

# Moldova 2024 Second Round Presidential Elections Technical Assessment Report

*Moldova held the second round of presidential elections on November 3, 2024, following October 20 polls in which voters approved enshrining European integration in Moldova's constitution. However, as none of the presidential candidates obtained an outright majority in the first round, a second round between the top two candidates was required by law. This report covers the inter-election campaign period from October 20 to date and is based on meetings with key electoral and political stakeholders and observations gathered from voting and counting processes in selected areas of Moldova on November 3.*

November 4, 2024

## *Summary*

The NDI technical assistance mission supports Moldova's democratic aspirations and the commitment to democratic practices that this election represents. We reiterate the conclusion by NDI's [international election observation mission](#) (IEOM) for the first round presidential elections and constitutional referendum that *“the greatest threat to the integrity of these elections has been a broad and concerted campaign of malign foreign influence from Russia collaborating with some Moldovan actors through information manipulation, vote buying, and other illicit financing of political activity.”*<sup>1</sup>

Although limited in scope, NDI's observation of the second round process showed that election day on November 3 was generally calm and orderly, and processes followed official procedures. Interlocutors informed the mission of a reported vote-buying scheme involving tens of thousands of voters and originating from Moldovan and Russian actors, which posed a significant threat to electoral integrity. Relative to the first round, the mission also noted the greater polarization of the electorate and a personalization of malign narratives that included derogatory or inciteful references to candidates' gender and ethnicity.

---

<sup>1</sup> NDI's international election observation mission preliminary statement for Moldova's 2024 presidential election and constitutional referendum can be found at <https://www.ndi.org/publications/ndi-international-election-observer-mission-presents-initial-findings-and>.

The technical assessment mission followed up on key issues noted in NDI's pre-election assessment mission (PEAM) in September and IEOM for Moldova's October 20 presidential election and constitutional referendum. NDI's technical assessment mission was led by Pekka Haavisto, Member of the Finnish Parliament and recent Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland, and Christopher Fomunyoh, Senior Associate for Africa and Special Advisor to the President at NDI. It comprised eight members from five countries, including NDI Board member Dean Fealk. Conclusions from NDI's PEAM, IEOM for Moldova's October 20 elections and the technical assessment mission will be issued in a comprehensive final report with detailed findings and recommendations on the electoral process.

### *Electoral Context*

On October 20, Moldova held a presidential election and constitutional referendum on European integration. Following two amendments to the Electoral Code in 2024, parliament eliminated a restriction on referenda occurring the same day as presidential or parliamentary elections. During her announcement to run for re-election, President Maia Sandu called for a constitutional referendum on European integration concurrent with the presidential elections. Ultimately, 11 candidates participated in the presidential elections. Results from the Central Election Commission (CEC) stated that the constitutional referendum narrowly passed with 50.35% of votes, and on October 28, the Constitutional Court confirmed the final results. Independent candidates President Sandu, supported by the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), received 42.49% of votes and Alexandr Stoianoglo, Moldova's former prosecutor general backed by the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), garnered 25.95% of votes. Both races proved more competitive than pre-election polling had predicted, raising questions by international and citizen observers about voter influence and other interference campaigns. As required by law, a second round presidential election between the two top contenders took place on November 3.

Following the first round election, presidential election campaigning continued, primarily on social media and through door-to-door canvassing. Rallies, signs and public events were limited. Stoianoglo and Sandu participated in one televised debate, notably held without a moderator upon agreement of both candidates.

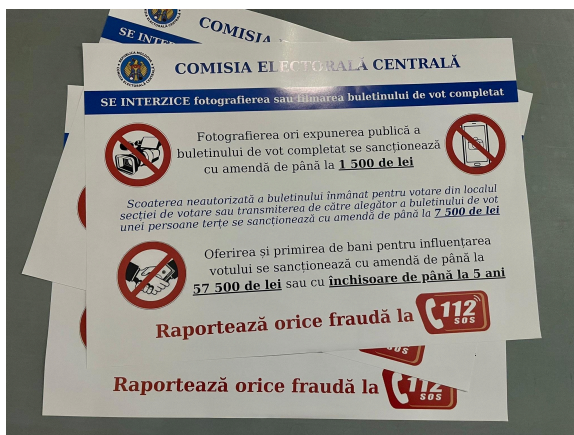
### *Key Findings*

#### **Foreign malign influence operations**

Nearly all of our interlocutors raised concerns over a widely reported, alleged coordinated vote buying plan funded by Russia and managed by Moldovan oligarch Ilan Shor, who now resides in Russia. Key to the alleged scheme was Shor's database of contacts, estimated at 300,000 to 400,000 Moldovans, many of whom had signed up to receive discounts in Shor's network of

consumer goods stores. Multiple investigations into these charges are on-going. Moldovan police have thus far established that the equivalent of 39 million U.S. dollars have been transferred from a Russian bank to the accounts of 138,000 Moldovan citizens<sup>2</sup>, and that the equivalent of one million U.S. dollars in cash was brought into Moldova from Russia via Armenia by plane. In addition, in a statement on election day, [Moldovan police announced](#) they have “reasonable evidence” of organized transportation of voters from Russia to Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Turkey to cast votes.<sup>3</sup>

*The technical assessment mission concludes that unprecedented levels of systematic, organized vote buying, if proven, pose the greatest threat to the integrity of these elections. These coordinated efforts, by local and foreign actors linked to Russia, must be taken seriously, both as a threat to Moldovan democracy and as a potential example for malign foreign influence operations which may be replicated in other countries across the world.*



*Posters reminding voters of the fines for vote buying and selling.*

In the lead up to the November 3 election, the Moldovan CEC organized a nationwide voter education campaign of text messages, pre-recorded phone calls, and posters at polling stations and inside polling booths reminding voters of fines for vote buying and selling. NDI’s technical mission observed these posters in Romanian at polling stations we visited. This effort is commendable and important, and would have a greater impact if replicated for future elections in other languages used by Moldovan citizens.

## Information environment

Moldovans continued to report to the NDI mission the circulation of false and misleading information about the candidates, particularly on social media. The mission also heard reports of personalized attacks against candidates. Notably, gender-based attacks against Sandu

<sup>2</sup> [Moldovan Police Accuse Pro-Russian Oligarch Of \\$39M Vote-Buying Scheme](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Moldovans choose president in decisive runoff overshadowed by fraud and intimidation claims | AP News](#)

characterized her performance during the candidate debate as “hysterical;” and descriptions of Stoianoglo have referenced his Gagauz origin, Turkic ethnicity and alleged poor command of the Romanian language. PAS condemned the use of this language about Stoianoglo and re-emphasized the need for merit-based campaigning.<sup>4</sup>

The mission noted structural issues that undermine the media’s ability to serve as a source of credible and verifiable information about elections and political developments. Traditional media in Moldova includes genuinely independent and credible news channels. Television has benefitted from regulation by the Audiovisual Council to root out disinformation, although a Moscow-centric worldview continues to permeate<sup>5</sup> Russian-language entertainment programming still allowed in Moldova. However, independent media has not proven financially viable without international funds. Social media, particularly TikTok, is growing as a news source among all age groups in Moldova. Unlike traditional media, however, social media is often used as a vehicle to carry unverified content, including outright false information. Telegram is both an unregulated carrier of false or misleading information and has been identified as a key channel for solicitations to buy votes.

### **Campaign environment**

Interlocutors reported to the technical assessment mission the lack of readily visible political activity outside of social media and door-to-door canvassing. Effective campaigning raises the level of citizen engagement in politics and provides voters with the information necessary to make informed decisions. The delegation notes that the siloing of campaign discourse into social media bubbles and one-on-one conversations may inhibit constructive open debate on issues of national interest, and may also increase the potential for inflammatory speech rooted in ethnic and/or gender prejudices, and may deepen polarization.

Interlocutors also mentioned examples of the misuse of administrative resources, such as a hospital administrator in Balti publicly endorsing Sandu and city councilors in Comrat campaigning for Stoianoglo using city letterhead. Moldova’s nonpartisan citizen election observation organization, Promo-LEX, also [identified](#) “at least eight cases” of misuse of administrative resources during the inter-election period.<sup>6</sup> These were isolated reports, not indicative of any coordinated efforts.

### **Election day**

On November 3, NDI’s technical assessment mission visited polling stations in selected areas to observe election day processes. At polling stations visited, procedures were generally followed

---

<sup>4</sup>[Xenophobic attacks on Alexandr Stoianoglo. The PAS team urges people to calm down](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Russian Television in Moldova: Winning Hearts and Minds](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Misiunea Promo-LEX de Observare a alegerilor prezidențiale și a referendumului republican constituțional din 20 octombrie \(3 noiembrie\) \(in Romanian\)](#)

and the overall environment was calm and orderly. Some polling stations visited by the mission experienced long lines of voters at times, but the technical assessment mission did not report any serious issues arising from lines. The CEC's preliminary results showed a turnout of approximately 54%, which is an improvement compared to the first round.

Promo-LEX, which deployed citizen observers to a statistical sample of over 600 polling stations, presented reports of procedural irregularities and incidents throughout the day. As of 10:00 pm on election night, [Promo-LEX reported](#) that “the majority of [...] observers rated the overall atmosphere in the polling station during election day as good and very good (99.5%).”

### *Recommendations*

NDI's technical assessment mission reaffirms the previous NDI recommendations<sup>7</sup> and makes the following additional recommendations:

- As these are the first national elections since the adoption of the new Electoral Code of 2022, Moldovan institutions, civil society, and political parties should embark on an inclusive, systematic review of the electoral framework to identify possible improvements to further consolidate electoral integrity.
- Appropriate Moldovan government bodies and institutions should systematically determine the legislative, regulatory, enforcement or other measures most likely to deter and prevent vote buying, and should make every effort to put these in place before parliamentary elections in 2025.
  - Opposition political parties should join in these efforts.
  - This may include consideration of the role of charitable or commercial networks in vote buying schemes.
- Civil society should engage in a robust, non-partisan awareness raising campaign on civic responsibility and consequences of vote buying, in all languages, in advance of future elections throughout Moldova.
- Moldovans must refuse attempts to corrupt their free exercise of the right to vote – including offers to buy their votes. The commitment to democracy - which according to polls is widely shared across Moldova - entails a responsibility by all citizens to protect the integrity of elections and the secrecy of the ballot.

---

<sup>7</sup> NDI's international election observation mission preliminary statement for Moldova's 2024 presidential election and constitutional referendum can be found at <https://www.ndi.org/publications/ndi-international-election-observer-mission-presents-initial-findings-and>.

- All political actors, contestants, media and voters should refrain from attacks on candidates disparaging their gender, ethnicity or other identity characteristics.
- Media and international partners should support independent voices in Moldova's media space to become more sustainable .

NDI calls on all stakeholders in Moldova, with the support of the country's international partners, to take steps to improve electoral processes ahead of the next elections.

NDI will continue to follow developments in this electoral process. Upon the conclusion of the 2024 election process, NDI will publish a comprehensive report with final findings and recommendations.

The delegation is grateful for the warm welcome and cooperation it received from all Moldovans with whom it interacted. The delegation's work was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).