dumitru-vangheli/>.

<sup>12</sup> “Fără Facultate, Dar Cu Funcție Publică: Cum a Ajuns Un Tânăr de 18 Ani Să Lucreze La Ministerul Culturii”, July 14, 2026, <https://radiomoldova.md/p/80835>.

While the EU Commission’s 2025 report acknowledges significant progress on anti-corruption in Moldova,<sup>13</sup> the WJP’s Absence of Corruption factor fell by one point and Transparency International’s CPI dipped from 43 to 42 after an all-time high. More anti-corruption measures have been implemented, but enforcement remains weak and judiciary reform and vetting have been slow. Some initiatives, such as the creation of the Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime Prosecution Office (PACCO), received criticism from civil society, experts and the Venice Commission as an attempt to politicise the judiciary.<sup>14</sup> So did the proposal to redefine the roles of anti-corruption agencies, extending the competencies of the National Anticorruption Center to investigate financial crimes related to EU funds – experts argue it lacks independence since its leadership is appointed by Parliament.<sup>15</sup>

Judicial reform and cleaning up the judiciary have been a central part of the process. The pre-vetting commission mandate has been completed. The Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM) and the Superior Council of Prosecutors (SCP) were staffed with members that passed pre-vetting<sup>16</sup> – though the process also involved scandals related to integrity and full disclosure of information.<sup>17</sup> The OECD also identified an established regulatory framework for fighting corruption related to “conflicts of interest, judicial integrity, prosecutorial integrity and political finance”.<sup>18</sup> Moldova has advanced judicial vetting and introduced measures like mandated anti-corruption prosecutors to swiftly investigate anti-corruption cases at a high level.<sup>19</sup>

There has been a change in personnel within institutions with some judges leaving voluntarily, allowing for a ‘cleaner’ system. But there have not been enough new personnel joining. The

<sup>13</sup> European Commission, Republic of Moldova 2025 Report, SWD(2025) 758 final.

<sup>14</sup> “Moldova Stalls Anti-Corruption Merger after Venice Commission Warning”, December 18, 2025, <https://moldova1.md/p/64676>; “Declinul Republicii Moldova În Indicele Percepției Corupției 2025”, accessed July 30, 2026, <https://www.mold-street.com/noutate/declinul-republicii-moldova-in-indicele-perceptiei-coruptiei-2025>.

<sup>15</sup> Iana Josu, “CRJM Asks Deputies Not to Vote for Changes Regarding CNA and PA”, *Ipri.Md*, June 11, 2026, <https://ipri.md/en/crjm-asks-deputies-not-to-vote-for-changes-regarding-cna-and-pa/>.

<sup>16</sup> “Raport Final Pre-Vetting: 38% Din Candidați Promovează Evaluarea. „CSM Și CSP – Pe Deplin Operațional”, October 2, 2026, <https://moldova1.md/p/68440>.

<sup>17</sup> CRJM, TREI DIRECȚII PRIORITARE PENTRU 2026 ÎN VEDEREA CONSOLIDĂRII STATULUI DE DREPT ÎN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA ȘI AVANSĂRII PROCESULUI DE ADERARE LA UE (2026), <https://crjm.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/JustPresso-ianuarie-2026-Editie-Speciala.pdf>; “Iulian Muntean Resigns from CSM after Corruption Scandal”, September 26, 2023, <https://moldova1.md/p/16523>.

<sup>18</sup> OECD, *OECD Justice Review of the Republic of Moldova*.

<sup>19</sup> OECD, *OECD Justice Review of the Republic of Moldova: Improving Access to Justice Services and Building Trust* (OECD Publishing, 2026), <https://doi.org/10.1787/40115711-en>.

Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ) works with only 12 out of 20 Judges appointed, despite eight public calls to fill the positions.<sup>20</sup>

There have also been scandals linked to the vetting process. A worrying precedent was set this year when Parliament lowered the necessary threshold to appoint a member of the Vetting Commission, showing that even the mechanism meant to fix enforcement is politically contested.<sup>21</sup> The pace of proposed reforms puts a lot of pressure on an already overstretched system which suffers from a shortage of qualified personnel ready to join institutions.

The main challenges are the gap between regulation and practice and the lack of enforcement, accountability and the trust of the population, further hindered by limited administrative capacity.<sup>22</sup> Moldova's judicial budget and its history of rule of law further slow the process. Despite increases, the judicial budget still ranks low compared with other OECD countries (though public-sector salaries are generally low across Moldova).<sup>23</sup> Chronic underfunding of the judiciary, combined with a history of weak rule of law, keeps the progress of reforms slow and contributes to low trust and motivation among judges. To accelerate vetting, the new reform on salaries in the public sector suggests that those who pass the vetting procedure should receive a higher salary – which could lead to major disparities between individuals.<sup>24</sup>

One of the key challenges remains citizens' trust in institutions and getting citizens on board with the reform process. There has been an improvement in public perception of the justice system in Moldova; 49 percent of respondents believe that the situation has improved in the last three years.<sup>25</sup> Corruption and politicisation remain the key issues hindering the reform process, followed by cronyism, a lack of meritocracy and the unprofessionalism of specialists.<sup>26</sup>

Civil liberties and regime legitimisation score well in the RESILIO-ACCESS data, highlighting that citizens' freedoms play an important role in Moldova's resilience. But the absence of corruption

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<sup>20</sup> “CSJ Ajunge La 12 Judecători Și Pune Capăt Transferurilor Temporare, Dar Rămâne La 60% Din Capacitate”, November 8, 2026, <https://radiomoldova.md/p/82814>.

<sup>21</sup> Tilman Hoppe, “A Bad Bet for Judicial Vetting”, *Verfassungsblog*, ahead of print, April 22, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.59704/1f71e31e67291de6>.

<sup>22</sup> OECD, *OECD Justice Review of the Republic of Moldova*.

<sup>23</sup> OECD, *OECD Justice Review of the Republic of Moldova*.

<sup>24</sup> “IPRE Warns of Salary Disparities in the Judiciary”, May 8, 2026, <https://moldova1.md/p/82411>.

<sup>25</sup> “SECOND NATIONAL PUBLIC OPINION POLL INTEGRITY IN THE JUSTICE SECTOR”, *IPRE*, February 6, 2026, <https://ipre.md/2026/02/06/al-doilea-sondaj-national-de-opinie-publica-integritatea-in-sectorul-justitiei/?lang=en>.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

remains the key factor for Moldova's rule-of-law resilience because of its potential to strengthen legitimacy and trust and contribute to strong institutions. Moldova has shown significant motivation and will to implement reforms, but challenges persist. The reform process has been slower than expected, and there is a discrepancy between the institutional design of reforms related to anti-corruption and their implementation. Recent scandals related to the transparency of appointments in the Moldovan government are likely to have a significant impact on perceptions of corruption.

## **2.2. Most important subsidiary resilience resources: Citizen participation and unbiased media**

Civil society, public deliberation and academic freedom score comparatively well in the RESILIO-ACCESS data, in line with its high score for civil liberties. Civil society operates in an enabling environment in Moldova.<sup>27</sup> The sector is large and includes more than 13,000 organisations.<sup>28</sup> However, the number of those operating is around a sixth, with 70 per cent of organisations concentrated in Chisinau.<sup>29</sup> Civil society has been instrumental in the EU accession process, government accountability and combating disinformation, and it remains a key pillar for Moldovan democracy.

Despite the importance of CSOs for the resilience of the rule of law in Moldova, trust in NGOs remains relatively low, at around 28 per cent (Figure 1). This is an increase from 2022, but it means that NGOs have a limited capacity to mobilise citizens around specific causes or to act as a bridge between citizens and the government.<sup>30</sup> Low trust in NGOs can be linked to campaigns portraying them as affiliated with or acting in the interest of foreign governments. Many citizens also view NGOs as being controlled by domestic interest groups or political parties.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "Moldova Report 2025 - Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood", accessed February 22, 2026, [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/moldova-report-2025\\_en](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/moldova-report-2025_en).

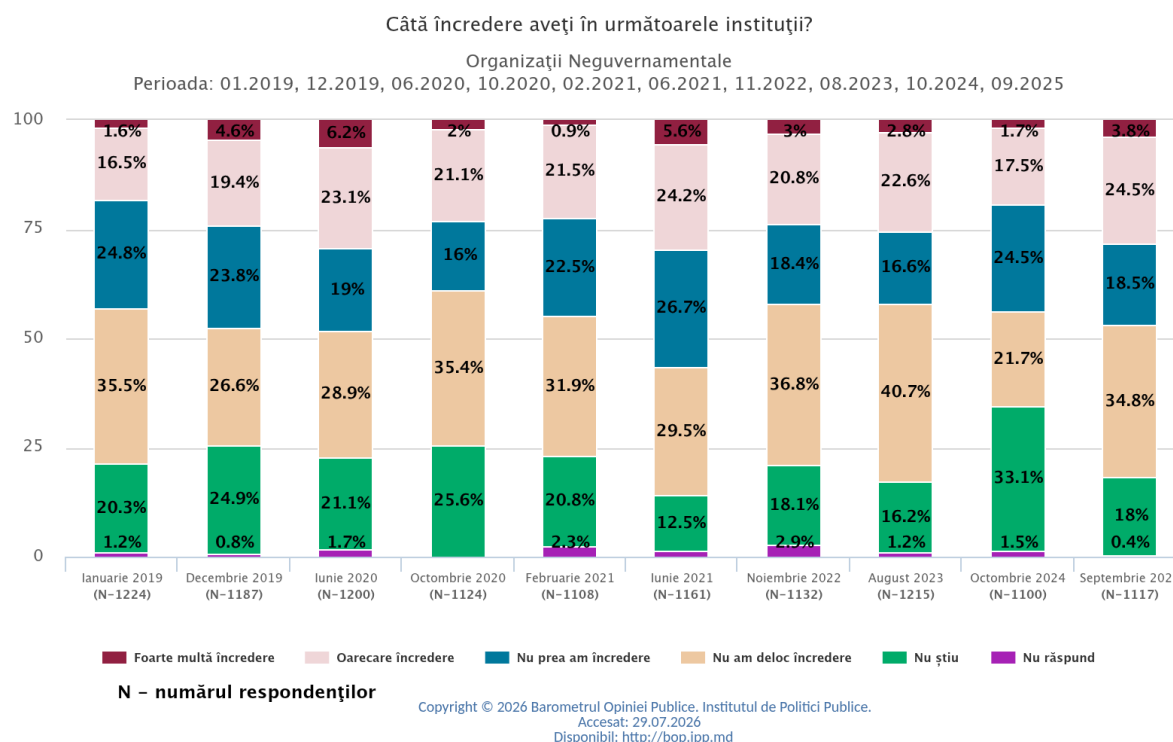
<sup>28</sup> Florin Gîscă et al., *CSO Meter 2025: Moldova Country Report*, n.d.

<sup>29</sup> "CSO Compass Moldova Unfolding Civil Society Organizations Landscape in Moldova through CSO Mapping, Study, and Platform", People in Need, accessed September 9, 2026, <https://moldova.peopleinneed.net/mo/cso-compass-moldova-study-2514pub>.

<sup>30</sup> *Citizens' Perceptions Regarding the Quality of Elections and the Functioning of Democratic Processes in the Republic of Moldova - European Platform for Democratic Elections*.

<sup>31</sup> "BTI 2026 Moldova Country Report", BTI 2026, accessed July 29, 2026, <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report?isocode=MDA&cHash=810883b9fb88ff046a65443aeca5eced>.

Figure 1: Trust in non-governmental organisations 2019–2025. Source: Public Opinion Barometer (BOP), Institute for Public Policy (IPP).



The enabling environment for civil society organisations does not always translate into direct citizen participation. Citizen participation contributes to the resilience of the rule of law – it can improve trust in institutions and accountability for decision-makers. Low trust in public institutions and a weak rule-of-law tradition might lead to citizens being more reluctant to engage in the reform process or accept tough reforms, especially if they require certain trade-offs.<sup>32</sup> Ensuring citizen participation and fostering a culture of debate can lead to more lasting reforms and institutions, higher trust in the country’s rule-of-law process and stronger buy-in when reforms are needed.<sup>33</sup>

Citizen participation in Moldova is legally unconstrained and citizens mobilise around elections, but institutional participation remains weak. RESILIO-ACCESS data show citizen participation as the lowest-scoring factor in Moldova’s profile, while civil society is high-scoring. This presents a

<sup>32</sup> “Citizen Participation for a More Resilient Democracy and More Effective Policies in Ukraine: Public Governance Review of Ukraine”, OECD, June 22, 2026, [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/public-governance-review-of-ukraine\\_7810f059-en/full-report/citizen-participation-for-a-more-resilient-democracy-and-more-effective-policies-in-ukraine\\_62a234f8.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/public-governance-review-of-ukraine_7810f059-en/full-report/citizen-participation-for-a-more-resilient-democracy-and-more-effective-policies-in-ukraine_62a234f8.html).

<sup>33</sup> OECD, “Citizen Participation for a More Resilient Democracy and More Effective Policies in Ukraine”

paradox; turnout and mobilisation for recent elections was more than 50 percent,<sup>34</sup> higher than other EU accession candidates. However, the Moldovan population is rarely involved in the democratic process outside of elections, and trust in the government and political parties remains low.

Instead, Moldovan citizens have greater trust in informal institutions, such as family networks, the church and local authorities. Social cohesion is built at the local level rather than around public institutions.<sup>35</sup> This explains why stronger civil society, media and academia in Moldova have not translated into higher citizen engagement and participation. While local networks provide crucial daily support, they do not necessarily encourage engagement in politics. This also means that governance-related improvements not directly linked to key concerns do not always translate into higher citizen satisfaction, leading to a pragmatic attitude from citizens toward the government.<sup>36</sup>

Moldovan citizens trust the democratic electoral process more than they trust political actors, and they generally do not feel ownership over political decisions on the national level. Around 32 percent are interested in politics and around 35 percent believe they can influence politics on the national level, though around 47 percent think they can influence politics on the local level.<sup>37</sup> Only a third of the population believes the country is governed by the people's will.<sup>38</sup> This is somewhat of a paradox, as most people also believe that they are free to vote, choose a candidate they want and express their opinion, while more than half of the population think that the recent elections were only to a small extent or not fair at all – mostly suggesting that irregularities occurred on the national level/diaspora or Transnistrian region, but not in their locality.<sup>39</sup> The idea of electoral fraud is also spread by some opposition parties, but concrete examples are not given. This demonstrates the

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<sup>34</sup> “IFES Election Guide | Country Profile: Moldova, Republic Of”, accessed July 29, 2026, <https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/142/>.

<sup>35</sup> “EU Democracy Promotion in Moldova: Trust, Hybridity, and Reform”, *Re-Engage | A Horizon Europe Project*, December 31, 2025, <https://re-engaging.eu/eus-democracy-promotion-in-the-republic-of-moldova/>.

<sup>36</sup> “EU Democracy Promotion in Moldova”

<sup>37</sup> *Citizens’ Perceptions Regarding the Quality of Elections and the Functioning of Democratic Processes in the Republic of Moldova - European Platform for Democratic Elections*, n.d., accessed July 28, 2026, <https://epde.org/reports/citizens-perceptions-regarding-the-quality-of-elections-and-the-functioning-of-democratic-processes-in-the-republic-of-moldova/>.

<sup>38</sup> “Institutul de Politici Publice | Prezentarea Rezultatelor Sondajului Barometrul Opiniei Publice, Septembrie 2025”, accessed July 28, 2026, <https://ipp.md/2025-09/prezentarea-rezultatelor-sondajului-barometrul-opinii-publice-septembrie-2025/#>.

<sup>39</sup> *Citizens’ Perceptions Regarding the Quality of Elections and the Functioning of Democratic Processes in the Republic of Moldova - European Platform for Democratic Elections*.

lack of ownership and involvement in political processes, amplified by disinformation and manipulation campaigns on social media.

Turnout and mobilisation for elections are high, yet citizens are largely disconnected from the democratic process outside of election cycles. Elections take place under considerable international scrutiny and monitoring and are fought over intense geopolitical narratives – pro-EU versus pro-Russia. Structural weaknesses of the party system also become apparent here. Generally only a few parties compete, with PAS established as the sole genuinely pro-EU party, smaller pro-EU alternatives failing to mature and many remaining parties associated with corruption, Russia or the Plahotniuc regime. Citizens effectively vote against perceived threats rather than in favour of trusted political actors.

This also pertains to citizen consultations. CSOs criticise their own limited involvement; citizens are rarely included and reforms are often passed in a hasty manner.<sup>40</sup> The new law on public participation in the decision-making process is intended to bring more momentum to this debate and encourage engagement, allow more time for consultations of documents and include a new element of proposing citizen initiatives.<sup>41</sup> It is a step in the right direction, but the ability to get more citizens engaged will also depend on the enforcement of this new legislation.

Another structural problem explaining low citizen participation is the massive concentration of civic infrastructure in the capital, while rural spaces are neglected. The government and parliament could utilise these kinds of decentralised initiatives to make the reform process genuinely participative – not only on paper or with a closed group of Chişinău-based NGOs but open to the wider segment of the population that serves as a vital, yet untapped resource for sustainable reforms. A citizen assembly implemented by one of the local organisations at the Parliament's request is a good example of how to engage citizens in the decision-making process and increase their trust in the reforms.

An important resource linked to civil society and citizen participation is media freedom. Media and journalists have received death threats (particularly around elections), and there have been reports of intimidation from politicians and economic actors.<sup>42</sup> Many media institutions have been

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<sup>40</sup> Interviews conducted by the author with civil society actors in Chisinau, July 2026.

<sup>41</sup> “Cetățenii Vor Avea Un Rol Mai Activ În Luarea Deciziilor: Guvernul Aprobă Reguli Noi Pentru Consultare Și Inițiativă Civică | Guvernul Republicii Moldova,” accessed July 29, 2026, <https://gov.md/ro/comunicate-de-presa/cetatenii-vor-avea-un-rol-mai-activ-luarea-deciziilor-guvernul-aproba-reguli>.

<sup>42</sup> “Moldova Report 2025 - Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood.”

confronted with Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP). Earlier this year, Moldova adopted anti-SLAPP legislation to mitigate the high number of judiciary cases that drain resources from media.<sup>43</sup> Access to information is often restrained, and despite the new law on access to information of public interest, journalists and civil society report very limited improvements and more actions to limit access to information from some state institutions.<sup>44</sup>

Issues remain concerning the media's access to resources. The media landscape is influenced by outlets financed by Russian money. Journalists risk inadvertently amplifying Russian propaganda, leading to self-censorship. Many Russia-affiliated channels migrated to YouTube or Telegram after their license was withdrawn; many Telegram channels and bots were also blocked and linked to illicit activity. Using security concerns and the risk of hybrid threats to restrict democratic measures also places the government in a dilemma over the precedent this sets. Government measures to combat hybrid threats have also led to Moldova being downgraded to a 'hybrid regime' by the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2025.<sup>45</sup>

### **2.3. Most important stressor factor: Organised crime and anti-system mobilisation**

According to the Global Index on Transnational Organized Crime (GITOC), there has been a slight decrease in Moldova's score for criminality score since 2023 and a slight increase in its resilience score.<sup>46</sup> Criminal actors remain a crucial issue, particularly those working to undermine governmental institutions – such as groups linked to Shor and Plahotniuc. The combination of organised crime and anti-system mobilisation has been a key rule-of-law stressor in Moldova over the past couple of years. Shor-linked networks have particularly intensified since 2022. This stressor works on several levels to undermine the Moldovan democratic system: using financial tools and illicit money to destabilise governmental institutions, consuming government resources, undermining trust in democratic institutions and the state, buying votes as well as Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) and Democracy Information Manipulation and Interference (DIMI). This stressor directly utilises the vulnerable economic situation, the weak rule of law and a history of low prosecutions. Since citizens' trust in institutions remains relatively low

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<sup>43</sup> "Moldova: Government Approves Anti-SLAPP Package, Bringing Greater Protection from Abusive Litigation | CSOMETER," accessed August 14, 2026, <https://csometer.info/updates/moldova-government-approves-anti-slapp-package-bringing-greater-protection-abusive>.

<sup>44</sup> "Noua Lege de Acces La Informații Și Năravul Lupului," CPR, accessed August 13, 2026, <https://cpr.md/publicatii/noua-lege-de-acces-la-informatii-si-naravul-lupului>.

<sup>45</sup> "The Democracy Index," *Economist Intelligence Unit*, n.d., accessed August 16, 2026, <https://www.eiu.com/n/global-themes/democracy-index-2025-hub/>.

<sup>46</sup> "The Organized Crime Index," accessed July 31, 2026, <https://ocindex.net/country/moldova>.

and their economic situation tense, these Russian-linked initiatives instrumentalise populations' grievances to discredit the government while using financial incentives to corrupt citizens' votes.

Russian-linked agents, particularly those operating through the Shor network, have targeted Moldovan institutions and citizens. These initiatives have included attempts to mobilise violent demonstrators against the government. Groups of people were trained in Serbia for a riot-incitement plot around the 2024 elections. These were financed by the Shor-linked NGO Evrazia, which was recently declared an extremist organisation.<sup>47</sup> The Russia-linked groups and parties aimed not only to question the legitimacy of the democratic process, but also to install a pro-Russian government which would prevent Moldova's reform process or EU accession. The rationale behind this is to create a captured state where reforms are not possible. During the 2025 parliamentary elections, Russia invested approximately €350 million (around 2 percent of the Moldovan GDP<sup>48</sup>), and €200 million in 2024.<sup>49</sup> In 2025, numerous transfers were made using cryptocurrency, and the Moldovan government used digital footprints to identify and confiscate some of the money aimed at destabilising the situation.

This is a key stressor for Moldova, as it aims not only to sway votes but also to undermine the system and use existing vulnerabilities to weaken governance. By forcing the government to spend resources addressing these issues, it also diverts energy from reform implementation. It exploits areas the government has not addressed well (such as the situation in Gagauzia) to test the extent to which government decisions remain in line with the rule of law. The history of corruption, including in the judiciary, enables these types of crimes to happen.<sup>50</sup> The Moldovan government has tightened legislation on electoral corruption in the last year and closed loopholes for illicit finances, but more work remains to be done in strengthening the population's resilience.

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<sup>47</sup> Ecaterina Arvintii, "74 de persoane reținute înainte de alegeri. Ar fi fost instruite în Serbia pentru dezordini, la indicația Rusiei," *NewsMaker*, September 22, 2025, <https://newsmaker.md/ro/74-de-persoane-retinute-inainte-de-alegeri-ar-fi-fost-instruite-in-serbia-pentru-dezordini-la-indicatia-rusiei>.

<sup>48</sup> "Maia Sandu La Varșovia: Rusia a Cheltuit Aproape 2% Din PIB-ul R. Moldova Pentru a Vicia Alegerile Parlamentare Din Septembrie 2025," January 26, 2026, <https://moldova1.md/p/67353>.

<sup>49</sup> "Republica Moldova acuză Rusia că a cheltuit 200 de milioane de euro pentru a „cumpăra” voturi la alegerile prezidențiale de anul trecut," *Digi24*, April 2, 2025, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/moldova/republica-moldova-acuza-rusia-ca-a-cheltuit-200-de-milioane-de-euro-pentru-a-cumpara-voturi-la-alegerile-prezidentiale-de-anul-trecut-3183071>.

<sup>50</sup> "A Russian Non-Profit Interferes in Moldova's EU Referendum — And Builds an Anti-Western Influence Machine", OCCRP, accessed September 9, 2026, <https://www.occrp.org/en/feature/a-russian-non-profit-interferes-in-moldovas-eu-referendum-and-builds-an-anti-western-influence-machine>.

Cybercrimes are common in Moldova and have significantly increased since 2022 with Russian backing, particularly targeting governmental institutions, media and civil society.<sup>51</sup> Cyber-attacks aim to undermine trust in independent media, civil society and governmental institutions – and in particular to question the government’s ability to recover and react. The number of cyber incidents rose from 173 in 2018 to more than 1,340 in 2024,<sup>52</sup> and on election day in 2025 there were around 900 million malicious requests directed at the website of the Central Electoral Commission.<sup>53</sup>

Moldova has taken significant steps to address organised crime and electoral corruption, including setting up the National Anticorruption Center and investigating electoral corruption.<sup>54</sup> However, corruption and embezzlement and an unreformed judiciary remain structural weaknesses, and transparency and access to legislative documents still leave room for improvement.<sup>55</sup>

### **3. The effect of the EU integration process**

The Moldovan government has shown a lot of will and motivation to bring Moldova into the EU and implement relevant reforms, and EU integration has been one of the strongest external drivers of Moldova’s rule-of-law resilience and the reforms linked to the rule of law. But the high pace of reforms created by the EU accession process has also put pressure on government institutions to implement changes and maintain institutional bureaucracy while facing hybrid warfare, multiple crises, poverty and regional instability.<sup>56</sup> The speed of the process and the ambition of the pace of reform risk creating hasty, under-consulted reforms that are passed on paper but not enforced. Reforms are being legislated at high speed to maintain accession momentum, and the process often leaves a wide gap between legislation and implementation. Increasing public support for reforms will be crucial.

Moldova’s EU accession process and its pro-EU government secured a commitment of a €1.8bn Growth Plan, support against hybrid threats through the EU Partnership Mission and a Rapid Response Mechanism for elections. This serves as direct evidence of the EU’s support for Moldova’s integration and strengthens resilience. EU-conditionality and support for the current PAS

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<sup>51</sup> “Sisteme critice din Republica Moldova, vizate de atacuri cibernetice lansate de rețele afiliate Rusiei”, Radio Chișinău, accessed August 14, 2026, <https://radiochisinau.md/sisteme-critice-din-republica-moldova-vizate-de-atacuri-cibernetice-lansate-de-retele-afiliate-rusiei---212589.html>.

<sup>52</sup> PROGRAM NAȚIONAL de securitate cibernetică pentru anii 2026-2030, <https://gov.md/sites/default/files/media/documents/sedinte-de-guvern/2025-12/NU-905-MDED-2025.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> “Helping Protect the 2025 Moldova Elections”, Cloudflare Blog, October 29, 2025, <https://blog.cloudflare.com/helping-protect-the-2025-moldova-elections/>.

<sup>54</sup> “Anticorupție CRJM”, Anticorupție CRJM, accessed August 13, 2026, <https://anticoruptie.crjm.org/ro>.

<sup>55</sup> “The Organized Crime Index”

<sup>56</sup> OECD, *OECD Justice Review of the Republic of Moldova*.

government have been a strong lever for Moldova's rule-of-law resilience. It remains a priority that Moldova preserves a deliberative process, includes consultation and does not cut corners. Otherwise the reform process risks alienating people and creating a misleading image of the EU as endorsing practices out of line with rule-of-law standards. The EU must balance supporting Moldova's EU integration for geopolitical reasons with ensuring that the process remains merit-based with a long-term vision for Moldovan democracy. The EU's own credibility concerning when and how to integrate Moldova remains crucial. Without agreement among the Member States, reform momentum might be lost and the trust of the Moldovan population in the EU integration process might erode.

Moldova is also coupled with Ukraine in the accession process. Chisinau is not officially advocating for decoupling, but there is a concern that it will not be able to advance if Member States block Ukraine's advancement. As a much smaller country, many of the issues raised by Member States over Ukraine's EU accession (particularly around economic and agricultural impacts) do not apply to Moldova in the same way. And the timing before elections in Member States in 2027 makes for a narrow window of opportunity. But Ukraine is a strategic and security partner for Chisinau; decoupling could create political tensions and risk leaving Ukraine in a geopolitical grey zone which will be used by Russia.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Moldova has a history of weak rule-of-law resilience, entrenched corruption, a weak judiciary and an overall weak governance system and institutions. The power grab culminated in Plahotniuc's state capture – a period of the highest media control and judiciary politicisation, electoral fraud and weakening of institutions. Since Maia Sandu became President and PAS took power, rule-of-law resilience has shown overall improvement. It has been strengthened by Moldova's EU accession process and the government's commitment to reforms. The trend is positive, yet challenges remain as reforms and laws are put in place at a quicker pace than they are implemented, creating a discrepancy between reforms being passed and legislation enforced.

Civil liberties and regime legitimisation as primary resources and civil society as secondary resources show that there is an enabling environment for participation. This strengthens Moldova's resilience as a society. Yet concerns of corruption remain high on the citizen agenda, and as trust in governmental institutions is low, it takes time to ensure the credibility of reforms and anti-corruption measures. Increasing citizens' trust is key to ensuring the credibility of reforms and the accountability of public actors. While citizens mobilise around elections, there is low engagement

in political reforms. Instruments to encourage citizen participation and transparency in decision-making processes are not yet fully functional. The Moldovan administrative and institutional capacity to absorb reforms remains limited and the bodies are often overstretched.

In terms of stressors, Moldova's overall capacity to deal with organised crime has improved, but the Moldovan government has faced a high level of attacks and anti-government movement and destabilisation from Russian proxies. This has exhausted governmental capacities and resources used for countering hybrid warfare. Resilience must be further strengthened to withstand these attacks, balancing security concerns with democratic and rule-of-law mechanisms.

The new Moldovan government faces the difficult task of delivering on citizens' expectations at a time when economic grievances prevail. The EU accession process plays a key role in rule-of-law resilience and represents a historic opportunity, but the Moldovan government should ensure reforms are passed diligently and not rushed. Otherwise, the credibility of both the EU accession process and the reforms themselves will remain compromised.

## About the author

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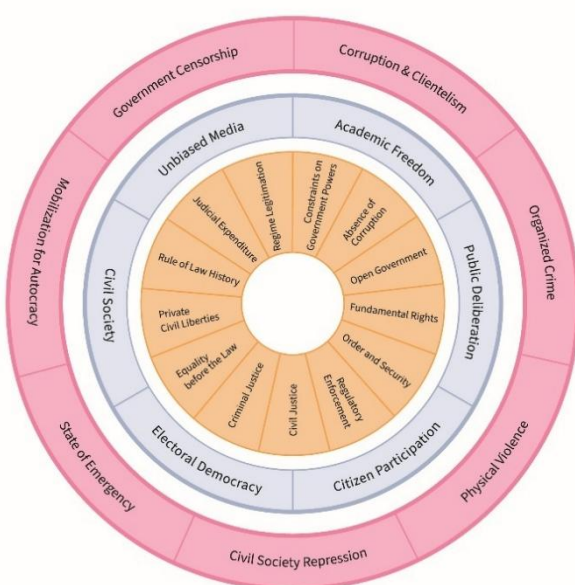
## About the project

RESILIO-ACCESS investigates the resilience of the rule of law in the current (potential) candidate countries for EU accession. The project explores how to measure resilience and how to assess the potential of the EU's enlargement policy toolbox to foster sustainable resilience in the region. Resilience is understood as the capacity of the rule of law to prevent, cope with or recover from hazardous events or incremental threats – without losing its core function, structure and purpose.

## About the paper

This paper is part of the **RESILIO-ACCESS Country Reports**, a collection of compact analyses that assess the source of rule-of-law resilience in EU aspirant countries by using the analytical framework of the RESILIO-ACCESS model.

### RESILIENCE RESOURCES AND STRESSORS



The RESILIO-ACCESS model is based on *three* dimensions: The system of the rule of law itself provides *primary resilience resources* such as an effective judicial system, the protection of fundamental rights and democratic elections. These resources are embedded into a social environment with *subsidiary resilience resources* such as civil society, academia and the media. However, these resources are constantly being challenged by *threats* such as autocracy, corruption, violence and censorship. The characteristics of each

dimension, their interactions and their conditions of resilience resources determine the overall resilience capacity of the rule of law.

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