

KEY FINDINGS ON ELECTION VIOLENCE PREVENTION:

Moldova: November 2014 Elections



Targeted peacebuilding efforts are frequently used to prevent election violence (PEV). Practitioners can draw from a variety of programming options or interventions, including peace messaging campaigns, preventive diplomacy, dedicated youth programs, or monitoring missions. The choice among preventive measures, however, is often made intuitively or impulsively, rather than based on risk assessments or thorough practice evaluations. In order to further professionalize the field, and help establish an evidence-based prevention practice, USIP recently concluded an ambitious study to assess whether common intervention models demonstrate a measurable impact on election violence levels. Despite the election violence in 2009 and political instability in the region, Moldova's 2014 Parliamentary elections remained largely peaceful. The timely implementation of election violence prevention measures played a significant role in realizing this outcome. The largely professional and capable provision of electoral security effectively prevented violence. Other priority prevention efforts included the civic and voter education by the Central Election Commission, and comprehensive international and local election monitoring; the implementation of preventive diplomacy and youth programming remained weak.

Electoral violence is the exception rather than the rule in Moldova. But despite the country's history of stable elections, 2009 presented an ominous precedent. After an aggressive campaign, the pro-Russian Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) had won the election. Suspicious of fraud, the pro-European opposition parties called on their supporters to protest the results. The situation escalated when protesters attacked the presidential palace and parliament building. In the police crackdown that followed, dozens of demonstrators were beaten and tortured. Several deaths are attributed to the 2009 post-election violence.

The November 2014 parliamentary election once again took place in the context of deep political polarization within society and fierce debate concerning the geopolitical orientation of the country. While the parties that had been in government since 2009 promoted a rapprochement with the European Union, some opposition parties favored close relations with the Russian Federation. Society was also divided, triggering fears of unrest similar to 2009. The outcome of the April 2009 elections had legitimized protest – and in the eyes of some, even violence – as a valid dispute mechanism. The Ukraine crisis loomed as well, invoking a longstanding identity question in Moldova. The most controversial development in the pre-election period was the exclusion of the opposition party Patria as an election contestant a few days before the election. The party was de-registered by the Central Election Commission and courts for allegedly receiving funds from a Russia, in violation of the electoral code prohibition against foreign financing. The growing frustrations among opposition parties combined with anxiety over the close elections to create a combustible mix.

The potential for electoral violence in 2014 was real due to the increasing polarization, regional instability, the recent precedent of electoral violence (in 2009), and destabilizing incidents prior to the election. But the partially fair elections proceeded with-



out violence, and the Parliament approved a new pro-European minority coalition in February, 2015.

PREVENTION TOOLS

- Government security operations targeting individuals that allegedly prepared election violence;
- Significant civic and voter education campaigns increased

PREVENTION MODEL & ELECTION VIOLENCE CODING, MOLDOVA CASE ANALYSIS

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	PEV MODEL	SECURITY SECTOR ENGAGEMENT	ELECTION MGMT. & ADMINISTRATION	PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY	PEACE MESSAGING	CIVIC & VOTER EDUCATION	MONITORING & MAPPING	VOTER CONSULTATIONS	YOUTH PROGRAMMING
CODING	.75	.50	.25	0	.75	.75	.25	.25	

turnout within a largely apathetic electorate;

- Election monitoring by domestic and international observers validated the mostly fair procedures.
- The election administration was not able to prevent the government's interference in the electoral process, which was intended to disadvantage the opposition parties.

The Moldovan government, in coordination with domestic and international civil society, mitigated and deterred potential violence during one of the highest risk elections in the country's history. A combination of security sector engagement, civic and voter education campaigns, and robust election monitoring helped overcome the vulnerable electoral context.

The Moldovan government acted through targeted operations by its security forces, arresting several individuals that were allegedly planning violent attacks during and after the election. The events in Ukraine had influenced the government's planning, fostering a sense of urgency. The security sector also received specialized crowd control training, boosting their capacity in case of instability. Critics voiced concern, however, that the risk of a "Maidan" situation in Moldova was overstated, and that the increased police activity functioned as a vehicle to intimidate opposition supporters.

Widespread monitoring and civic education campaigns accompanied the multi-party efforts to engage voters and ensure fairly implemented election processes. The Central Election Commission played a proactive role throughout the election period, by producing information materials on the importance of voting and by organizing open-door events, both in close cooperation with civil society and media outlets. These educational efforts boosted the turn-out within a generally apathetic electorate. Monitoring efforts from domestic and international actors throughout the country similarly helped ensure generally free and fair procedures despite accounts of political interference and minor corruption. These concerns mostly related to the weakness of the Central Election Commission, and its inability to stop the incumbent parties from steering the election process in their favor. For example, the Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to open 95 polling

stations for diaspora voters, of which only five were located in the Russian Federation where many Moldovan guest workers reside. Other standard prevention tools – preventive diplomacy, peace messaging, voter consultations, youth programming – were largely absent or poorly implemented. Future elections would benefit from more adequate election management as a preventive tool, to fully curb the inference of political parties in the electoral process. Preventive diplomacy was poorly implemented as the meddling of outside powers in the election campaigns increased tensions between the political parties instead of reducing them. An important pre-condition for preventive diplomacy is impartiality – a feature that the most engaged foreign powers in Moldova did not possess in 2014. The differing interests between the European Union and the Russian Federation regarding Moldova's political direction further polarized the electorate. Representatives from the EU and Russia interfered in the pre-election campaigns, not to ensure peaceful elections, but rather to safeguard political interests.

The findings from Moldova illustrate the mitigating impact of prevention measures, and suggest that additional prevention tools could further improve the fairness and stability of future elections. The best way to reduce the potential for electoral violence in the long run is to remedy some of the structural vulnerabilities in Moldova, particularly the deficits in the political system and the polarization in society.

ABOUT THE CENTER

Through evaluative research and field experiments, USIP's Center for Applied Research on Conflict (ARC) will continue to facilitate the transition from intuitive programming towards sustained election support grounded on empirical research and rigorously evaluated for impact.

Project Team:

- Jonas Claes,
Project Lead: jclaes@usip.org
- Dominik Tolksdorf,
Moldova Case Lead: dotolks@googlemail.com