



Freedom in the World - Moldova (2010)

Capital:
Chisinau

Population:
4,133,000

Political Rights Score: 3 *

Civil Liberties Score: 4 *

Status: Partly Free

Explanatory Note

The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Transnistria, which is examined in a separate report.

Ratings Change

Moldova's political rights rating improved from 4 to 3 due to parliamentary elections that resulted in a rotation of power between the long-ruling Communist Party and a coalition of opposition parties.

Overview

The ruling Communist Party won April parliamentary elections amid claims of fraud, triggering antigovernment violence by young protesters in the capital. Police allegedly responded with severe beatings and other human rights abuses. The Communists, with their narrow legislative majority, were unable to elect a new president, leading to repeat parliamentary elections in July. An alliance of opposition parties won the vote and formed a new government, but they were also unable to muster the three-fifths majority required to elect a president, meaning a third round of parliamentary elections would have to be held in 2010.

Moldova gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, and free and fair elections were held in 1994. The Communist Party of Moldova (PCRM) took power at the head of a majority coalition in 1998 and won a landslide victory in 2001 on the promise of a return to Soviet-era living standards. Vladimir Voronin was elected president by Parliament.

The PCRM took 56 of 101 seats in the 2005 parliamentary elections and built a coalition to obtain the 61 votes needed to reelect Voronin. Election monitors highlighted a number of flaws during the campaign, including police harassment of the opposition, manipulation of the state media, and abuse of state funds by the PCRM.

After charting a foreign policy course away from Russia and toward the European Union (EU) in the period surrounding the elections, Voronin steered the country

back toward Russia in 2007 and 2008. The Kremlin's cooperation was seen as essential in resolving the status of Transnistria, a separatist region that had maintained de facto independence from Moldova since 1992.

As Voronin repaired ties with Russia, his government's friction with Romania increased. After Romania joined the EU in January 2007, many Moldovans had applied for Romanian citizenship, taking advantage of the fact that much of Moldova had been part of Romania prior to World War II. This trend, coupled with the two countries' essentially identical dominant languages, stoked government concerns that Romania was seeking to undermine Moldovan nationhood.

The ruling PCRM won 60 seats in April 2009 parliamentary elections, though international monitors noted flaws in the voter lists, intimidation and harassment of opposition parties, and media bias, among other problems. Three opposition parties also won representation: the Liberal Party (PL) and the Liberal Democratic Party (PLD), each with 15 seats, and the Our Moldova Alliance (AMN), with 11. The results triggered youth-led protests in the capital on the day after the balloting, and the demonstrations turned violent on the second day, with some protesters ransacking government buildings. Police responded with beatings and hundreds of arrests, and three suspected deaths at the hands of police were reported.

The PCRM chose Voronin, who was constitutionally barred from seeking a third presidential term, as the new Parliament speaker. However, the party needed a three-fifths legislative majority, or 61 votes, to elect Prime Minister Zinaida Greceanii as the new president. It failed twice to elect its candidate, triggering fresh parliamentary elections in July. Although similar flaws were reported by observers, the balloting reduced the PCRM's share to 48 seats, with four opposition parties capturing the majority. The PLD took 18, followed by the PL with 15, the Democratic Party (PD) with 13, and the AMN with 7.

The new majority, calling itself the Alliance for European Integration (AIE), subsequently elected PLD leader Vlad Filat as prime minister and PL leader Mihai Ghimpu as Parliament speaker. PD leader Marian Lupu was its presidential candidate; he had served as Parliament speaker until May, then defected from the PCRM to the opposition in June. However, the AIE failed twice—in November and December—to secure his election, meaning a third bout of parliamentary elections would have to be scheduled for 2010. In the interim, Filat's government would remain in place, with Ghimpu serving as acting president.

After convening in September, the new AIE-led Parliament began repairing relations with Bucharest. Voronin had blamed the April rioting on Romania, expelling the country's ambassador and imposing visa requirements on Romanian travelers; Romania had responded by making it easier for Moldovans to obtain Romanian citizenship. Among other steps, the AIE quickly reversed the visa rule and overturned a law barring public servants from holding dual citizenship.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Moldova is an electoral democracy. Voters elect the 101-seat unicameral Parliament by proportional representation for four-year terms. Since 2000, Parliament has elected the president, who serves for up to two four-year terms. His choice for prime minister must then be approved by Parliament.

The April 2009 parliamentary elections, like previous elections, were marred by flawed voter lists, progovernment media bias, the abuse of administrative resources, and intimidation of opposition parties. Opposition critics focused on the voter lists, which had increased in size since 2005 despite a declining population. The voter rolls grew again ahead of the July repeat elections, which suffered from a similar set of flaws. In one apparent improvement between the April and July votes, the vote threshold for party representation in Parliament was lowered from 6 percent to 5 percent.

Corruption has been a major problem in Moldova, and high-profile antigraft prosecutions under the PCRM government often appeared politicized. Anticorruption officials reported in late 2008 that no public servant had ever been fired for missing or faulty income declarations. Access to information remains limited, and a bill on state secrets that was approved by Parliament in 2008 drew criticism for its broad scope and potential conflicts with the existing access to information law. Moldova was ranked 89 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Print media present a range of opinions, but they are not widely available in rural areas. The criminal code, along with June 2008 amendments to the Law on Editorial Activity, contains vague provisions banning defamation of the state and the people. Prison sentences for libel were abolished in 2004, but journalists practice self-censorship to avoid crippling fines. In the 2009 elections, public broadcasters and the PCRM-owned television station NIT favored the ruling party, while certain smaller stations like the Romanian-owned Pro TV and the radio station Vocea Basarabiei were more critical of the government. Outlets that air critical or opposition views were excluded from frequency distributions, threatened with license revocations, and harassed through criminal investigations in the months before the voting. During and after the April rioting, news websites and other internet-based media were temporarily disrupted, and many Romanian and foreign journalists were turned back at the border or expelled. Other journalists were briefly arrested and intimidated by police.

Although the constitution guarantees religious freedom, the government has shown its preferences through the selective enforcement of registration rules. A law passed in 2007 banned "abusive proselytism" and denied legal status to groups with fewer than 100 members. It also acknowledged the "special significance and primary role" of the Orthodox Church; the PCRM government clearly favored the Russian-backed Moldovan Orthodox Church and showed hostility toward the Romanian-backed Bessarabian Orthodox Church. Moldovan authorities do not restrict academic freedom, but bribery and dismal salaries in the education system

remain problems.

Citizens may participate freely in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). However, private organizations must register with the state, and some NGOs have complained of bureaucratic obstruction and police harassment. Under legislation passed in February 2008, organizers of demonstrations must only give notice to authorities, but some local officials reportedly continued to require permits in 2009. Hundreds of people were arrested in connection with the April 2009 postelection protests, and many reported severe beatings and other abuse both before and after arrest. Organizers were charged with a range of offenses, though these charges were dropped under the new government in the fall. Civil society groups blamed for the unrest were scrutinized by tax officials in its wake. Nevertheless, human rights groups held a march in July to protest police abuses. Authorities have exerted pressure on unions and their members, and employers are rarely punished for violating union rights. During the 2009 campaign periods, public employees were reportedly pressured to attend political events.

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, there is evidence of bribery and political influence among judicial and law enforcement officials. The authorities have pursued politicized criminal cases against government opponents, and long-standing concerns about abuse and ill-treatment in police custody were renewed in the aftermath of the April 2009 protests. At least three people reportedly died in the crackdown, and detainees were allegedly charged collectively with no access to counsel. In December, the new government filed charges against the former interior minister and the former Chisinau police chief in connection with the police response to the protests. Prison conditions in general are exceptionally poor. About a dozen inmates began a hunger strike in November to protest beatings and a lack of light and heat in their cells.

In an apparent act of political violence, an attacker threw a grenade into the crowd at an outdoor concert in October, injuring 40 people. Police linked the blast to telephone threats received by Prime Minister Vlad Filat's office the same day.

Members of the Romany community suffer the harshest treatment of the minority groups in Moldova. They face discrimination in housing and employment, are targets of police violence, and are considered vulnerable to voter intimidation and vote-buying.

Women are underrepresented in public life. A total of 24 women were elected to Parliament in April 2009, and this increased to 25 in July. Moldova remains a significant source for women and girls trafficked abroad for forced prostitution, though the government's antitrafficking efforts led the U.S. State Department to raise the country out of the worst possible ranking in its 2009 Trafficking in Persons Report.

** Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of*

freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom. Click [here](#) for a full explanation of Freedom in the World methodology.