



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Elections in Moldova

2020 Presidential Election

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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October 30, 2020

Frequently Asked Questions

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When is Election Day?

On May 21, 2020, the Parliament of Moldova called for the presidential election to take place on Sunday, November 1, 2020.¹ Voting will take place from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.² at 2,143 polling stations, including 139 abroad and 42 special polling stations on the left bank of the Nistru River (Transnistria).³⁻⁴

Why is this election important?

Moldova's presidential election on Sunday, November 1, is an opportunity for Moldovans to weigh in on a variety of domestic and geopolitical challenges the country faces and help set the country on a more certain path after a tumultuous 18-months that have seen successive governments fall and the institution of a technocratic government in a placeholder role. Voters will, in part, be choosing whether to pursue closer ties and integration with Europe or to associate economically and politically more closely with Russia. As the result of a 2016 Constitutional Court ruling, Moldova's president will be elected by direct vote for the first time since 2000, giving Moldovans the opportunity for the first time in nearly two decades to explicitly select the president of their country.⁵ The president of the Republic of Moldova, as head of state, represents the country and is the guarantor of the national sovereignty and independence, as well as of the state's unity and territorial integrity.

Moldova faces a complex array of challenges coming into its election. The country remains one of the poorest in Europe despite its approximately decade-long push toward Europe, and minimal economic and job opportunities, which are driving extremely high migration from Moldova. These challenges are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has proliferated widely in Moldova. The country has one of the highest proportional infection rates in Europe,⁶ and the government's response to the pandemic has become a major area for criticism leveled by the opposition.⁷

Who are the candidates?

The top two candidates running for the post, presidential incumbent Igor Dodon of the Party of Socialists of Moldova and his pro-European opponent, Maia Sandu of the Party of Action and Solidarity, will face off in a rematch of the 2016 presidential election. Sandu was prime minister of Moldova from June 8 to November 14, 2019, before being ousted following a no-confidence vote. They represent divergent visions of what the future may hold for one of Europe's poorest countries. The six other candidates are less likely to win. These are: Our Party leader Renato Usatii, Dignity and Truth Platform leader Andrei Nastase, former Liberal Democratic Party leader Tudor Deliu, Shor Party Member of

¹ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR) Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

² Article 55, Time and Place of Voting.

³ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

⁴ Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), Moldova's Pro-Russian President Under Pressure in Re-Run of 2016 Election, Madalin Necsutu, October 15, 2020.

⁵ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

⁶ World Health Organization, Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Weekly Update, October 11, 2020.

⁷ BIRN, Moldova's Pro-Russian President Under Pressure in Re-Run of 2016 Election, Madalin Necsutu, October 15, 2020.

Parliament Violeta Ivanov, National Unity Party leader Octavian Ticu and Liberal Party leader Dorin Chirtoaca.⁸

According to the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, President Dodon and Sandu are polling higher than the other candidates and are very likely to compete in a run-off – a direct rematch of the election in 2016. However, unlike their previous challenge, where public opinion polls correctly predicted that Dodon was a slight favorite (he eventually emerged victorious), this time polls current predict a slight edge for Sandu.

Dodon and Sandu represent divergent geopolitical paths for Moldova, with Dodon favoring closer relationships with Russia and Sandu seeking further European integration. Both candidates have criticized corruption within Moldova as well.

What is the electoral system?

The president of Moldova is elected for a four-year term through a single nationwide constituency.⁹ A candidate is considered the elected winner if he or she receives over 50 percent of the votes cast in the first round of voting with at least one-third of registered voters participating. If turnout is lower than required, the elections are declared invalid, and repeat elections with the same candidates must be conducted within two weeks of this announcement. If no candidate receives the required percentage of votes initially, the two candidates who received the most votes will face off in a second round after two weeks. In this second round, the candidate who receives the most votes wins, regardless of voter turnout.¹⁰

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

To be eligible to run for president, candidates must be at least 40 years of age, have resided in Moldova for at least 10 years and possess proficiency in the state language (Romanian).¹¹ To be registered by the Central Election Commission (CEC), candidates for president need at least 15,000 signatures (but not more than 25,000) from at least half of all second-level administrative territorial units of the Republic of Moldova.¹² To be considered acceptable, candidates need to receive at least 600 signatures from a given administrative territorial unit.¹³ Only 35 of the 37 second-level administrative territorial units are within government control,¹⁴ and a candidate must receive signatures in 18 out of 35 units.¹⁵ Political parties, electoral blocs or individual candidates can submit nominations, which must be received at least 30 days

⁸ BIRN, *Moldova's Pro-Russian President under Pressure in Re-Run of 2016 Election*, Madalin Necsutu, October 15, 2020.

⁹ Article 107, *Elections of President of the Republic of Moldova*.

¹⁰ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

¹¹ Article 110, *Special Conditions set for Candidates for the position of President of the Republic of Moldova*.

¹² Article 113, *Special Conditions for Signature Collecting Lists*.

¹³ Article 113, *Special Conditions for Signature Collecting Lists*.

¹⁴ Two are located within Transnistria, which presently operates under separate jurisdiction.

¹⁵ ODHIR Needs Assessment Mission Report, August 17-21, 2020.

before the election (between September 1 and October 1).¹⁶ In total, eight candidates, including two women, were approved for the 2020 presidential election.¹⁷

Who can vote in this election, and how many registered voters are there?

Voter registration in Moldova is captured in the State Registry of Voters (SRV) and is updated through an ongoing process based on data extracted from the State Population Register. All Moldovan citizens who reach 18 years of age and have no statutory prohibitions to vote are included in the State Population Register, which feeds into the SRV.¹⁸

As of October 8, the SRV included 3,287,140 voters. This total can be broken down into 2,798,306 voters registered at a residence or domicile, 232,631 without a residence or domicile and 256,203 in Transnistria.¹⁹ Furthermore, 59,921 voters are registered to vote abroad.²⁰

What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?

According to Moldova's electoral code, candidates may receive up to 0.05 percent of the total state budget for their campaign funds.²¹ This is equal to a value of MDL 18.92 million, or approximately \$1.11 million USD.²² The law also provides rules and regulations for individuals, legal entities and citizens abroad to donate to campaigns, with specific instructions on how to declare such donations and the ceilings limiting them. Individuals may donate up to the amount of six yearly average salaries, legal entities up to 12 yearly average salaries and citizens voting abroad up to three yearly average salaries. All these donations must be submitted via wire transfer.²³ As an exception, individuals may submit up to the three yearly average salaries in cash in lieu of the six they are entitled to donate via wire.²⁴ At the time of writing, the average yearly salary in Moldova is MDL 6,975 (approximately \$408 USD). This means that citizens living abroad can submit up to MDL 20,925, as can individuals if they donate in cash, while individuals in-country, donating via wire transfer, can submit up to MDL 41,850. Legal entities can submit up to MDL 83,700.²⁵ The Central Election Commission maintains various means of confirming compliance with these donation and expenditure requirements.²⁶

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

In Moldova, the Central Election Commission (CEC) is the highest-level electoral management body, followed by District Electoral Councils (DECs) and Precinct Electoral Bureaus (PEBs).²⁷ The CEC is

¹⁶ Article 49, Registration of Candidates.

¹⁷ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

¹⁸ Article 42, State Registry of Voters.

¹⁹ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

²⁰ <https://inregistrare.cec.md/Statistics>

²¹ Article 41, Terms and Conditions of Financial Support for Electoral Campaigns.

²² ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

²³ Article 41, Terms and Conditions of Financial Support for Electoral Campaigns.

²⁴ Article 41, Terms and Conditions of Financial Support for Electoral Campaigns.

²⁵ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

²⁶ Article 41, Terms and Conditions of Financial Support for Electoral Campaigns.

²⁷ Article 14, System of Electoral Bodies.

composed of nine individuals, one appointed by the president and the others by Parliament, proportionally represented by the strength of the majority and opposition factions. These individuals serve a five-year mandate.²⁸ In addition to the nine-member CEC, there are 36 DEC and 2,004 PEB, including 42 special polling stations on the left bank of the Nistru River (Transnistria) and an additional 139 locations abroad in 36 countries. Locations of polling sites outside the country can be found [here](#). DEC are nominated by court and local councils, which in turn nominate PEB.²⁹ DEC have seven to 11 members and PEB have five to 11 members. As reported by the Centre for Continued Electoral Training (CICDE) under the CEC's Facebook page, the DEC and PEB comprise over 19,600 members.³⁰

According to the electoral code of Moldova, the CEC has a range of important electoral responsibilities and powers. These include:³¹

- Studying the procedure for organizing and holding elections with the goal of improving the election legislation and procedures, and submitting proposals to the government and Parliament concerning the appropriateness of operating amendments to election legislation;
- Developing regulations and guidelines to improve the election procedures;
- Ensuring the compilation and verification of voter lists;
- Offering election-related information to the media and the general public for debates;
- Establishing contacts with political parties and with other sociopolitical and nongovernmental organizations entitled to nominate candidates for public positions, facilitating their full participation in the election process;
- Advising public associations interested in conducting civic education campaigns during the run-up to the elections;
- Analyzing election fraud, including allegations of related to past, current or future elections and taking preventive anti-fraud measures.

According to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the CEC has successfully carried out important election preparations within the legal deadlines. This includes holding regular sessions open to observers and the media, as well as livestreaming these sessions online. Moreover, the CEC has organized a large-scale training program for election officials and other key stakeholders in advance of the election, including 250 face-to-face seminars, 100 webinars and six live video conferences organized between September and October. As a result, more than 12,000 people are trained. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, these trainings largely took place in an online format.³²

The CEC's CICDE has also prepared various educational tools for voters. Videos that are part of the campaign are in the Romanian language with Russian and Gagauz subtitles, and with sign language interpretation for voters who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, while print materials are available in

²⁸ Article 17, Central Election Commission Composition and Term of Office.

²⁹ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

³⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/CICDE/photos/a.529147850502455/3414820225268522/>

³¹ Article 22, Central Electoral Commission General Duties.

³² ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

Romanian, Romani, Gagauz, Russian and Ukrainian. The educational campaign includes a dedicated voter information campaign that details Election Day procedures for voters in Moldova and abroad, accessibility for voters with disabilities and measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 during elections.³³

How is the election management body protecting the elections and voters from COVID-19?

Moldova currently has one of Europe's highest rates of COVID-19 infection proportional to the population, according to the World Health Organization, at 15,311 cases per million people as of October 11.³⁴ The scale of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has added new variables to the Moldovan presidential election and forced the Central Election Commission (CEC) and other electoral stakeholders to take specific actions to instill public confidence in the safety of voting amid the pandemic.

The CEC and the National Extraordinary Commission for Public Health have issued instructions on how to reduce the spread of COVID-19 during the elections, especially within polling stations. This includes social distancing guidelines and utilization of protective equipment.³⁵ The CEC's Centre for Continued Electoral Training has trained lower-level officials on specific roles and responsibilities related to conducting elections in the midst of the pandemic. In addition, The CEC has developed a set of rules to standardize the application of electoral procedures related to the organization, arrangement and equipping of polling stations with materials necessary for conducting voting during a pandemic in accordance with the National Extraordinary Public Health Commission.³⁶ In order to protect all participants in the electoral process, the CEC procured personal protective equipment for all polling stations including:

- Over 585,000 masks;
- Over 320,000 pairs of gloves;
- About 27,000 liters of hand sanitizer solution;
- Over 14,500 liters of surface disinfectant solution;
- Over 62,000 visors;
- 2,300 thermometers;
- About 13,000 protective suits; and
- 3 million protective masks for all voters who will go to the polls.

According to the electoral code, voters in Moldova must cast their ballots in person.³⁷ However, mobile voting is available in Moldova for certain voters, including for health reasons or for those in prison.³⁸ That said, given the growing spread of COVID-19 within Moldova and the need to ensure public health

³³ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

³⁴ World Health Organization, Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Weekly Update, October 11, 2020.

³⁵ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

³⁶ https://a.cec.md/ro/conditiile-de-criza-in-sanatate-publica-dicteaza-noi-reguli-2781_98003.html

³⁷ Article 58, Voting.

³⁸ Article 60, Ensuring the Security of the Voting Process.

during the election, the CEC agreed to expand the eligible population for mobile voting to voters in quarantine or with symptoms of respiratory illness. Voters are able to apply for mobile voting within two weeks of Election Day. If a voter is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 on Election Day and has a medical certificate, he or she can request mobile voting up until 3:00 p.m. on Election Day. Anyone who comes to the polls and shows symptoms of respiratory illness or fever will be required to request mobile voting.³⁹

What is the government doing to strengthen its technology and procedures to resist vulnerabilities and counter malign interference?

Moldova, as a former constituent republic of the Soviet Union, has significant cultural and economic ties with Russia. Given the presence of a sizeable ethnic Russian minority population in the country, Moldova has a complicated relationship with Russia and the European Union (EU). According to *Kremlin Watch*, Russia has put a strong emphasis on bringing Moldova closer to the Eurasian Economic Union it leads.⁴⁰ While internet use is expanding in Moldova, most news is still consumed via television.⁴¹ The government has taken some controversial steps to combat disinformation in the country, notably banning television rebroadcasts of content produced outside the EU, U.S., Canada or other selected countries – but not including Russia. The objective of this legislation is to curb the influence of foreign media in the country and counter dangerous narratives from Russia. Speaker of the Parliament Andrian Candu signed a decree promulgating this “anti-propaganda” law on January 10, 2018, after President Igor Dodon’s refusal to sign. This decree was made possible by the Constitutional Court’s decision to grant the chairman of the Parliament or the prime minister the right to declare this document in place of the country’s president.⁴²

What provisions are in place that support the equal rights of ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and women?

The most populous ethnic minorities in Moldova include Romani, Gagauz, Russians and Ukrainians, and the Central Election Commission (CEC) has translated its voter education campaign print materials into these languages and dubbed voter education campaign videos in Gagauz and Russian.⁴³

Moldova’s electoral code offers the opportunity to request a vote via a mobile ballot box for voters with disabilities who cannot physically come to designated polling locations.⁴⁴ However, this system will be challenged by the likely increased demand for this right as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It remains to be seen whether mobile voting can be efficiently scaled.

³⁹ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

⁴⁰ *Kremlin Watch*, Moldova (October 2020).

⁴¹ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

⁴² *Kremlin Watch*, Moldova (October 2020).

⁴³ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

⁴⁴ Article 60, Ensuring the Security of the Voting Process.

Two female candidates are running, Maia Sandu and Violeta Ivanov⁴⁵ (with Sandu, a former prime minister, considered a leading candidate), indicating that there is a level of social acceptance of a woman's right to run for office. Notably, however, the CEC does not feature any female members.⁴⁶

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

The elections will be monitored by 1,887 national observers and 310 international observers. In addition, 77 observers from nongovernmental organizations and diplomatic missions and 154 observers proposed by candidates were accredited to observe polling stations located internationally.⁴⁷ For the polling stations in Moldova, the District Electoral Councils may accredit, at the request of the candidates, one national observer per Precinct Electoral Bureau from each candidate.

Without intervening in the electoral process or other electoral matters, observers have the right to attend all electoral operations, all meetings of electoral bodies, including on Election Day, and to inform the chairman of the electoral body about observed irregularities. They have access to all electoral information, as well as the electoral lists the minutes drawn up by the electoral bodies and, upon notifying the chairperson of the electoral body, can take photos and film as long as the secrecy and security of voting is not endangered.

When will official results be announced?

The official results of the November 1 elections will be known once all votes cast have been counted. If no candidate wins 50 percent of the vote in the first round, a second round of elections will be held two weeks after the first round.⁴⁸ Preliminary results are shared the day after the election on the Central Election Commission (CEC) [website](#). The CEC has five days to announce the final results after receiving the documents from District Electoral Councils. Within three days after tabulating the election results, the CEC shall submit a report to the Constitutional Court regarding the results of elections. The results of elections for the position of president of the Republic of Moldova are validated by the Constitutional Court, and the winning candidate shall take the oath of office before the Parliament and the Constitutional Court within 45 days after elections.

⁴⁵ BIRN, Moldova's Pro-Russian President under Pressure in Re-Run of 2016 Election, Madalin Necsutu, October 15, 2020.

⁴⁶ ODHIR Interim Report (September 22-October 8, 2020), October 12, 2020.

⁴⁷ https://a.cec.md/ro/alegerile-prezidentiale-de-duminica-vor-fi-monitorizate-de-2-2781_98058.html

⁴⁸ Article 120, The Second Round of Elections. Special Provisions.

Resources

- [Electoral Code of the Republic of Moldova](#)
- [Central Election Commission of the Republic of Moldova](#)
- [Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights \(ODHIR\) Interim Report, Moldova Presidential Election 2020](#)
- [ODHIR Needs Report, Moldova Presidential Election 2020](#)
- [Balkan Investigative Reporting Network \(BIRN\), Moldova's Pro-Russian President Under Pressure in Re-Run of 2016 Election](#), Madalin Necsutu, October 15, 2020.
- [Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) Weekly Report](#) as of October 11, 2020.
- [Kremlin Watch, Moldova October 2020.](#)

About IFES in Moldova

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) does not currently have project activities in Moldova. However, IFES worked in the country for two decades beginning in the mid-1990s, supporting the development of professional election administration and a level electoral playing field. More recently, IFES has engaged with the Moldovan Central Election Commission through its programs in Ukraine and the Regional Europe Office to exchange regional experiences and discuss international best practices.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Central Election Commission as of October 30, 2020, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.