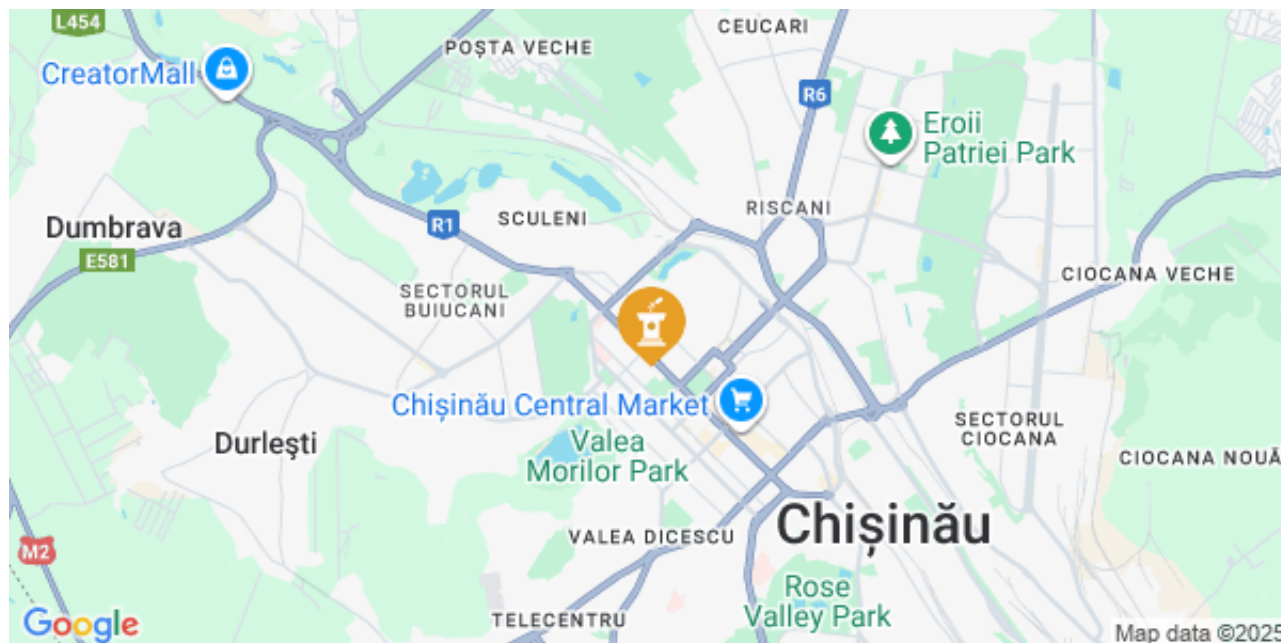




Politics



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Moldova Analysis: Threat of Russian destabilization attempts remain high ahead of parliamentary elections on September 28

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Executive Summary

- Moldova's parliamentary elections on September 28 are taking place amid a highly polarized political environment and significant concerns over Russian-backed destabilization.
- The pro-EU PAS party and the pro-Russian BEP bloc are the main contenders. Uncertainty over the electoral outcome is expected to persist, with lasting opinion polling showing conflicting outcomes.
- Intensified Russian destabilization attempts increase the risk of disruptive actions targeting political campaigns and the electoral process in the coming days.
- In the lead-up to the elections, as well as immediately before and after voting, political rallies, spontaneous gatherings, and potential violent clashes between opposing groups are likely, particularly in major urban centers such as Chisinau, Balti, and Comrat.
- **Those operating or residing in Moldova in the coming days are advised to maintain heightened vigilance, particularly near political protests, and exercise caution due to**



the risk of Russian-linked destabilization activities.

- Allot for travel-related disruptions as well, especially on September 28.

Current Situation

Parliamentary elections scheduled for September 28

- The voting for parliamentary elections will take place nationwide on September 28. Polling stations will open from 07:00 to 21:00 (local time).
- Members will be elected to the 101-seat unicameral parliament for a four-year electoral term. In total, 21 parties are contesting in the elections.
- The key contesting parties include the center-right, pro-EU Partidul Actiune si Solidaritate (PAS) party, as well as the left-wing pro-Russian electoral alliance Blocul Electoral Patriotic (BEP), led by the left-wing pro-Russia Partidul Socialistilor din Republica Moldova (PSRM).
- The elections were called early after parliament voted on April 17 to dissolve itself amid political instability and weakening government support. This followed a failed no-confidence motion initiated by opposition parties in December 2024.

PROFILE OF MAJOR PARTIES CONTESTING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS	
<p>Partidul Actiune si Solidaritate (PAS)</p>  <p>Leader: Igor Grosu Ideology: Centre-right</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pro-European• Anti-Russian	<p>Blocul Electoral Patriotic Alliance (BEP)</p> <p>Leader: Igor Dodon</p> <p>Parties: Partidul Socialistilor din Republica Moldova (PSRM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partidul Comunistilor din Republica Moldova (PCRM)• Partidul Republican Inima Moldovei (PRIM)• Partidul Viitorul Moldovei (PVM)  <p>Ideology:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Left-wing• Eurosceptic• Pro-Russian

Nationwide raids carried out over concerns of Russian destabilization attempts, mass unrest

- On September 9, in a speech to the European Parliament, President Maia Sandu warned of Russian-backed “hybrid war” tactics targeting the elections. She accused Moscow of attempting to sway the outcome through disinformation campaigns, vote-buying, and the illicit funding of political parties.
- On September 22, Moldovan police carried out nationwide raids on over 250 properties, arresting 74 people. The operation targeted over 100 individuals and four prisons as part of a criminal

investigation into alleged plans for mass unrest coordinated by Russia through criminal networks ahead of the elections.

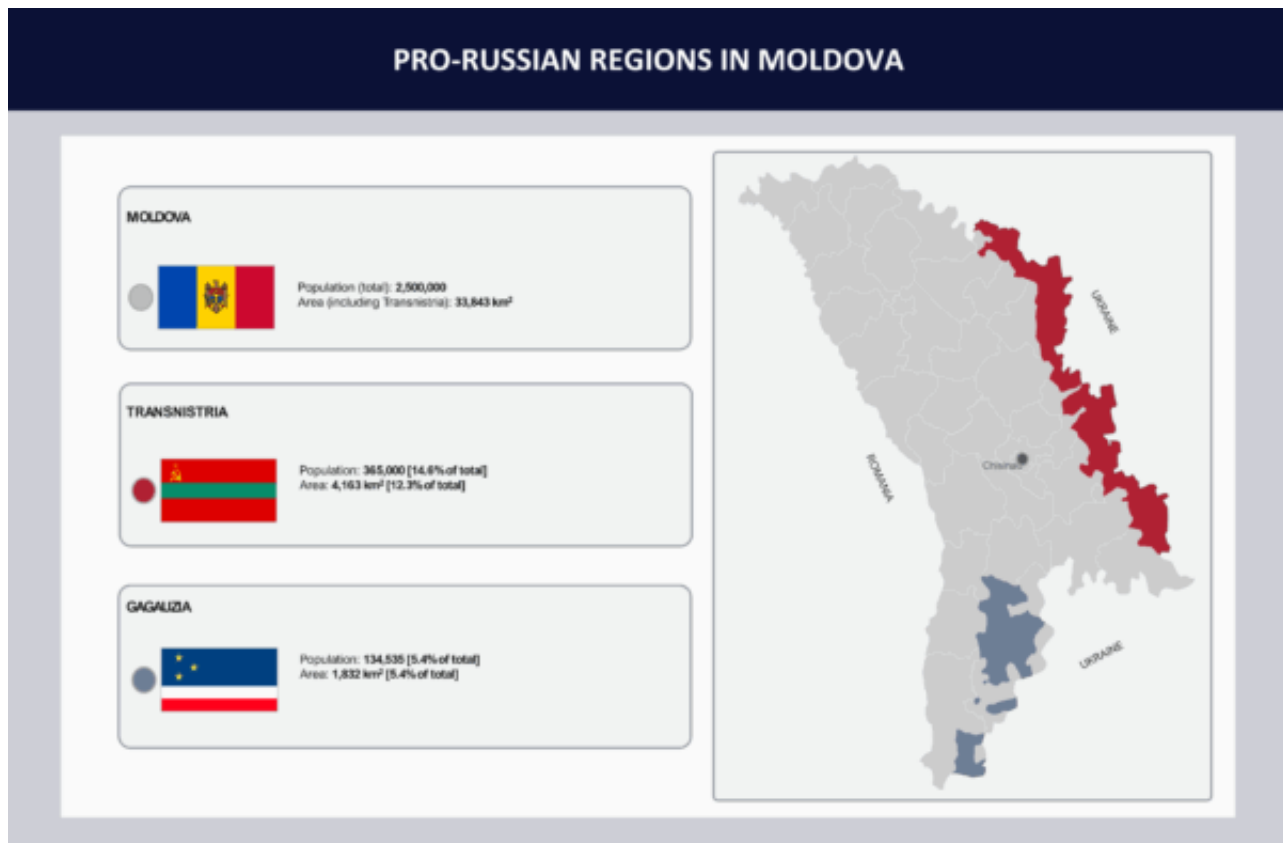
- Authorities reported that many of the suspects had “systematically” travelled to Serbia for training. Igor Dodon, former president and co-leader of the pro-Russian BEP block, stated that some of his party members were among those targeted in the raids.
- Separately, an investigative report by a UK-based media outlet revealed leaked documents outlining Russian plans to interfere in the vote through its hybrid warfare tactics.
- The tactics reportedly include mobilizing Moldovan citizens abroad to cast ballots, organizing disruptive protests, spreading disinformation on social media, and using compromising material to pressure officials into obstructing the process.
- The documents indicate the objective is to undermine the PAS party and remove its leader, President Sandu, from power.

Assessments & Forecast

Intensified Russian destabilization attempts increase the risk of disruptive actions targeting political campaigns, electoral process in the coming days

1. Based on precedent, reports of Russian interference are credible, as Moldova has accused Moscow of destabilization efforts against President Maia Sandu and the PAS government since 2022. These have included disinformation campaigns, gas supply threats, and exploiting tensions with the pro-Russia breakaway region of Transnistria to heighten security concerns. Previously, in February 2023, Sandu alleged that Russia plotted to overthrow the pro-EU government by deploying foreign saboteurs disguised as protesters to stage violent attacks and seize hostages. Authorities claimed to have foiled the plan, detaining seven suspects after an undercover agent infiltrated Russian-backed groups.
2. Media reports in March 2023 cited a leaked 10-year plan by Russia’s FSB outlining strategies to destabilize Moldova, including support for pro-Russia groups, use of the Orthodox Church, and energy coercion. While details on the Church’s role remain unclear, Chisinau considers the Moscow-linked Metropolitanate of Moldova an “agent of Russian influence.”
3. For the upcoming elections, Moldovan oligarch Ilan Shor, sanctioned by the USA for enabling “the Kremlin’s malign influence operations” and currently a fugitive in Moscow, is reported to play a central role in destabilization efforts. He has allegedly financed disinformation campaigns and offered monthly salaries to individuals willing to participate in anti-government protests in Chisinau, reinforcing concerns of direct Kremlin-backed interference.
4. Overall, Russian electoral interference presents a significant threat to Moldova’s electoral process because Moscow’s influence operations have proven effective in shaping public opinion and mobilizing opposition. This was most notably demonstrated in the October 2024 EU membership referendum, which delivered an unexpectedly narrow result, with “Yes” winning by only 50.46 percent to 49.54 percent.
5. Given this backdrop, the risk of Russian-backed disruption to the upcoming elections is high. Likely tactics in the coming days may include:
 - **Targeted disruptions** such as blocking access to polling stations, especially in pro-Russian strongholds, such as Gagauzia, a predominantly Turkic-speaking region, as well as areas near the breakaway region of Transnistria.
 - **Sabotage and technical interference**, including attempts to disrupt transport and communications networks or conduct cyberattacks against electoral infrastructure, with the aim of corrupting voter data, delaying results.
 - **Physical disruption**, potentially involving vandalism or sabotage of government or electoral buildings, alongside orchestrated protests near polling stations, particularly in Chisinau and other urban centers.

- **Intensified disinformation campaigns**, with Moscow-backed networks pushing anti-EU narratives online, framing Moldova's integration with the EU as a threat to traditional values and Moldova's security.
- **Electoral fraud** to undermine the vote-share of pro-EU PAS party, wherein pro-Russia actors attempt large-scale voter bribery. Indeed, similar bribery campaigns were reported backed by reports of illicit funding transfers to Moldovan citizens during the 2024 EU membership referendum.
- **Incite protests and civil unrest** during the election period by holding violent protests and counter-protests near pro-EU rallies.



Amid a highly polarized political landscape and Russian disinformation campaigns, uncertainty over electoral outcomes to persist

1. Uncertainty over the electoral outcome is expected to persist in the run-up to the elections. Recent opinion polling shows conflicting outcomes: some surveys place the pro-European PAS ahead with around 30 percent, while others show the pro-Russian BEP bloc leading with over 33 percent. The varying projections reflect Moldova's deeply polarized political landscape, where regional divisions and distrust of institutions complicate reliable polling. In particular, areas with strong pro-Russian sentiment, such as Gagauzia and districts adjacent to Transnistria, are difficult to survey accurately, further amplifying uncertainty.
2. PAS's electoral prospects hinge on its ability to mobilize its core supporters, particularly the Moldovan diaspora in Europe, which has historically provided crucial backing in favor of EU integration. However, persistent public dissatisfaction over high energy costs, inflation, and perceptions of weak governance remain significant vulnerabilities. These domestic concerns, amplified by targeted disinformation campaigns portraying PAS as both economically inept and

socially disconnected from “traditional values,” threaten to erode its base of support.

3. **FORECAST:** While PAS secured an outright majority of 63 of 101 seats in the 2021 parliamentary elections, the latest projections suggest that no single party is likely to secure such dominance this time. A fragmented outcome appears likely, with smaller parties potentially playing a decisive role in coalition-building. The BEP bloc, buoyed by Russian support, could use such a scenario to exert influence beyond its electoral weight, complicating post-election governance and policy direction.
4. **FORECAST:** Moscow’s active attempts to discredit the process increase the likelihood of contested results, with rival blocs potentially refusing to concede defeat. This uncertainty is expected to exacerbate political tensions and could spill into the streets in the form of protests and unrest, particularly if the final tally is close. Even if election day proceeds without major unrest and disruption, the aftermath will likely be marked by disputes over legitimacy, unstable coalition talks, and elevated risks of Russian-backed actors exploiting the volatile environment to undermine state institutions and slow Moldova’s EU integration trajectory.
5. Assessment of possible outcomes is as follows:
 - **Outright PAS majority:** Would enable Sandu’s government to consolidate pro-European reforms and advance integration with the EU more decisively, though Russian-backed disinformation campaigns will continue to undermine its domestic legitimacy.
 - **Pro-Russian coalition majority:** A heterogeneous bloc led by BEP could obstruct EU integration efforts, shift Moldova’s foreign policy orientation, and provide Moscow with greater leverage over internal decision-making.
 - **Fragmented parliament:** The most likely scenario, where coalition instability, protracted negotiations, and weak governance dominate, creating prolonged political uncertainty and raising the risk of unrest and further external interference.

Potential for political campaign rallies and protests remains elevated in the run-up to the vote, following result announcement

1. **FORECAST:** With elections approaching and considering the high potential for a Russia-led destabilization campaign stirring unrest, political campaigning and spontaneous protests are likely to take place in the run-up to the elections. Protests are particularly likely around polling stations, major public squares, and government buildings in key urban centers such as Chisinau, Balti, and Comrat. The recent nationwide raids targeting members of the BEP bloc further elevate the likelihood of large-scale, anti-government protests in the coming days.
2. Protests can also be expected following the declaration of election results, especially if the results are not in favour of the pro-Russia BEP bloc. In such a scenario, pro-Russian actors and members of the bloc are likely to contest the outcome in their attempts to delegitimize the PAS by calling for nationwide anti-PAS protests. **FORECAST:** Given the deeply polarized political climate, such protests carry a heightened risk of unrest and violence, including clashes between pro-European PAS supporters and pro-Russian parties, such as the PSRM. Incidents are most likely near polling stations, party offices, and other politically symbolic locations, where tensions can escalate rapidly. The participation of pro-Russia extremist elements is likely in such demonstrations in gatherings to stoke unrest.
3. **FORECAST:** Additional tactical risks include localized sabotage or vandalism targeting polling stations, party offices, and government infrastructure. Cyber operations aimed at disrupting electoral communications or amplifying disinformation could further inflame tensions and undermine public confidence in the process.
4. **FORECAST:** Authorities are expected to deploy extensive security measures, particularly in Chisinau and in cities with sizable pro-Russian populations. Measures may include cordoning off sensitive areas, pre-emptive road closures, and traffic diversions to contain crowds and limit disturbances. In the event of escalation, law enforcement is likely to employ forceful crowd-control tactics, including tear gas, water cannons, and mass arrests.
5. Nationwide travel disruptions are also anticipated, as high voter mobility over the election weekend is expected to exacerbate road congestion and delays on public transport.

Recommendations

1. Those operating or residing in Moldova on September 28 are advised to maintain heightened vigilance and allot for travel disruptions due to the parliamentary elections.
2. Exercise increased caution given the threat of Russian destabilization activities, including potential unrest, cyberattacks, and infrastructure disruptions.
3. Maintain heightened vigilance in the vicinity of any anti-government protests, especially in Chisinau.
4. Avoid nonessential travel to the pro-Russia breakaway region of Transnistria.
5. Public, private, and third-sector organizations operating in Moldova are advised to increase their awareness of threats emanating from pro-Russia groups. Increased awareness of an organization's footprint and perceptions from fringe groups can help uncover potential violent actors and plots before they occur.
6. For any questions and risk assessments, please contact intel@max-security.com