

Independent media and democratic resilience

Strategic insights from
the 2025 parliamentary
elections in Moldova





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Natalia Gavriliță, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova (August 2021 to February 2023), IFPIM Board Member (from July 2026 - present)



Introduction

Throughout the 2024 presidential election and constitutional referendum on EU accession, as well as the 2025 parliamentary elections, the integrity of public debate in Moldova was challenged by both foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) and the growing domestication of disinformation – externally-driven narratives adopted and repackaged by local actors.

These pressures unfolded within a heavily contested and polarised media environment, in which independent outlets, often operating under limited resources, competed against actors backed by political, illicit, or foreign-linked interests and funding. Yet the role of independent outlets was fundamental: by informing the public, holding power to account, exposing manipulation, and creating space for pluralistic debate, they helped protect the conditions under which citizens could make meaningful electoral choices based on reliable information.

This contribution was particularly significant in the context of the September 2025 parliamentary elections. These elections reaffirmed Moldova's European trajectory, with the pro-EU Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) winning 55 out of 101 parliamentary seats, but also highlighted the continued vulnerability of the [country's information space](#)¹ and the scale of the effort required to protect it.

As Natalia Gavrilă, prime minister of the Republic of Moldova from August 2021 to February 2023, observed: "Moldova resisted,

and continues to resist, because it applied the so-called whole-of-society approach, in which practically all institutions worked in tandem and complemented one another in countering FIMI, while independent media was probably one of the most important elements in this equation."

This brief assesses how independent media — and specifically outlets supported by the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM) — played a critical role in protecting the integrity of Moldova's electoral information environment. This brief builds on IFPIM's first Moldova learning brief, which focused on the 2024 presidential elections and the EU accession referendum. It draws on evidence from both the 2024 and 2025 electoral cycles to identify emerging patterns and examine which approaches proved most effective at both the media outlet level and funder level.

The analysis draws on insights shared by ten IFPIM-supported outlets in Moldova. These include six national organisations (Agora, Diez, NewsMaker, Ziarul de Gardă, Jurnal TV, and TV8) and four regional outlets (TV Nord, SP, Studio-L, and Nokta). Their insights are complemented by interviews with key figures across Moldova's electoral and media landscape.

The brief provides practical lessons for policymakers, funders, and media-support organisations. Its conclusions are relevant not only to Moldova, but also to other media environments facing political influence, foreign interference, or evolving forms of information manipulation.



Media consumption and access to reliable information

Media consumption in Moldova is evolving rapidly. Social media is now a primary source of information, used by around 80% of the population, while television (76.9%) and online news platforms (60.8%) remain important sources, [particularly for older audiences](#).² Television remains the source of information most frequently identified as the most trusted, selected by 29% of Moldovans, (29%), followed by social media (19%).³

Independent media — defined as those that are editorially independent of political and business interests — maintain considerable visibility in this changing landscape. All IFPIM supported outlets met this definition and most rank among the country's most accessed news websites, as measured by the number of individual users. This indicates that independent media continue to play an important role in shaping the information environment.

Access to information nevertheless remains uneven. Communities in Gagauzia, Transnistria, northern Moldova, and other areas with limited local media provision are particularly exposed to Russian disinformation and pro-Russian narratives. Language represents a further dividing line, with Romanian and

Russian-speaking audiences often relying on different news sources, platforms, and information networks. In particular, a 2025 study found that Russian-speaking audiences rely more heavily on Telegram, VKontakte, and TikTok for news [than Romanian-speaking audiences](#).⁴ This is particularly important, because weaker moderation and oversight on these platforms can enable larger volumes of false or misleading content to circulate.

At the same time, the rapid growth of TikTok, YouTube, and Telegram in Moldova has expanded the channels through which information — and disinformation — reaches audiences. This creates both risks and opportunities: manipulative content can spread rapidly and move easily between platforms, but independent media also have new avenues to reach audiences which may not regularly consume conventional news formats.

These consumption patterns and persistent inequalities in access have shaped both the reach of independent media and the conditions under which independent outlets worked to provide reliable information and counter manipulation in the 2025 elections.



Challenges

The 2025 electoral cycle placed considerable pressure on Moldova's independent media. Outlets faced three closely connected challenges: severe financial insecurity, an increasingly sophisticated disinformation environment, and engaging audiences across fragmented linguistic, geographic, and digital spaces.

Unprecedented scale disinformation

Independent media also confronted disinformation on an unprecedented scale. FIMI increasingly combined external influence with domestic amplification. Tactics included voter corruption schemes, coordinated [disinformation campaigns](#), and the [mobilisation of domestic actors](#).⁵

Compared with 2024, disinformation became increasingly localised in the 2025 election cycle. Narratives originating outside Moldova were increasingly repackaged and disseminated by recognisable local actors, including political figures, affiliated media personalities, clergy representatives, and online content creators.

This gave externally aligned messages a stronger appearance of domestic legitimacy, made their origins harder to identify, and allowed them to connect more effectively with local concerns and grievances.

Financial insecurity

Independent media in Moldova continue to operate in a small, fragmented, and unevenly developed market, with limited advertising revenues, heavy dependence on donor funding, and a shortage of qualified personnel.

These pressures intensified following the major cuts to U.S. foreign assistance in January 2025, which reportedly accounted for more than 50% of total donor support for media in the country. For many outlets, both national and regional, this withdrawal created a severe financial blow. It reduced planning certainty, made it harder to retain talent, constrained investment in innovation and technology, and squeezed resources for field reporting and coverage in underserved communities.

Fragmented audience environment

Independent media also faced the challenge of reaching audiences fragmented across languages, regions, and levels of digital access. Some parts of Moldova — especially in Gagauzia, Transnistria, and rayons in the north — continue to be characterised as information-sensitive spaces or information deserts. In these areas, linguistic factors, limited independent media presence, and socio-economic vulnerabilities create favourable conditions for disinformation to spread more freely.

Regional media are especially important in these communities. They are often best placed to understand local concerns, communicate in relevant languages — particularly Romanian and Russian — and build trust with audiences. However, serving audiences well requires specific editorial and distribution strategies, placing further pressure and demands on already limited staff, expertise, and budgets.

IFPIM grantees:



- └ **Agora:** Launched in 2014 as a niche outlet focusing on business and finance, Agora has since evolved into a generalist media platform that enjoys wide popularity among the Romanian-speaking population



- └ **Diez:** Originally a source of practical information on education, job opportunities, and entertainment for young people aged 18-35, Diez now offers a broader mix of daily news, current affairs, and in-depth explainers, while maintaining its youth-focused approach.



- └ **Jurnal TV:** Known for its diverse local content, editorial independence, responsible journalism, and a commitment to European values, Jurnal TV is Moldova's largest independent media outlet.



- └ **NewsMaker:** A prominent online platform that publishes in both Russian and Romanian, Newsmaker is well-respected for the quality of its Russian-language content



- └ **Nokta:** Launched in 2017, Nokta has become one of the most prominent media outlets in the southern part of Moldova, in one of the regions highly exposed to disinformation. Nokta produces content primarily in Russian and targets underrepresented Russian-speaking communities in Gagauzia and Tiraspol.



- └ **SP:** A prominent independent regional publication, founded in 1994, that provides audiences in northern Moldova with accurate, fact-based information in both online and print formats. Serving Russian- and Romanian-speaking communities, it plays a vital role in delivering credible news, investigative reporting, and fostering civic engagement.



- └ **Studio-L:** Founded in 1993 and based in Causeni, Studio L is the oldest regional television station in southeastern Moldova. It serves a vulnerable region highly exposed to disinformation, addressing a critical information gap as the sole licensed media outlet in the area.



- └ **TV8:** This popular TV station provides national coverage in both Romanian and Russian, with a strong focus on news and current affairs.



- └ **TV Nord:** Founded in 2020, TVN is committed to providing accurate and fair information to communities in Northern Moldova. Through its main platform, Tvn.md, and its associated social media channels, TVN is a key provider of regional news, with a strong and growing presence in the northern part of the country.



- └ **Ziarul de Gardă:** Established in 2004 as a newspaper and now also available online, Ziarul de Gardă is among the leading investigative media outlets in Moldova.



Key Insights

Six key insights emerge from the evidence. The first four concern how independent media strengthened Moldova's electoral information environment — the editorial strategies, capabilities, and relationships that made their work effective. The final two turn to what helped enable this, including the diversity of outlets supported by IFPIM, strengthening the ecosystem as a whole, and the flexible core funding that underpinned this support. Together, these insights show what independent media achieved and illuminate the conditions that made it possible.

“Civil society and especially media were one step ahead of political actors in communicating, informing, and exposing factors that could harm the democratisation process.”

Angela Grămadă, political analyst, researcher, and director of the Experts for Security and Global Affairs Association



Getting ahead of disinformation by leading the conversation

One of the clearest strategic lessons from the 2025 parliamentary elections is that media outlets were most effective when they did not simply react to disinformation but led the conversation. In practice, this meant taking the lead on issues being exploited by manipulation and connecting them to people's everyday experiences and concerns. Debunking remained important, but was not individually sufficient.

Manipulation did not circulate solely through overt political messaging. Narratives were increasingly carried by local actors and framed to exploit social anxieties and foment identity divisions. Claims about the EU, traditional values, and security resonated because they spoke to immediate personal concerns. This meant manipulation was therefore both harder to identify and to counter through factual correction alone.

Independent media responded by explaining these issues in equally personal and locally relevant terms. Rather than contesting individual false claims in isolation, outlets set out to reframe the conversation - responding directly to the everyday concerns manipulation was tapping into. This also shaped how media approached FIMI as a subject in its own right: rather than treating it as a specialist or geopolitical concern, outlets covered manipulation itself in ways that were accessible and locally relevant, helping audiences recognise the dynamics at play in their own information environments. This approach helped reach audiences less engaged with formal political news and address the underlying dynamics on which manipulation relied.

As Anastasia Nani, media expert and deputy director of the Independent Journalism Center, noted, such an approach was important because it “brings complex topics closer to people's everyday concerns” and allowed journalists to respond directly to the anxieties circulating in local communities, while also helping to build trust and strengthen audiences' ability to recognise manipulation.

Studio-L offers a particularly strong example. Operating in three districts located near to the separatist region of Transnistria and the border with Ukraine — areas characterized by limited independent media presence — the outlet combined consistent on-the-ground reporting with formats tailored to local communities. The outlet produced talk shows in rural areas that addressed false narratives about the EU, including allegations about foreign land ownership, threats to religion, and the erosion of national traditions. By combining expert input with the voices of residents, these programmes translated complex geopolitical topics into practical and accessible public conversations.

Over a six-month period, Studio-L journalists visited more than 60 rural localities and produced more than 300 journalistic materials per month. Their reporting covered local issues, community concerns, public policy, and national developments with regional impact. Programmes such as ‘Satele care țin Moldova vie’ (The Villages That Keep Moldova Alive), ‘Europa sunt EU’ (I am Europe), and ‘Dialog în generații’ (Dialogue across generations) created space for discussion in communities exposed to heightened information risks.

News-makers' *Drugaya Moldova*' (The Other Moldova), a documentary project exploring life in local communities outside of the capital city, also illustrates this approach. Through field reporting, the project engaged both Romanian- and Russian-speaking communities, creating space for dialogue across linguistic and social divides. By focusing on shared experiences, it offered an alternative to polarising "us versus them" narratives and helped create common ground and foster mutual understanding among communities that often occupy different information spaces.

Outlets also used format and style to make complex subjects easier to engage with. Satire and comedy proved particularly effective, with programmes such as TV8's *Alo* (Hello) and Jurnal TV's *Peste Picior* (Tongue-in-Cheek) addressing manipulative narratives in ways that reached audiences unlikely to follow conventional political coverage.

"The media needs to be closer to communities, because there is an absolute need for journalism that produces original content, promotes valuable people, and flags irregularities when they occur."

Viorica Zaharia, media expert and president of the Press Council of Moldova

Underpinning these approaches was proximity to audiences. Direct engagement enhanced outlets' understanding of how national debates were experienced outside the capital. Regional events brought journalists into direct conversation with audiences outside Chişinău and created space for honest dialogue and feedback.

A Jurnal TV representative noted that this kind of face-to-face engagement "helps reinforce credibility and turns abstract notions of trust into something more tangible and relational. It also enables newsrooms to better understand the mood in the regions and to grasp more clearly the everyday problems facing Moldovans, often different from how they are perceived in Chişinău."

Viorica Zaharia, media expert and president of the Press Council of Moldova, similarly emphasised the importance of proximity: "The media needs to be closer to communities, because there is an absolute need for journalism that produces original content, promotes valuable people, and flags irregularities when they occur."

Through anticipating the concerns that are exploited through manipulation, and addressing these concerns directly using a diverse range of content and format types, media outlets were ultimately able to lead the conversation to counter disinformation and manipulation, rather than only correcting it.

Reach and engagement expanded through better understanding of platforms and formats

The 2025 cycle highlighted the importance of understanding where and how different audiences consume information, and the need to experiment with formats in response to those trends. With social media now the primary source of information, especially for younger audiences, independent media increasingly treated these platforms as core reporting and distribution spaces rather than secondary channels for republishing conventional content.

Across IFPIM's portfolio, outlets developed a closer understanding of how audience behaviours, expectations, and preferences varied across platforms, and used these insights to inform editorial decisions. They adapted content through short explainers, visual storytelling, accessible language, and platform-specific production styles. Several also invested in identifiable on-screen personalities who became recognisable "faces" of their social media presence — including Diez and Newsmaker at national level, and Nokta at regional level.

These experiments in editorial adaptation and effective platform use translated to notable gains in visibility. Diez expanded its use of short-form video and real-time election content, producing more video than in any previous election period and engagement hit three million across social media during the election month alone. Ziarul de Gardă reached a major milestone in October 2025, ranking first among media websites in Moldova by number of users according to Gemius data. Nokta's social media engagement nearly doubled during 2025. TV8's TikTok views increased by nearly 50% over the

same period and the outlet also expanded its reach through multilingual Romanian- and Russian-language content and targeted campaigns across Facebook and Instagram.

Platform-savvy journalism both reached more people and enabled new forms of audience participation. On election day, Diez encouraged young audiences to tag the outlet after voting, as part of a flashmob-style campaign. Such initiatives positioned audiences not only as consumers of information, but also as active participants in public conversation.

Sustaining this connection, however, requires more than individual campaigns or successful formats. Diez described the need for "a balanced content ecosystem, where different formats serve distinct functions, from attracting attention to building long-term loyalty and responding to evolving needs." During this period, outlets also moved beyond visibility toward more sustainable forms of engagement and trust. Nokta, for example, attributes its steady growth in engagement to closer attention to audience analytics and consistent tracking of which content and formats work for different demographics, helping them to attract "new audiences and strengthen trust among existing readers."

The wider lesson here is that successful platform adaptation requires editorial choices informed by audience behaviour. Outlets adapted their journalism to the formats, platforms, and presenters with which different audiences were most likely to engage.

Through its investigations, independent media contributed significantly to documenting and explaining how Kremlin-linked propaganda and disinformation networks operate, giving the public a clearer understanding of the mechanisms used to try to influence electoral choices.

Anastasia Nani, media expert and deputy director of the Independent Journalism Center from Moldova (IJC).



Photo courtesy of Ziarul du Guarda

Investigative journalism exposed the machinery of disinformation

Investigative reporting remained one of the most important tools for countering FIMI during the 2025 electoral cycle, exposing the mechanisms through which FIMI and domestic proxies sought to distort the information environment. As media expert Anastasia Nani noted:

“Through its investigations, independent media contributed significantly to documenting and explaining how Kremlin-linked propaganda and disinformation networks operate, giving the public a clearer understanding of the mechanisms used to try to influence electoral choices...” Anastasia Nani, media expert and deputy director of the Independent Journalism Center from Moldova (IJC).

A significant example is Ziarul de Gardă’s undercover investigation ‘Kremlin’s Digital Army’, which revealed how Kremlin-linked digital networks recruited and even paid operatives in cryptocurrency to spread coordinated propaganda online. This investigation built on earlier reporting on vote-buying and political manipulation and showed that investigative journalism can stimulate follow-up reporting across the sector and act as a direct counterweight to organised disinformation.

Investigations by other national media outlets had similar effects on the ecosystem. For example, TV8’s investigative series ‘Cutia Neagră’ (The Black Box) and ‘Cutia Neagră Plus’ (The Black Box Plus) exposed electoral corruption schemes orchestrated by proxy politicians linked to a fugitive oligarch, Ilan Sor as well as connections between Moldovan politicians, political parties, and Kremlin-linked actors.

“Investigative journalism has played a very important role in keeping Moldova among democratic countries. Investigative journalism is essential for attribution. For example, President Maia Sandu may publicly state that Russia is abusively interfering in Moldova’s internal affairs, but it is independent journalism that gives credibility to such political statements by uncovering electoral corruption schemes or disinformation campaigns,” Natalia Gavrilă, former prime minister of the Republic of Moldova (August 2021 to February 2023)

Examples from regional media demonstrate that locally grounded verification remains an important complement to larger investigations, particularly in instances when false alarms can amplify fear in small communities. Shortly after the elections, SP responded to false reports about terrorist threats in schools in Bălți. These reports echoed a broader campaign narrative claiming that a victory by pro-EU forces would draw Moldova into war and destabilise the country. Rather than addressing the claim abstractly, SP published explainers, with information verified by the authorities at a moment when parents and communities were actively seeking reliable information. The explanation circulated widely in local chat groups. As an SP representative noted, countering this narrative “helped to calm fears, counter falsehoods, and redirect attention away from speculation, but also reinforced our role as a trusted point of reference in the community.”

These examples show the complementary value of national investigations and locally trusted verification and how they contributed to exposing the machinery of manipulation.

Collaboration amplified public interest journalism

Moldova's media sector has long struggled with a limited degree of professional solidarity, a challenge that has been repeatedly noted in the media community in previous years. Yet this dynamic has begun to shift. The 2025 parliamentary elections, building on trends already visible in 2024, showed independent media increasingly capable of acting collectively in moments of pressure.

Faced with intensified disinformation pressures, media outlets demonstrated a greater willingness to move beyond competition and to collaborate in the public interest. Outlets increasingly built on one another's reporting, amplifying independently produced content across the sector. This allowed public interest journalism to travel further and supported the gradual consolidation of a more cohesive media ecosystem.

"Some of the good practices originated from the bad practices of the past. It was crucial that the Moldovan institutions that had for years been working each on their own, started cooperating (and) exchanging information." Jānis Mažeiks, former EU Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova, 2021–2025

Ziarul de Gardă's 'Kremlin's Digital Army' investigation again provides a strong example. The investigation's exposure of coordinated disinformation networks was rapidly taken up across the media ecosystem. In the days following publication, it was republished and broadcast by around 50 national and international outlets. It was also picked up

by "approximately 20 online media outlets in Moldova and another 20 in Romania, significantly extending its reach, including among diaspora audiences", as Victor Mosneag, editor-in-chief of Ziarul de Gardă, noted.

Beyond this immediate amplification, the investigation also triggered further reporting. NordNews, a regional media outlet from the north, published its own investigation into Russia's direct involvement in Moldova's elections, [documenting networks of influence coordinated by fugitive oligarch Ilan Șor](#).⁶

Other reporting demonstrated how outlets could contribute to a shared public interest agenda. Ziarul de Gardă's investigation into the involvement of the Moldovan Orthodox Church, which is subordinate to the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate, extended earlier reporting by Jurnal TV on the role of clergy in mobilising pro-Russian voters.

This mutual amplification was made possible through a shared foundation of editorial credibility. Outlets were willing to republish and build on one another's work because they trusted its quality. This conclusion is supported by independent assessments: IJC's Media Radar ranks Newsmaker, TV8, Ziarul de Gardă, Agora, and Nokta among Moldova's stronger performers, and six of ten awards at the 2025 Annual Press Club Gala went to IFPIM-supported media. While awards are not measures of audience trust, they indicate a level of professional credibility and editorial rigour in a contested media environment.



Photo courtesy of Diez

“It was crucial that the Moldovan institutions that had for years been working each on their own, started cooperating (and) exchanging information.”

Jānis Mažeiks, former EU
Ambassador to the Republic
of Moldova, 2021–2025



Diversity of national and regional outlets strengthened the information ecosystem

The 2024 and 2025 election cycles demonstrated that national media alone cannot provide the breadth of coverage needed in Moldova's fragmented information environment. In 2025, IFPIM expanded its Moldova portfolio beyond national outlets to include a broader group of regional media. This shift reflects a growing recognition of the complementary roles that different outlets play within the information ecosystem.

National media — such as Agora, Jurnal TV, Newsmaker, TV8, Diez, and Ziarul de Gardă — are crucial in setting the public agenda, scrutinising political actors, producing investigations with national resonance, and shaping wider public debate during and after the September 2025 parliamentary elections.

Regional media — such as SP, TV Nord, Studio-L, and Nokta — play an equally significant role in reaching communities that are often underserved, more exposed to false narratives and FIMI, and less likely to be reached by national reporting alone. In some regions, a single public interest media outlet is often the only source of information. Their comparative advantage lay in proximity to audiences, familiarity with local concerns, and a closer understanding of how manipulative narratives circulate within specific communities and language environments.

“In an age when disappointment with democracy promotion is widespread, governments are scaling back their efforts and societies are increasingly unconvinced that supporting democracy abroad is worthwhile, even as it comes under growing attack. Moldova offers a compelling example of why such support remains essential. It demonstrates the critical role of independent media in strengthening democracy, countering hybrid threats both offline and online, and protecting the freedom of millions of people to make informed electoral choices based on reliable information rather than manipulation by opaque algorithms or malign actors. As President Maia Sandu stated on one occasion, freedom of speech is for people, not for computer algorithms.”

Nicu Popescu, Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova between August 2021 and January 2024

As Viorica Postolachi, executive director of TV Nord put it, regional media: “gives a voice to communities, brings local issues to light, and provides verified, relevant information where national coverage often falls short, turning everyday concerns into visible public issues and countering disinformation through trust and direct engagement on the ground.”

The value of a diverse portfolio was especially visible in information-vulnerable regions — those with limited independent media provision and heightened exposure to manipulation. In Gagauzia, where professional journalism remains limited, Nokta played a vital role in providing verified Russian-language reporting tailored to local audiences. TV Nord responded to similar vulnerabilities by “delivering accessible, locally relevant, and contextual content that responds directly to community concerns” (Viorica Postolachi).

Language diversity emerged as a particularly crucial element of the ecosystem. Newsmaker, SP, and Nokta continued to provide high-quality Russian-language reporting at a time when professional independent Russian-language content remained limited. Other IFPIM-supported media outlets, including Jurnal TV, TV8, Diez, Ziarul de Gardă, and TV Nord, also produced and increased Russian-language content or adapted formats for audiences more exposed to manipulative narratives.

Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate the collective impact and visibility of independent media during the 2025 election context across the wider information ecosystem. Rather than operating in isolation in responding to disinformation, a regionally and linguistically diverse cohort of outlets increasingly functioned as part of a loosely connected and resilient system in which content is amplified, extended, and reinforced across platforms, audiences, and regions.

Nicu Popescu, Moldovan deputy prime minister and minister for foreign affairs and European integration of Moldova between August 2021 and January 2024: “In an age when disappointment with democracy promotion is widespread, governments are scaling back their efforts and societies are increasingly unconvinced that supporting democracy abroad is worthwhile, even as it comes under growing attack. Moldova offers a compelling example of why such support remains essential. It demonstrates the critical role of independent media in strengthening democracy, countering hybrid threats both offline and online, and protecting the freedom of millions of people to make informed electoral choices based on reliable information rather than manipulation by opaque algorithms or malign actors. As President Maia Sandu stated on one occasion, freedom of speech is for people, not for computer algorithms.”

Flexible core funding strengthened resilience and autonomy to respond to disinformation

Central to IFPIM's approach in Moldova is its use of flexible core funding, which provides support for an organisation's overall activities and operations rather than focusing on specific project outputs. Funding was provided over the medium to long term, with most grants beginning before the electoral cycles, giving outlets time and resources to plan beyond immediate demands.

Because funding was not tied to short-term content outputs, outlets were able to build strategies tailored to their own contexts and priorities. In practice, this meant they could make their own decisions about retaining teams and sustaining investigations, allocating resources for travel to communities, experimenting with formats, and responding to emerging information threats.

"It was the first time to access this kind of support as the one provided by IFPIM and it allowed us to flexibly budget and plan for our operational needs, in comparison to many other grants which are content oriented." Diez

This flexibility was particularly important in a challenging information environment. Independent media often depend on fragile, short-term funding, while many actors responsible for disinformation benefit from domestic or foreign patronage, including opaque sources of finance. Without predictable and independent funding, public interest media entered the election cycles at a significant disadvantage.

As Anastasia Nani, media expert and deputy director of the Independent Journalism Center in Moldova (IJC) observed: "Institutional support, or core funding, is essential for the stability of the media sector..."

The value of core funding therefore extended beyond organisational stability. It underpinned many of the strategies identified in this brief: sustained investigations, adaptation to different platforms, direct engagement with communities, multilingual reporting, and collaboration across the sector — all of which collectively proved essential in the fight against FIMI.

"Institutional support, or core funding, is essential for the stability of the media sector..."

Anastasia Nani, media expert and deputy director of the Independent Journalism Center from Moldova (IJC)



Conclusion

The 2024 and 2025 electoral cycles demonstrate that independent media form an essential part of Moldova's democratic infrastructure and resilience. Their contribution extended beyond providing accurate electoral information: outlets exposed the structures behind interference, anticipated manipulative narratives, and connected complex issues to people's everyday concerns.

At the outlet level, the importance of understanding audiences was consistently reinforced. This is not a new principle, but the experience of the 2024 and 2025 elections shows how fundamental and demanding it is in practice. Effective responses to manipulation depended on identifying the concerns being exploited, the questions audiences wanted answered, and the formats, platforms, and presenters most likely to drive engagement. Outlets developed this understanding through sustained reporting within communities, direct interaction with audiences, and analysis of online behaviour.

For IFPIM, the principal learning is that both the composition of its portfolio and the design of its support mattered. Expanding the portfolio beyond national organisations to include regional, youth-focused, and minority-language media increased its reach and complementarity. Flexible core funding gave outlets the stability and editorial freedom to retain staff, sustain investigations, test new formats, extend coverage, and respond to changing audience needs and emerging information threats. As Viorica Postolachi, executive director of TV Nord, explained, IFPIM's support "Gave us stability in a difficult period, allowed us to retain

our team and plan more predictably, while also giving us the flexibility to test new formats and adapt to changes in the media environment."

The resilience of Moldova's independent media remains fragile. Elections take place over a defined period, but democratic resilience is built over years, including between campaigns. Independent media's contribution to that resilience is preventative as well as responsive: audiences who regularly consume [independent news are consistently found to be less susceptible to disinformation](#)⁷. Sustaining that contribution depends on support that looks beyond individual outlets and individual elections, to the diversity and resilience of the information environment as a whole.

Evidence from the two electoral cycles points to four priorities for funders and international partners:

-  Support the diversity and complementarity of the wider media ecosystem, rather than focusing only on individual outlets.
-  Provide predictable, flexible core funding that extends beyond electoral cycles and enables outlets to adapt to emerging threats and changing audience needs.
-  Support efforts to invest in audience understanding and experimentation with audience participation
-  Prioritise long-term support for regional and multilingual media serving information-deprived communities.



“Moldova illustrates the effectiveness and continued relevance of democracy support. Its impact is not only rooted in values but also in tangible stability. A more democratic Moldova has meant citizens rejecting corruption and resisting being drawn into hostile operations against Ukraine. This shows that such assistance delivers real results. It is vital not only for democratic resilience but also for broader European peace and stability.”

Nicu Popescu, Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova between August 2021 and January 2024

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CREDITS

Author

Victor Gotisan

Editor

Magda Walter

Editorial team/commissioning editors

Bridie Rollins, Maha Taki

Copy editor

Nathan Carpenter

Designers

Juan Heilborn & Guadalupe Lobo
for Media Branding

IFPIM Grantees

Agora, Diez, Newsmaker, Ziarul de Gardă,
Jurnal TV, TV8, TV Nord, SP, Studio-L and Nokta

Other interviewees (all interviews were conducted across May-June 2026)

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Natalia Gavriliță, former Prime Minister of the
Republic of Moldova (August 2021 to February 2023),
IFPIM Board Member (from July 2026 - present)

Jānis Mažeiks, former EU Ambassador to
the Republic of Moldova, 2021–2025

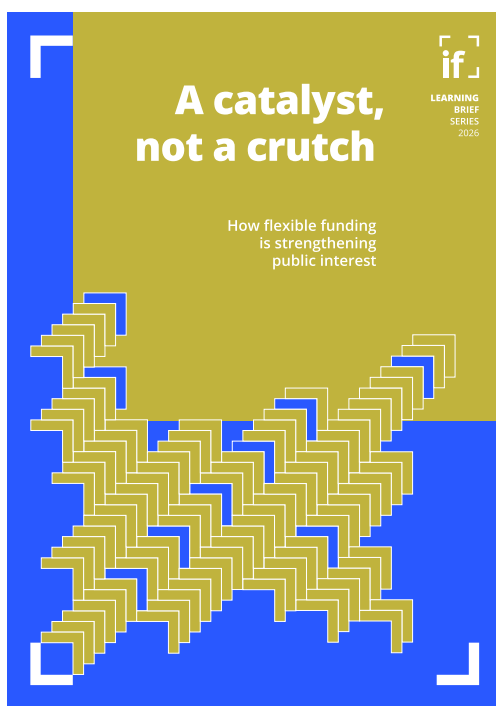
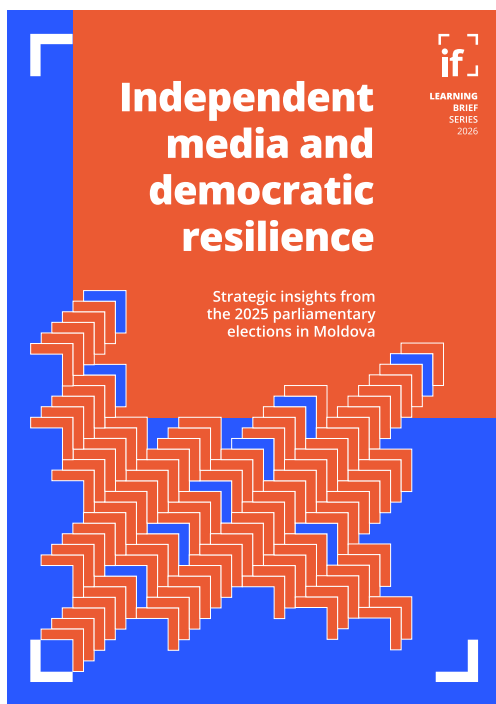
Valeriu Pașa, political analyst and Executive
Director at WatchDog Community

Anastasia Nani, media expert and Deputy Director
of the Independent Journalism Center in Moldova

Angela Grămadă, political analyst, researcher
and President of the Experts for Security
and Global Affairs Association

Viorica Zaharia, media expert and member
of the Press Council of Moldova

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