CENTER FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND COUNTERING DISINFORMATION

NATIONAL INFORMATION RESILIENCE INDEX FOR MOLDOVA: THE COMPARATIVE REPORT 2024–2025



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INTRODUCTION

This report represents in-depth analysis focused on tracking changes in key strategic directions within Moldovan society between 2024 and 2025. It provides data-driven insights to support the Center for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation (CSCCD) in its mission to enhance the resilience of Moldovan society against foreign information manipulation and related threats.

The mission of the CSCCD is to reinforce and coordinate interinstitutional efforts to counteract disinformation, information manipulation, and coordinated activities that disseminate harmful messages, narratives, or communications, regardless of their source. This work aims to safeguard national interests, as outlined in Article 6 of the Law on the Center for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation[1].

The Concept for strategic communication and countering disinformation, information manipulation and foreign interference[2], as approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, relies on the National Security Strategy[3]. Its overarching goal is to support, strengthen, and help realize the national interests that shape the vision of a 21st-century Moldova: a democratic, European republic firmly integrated into the political, economic, social, and security frameworks of advanced democracies and developed economies, with a clear national identity and growing international standing.

To achieve this goal, the entire vision is focused on the central pillars of strategic communication:

- European integration
- Social cohesion
- Economic resilience
- Strengthening the defense sector
- Strengthening national security in the regional context

[1] Republic of Moldova Parliament LAW No. 242 of 31-07-2023 on the Center for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation and on the amendment of certain normative acts

[2] Concept for strategic communication and countering disinformation, information manipulation and foreign interference, 2024-2028

[3] National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova

The National Information Resilience (NIR) index was developed by CSCCD as a tool and methodology to strategically guide its activities and assess developments in the Moldovan society across five key priority areas as strategic objectives of the country. It supports measuring progress in the strengthening of societal resilience against information manipulation and disinformation. Specifically, the NIR Index allows for the identification and analysis of long-term changes in public beliefs and attitudes, considering the enduring effects of both disinformation in the information space and Moldova's national narratives. Furthermore, it acts as a strategic framework for guiding the actions of the Center and its partners in advancing national interests, enhancing societal resilience, and carrying out the Center's responsibilities as defined by the law and the Strategic Concept.

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive analysis based on the core pillars of strategic communication and efforts to counter disinformation, information manipulation, and foreign interference, as outlined in the Concept for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, Information Manipulation, and Foreign Interference.

THE METHODOLOGY

The volatile and rapidly evolving regional context has created a pressing need for an integrated approach to strategic communication and the countering of hybrid aggression against the Republic of Moldova, including election interference and organized, sustained disinformation campaigns. These developments directly affect Moldova's daily information environment and societal dynamics, highlighting the critical importance of coordinated efforts to enhance resilience and foster a more prosperous society.

To guide and assess the impact of the information environment and the efforts of the Center and its partners in building a resilient Moldovan society across the five key pillars, the Center has developed an analytical tool to regularly measure long-term shifts in attitudes and beliefs that affect developments in priority areas linked to Moldova's national interests.

The designed indicators take into consideration and are based on:

- A comprehensive analysis of existing research conducted in both Moldova and other European countries, covering the most relevant topics and analytical models aligned with Moldova's national security priority areas.

- Extensive consultations held with Moldovan and international experts on economic policy, EU cooperation, societal cohesion, defense, security, and foreign information manipulation. They provided assessments of the current situation and insights into each priority area.
- Final selection of core indicators for each of the priority areas, to fit them into one comprehensive survey, allowing for extensive cross-analysis of interdependencies between the priority areas.

The Index is further applied as a structured public opinion monitoring tool for regular (annual) data collection. Such a tool, which consolidates all priority areas into a single data-collection process, becomes essential, both for establishing timelines of changes in key indicators and for cross-analyzing the interdependencies of various indicators. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the synergies between the strategic priorities and the possible causes for changes. It provides useful insights for both risk analysis and for designing effective interventions to counter the effects of FIMI.

The current report is based on the NIR Index surveys from 2024 and 2025, designed by CSCCD with expert input from the International Practitioners Partnership Network PractNet. The data was collected by the public opinion survey company CIVIS via phone interviews, in May 2024 it included a sample of 1,204 and in May 2025 a sample of 1207 respondents. In both years the sample was representative of the Moldovan population weighted by key demographics. The analysis relies primarily on the NIR Index, supplemented where possible with comparisons to other Moldovan and international data – such as statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics, election results analyses, and findings from the CSCCD's monitoring and analysis of the information space in the Republic of Moldova – to provide context and support the conclusions.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

On 3 March 2022, Moldova applied for European Union membership and on 23 June 2022 Moldova was given a European perspective by unanimous agreement between the leaders of all 27 EU Member States[4]. The current report presents a comparative overview of the changes in public opinion in Moldova between May 2024, prior to the EU membership referendum, and following the referendum in May 2025. In 2024, the NIR Index had quite accurately predicted the results of the constitutional referendum on EU accession. The Index results highlighted the risks of information manipulation intended to impact the elections, as public attitudes toward EU accession were highly sensitive and potentially strongly influenced through the information space. The present analysis follows further developments in 2025, including the impact of the referendum and other developments related to EU accession and its communication to the Moldovan public.

EU integration offers a clear and comprehensive framework for strengthening democratic governance in Moldova, helping the country to eventually benefit from membership as other EU states do, and build the capacity to contribute in return. Accession is a process of industrial, economic, political, legal, social, and cultural transformation needed to meet the EU criteria, requiring reforms in both policies and their implementation. According to documents of the European Commission[5], the EU has prioritized judicial reform in Moldova, to ensure a strong rule of law and an independent judiciary. It has also emphasized the need for anti-corruption measures and for strengthening democratic governance by curbing the political influence of oligarchs.

The Moldovan Concept on strategic communication[6] underscores that European integration offers the strategic clarity needed for coherent, consistent, and effective communication of a unified state identity, geopolitical and security choices, as well as key long-term development goals within a democratic political system. The Concept also emphasizes the prospect of an improved economic situation for Moldovan citizens, based on the goal of significantly strengthening the political, economic, and social framework.

[4] European Council conclusions on Ukraine, the membership applications of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, Western Balkans and external relations, 23 June 2022

[5] Commission Opinion on the Republic of Moldova's application for membership of the European Union, 16 June 2022

[6] Concept for strategic communication and countering disinformation, information manipulation and foreign interference, 2024-2028





EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **EU ACCESSION SUPPORT UNCHANGED OVERALL,** but positions shift to stronger extremes. 53% of the Moldovan people express their intention to vote in support of Moldova becoming a member of the EU (52% in 2024). A closer look at these numbers points to a trend of positions becoming stronger both among the EU supporters and those against EU accession. Such signs of increasing polarization in the society serve as a warning that tensions may eventually erupt, in Moldova as a whole or in specific regions.
- **WHILE MOST MOLDOVANS FEEL CONNECTED TO EUROPE, THE EU–RUSSIA PULL IS POLARIZING.** A shrinking "middle ground" of people expressing neutral positions about Europe or Russia confirms the trend of increasing polarization around the EU-Russia axis. Compared to 2024, there is a clear trend toward stronger alignment with either Europe or Russia, with 56% reporting feeling a close connection with the EU, an increase from 51% in 2024. In comparison, about one-third (36%) expressed feelings of connection to Russia (up from 30% in 2024).
- **THE DIVIDE BETWEEN THE EU SUPPORTERS AND THE EUROSKEPTICS IS GROWING:** The 2025 survey shows that the majority of Moldovans have continued confidence in the EU and its values and positive impact on Moldovan security. However, a closer look reveals a growing polarization between the supporters of the EU and the skeptics here as well.
- **EU BENEFITS VS. FEARS: THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE AND INFORMATION SPACE IS SIGNIFICANT.** Moldovans who have lived in EU countries are twice as optimistic about EU accession compared to those who lived in Russia, highlighting the impact of direct experience and information environment on expectations. Similarly, those trusting Russian media are twice as pessimistic about the EU, reflecting Russian media narratives rather than lived reality.

EU ACCESSION SUPPORT UNCHANGED OVERALL, BUT POSITIONS SHIFT TO STRONGER EXTREMES

According to a public opinion survey conducted in spring 2025, 53% of Moldovan population declared that they would vote in support of Moldovan accession to the EU (52% in 2024), while 33% expressed a preference to stay out of the EU (28% in 2024) and 4% were not planning to vote in such a theoretical referendum.

The 2024 and 2025 results closely mirror the EU referendum vote in October 2024, showing a narrow majority in favor of the EU. Support is stronger among Moldovans who feel closer to Europe and have lived in the EU, while it is much weaker among those who consider Russian Federation media as a significant and trusted source of information.

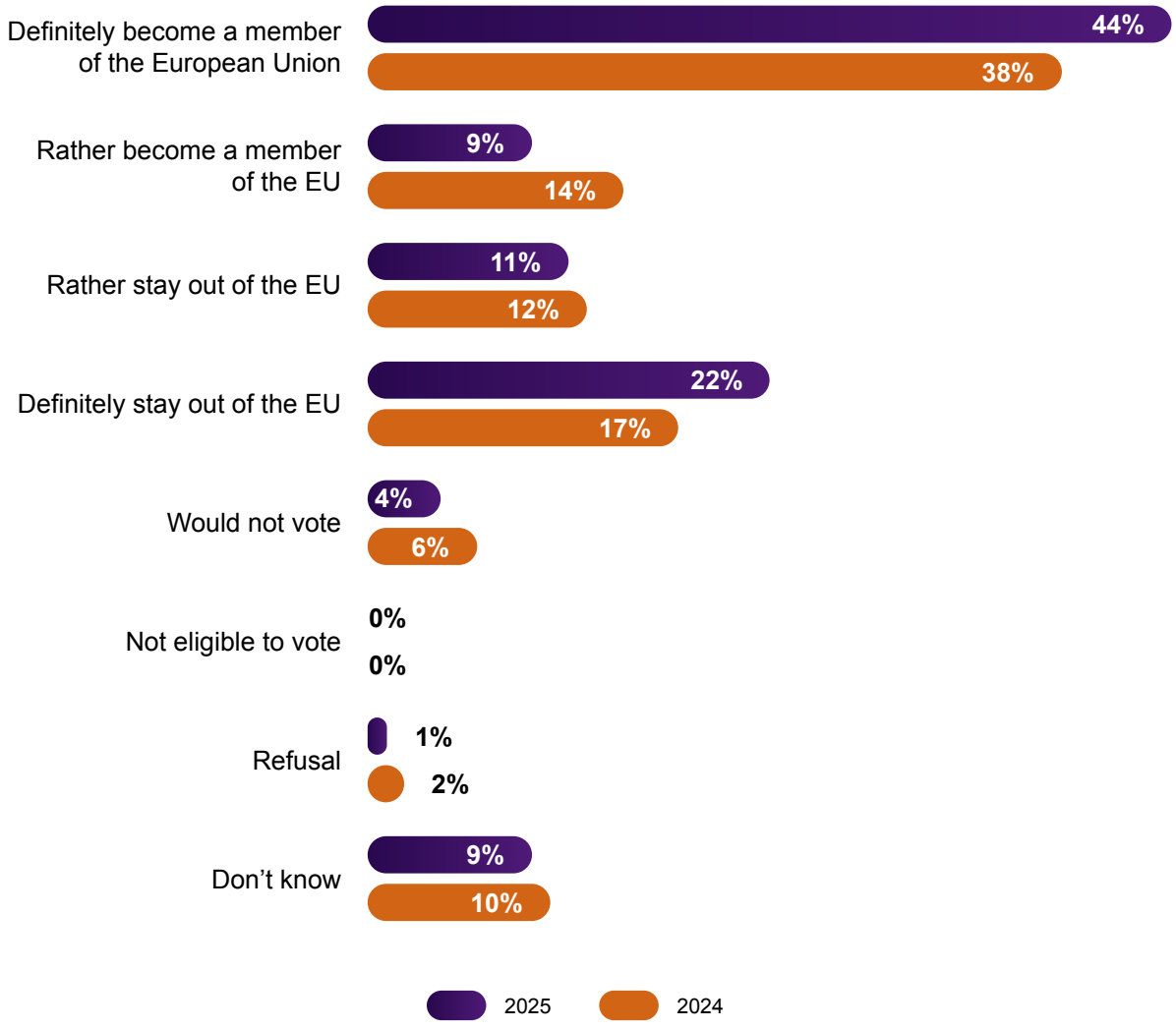
- Higher support for EU membership aligns with a stronger commitment to democratic governance, greater trust in institutions, and a sense of closeness to Europe—alongside higher economic well-being and a belief in personal agency to influence Moldovan society.
- Support also strongly correlates with placing value in democratic governance and feeling connected to Europe.
- Support for EU accession is higher among those who trust Romanian-language Moldovan media, but much lower among those who trust Russian Federation media.

At the same time, while overall support for the EU accession is solid, it is important to note a shift in opinions among some groups that were previously more neutral about EU accession.

- The 2024-2025 results show growing polarization: support for “definitely become a member” rose from 38% to 44%;
- At the same time, those wanting Moldova to “definitely stay out of the EU” increased from 17% to 22%.

This highlights the polarized nature of the Moldovan public opinion, clearly reflecting both the broader debate and the vectors of manipulative narratives concerning EU accession in the lead-up to the September 2025 parliamentary elections. These trends are also reflected in the CSCCD's analysis of the information space.

IF TOMORROW THERE WAS A REFERENDUM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA ABOUT ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION. WOULD YOU VOTE FOR MOLDOVA TO...



WHILE MOST MOLDOVANS FEEL CONNECTED TO EUROPE, THE EU–RUSSIA PULL IS POLARIZING

In 2025, 56% of Moldovans feel connected to Europe, up from 51% in 2024, while those feeling no connection dropped from 45% to 39%. This might suggest a general trend towards Europeanization. At the same time, the share of Moldovans feeling a connection to Russia increased as well, to 36% (from 30% in 2024), with weak/no connection dropping from 65% to 59%, showing that the trend is rather towards polarization, with the various groups shifting in different directions. Nearly all feel connected to Moldova (95%) and their local community (94%), highlighting a strong importance of local identity, explored further in the social cohesion chapter. The following trends appear:

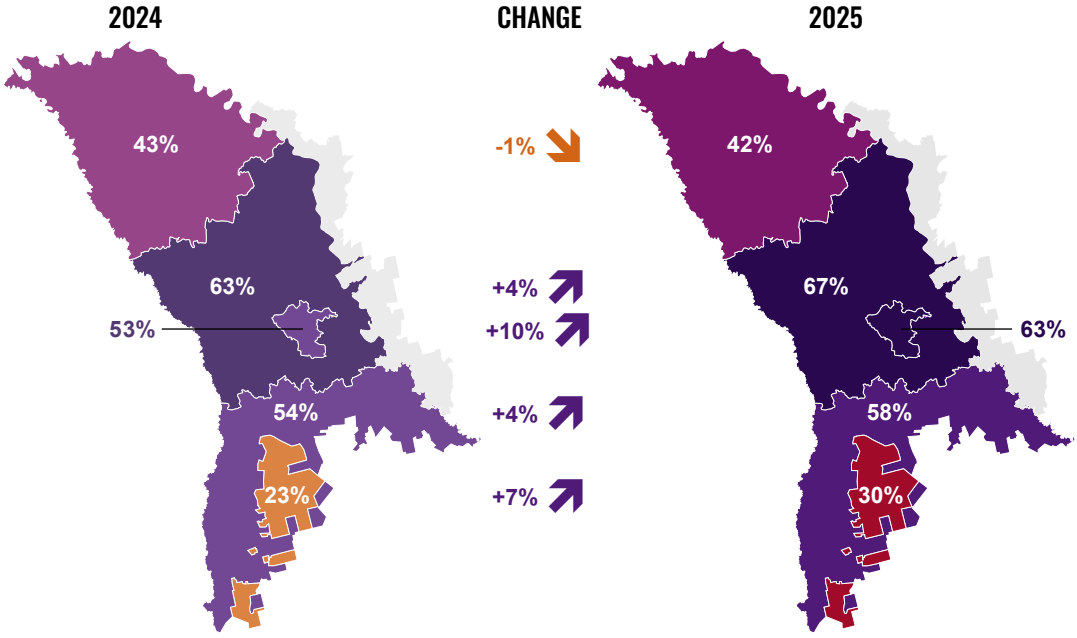
- The pro-Europe position is consistent across all ages and is higher among the more educated respondents and those who are more confident economically, while pro-Russian sentiment is strongest among older adults (55+) and those with lower levels of education.
- Despite growing Europe-Russia polarization in Moldovan public opinion, many Moldovans feel connected to both, although alignment with Europe is less likely to coincide with feeling connected to Russia: just 33% of those connected to Europe also feel connected to Russia, while 50% among those feeling connected to Russia feel connected to Europe as well.
- Moldovans who have lived in an EU member state for at least six months tend to feel more connected to Europe, suggesting that direct experience in the EU significantly shapes their attitudes. At the same time, ethnic minorities are somewhat more likely than average to feel connected to Russia.

The NIRI data thus reveals a growing polarization in emotional ties toward either Europe or Russia, reflecting an intense debate over Moldova's future direction and a shrinking middle ground. While EU accession involves comprehensive transformation across industrial, economic, political, legal, social, and cultural domains to meet the EU criteria, the Russian Federation discourse in opposition to Moldova's Europeanization often reduces it to much more personal questions of connection — to Europe or to Russia.



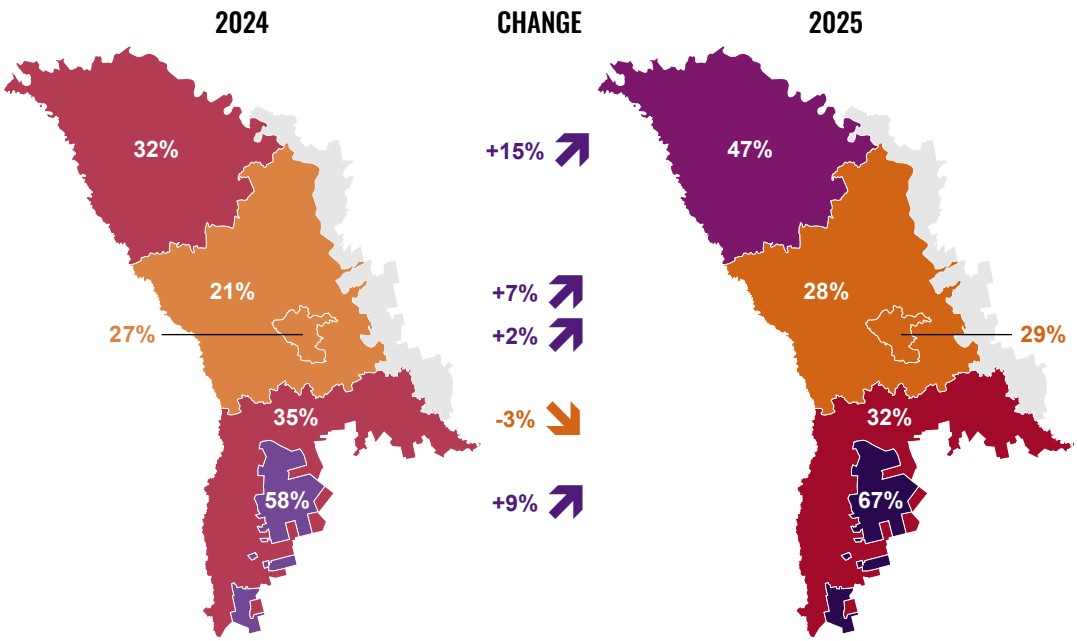
HOW STRONGLY DO YOU FEEL CONNECTED TO EUROPE

Completely/rather agree



HOW STRONGLY DO YOU FEEL CONNECTED TO RUSSIA

Completely/rather agree



MOLDOVANS WITH EU EXPERIENCE FAVOR MEMBERSHIP – AN OPEN DIALOGUE IS CRUCIAL TO HELP OTHER MOLDOVANS DECIDE

The 2025 survey shows continued confidence in the EU and its values among Moldovans. Assessment of Moldova's ability to protect its interests in the EU increased slightly, to 50%, showing a subtle change from 47% a year ago and suggesting that more information on the decision-making processes in the EU might be helpful. The majority, or 54%, believe that EU membership will strengthen Moldova's security and defense, while 39% still associate EU accession with the risk of attack from the Russian Federation. Disagreement with this concern grew from 39% a year ago to 44%.

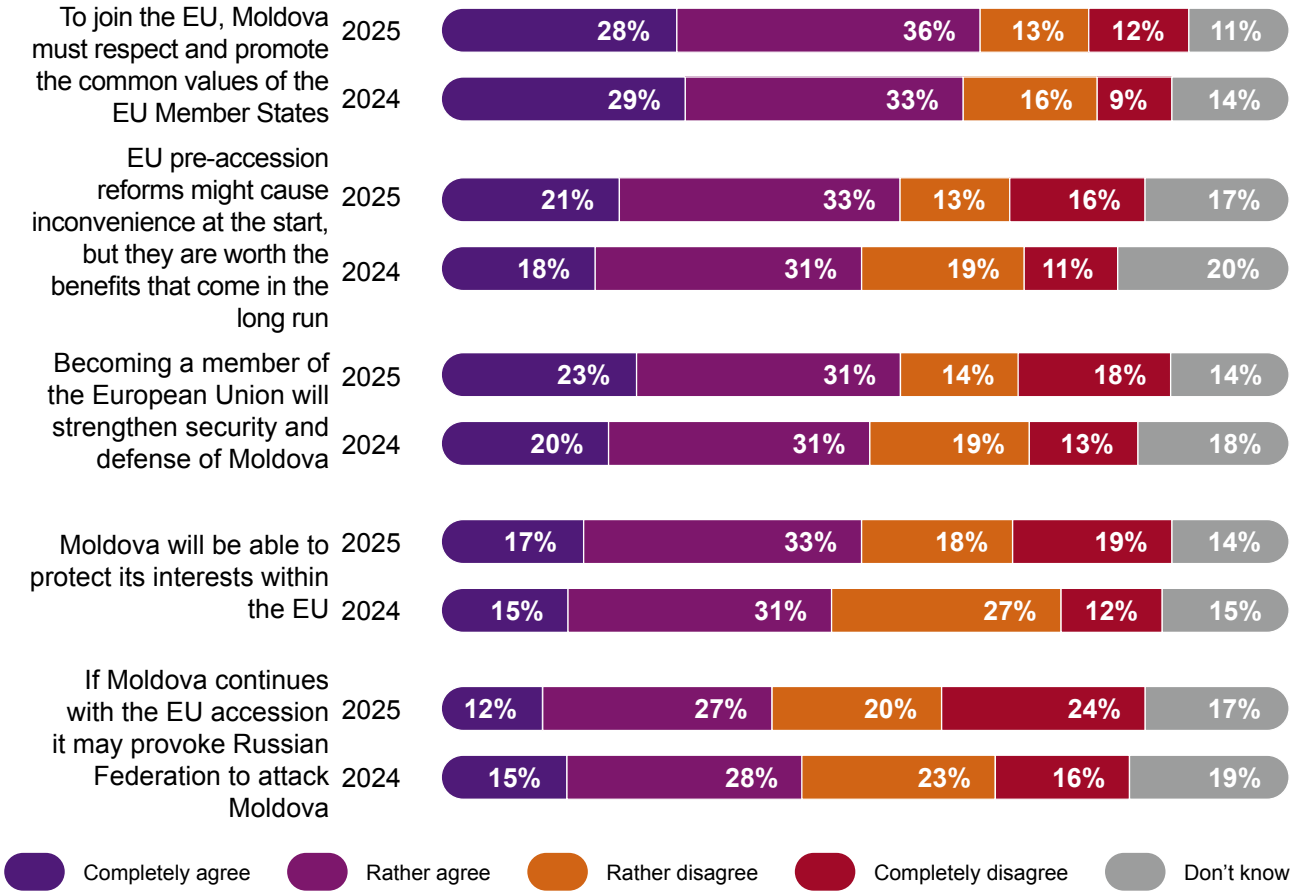
The cross-analysis of various indicators and demographic trends also reveals clearer trend patterns:

- Personal experience of having lived in the EU/USA is clearly associated with a more positive outlook. For example, 68% of those with EU experience support pre-accession reforms, even if they involve short-term inconveniences, for the sake of long-term benefits (compared to a 54% average).
- Younger respondents, those with higher levels of education, and individuals from the Central region or Chișinău generally tend to express positive views on most statements regarding the EU, whereas respondents from UTAG&Taraclia and the Northern regions tend to be more skeptical.
- The concern about the Russian Federation attacking Moldova if it continues its accession to the EU is higher among respondents who express support for joining the EU, or view NATO as positive for Moldova, or trust Moldova's information space, while those trusting Russian media perceive such attack as less likely. This suggests that trusted media narratives strongly influence security risk assessments.
- There is a very strong correlation between trust in Moldovan state institutions and confidence in the EU, raising the question of whether these positions on the EU are based on actual understanding of its functioning or primarily based on trust.

Just like with the issues discussed in previous chapters, a closer look reveals growing polarization here: positions of confidence about the EU intensify (more “completely agree”, fewer “rather agree”) while EU skeptics also adopt stronger stances. This trend is risky, as it pushes people toward clear-cut positions, making it rather difficult to initiate an open democratic dialogue and develop fact-based debate on the central issues, and encouraging more radical, often emotion-driven stances. For individuals who are currently less informed about the EU, this creates an environment in which FIMI (which primarily targets emotions and fears) sways the undecided more effectively than rational, fact-based arguments.

To counter such a trend, it is important to facilitate open public dialogue about the central issues related to Moldova and the European Union. This is achieved through addressing public concerns in a practical manner (in addition to general high-level discussion). It also requires providing hands-on solutions and communicating their impact on all levels, as well as ensuring transparency of the pre-accession processes to support trust.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION?



EU BENEFITS VS. FEARS: THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE AND INFORMATION SPACE

Roughly half of Moldovans believe that EU accession will benefit various social groups, including citizens in general, farmers, ordinary employees, private businesses, and state enterprises. At the same time, around 30% suppose that these groups will suffer negative effects due to the accession, while another 10-15% expect nothing to change. Compared to 2024, the proportion of positive expectations for most elements did not change significantly, while negative expectations increased by up to 10% and neutral positions decreased. Such a shift may reflect the impact of emotion-driven disinformation on swaying the neutral or undecided towards more negative positions, as discussed above.

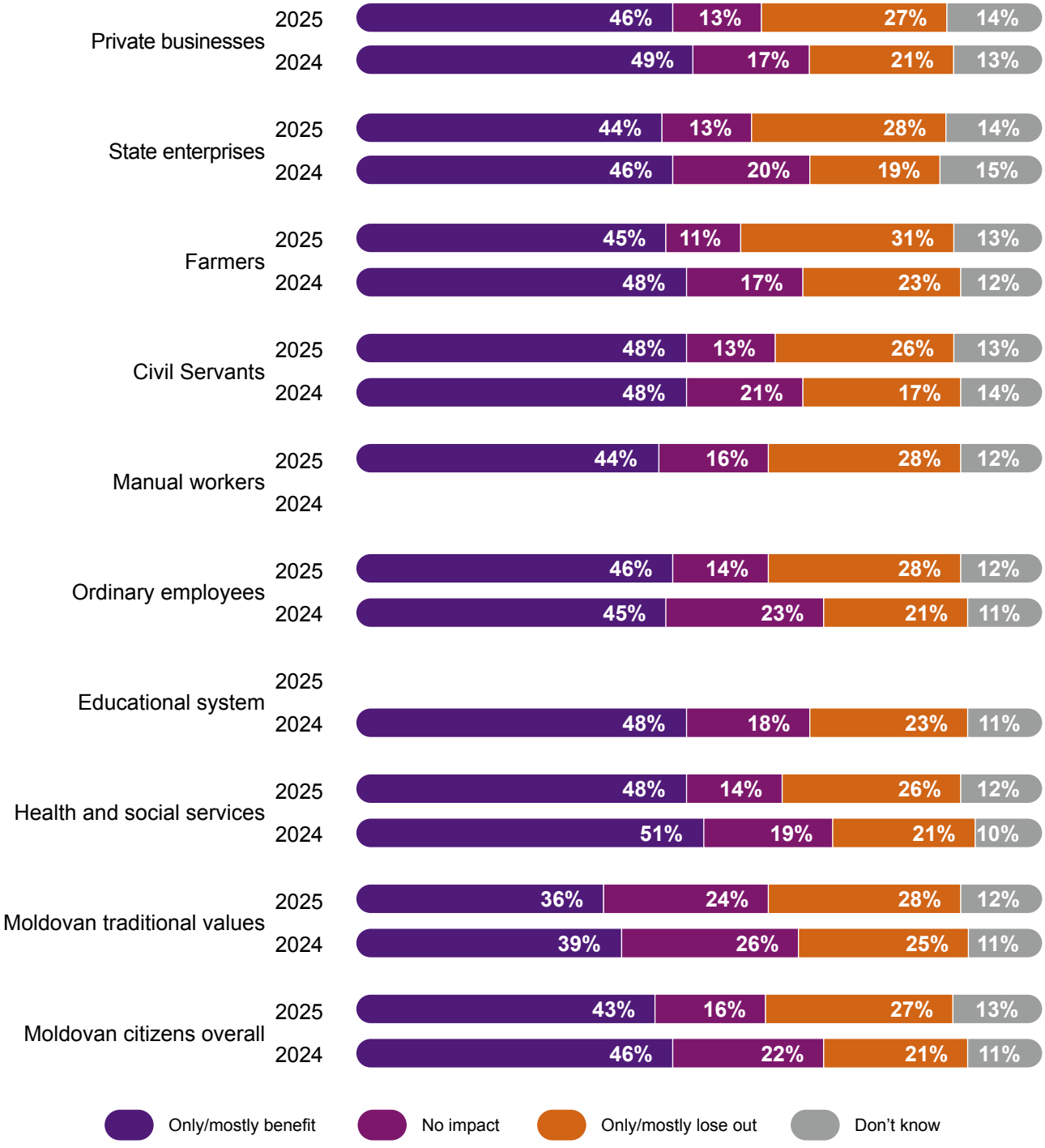
Both positive and negative expectations remain consistent across genders. Some differences are more pronounced across age groups, with younger generations tending to be more positive, and across regions, with Chișinău and the Central region showing considerably more positive views, while UTAG&Taraclia are the most negative. Expectations also appear to be significantly linked to first-hand experience with living in the EU/US. Those who have lived in the EU/US for at least six months hold more positive EU expectations, with approximately 60% anticipating benefits for all social groups surveyed, compared to ~30% among those with experience living in the Russian Federation.

This helps explain strong pro-EU support among the Moldovan diaspora in the EU, as seen in the October 2024 referendum, and shows that firsthand EU experience reinforces positive views and support for Moldova's membership. Notably, the Moldovan diaspora living in Russia (along with Turkey and Bulgaria) was one of the few groups where support for EU accession did not prevail.[7]

These trends likely reflect widespread negative EU narratives in the Russian information space and intensive 2024-2025 disinformation campaigns fueling anti-EU sentiment among Moldovans. For instance, expectations are least positive regarding the EU's impact on traditional Moldovan values, reflecting disinformation strategies that exploit emotional sensitivities by falsely claiming that EU membership will undermine Moldova and threaten its traditional values – despite there being no factual basis for such claims.

[7] Radio Europa Liberă Moldova

WHAT DO YOU THINK, AFTER THE ACCESSION TO THE EU, THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES IN MOLDOVA WILL BENEFIT OR SUFFER?



SOCIAL COHESION: TRUST, BELONGING AND AGENCY

Social cohesion is a fundamental pillar in building a united and resilient society – particularly in contexts marked by ethnic plurality, stresses the Concept of Strategic Communication of Moldova. Within the framework of the National Information Resilience Index, this metric seeks to identify the core values shared by the people of Moldova and to understand the beliefs and guiding principles that could serve as a common foundation for national unity and values, as well as trust-based behaviors, including cooperation and obeying democratically agreed rules and principles.

Socially cohesive societies are characterized by a strong sense of inclusion, belonging, recognition, participation, and legitimacy. Social cohesion reflects both the relationships between the state and its citizens and the interactions among various societal groups. It is underpinned by a shared set of attitudes and norms, such as:

- trust – mutual confidence that no party will exploit another's vulnerabilities;
- belonging – a shared sense of identity and place within society;
- agency – belief that our actions and choices matter in shaping our lives and surroundings.

These attitudes are not merely abstract; they manifest behaviorally in the ways people engage with one another and with institutions in everyday life, shaping a society that is resilient, inclusive despite ethnic or cultural differences, and unified around a common purpose. What is essential here is a strong awareness of the importance of everyone's personal engagement, and of how individual decisions contribute to achieving the desired changes and the future vision for Moldova.





SOCIAL COHESION IN MOLDOVA: KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **WHAT DOES IT REALLY TAKE FOR THE MOLDOVAN SOCIETY TO BE STRONG AND REMAIN COHESIVE?** While most Moldovans agree that a strong and socially cohesive state requires caring for the homeland – the nature and the environment of Moldova – respect the Moldovan government institutions and laws, work hard and pay taxes honestly, it's concerning that crucial collective responsibilities, such as crime intervention and protecting Moldova from its enemies, have declined in perceived importance compared to 2024.
- **NATIONAL PRIDE STRENGTHENED, PERCEIVED SECURITY ROSE – BUT ELECTORAL TRUST DECLINED.** Positive developments in increased perceived security, along with signs of a strengthening sense of community, are tainted by a somewhat decreased trust in the fairness of democratic elections in Moldova, which may become problematic in the long run. Declining trust in democratic processes weakens citizens' understanding of what impact each Moldovan's vote has on state and local decisions, thereby increasing the risk of election interference.
- **TRUST IS THE BACKBONE OF SOCIETY.** People trust institutions and information sources they experience directly, such as family, friends, and colleagues. Romanian-language Moldovan media and official statements from public authorities consistently rank as the most important and trusted information sources.

- **SOCIAL TRUST IS GROWING, BUT EMERGING REGIONAL "TRUST BUBBLES" ARE A RISK TO BE CONSIDERED.** Compared to last year, the social trust and overall trust towards the regions has increased in 2025. However, a closer look into regional trends shows that respondents from Chisinau actually trust the regions less than before, while the regions trust each other considerably more – suggesting a growing divide between the capital and the regions.
- **BUILDING AGENCY TO EMPOWER THE POPULATION – IT TAKES TIME AND PERSISTENCE.** Agency, or the perceived ability of individuals to influence how the Moldovan society functions, is a critical component of social cohesion. It reinforces key elements such as trust in institutions, civic participation, and a sense of belonging, while also supporting broader pillars like economic resilience and defense readiness.
- **DISINFORMATION AND THE INFORMATION SPACE ARE FACTORS TO BE RECKONED WITH.** Moldovans who view Russian Federation media as an important source of information are considerably more likely not to value living in a democratic society, have lower trust in political institutions, lower perceived security and agency. At the same time, they are likely to believe that they never encounter disinformation.





WHAT DOES IT REALLY TAKE FOR MOLDOVAN SOCIETY TO BECOME STRONG AND REMAIN COHESIVE?

National or state identity typically reflects one's sense of belonging to a particular state or nation. This identity can stem from shared cultural heritage, language, and traditions, from common liberal democratic principles, or from collective historical experiences within culturally and linguistically diverse populations. At the same time, it reflects a collective agreement of most, if not all, members of the society on the fundamental values and principles at the core of the society – sets the "rules of the game".

A strong national identity is essential for modern political success. It strengthens state security, enables good governance, supports economic growth, builds citizen trust, and makes liberal democracy viable.[8]

NIR Index results show that similarly to 2024, the values shared by the overwhelming majority and most associated with the strength of the Moldovan state and societal cohesion are caring for the nature and environment of Moldova, followed closely by the core principles of reliable democratic governance: paying taxes honestly, respecting governmental institutions and laws, participating in elections, and committing to daily work.

But what is particularly alarming, and worthy of attention, is the declining agreement on the importance of shared responsibility for defending the rule of law – such as intervening when someone is actually breaking the law, or defending Moldova from its enemies, including doing the compulsory military service. This may indicate a certain consumerist view of the relationship between the state and its citizens, where democracy, security and stability – achieved through the rule of law or state defense – are seen as a "service" provided by the state, rather than common values sustained both by governmental institutions and by each citizen of the state. Given the increased respect for the National Army as an institution, this may also indicate a trending expectation for the professionalization of defense, at the expense of public awareness of the role and responsibility each Moldovan citizen holds in contributing to national defense.

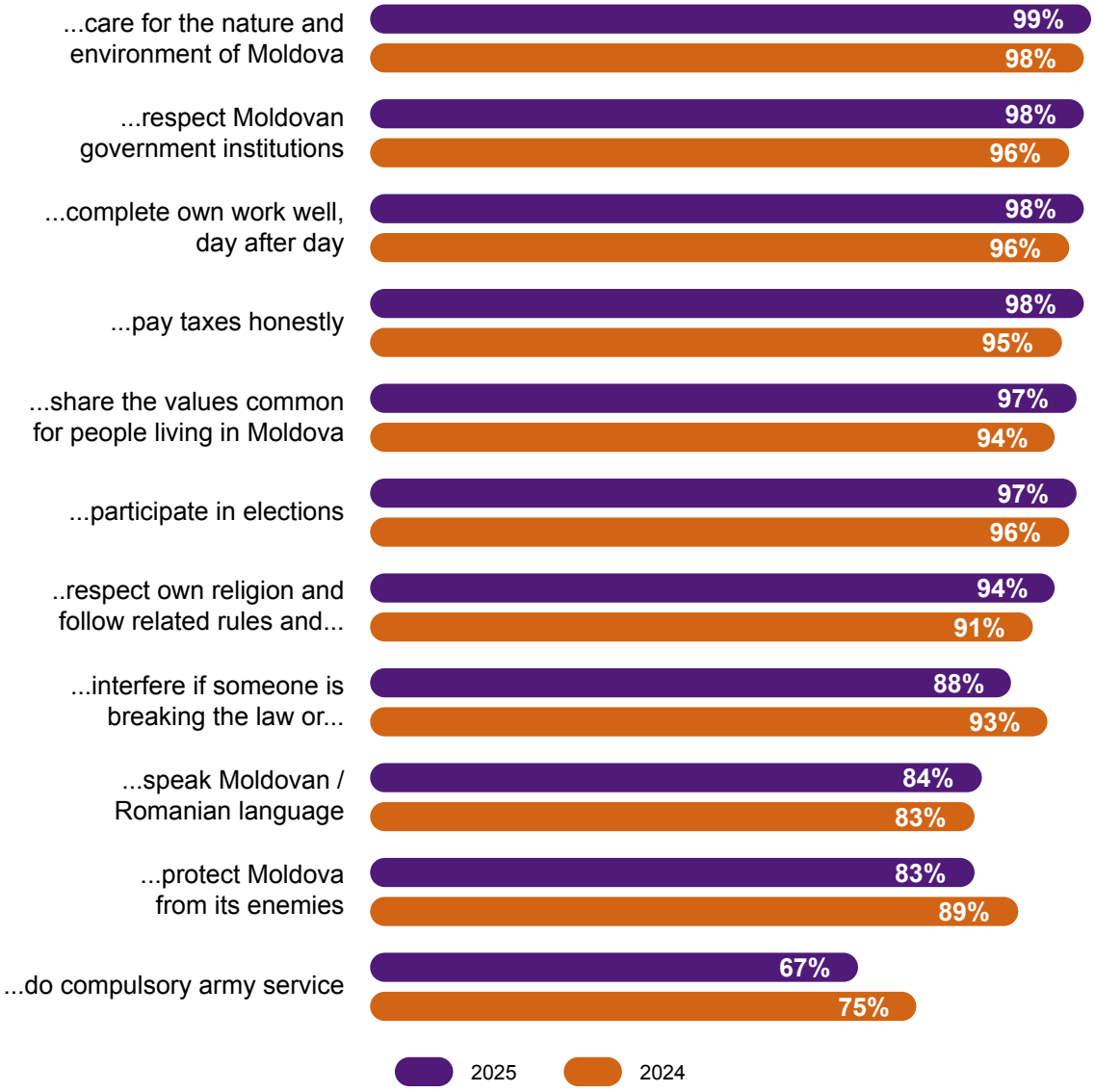
[8] Fukuyama, F. (2018) Why National Identity Matters. Journal of Democracy, Johns Hopkins University Press, Vol. 29, Nr. 4, pp. 5-15



Countering such a trend requires raising awareness of the importance of civic participation in sustaining the public goods enjoyed by everyone living in Moldova. It also requires increasing agency, or perception and understanding of how people can contribute. As a side-effect, higher agency is the way to increase institutional trust, as public institutions and services become less distant and abstract, and more understandable and transparent through direct personal experience.The strong positive sentiments toward Moldovan citizenship indicate a solid emotional bond and a potential for developing a distinctive national or state identity. At the same time, they may also indicate high expectations for the state to justify and uphold this sense of pride.

FOR THE MOLDOVAN STATE AND SOCIETY TO BECOME STRONG AND REMAIN COHESIVE, HOW IMPORTANT IS IT THAT ALL PEOPLE IN MOLDOVA...

very / rather important

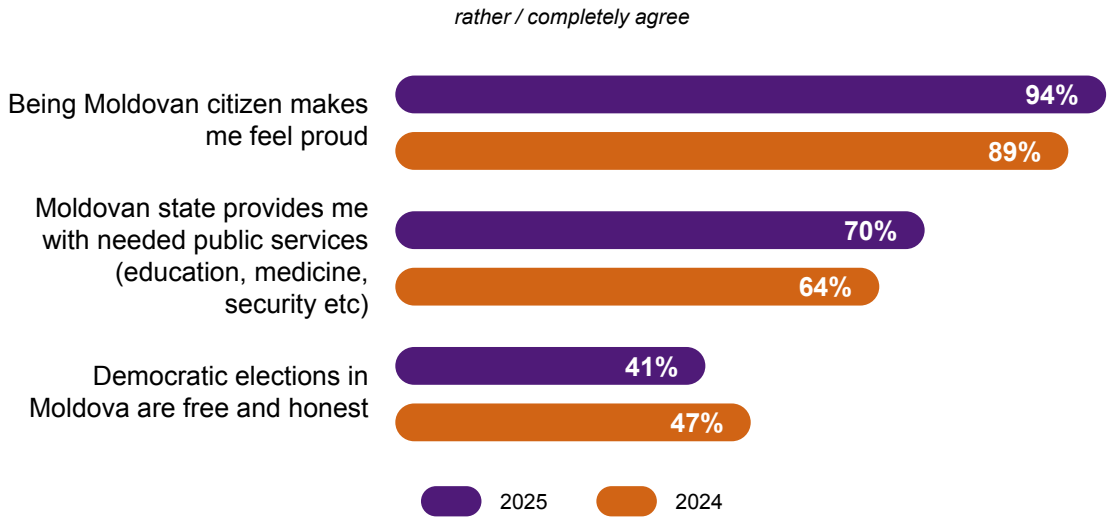


NATIONAL PRIDE STRENGTHENED, PERCEIVED SECURITY ROSE – BUT ELECTORAL TRUST DECLINED

Pride in being a Moldovan citizen – already exceptionally high (89%) in 2024 – has increased even further in 2025, to 94%, although its meaning varies among different groups, depending on their values.

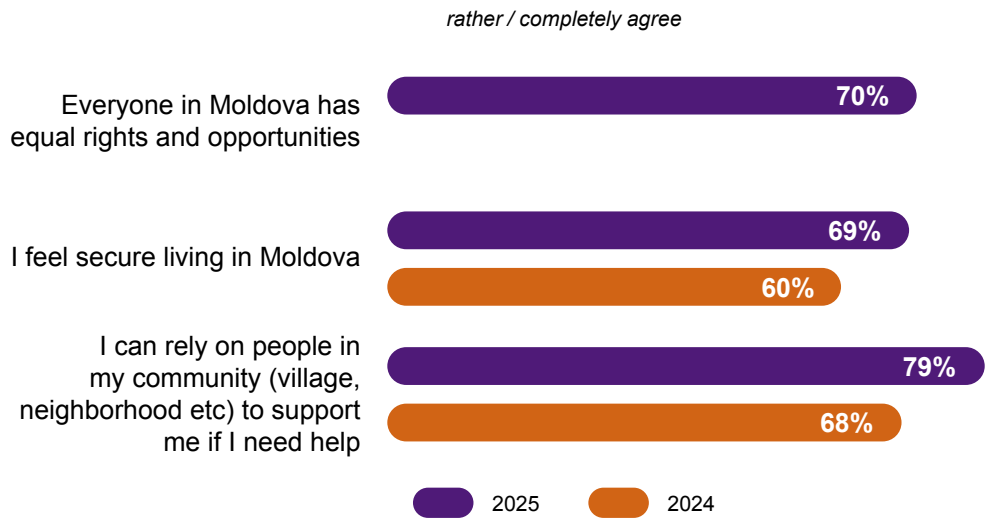
Positive trends in perceived security and in the understanding that the Moldovan state provides essential public services may result from intensive communication during the dual election years. Meanwhile, stronger confidence in receiving community help in times of need suggests that community cohesion is growing in Moldova.

Compared with 2024, the confidence that democratic elections in Moldova are free and honest decreased from 47% to 41% in 2025. Similarly, the number of people who consider it important to live in a democracy has changed somewhat – 61% of Moldovans consider it important (65% in 2024) and 14% consider it not important (10% in 2024). These changes warrant close attention, as trust in elections is fundamental to the functioning of a democratic society and to providing state institutions with a strong governance mandate.



Such a shift in trust in democratic elections may be due to a number of both internal and external factors:

- Both the 2024 and 2025 elections saw widespread cases of election interference by both Russian Federation FIMI and direct purchasing of electoral votes, which inevitably eroded trust in democratic processes. Coordinated malign efforts to influence targeted communities (citizens abroad, rural population, etc.) by introducing and exploiting sensitive topics tailored to these social groups also play a role. Perceptions regarding the fairness of the electoral process were shaped through a combination of hybrid and informational warfare tactics, including efforts to delegitimize and discredit the process itself, the political leadership, and the electoral authority.[9]
- At the same time, vote-buying is only possible when voters make the decision to sell their vote. Selling a vote is a symptom of insufficient understanding of what democracy means, how strongly each vote influences developments in Moldova, and how essential it is for every citizen to use their vote responsibly for democratic processes to function.
- On the other hand, considering how close the results of the 2024 EU referendum were, such decline in trust in democratic elections may reflect the emotional reaction of a substantial share of the Moldovan population whose vote ended up in the minority. In the 2025 elections, based on lessons learned, Moldovan institutions took serious steps to safeguard the electoral process from malign interference. Future research will show what effect this will have on trust in democratic elections.



[9] Divide, Delegitimize, Discredit. Tactical analysis of pro-Russian influence operations in the Republic of Moldova, September 2024-January 2025

MOLDOVA'S TRUST LANDSCAPE: PROXIMITY MATTERS, POLARIZATION GROWS

Trust forms a cornerstone of social cohesion, encompassing confidence in both interpersonal relationships and institutional structures, as well as faith in the reliability of information sources. This fundamental element acts as society's foundation. Trust frequently becomes the main target of disinformation campaigns, serving as an information manipulation object of hybrid warfare.

Analysis of trust in institutions and information sources in 2024-2025 shows:

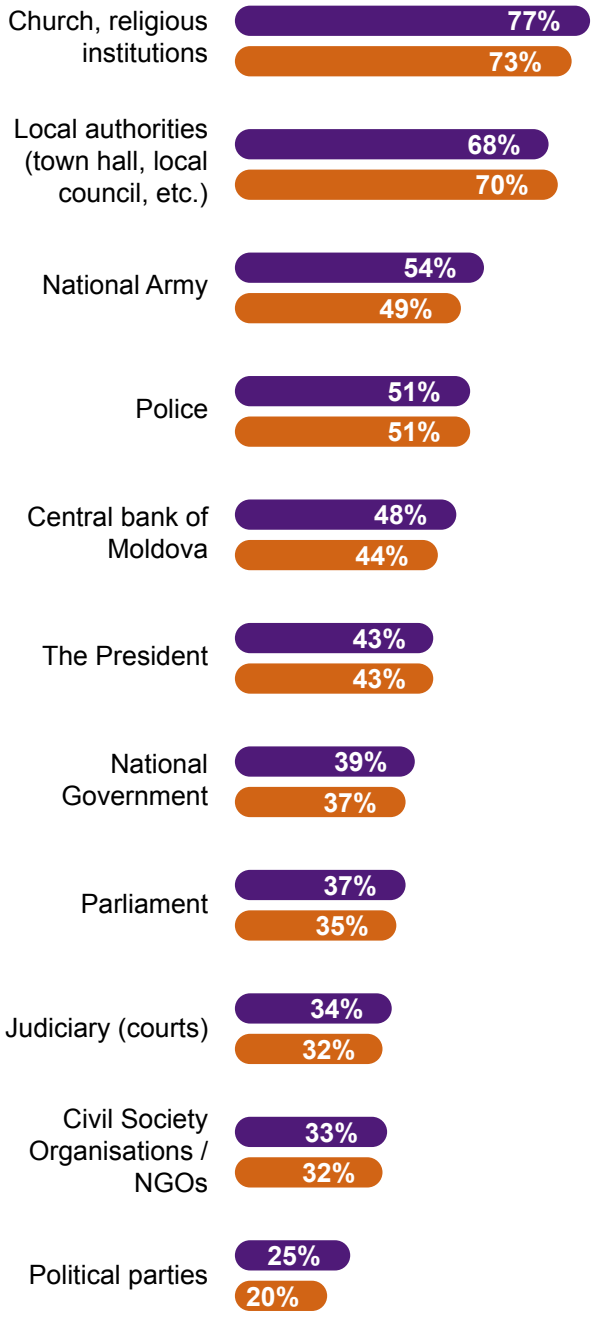
- Proximity and personal contact remain crucial for institutional trust, with distant organizations generating less confidence. The same applies to information sources. Local entities like churches and municipal authorities consistently earn significantly more trust than central government institutions, likely due to their community presence.
- Trust towards the Moldovan National Army increased substantially, placing it at the top of all central government institutions researched. This result likely stems from an effective combination of high-level strategic communication and skillful grassroot outreach by the National Army.
- Trust in political parties, although very low and the lowest among institutions researched, increased by 5%, while the share of those who expressed distrust dropped by 7%. This is likely to be the result of pre-election campaigning and communication that increased both awareness of what the parties are doing and perceived proximity.
- Overall trust in the President, the Parliament and the Government remained stable compared to 2024. However, a closer look reveals signs of polarization, with positions shifting towards stronger trust/distrust, as part of the overall trend also observed across other indicators.
- Moldovan national media and comments or statements by state officials rank among the top 3 most trusted information sources, and trust in them has increased since 2024. Still, they rank below relatives, friends and other personal contacts which are considered the most trusted sources. The share of people trusting Russian Federation media increased from 32% to 36%, it is now at the same level as other international media (37%, no significant change from 2024).



TRUST IN INFORMATION CHANNELS

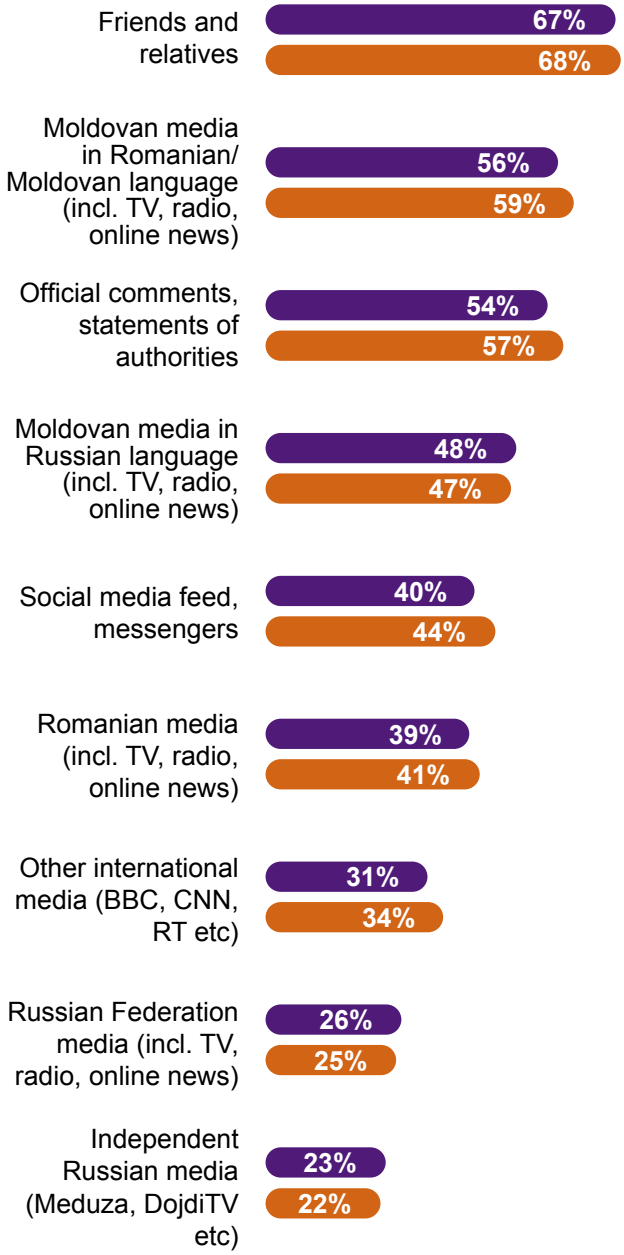
TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU TRUST EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS OR INSTITUTIONS

rather / completely trust



TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU TRUST THE INFORMATION YOU ENCOUNTER IN EACH OF THESE INFORMATION SOURCES?

rather / completely trust



2025 2024

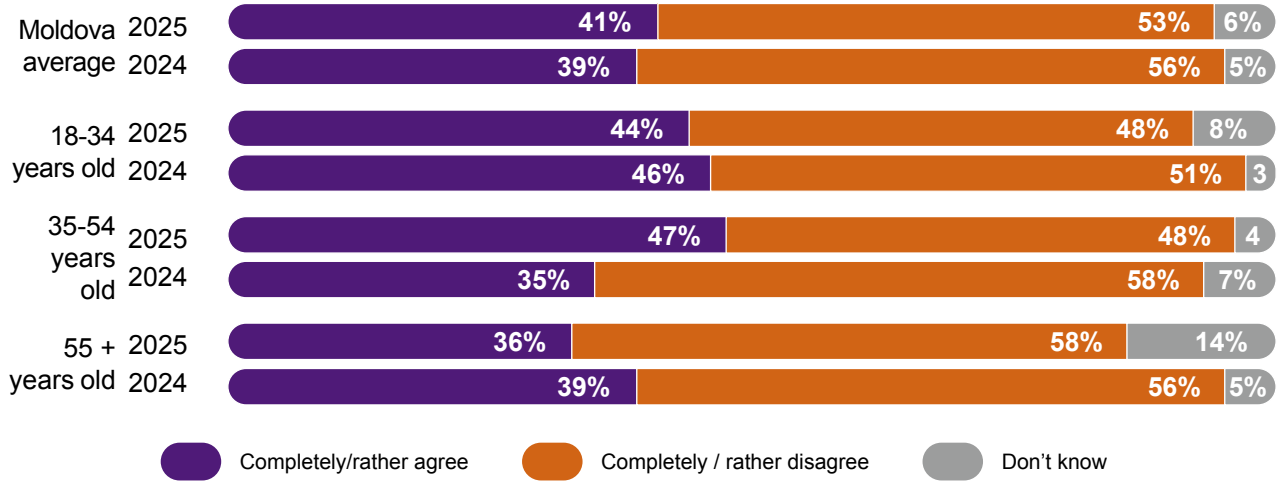
BUILDING AGENCY TO EMPOWER THE POPULATION – IT TAKES TIME AND PERSISTENCE

Agency – the perceived ability to influence society – is a key predictor of social cohesion. Stronger agency supports awareness of how personal choices, be it participation in elections or following the laws and rules of society, impact the society and the wellbeing of its members, while low agency increases the risk of social tension. In 2025, 41% of the Moldovan population perceive that they can impact how things work in Moldovan society – a small change compared to 39% a year ago.

The insights of the NIR Index result analysis regarding the level of agency:

- Higher agency is linked to higher appreciation of democratic governance and higher trust in all major state institutions. It also correlates with higher perceived security and life satisfaction.
- People with higher agency are more likely to express readiness to defend Moldova and share the belief that that Moldova can be defended in case of an external attack.
- Higher agency correlates with greater readiness for action – including emigration high-agency individuals are more likely to say that they would "take their family and leave" if Moldova were invaded. The solution here is empowerment through clear communication, showing how each Moldovan can improve their lives, strengthen security, and build a stronger Moldova.
- People with higher agency are more likely to feel connected to Europe, while those with weaker sense that they can impact things in Moldova are more likely to express connection to Russia.
- People with higher agency are more likely to consume and trust Romanian-language Moldovan media, while those who say they consume and trust Russian Federation media are likely to say that they have little influence over how Moldovan society functions.

I FEEL THAT I CAN IMPACT HOW THINGS WORK IN MOLDOVAN SOCIETY



In 2025, on average 41% of respondents agree that they feel they can impact how things work in Moldovan society, while 53% disagree. The agency is higher (47%) among the middle age group of people aged 35-54. It is notable that in this group specifically, agency has increased from 35% in 2024. On average, agency is also higher in the Center region, in rural areas, and among people with higher economic wellbeing. It is lowest among respondents aged 55+, especially women, among whom 61% feel that they have no impact on things.

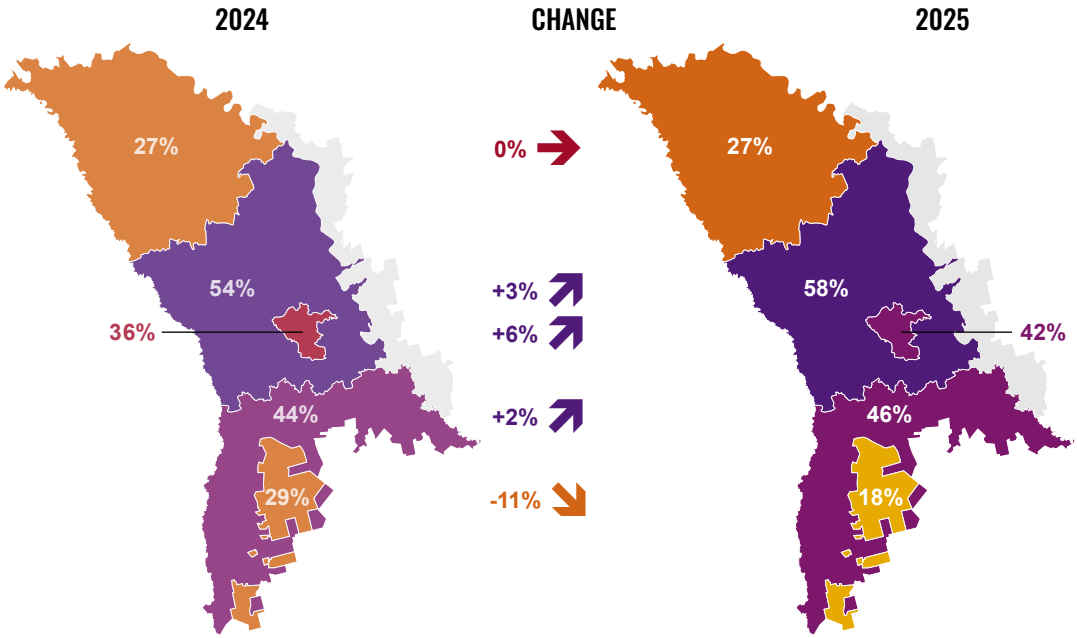
A deeper analysis shows that the dynamics of agency differ across regions: compared with 2024, the level of agency in 2025 decreased in UTAG&Taraclia from 29% to 18%, while it increased slightly in Chișinău.

4% of the Moldovan population feel that their group is discriminated against in 2025 (down from 5% the previous year). Among this 4%, the most commonly cited reason is discrimination based on language, which rose significantly to 40%, up from 22% (of this 5%) a year earlier.

The opposite of agency is perceived discrimination – the feeling of being treated unjustly, often implying an inability to change the situation. Many narratives in Russian Federation media specifically aim to reinforce the feeling of powerlessness and stimulate perceived discrimination. The decreasing agency in some Moldovan regions, along with the increased perception of language-based discrimination, is thus likely evidence of the impact the targeted malign narratives in the media environment have on people's perceptions.

I FEEL THAT I CAN IMPACT HOW THINGS WORK IN MOLDOVAN SOCIETY

Completely/rather agree



DISINFORMATION AND THE INFORMATION SPACE ARE FACTORS TO BE RECKONED WITH

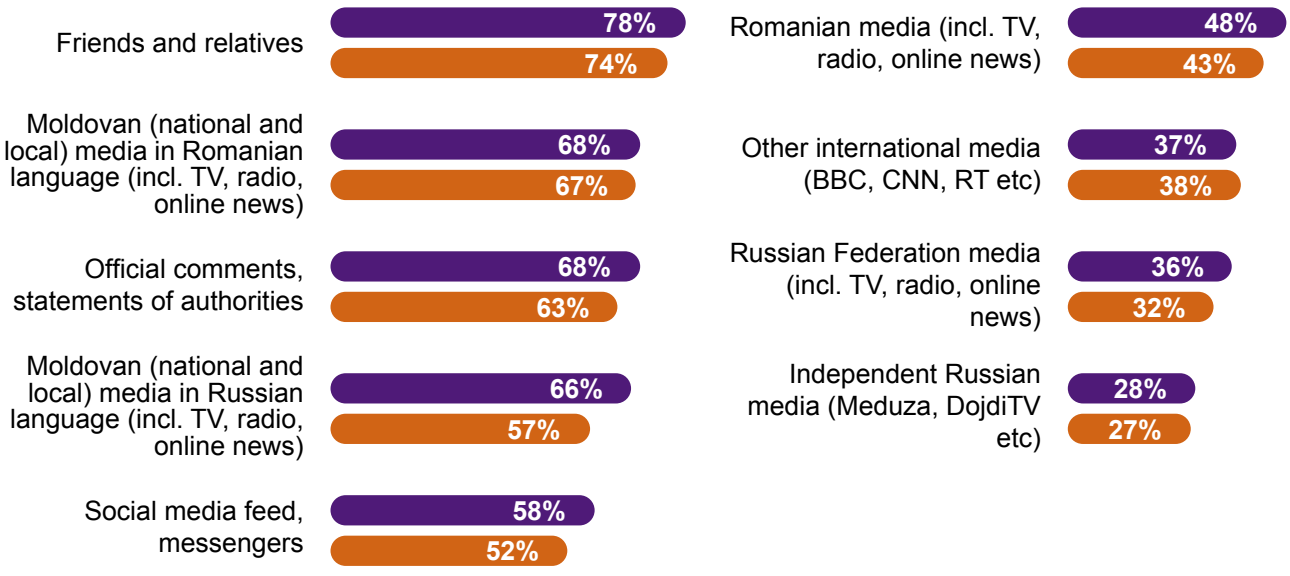
Compared to 2024, the perceived importance of practically all information sources has increased, likely reflecting the impact of a year situated between two major elections and a referendum. The following trends in the importance of media can be observed in 2025:

- Romanian-language Moldovan media is more likely to be considered an important information source by those who value democratic governance, have stronger trust in state institutions, political parties and NGO-s, are more strongly connected to Europe and less to Russia, perceive NATO as rather positive for Moldova, and have higher perceived security and life satisfaction.
- Russian Federation media is more likely to be considered an important information source by people who do not consider it important to live in a democratically governed country, have weaker trust in state institutions, feel a stronger connection to Russia and a weaker connection to Europe, have weaker trust in Romanian-language Moldovan media, have lower life satisfaction and are likely to experience economic difficulties, see the EU and NATO as rather negative for Moldova, while seeing Russia as positive.

This is a clear example of the connection between the information space respondents consider important and their perceptions and positions on strategically important issues for Moldova – from institutional trust to regional and international partnerships.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING SOURCES OF INFORMATION OR NEWS TO YOU?

very / rather important



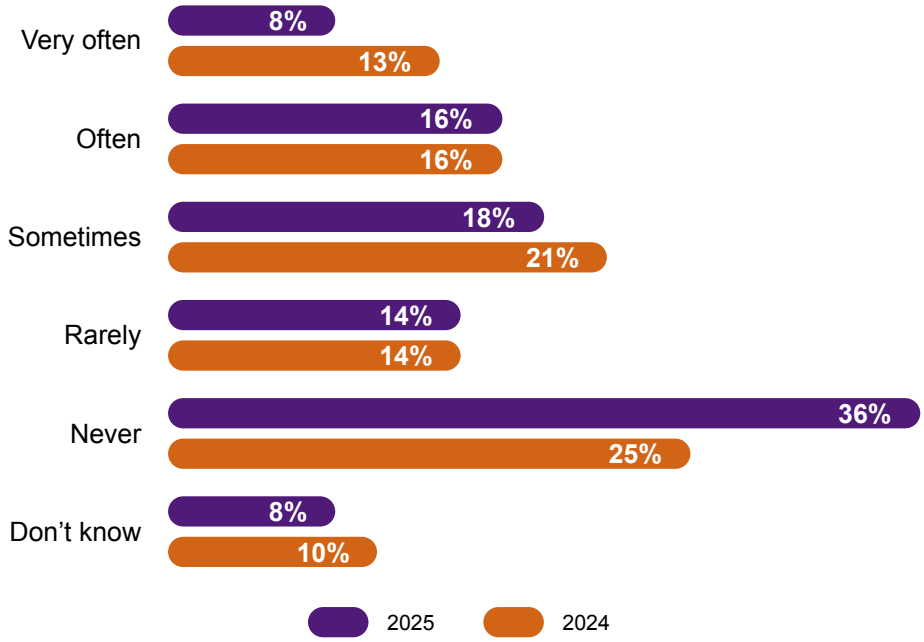
In 2025, only 8% of Moldova's population think that they are exposed to disinformation very often (down from 13% in 2024), while 16% say they encounter it often. Meanwhile, 18% believe they are exposed to it only sometimes, 14% that they encounter it rarely, and a total of 36% think that they are never exposed to disinformation. The latter group increased by 11% compared to 2024. In UTAG&Taraclia, a total of 86% of respondents claim they are never exposed to disinformation – more than double the national average for Moldova. In 2024 it was 35%, which did not differ significantly from the average.

People who respond "never" regarding encountering disinformation:

- Respond "I don't know" to questions about Europe considerably more often than average, while also being more likely to feel a connection to Russia.
- are more likely to consume and trust Russian Federation media, while less likely to consider Romanian-language Moldovan media or official statements by authorities as important, and are more likely to respond "I don't know" when asked about trust.

This suggests a trend of trusted media sources becoming a matter of choice rather than merit. In contexts of high uncertainty, when it is difficult to decide what to believe, people may choose to trust a single media source without questioning it, while disregarding all others, seeking to create a sense of stability. If the information people receive from their preferred media sources is reinforced within their communication circles, the effect of echo chambers can strengthen this trend further, leading individuals to deny any exposure to disinformation.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK THAT YOU HAVE BEEN PERSONALLY EXPOSED TO DISINFORMATION AND FAKE NEWS OVER THE PAST 7 DAYS?



ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Economic resilience is one of the core elements of the foundational concept[10] guiding the work based on the national security strategy and efforts to build the overall resilience of Moldovan society, serving as the basis for sustained national prosperity and stability. Moldova's concept of strategic communication emphasizes diversification, innovation, and sustainable growth as key development catalysts. The Concept highlights the importance of accurate communication regarding the economic policies and initiatives of the government and strategic partners, viewing it as crucial for building a climate for a dynamic and robust business environment.

A nation's economic resilience is based on the ability of its citizens, families or households, and businesses to endure, adapt to, and recover from economic shocks or disruptions, while flexibly adapting to changing conditions. Strong adaptive mechanisms and flexible strategies help to collectively form the backbone of national economic stability and growth.

Awareness of the economic policies – their aspirations and the impact of their implementation on state, regional and individual levels – needs to be linked to clear and transparent communication of how the institutions are implementing these policies. Strong confidence and trust in institutions require trust in fair and transparent use of public funds, which in turn depends on awareness of how government resources are allocated and clear messaging about their impact on local communities and individuals. Effective and proactive communication is crucial to building awareness and trust, which is at the core of the principles governing the activities of CSCCD.

[10] Concept for strategic communication and countering disinformation, information manipulation and foreign interference, 2024-2028





ECONOMIC RESILIENCE IN MOLDOVA: KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **LIFE SATISFACTION IS UP; FUTURE EXPECTATIONS ARE UNCLEAR.** More than half of Moldovans say they are satisfied with life, which is a more than 10% increase compared to last year. But when it comes to expectations for the future, the proportion of Moldovans anticipating a change for the worse or expressing uncertainty of what to expect slightly increased, while the proportion expecting no change declined. Negative or unclear expectations make people vulnerable to critical messages, including FIMI, and may reflect their lack of understanding of or confidence in current developments in Moldova.
- **HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR ECONOMIC POLICY – HOW TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE REALIZED?** Public support for the core principles of the economic policy of Moldova (e.g. innovation, diversification, infrastructure, energy security) is high and has grown since 2024, but the view that the economic changes and developments in Moldova are on the right track, suggesting low awareness of the practical impact and potential of these economic policies for the population.
- **MOLDOVA'S BRAIN DRAIN CHALLENGE: YOUTH MOBILITY VS. ECONOMIC RESILIENCE.** 67% of Moldovans would stay in Moldova and do whatever it takes to find a job there, compared with 23% who would look for work abroad. At the same time, among the younger generation the choice is nearly split 50/50.
- **ACTIVE TRANSITION: GROWING AWARENESS AND INTOLERANCE OF CORRUPTION.** Public attitudes towards corruption, already strongly negative in 2024, are becoming even more black-and-white in 2025, with 73% of the population rating informal payments a full 10 points out of 10 as the factor holding Moldova back and blocking its development. Negative attitudes toward corruption remain consistent across all major demographic groups.
- **MOLDOVA'S ECONOMIC CROSSROADS: EU SUPPORT IS STEADY AMID GROWING POLARIZATION.** Half of Moldovans support the country's economic alignment with the EU, while less than a third favor alignment with the Russian Federation. Compared to 2024, the positions on economic alignment have become more entrenched among both EU and Russia supporters.

LIFE SATISFACTION IS UP; FUTURE EXPECTATIONS ARE UNCLEAR

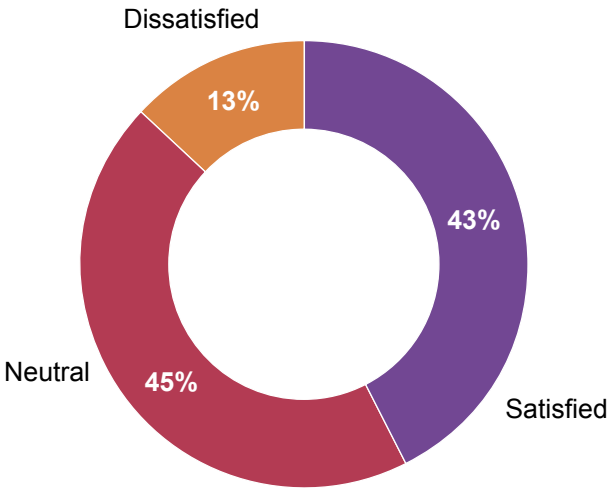
Life satisfaction is an important indicator of overall wellbeing, positively influencing physical and mental health as well as social relationships – factors essential for the successful development of both individuals and society. Over half of Moldovans report being satisfied with life in 2025 – a 10% increase from 43% in 2024.

Life satisfaction is highest:

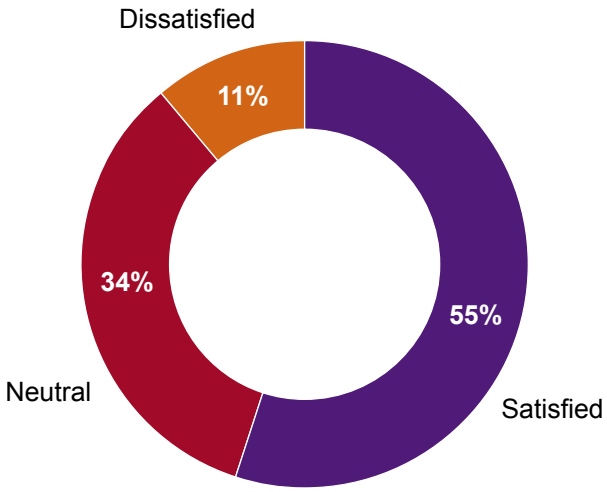
- among the younger age group of 18-34, especially males;
- among people with greater economic stability, more likely in the Center region of Moldova, in rural areas.

It is considerably below average among people with lower income and more economic difficulties, among pensioners and ethnic minorities.

LIFE SATISFACTION: 2024



LIFE SATISFACTION: 2025



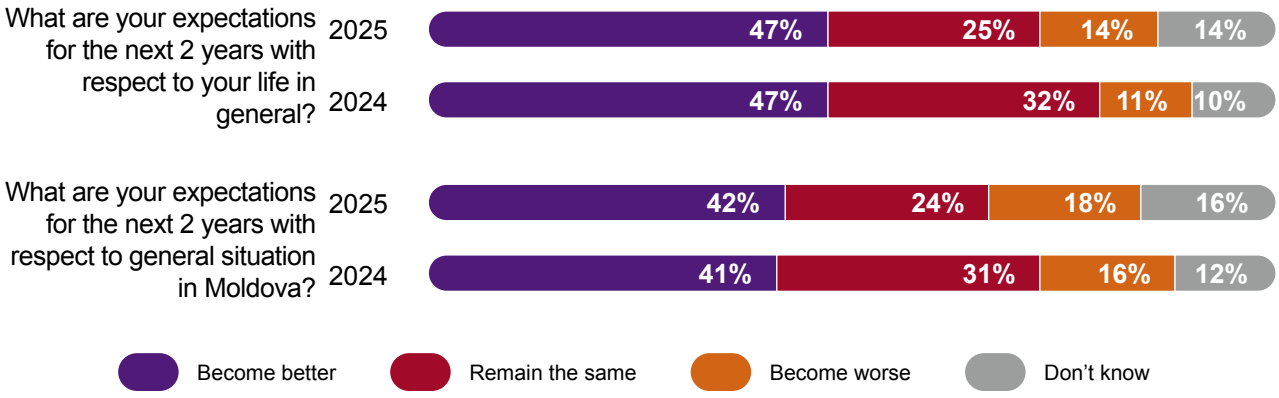
While life satisfaction increased, expectations for the future grew murkier. Although the proportions of those expecting improvement (47%) or decline remained steady from 2024, the share expecting no change dropped from one-third to one-quarter, while uncertainty ("don't know") responses increased.

Future expectations vary sharply by region. Center and Chisinau are far more optimistic, with 55-58% expecting positive changes and only 7-17% anticipating decline, compared to UTAG&Taraclia, where 31% expect change for the worse in their personal life, while 40% fear change for the worse on the national level and 38% are uncertain. Only 23% expect personal improvement and 18% national progress. The North region shows a similar but milder trend.

This stark contrast in future expectations stems from various factors:

- More positive personal and national outlooks correlate with higher agency, suggesting that people who understand the current developments in Moldova and recognize their personal influence on them are also more likely to believe these changes will be beneficial.
- Positive future outlooks are linked to stronger institutional trust, pro-EU/NATO stance, security confidence, and belief that Moldova can be defended, while negative outlooks tend to correlate with the opposite views, suggesting vulnerability to messages against these strategic priorities of Moldova.
- Positive expectations correlate with reliance on Moldovan media and reduced importance of Russian media, while trust in Russian media correlates with negativity, suggesting the latter has a substantial influence on people's assessment of Moldova's strategic choices and their impact on their future perspectives.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE



HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR ECONOMIC POLICY – HOW TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE REALIZED?

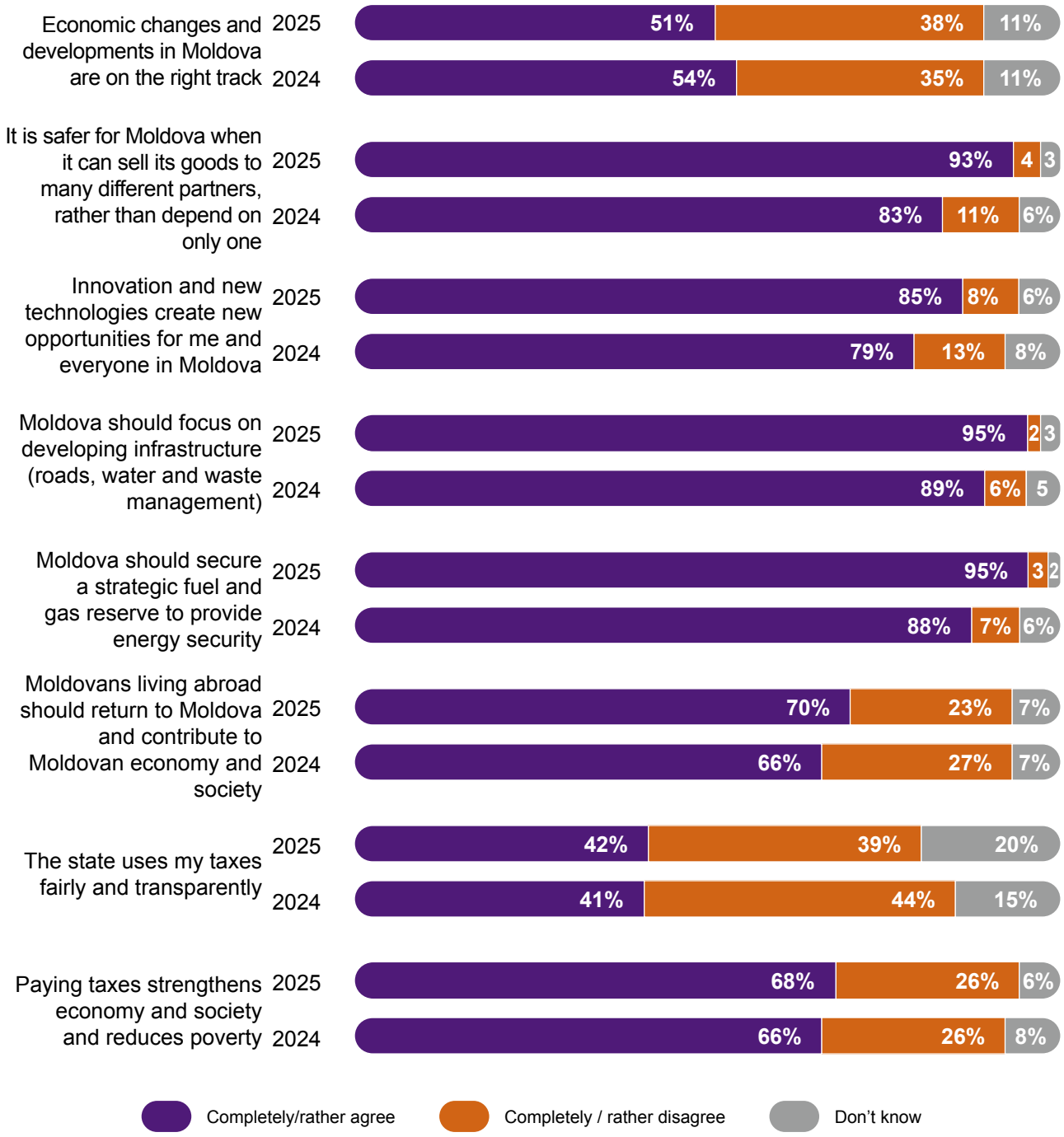
Compared to 2024 there has been an increase in public support for diversification principles (particularly diversifying trade partners), as well as innovation, infrastructure development, and energy security, the support rising from already high levels to 85%-95%. Agreement with these principles remains consistently high across all demographic groups regardless of background or worldview.

At the same time, when asked whether they believe Moldova's economic changes are on the right track, only 51% of respondents expressed agreement, indicating a significantly lower level of confidence.

- Agreement is higher among the younger age groups of 18-34 and in the Center region, while significantly lower in the North and UTAG&Taraclia.
- Higher agreement aligns with placing value in democratic governance, stronger institutional trust, and feeling closer to Europe (67%), while those feeling closer to Russia show much lower agreement (31%).
- Views on whether economic policy is on the right track strongly correlate with personal financial situations – 69% of those living comfortably and 60% of those managing on current income agree, compared to only 35% of those facing economic difficulties.

The stark contrast between support for economic principles versus Moldova's economic developments suggests that while most Moldovans agree with the policy directions, their personal experiences, economic situations, and information environment influence how they judge current implementation. Given Moldova's economic turbulence stemming from Russia's war against Ukraine and the Russian tactics of exploiting economic grievances to influence the population, building awareness of economic policy aspirations, ongoing projects, and tangible benefits is essential to counter both present difficulties and hostile information operations.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS...

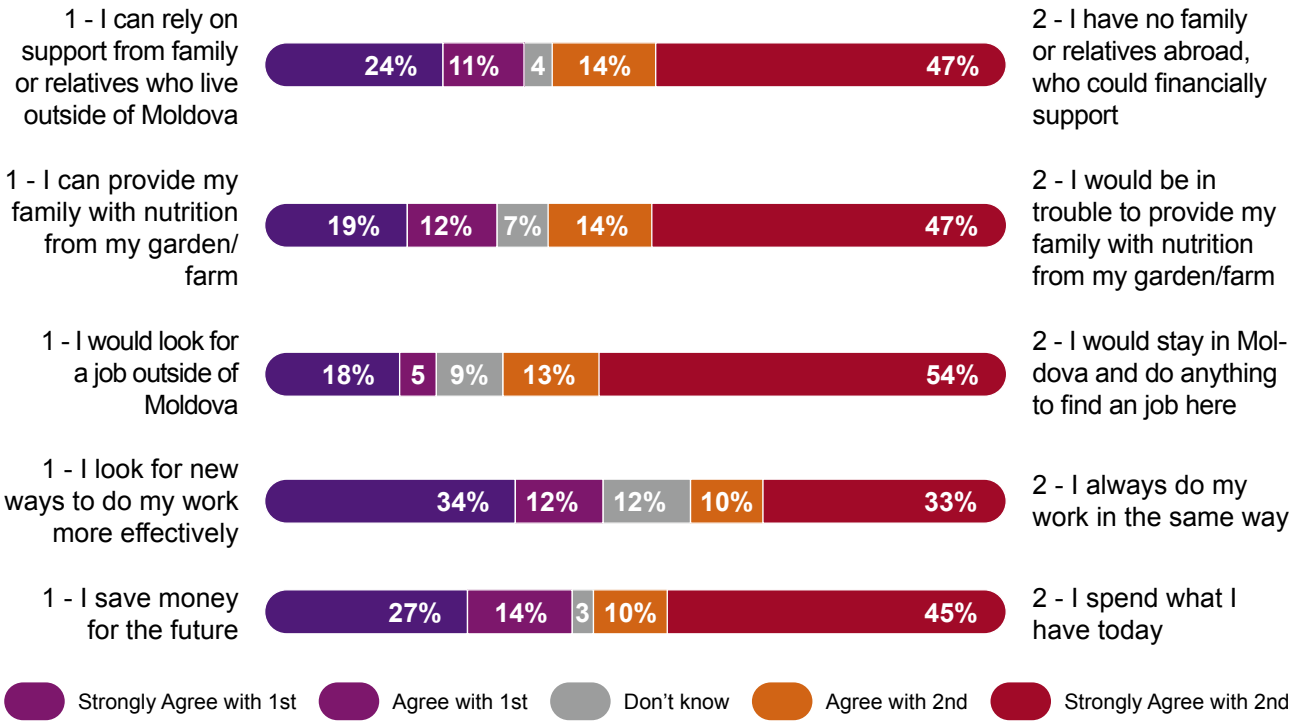


MOLDOVA'S BRAIN DRAIN CHALLENGE: YOUTH MOBILITY VS. ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

67% of the population would stay in Moldova and do whatever it takes to find employment there. Significant age differences exist – 74% of those 55+ would stay, compared to 50% of 18–34-year-olds. Geographically, Gagauzia shows the strongest commitment, with 85% willing to stay, while among Chisinau residents the share is 60%.

Notably, income level, subjective economic wellbeing, and institutional trust showed no statistically significant relationship with the willingness to stay in Moldova in the event of losing a stable income. However, perceived discrimination – the feeling of being treated unjustly for reasons such as language, ethnicity, or disability – was significantly related. Namely, those reporting experiences of discrimination were less likely to stay and more likely to express uncertainty by responding "I don't know."

Age patterns align with typical labor mobility trends – older generations tend to be more settled whereas younger ones are more mobile. While the fact that half of the most promising young people are declaring a commitment to stay in Moldova signals positive potential for economic resilience and national development, the younger generation's higher mobility could become an advantage if leveraged to attract internationally experienced talent back to the country. To capitalize on this opportunity, a closer investigation is required.

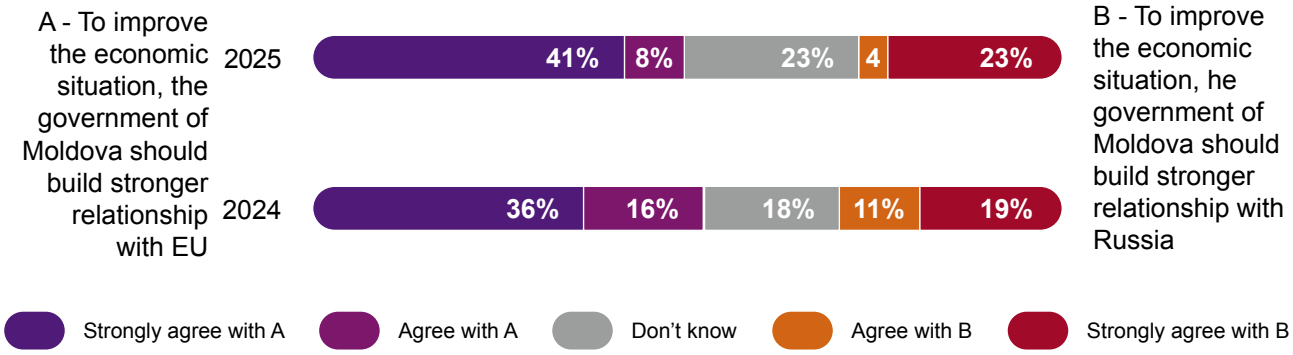


MOLDOVA'S ECONOMIC CROSSROADS: EU SUPPORT IS STEADY AMID GROWING POLARIZATION

50% of respondents support economic alignment with the European Union to improve the economic situation in Moldova, showing little change from the 52% in 2024. Support for economic alignment with Russia (27%) did not change significantly either, from 29% in 2024. 23% of Moldovans do not take a clear position on this question, an increase from 18% the year before. Compared to 2024, positions on economic alignment have become more entrenched among the supporters of both the EU and Russia, likely due to electoral pressures demanding clearer stances. This shift reinforces the broader trend toward societal polarization.

The following trends can be observed regarding support for the economic alignment with the EU:

- Support is stronger among the younger generation (59% EU support); in Center regions (67%) and Chisinau (60%) vs. UTAG&Taraclia (11%); among respondents with higher education (59%), higher income, and stronger economic wellbeing;
- Respondents with experience living in the EU express higher levels of support – 63% of them favor economic alignment with the EU. Notably, those with experience living in Russia show nearly equal support for EU alignment (36%) and Russian alignment (38%).
- Support for economic alignment with the EU correlates with greater appreciation for democratic governance, greater institutional trust, higher sense of agency and security, and stronger backing for EU membership.



ACTIVE TRANSITION: GROWING AWARENESS AND INTOLERANCE OF CORRUPTION

Public attitudes towards corruption, already strongly negative in 2024, are becoming even more black-and-white in 2025, with 73% of the population rating informal payments a full 10 points out of 10 as the factor holding Moldova back and blocking its development. Negative attitudes toward corruption remain consistent across all major demographic groups.

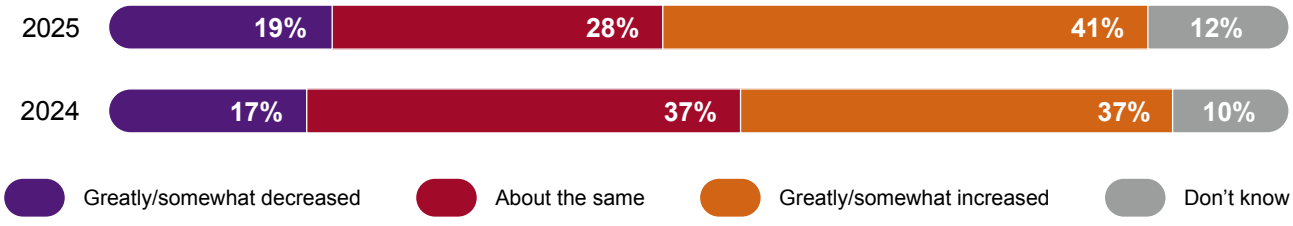
At the same time, despite the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index' (CPI)[11] score showing a steady decline of corruption in Moldova since 2020, the NIRI results indicate that the proportion of people perceiving an increase in corruption over the past year has actually grown from 37% to 41%. The share of those thinking it is about the same has decreased from 37% to 28%, while 19% think it has declined.

The perception of increasing corruption is linked to:

- economic wellbeing and life satisfaction – weaker wellbeing/lower satisfaction correlates with stronger perception of growing corruption;
- information space – Russian Federation media consumers are more likely to perceive growing corruption (56%) vs. Moldovan Romanian-language media consumers (33%);
- regional differences – highest in UTAG&Taraclia (74%), lowest in Chisinau (35%), likely intertwined with information space patterns.

Upticks in perceived corruption often reflect heightened awareness and reduced tolerance of informal practices rather than actual corruption growth. As people become more critical of previously accepted behaviors, they notice and report more corruption. Media coverage educates but also reinforces corruption perceptions. Transparency and anti-corruption efforts take time, with results visible only long-term.

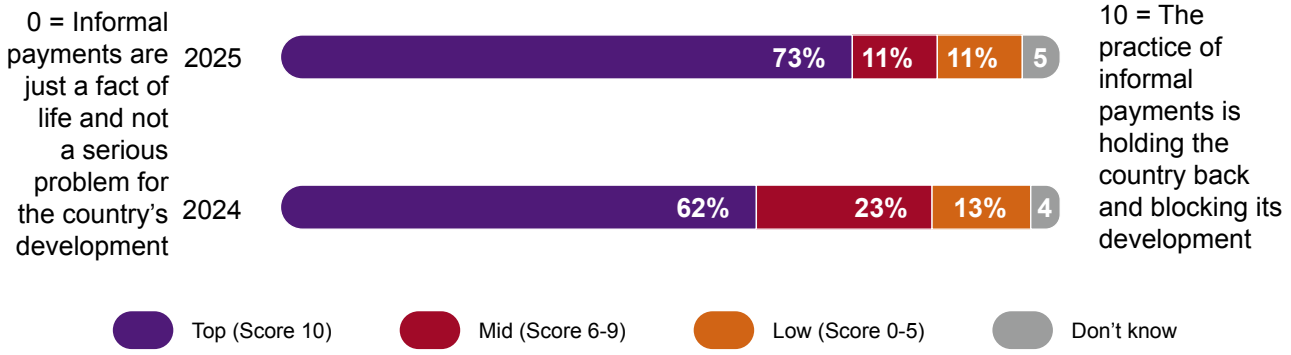
HOW HAS THE LEVEL OF CORRUPTION CHANGED IN MOLDOVA OVER THE PAST YEAR?



[11] Corruption Perception Index: Moldova

FIMI strategies aimed at eroding public trust in governmental institutions often also focus on the issue of corruption. Remarkable correlation between the consumption of Russian Federation media and respondents' perceptions around corruption tend to confirm that high perception of increased corruption in Moldova may be partially due also to heightened information interference during elections.

Meaningful cultural change requires continued targeted transparency reforms, especially where central public investments lack visible local impact. This must include recognizing and persistently communicating positive examples at all levels while giving crucial regional attention to countering strong FIMI influence in affected areas.



STRENGTHENING THE DEFENSE SECTOR

Comprehensive defense and security infrastructure serves as the cornerstone for protecting national sovereignty and neutralizing external threats while maintaining territorial integrity. The strengthening of national defense capabilities and security institutions, combined with transparent communication about defense policies and strategic initiatives, builds crucial public consensus that aligns with core national interests – a principle emphasized in the Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation Framework 2024-2028.

As articulated in the Presidential Vision for Moldova's National Security Strategy, an effective defense and security apparatus is fundamental not only for protecting citizens and the national economy but also for establishing the stable foundation necessary for sustainable economic prosperity. Strong security capabilities create a protective environment that enables economic development, ensures reliable public service delivery, safeguards critical infrastructure, and maintains the resilience of essential national systems. Moreover, robust security frameworks attract foreign direct investment and create conditions conducive to encouraging the Moldovan diaspora's return, contributing to demographic and economic revitalization.

Security represents a collective public good that requires shared investment from all citizens and institutions within Moldova, generating mutual benefits that strengthen the entire society. This shared responsibility model emphasizes that national security extends beyond military considerations to encompass economic stability, social cohesion, and democratic resilience.

This analysis examines critical elements necessary for fostering public understanding and garnering support for Moldova's defense and security objectives, including citizen awareness of national security developments, confidence in security policies and strategic directions, and trust in the institutions responsible for safeguarding the nation's interests and democratic values.





STRENGTHENING THE DEFENSE SECTOR IN MOLDOVA: KEY HIGHLIGHTS

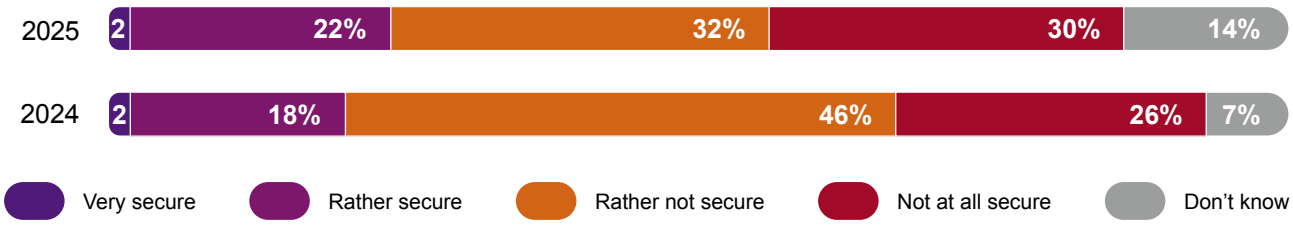
- **SECURITY PERCEPTION IMPROVED, BUT ANXIETY ALSO ROSE.** While the overall national security perception in Moldova shows signs of improvement, the polarizing trends are evident here as well: among less secure members of society, the proportion of those feeling “not at all secure” has increased.
- **SUPPORT FOR PARTNERSHIPS IS GROWING, BUT PARTNERS NEED TO BE DEFINED.** Only 30% of Moldovans believe it is possible to defend Moldova in case of an attack, no change from 2024. While 78% support building defense partnerships with countries and unions that would help Moldova in case of an attack, it is important to note that opinions about the nature of these partnerships can vary widely.
- **TRUST IN THE NATIONAL ARMY GROWS DESPITE LOW DEFENSE CONFIDENCE.** In 2025, public attitudes toward Moldovan National Army personnel became increasingly favorable compared to the previous year, with 89% of respondents expressing respect for those serving in the National Army. Institutional trust in the National Army also experienced significant growth to 54%, up from 49% in 2024. Despite that, only 27% perceive that the National Army would be able to defend Moldova.
- **TRUST IN POLICE & LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION: REGIONAL INSIGHTS.** Trust in effective police and law enforcement cooperation is a key element of national security. Therefore, the decline in public perception from 48% to 43% is a significant and concerning change. A closer look reveals clear regional trends that warrant further attention for a full understanding.
- **NATIONAL SECURITY THREAT PERCEPTION IS HIGH AND RISING.** In 2025, perceptions of the likelihood of various issues that could threaten Moldova’s stability and security increased significantly, reaching levels of around or above 80%. While corruption and kleptocratic practices top everyone’s list of concerns, perceptions of some other threats are more divisive.
- **DEFENSE READINESS UP – BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN.** The willingness of the Moldovan population to enlist in or fight alongside the National Army to defend the country is gradually increasing, while over half are prepared to contribute to national defense but not directly engage in combat.

SECURITY PERCEPTION IMPROVED, BUT ANXIETY ALSO ROSE

Perceived security predicts societal stability by fostering trust and forward-looking attitudes. It promotes wellness and engagement through positive daily behaviors, while security deficits generate anxiety and stress that undermine social functioning. Although the overall share of those who perceive Moldova to be secure from any possible threats increased from 20% to 24%, this remains very low, with only 2% rating the country as “very secure.” The level of perceived security is relatively consistent across all demographic groups, while higher perceived security is more likely among people with:

- higher institutional trust and faith in democratic elections;
- higher life satisfaction and agency;
- stronger European connection and weaker Russian ties;
- a belief that Moldova can defend itself;
- a view that NATO/EU are security-positive while seeing Russia as negative.

HOW SECURE FROM ANY POSSIBLE THREATS IS MOLDOVA CURRENTLY?



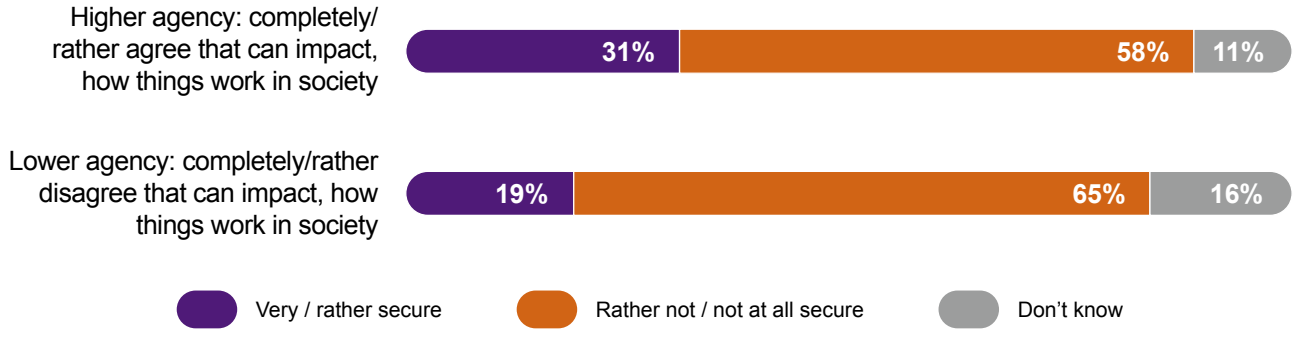
Despite overall increased security, those feeling “very insecure” rose from 26% to 30%, reflecting sharper polarization. The 30% viewing Moldova as “not at all secure” are more likely to

- devalue democratic governance;
- be strongly connected to Russia and not at all connected to Europe;
- trust Russian Federation media, while trust in Moldovan sources is linked to higher perceived security.
- live in UTAG&Taraclia (where 68% feel “not at all secure”);
- belong to ethnic minorities.

This emerging trend aligns with the polarization tendencies observed in other key pillars of societal resilience in Moldova, showing a similar pattern of strong connection to the information sources consumed by the respondents and once again highlighting the importance of information resilience.

Agency, or perception that a person can impact the developments in Moldovan society, has demonstrated a significant link to perceived security – suggesting it as one possible solution to increasing anxiety. Empowering specific social groups or regions and raising their awareness of how their actions can contribute to both their wellbeing and security may reduce anxiety, thereby also lowering their vulnerability to FIMI targeting Moldova’s current strategic choices.

HOW SECURE FROM ANY POSSIBLE THREATS IS MOLDOVA CURRENTLY?



SUPPORT FOR PARTNERSHIPS IS GROWING, BUT PARTNERS NEED TO BE DEFINED

Only 30% of Moldovans believe it would be possible to defend Moldova in case of an attack, showing little change over the past year. Similar to the trend towards polarization in perceived security discussed above, there is also a change in the proportion of respondents who are completely unconvinced that Moldova can be defended – it increased from 25% to 30%. The belief that Moldova can be defended is stronger among:

- younger respondents, 18-34 years of age;
- those who are economically very secure;
- those who have a stronger trust in Moldovan state institutions and a stronger agency;
- those who have a higher trust in Romanian- and Russian-language Moldovan media;
- those who see the EU and NATO as positive for Moldova and have a stronger connection to Europe.

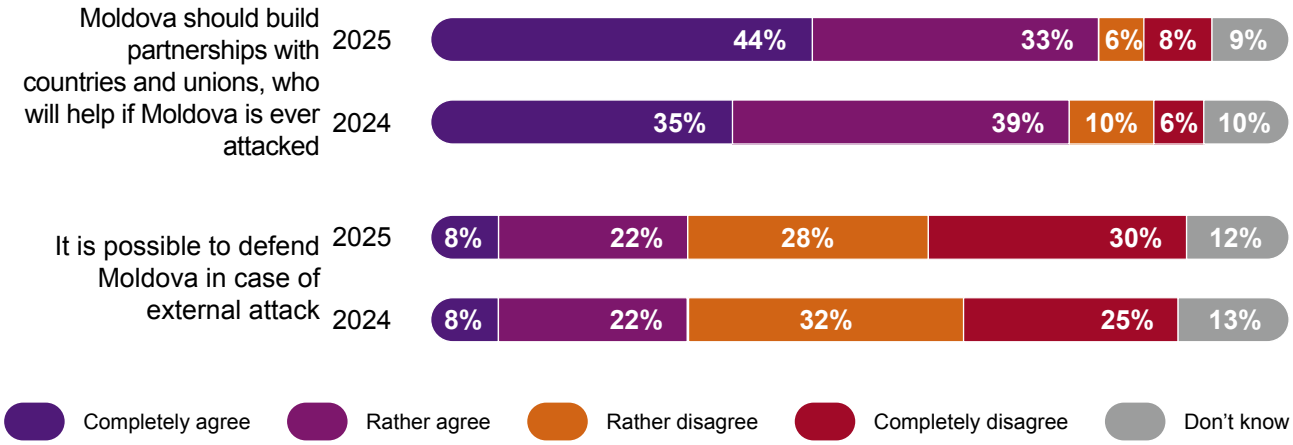
While 78% of respondents support building defense partnerships with countries and unions that would help Moldova in case of an attack, it is important to note that opinions about the nature of these partnerships can vary widely. Support for defense partnerships is linked to different axes of cooperation, meaning that the partners the respondents consider desirable can vary significantly:

- About 90% of respondents who view the EU and NATO as positive for Moldova also support defense partnerships. At the same time, among those who view NATO negatively, 62% still support partnerships (clearly, they do not see NATO as the partner).
- Among respondents who view the Russian Federation as positive for Moldova, 68% also support defense partnerships. While this is lower than the Moldovan average of 78%, it is still a high level of support.



Such discrepancies suggest that, given the low public confidence in Moldova's ability to independently defend itself from any attack, the choice of which direction or axis of cooperation to support may be strongly influenced by the public debate on the potential effects various partnerships may have, as well as a clear and credible analysis of geopolitical developments and their possible implications for Moldova.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS...



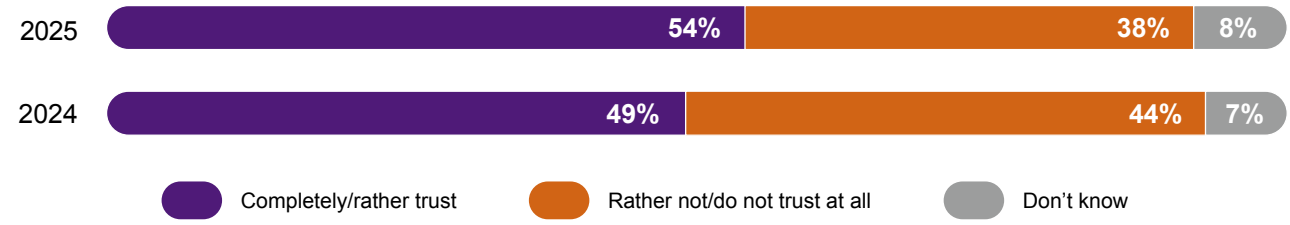
TRUST IN THE NATIONAL ARMY GROWS DESPITE LOW DEFENSE CONFIDENCE

Public attitudes toward Moldovan National Army personnel became increasingly favorable in 2025 compared to the previous year, with 89% of respondents expressing respect for those serving in the National Army. Institutional trust in the National Army also experienced significant growth, climbing to 54% from 49% in 2024. This pattern confirms the evident tendency for citizens to view individual service members more favorably than the institution itself, with trust in the Army remaining closely tied to broader confidence in state institutions. Not surprisingly, trust in the National Army strongly correlates with:

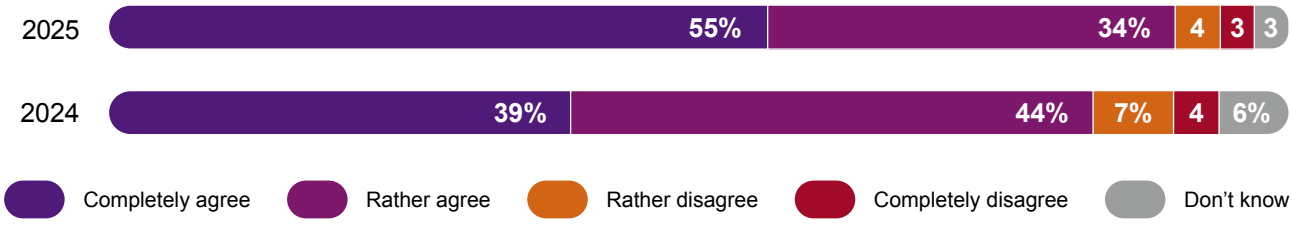
- overall institutional trust and relevance of democratic governance;
- feeling connected to Europe rather than connected to Russia;
- a stronger reliance on Moldovan national media and official statements as an information source.

The confidence in the Moldovan National Army's capability to protect and defend the country is considerably more modest, with only 27% agreeing that the National Army could succeed in this, while 65% hold the opposite view.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU TRUST THE NATIONAL ARMY



I RESPECT PEOPLE WHO SERVE IN MOLDOVAN NATIONAL ARMY



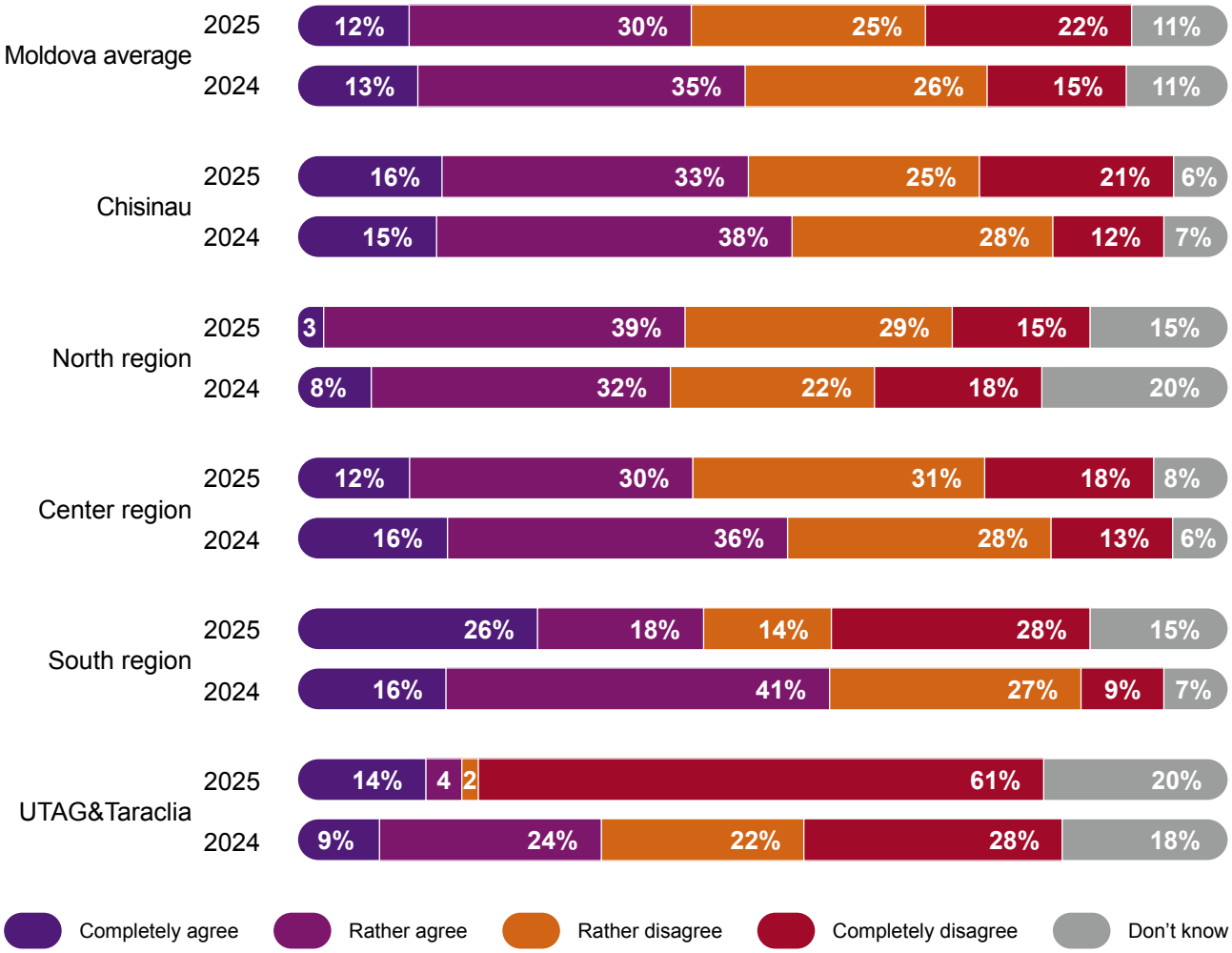
TRUST IN POLICE & LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION: REGIONAL INSIGHTS

Trust in the effective functioning of the police and law enforcement is an essential element of national security, as it enables community cooperation crucial for crime prevention and solving, reinforcing the legitimacy of law enforcement institutions. Without that trust, citizens won't report crimes or assist investigations, which can lead to social unrest and injustice. From a regional perspective, the police and law enforcement are often among the key central government institutions that maintain direct, everyday contact with the local population.

In 2025, overall institutional trust in the police remains stable at 51%. However, public perception that the police and law enforcement authorities cooperate effectively to fight crime and terrorism has decreased from 48% to 43%, marking a significant change. A closer look reveals that while most Moldovan regions, except for the North, have seen some shift (the change is mostly within measurement error), the most remarkable change in related perceptions took place in UTAG&Taraclia. Here, the trust in the ability of the police and law enforcement to cooperate to fight crime and terrorism is currently the lowest at 18%, while the share of people completely disagreeing is exceptionally high at 61% (in 2024 "completely disagree" was 28%).

To better understand the root causes of the drastic decline in perceptions of police and law enforcement cooperation in UTAG&Taraclia since 2024, more focused analysis is required. A preliminary look at the already mentioned trends captured by the NIR Index suggests a likely link with the overall significantly lower trust in all government institutions in UTAG&Taraclia, as well as a stronger reliance on and trust in Russian Federation media. This information environment makes the local population considerably more vulnerable to FIMI.

IN MOLDOVA, THE POLICE AND OTHER LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES COOPERATE ADEQUATELY TO FIGHT CRIME AND TERRORISM



NATIONAL SECURITY THREAT PERCEPTION IS HIGH AND RISING

In 2025, perceived threats to Moldova's stability and security increased significantly, reaching around 80% or higher. Exceptions include inter-ethnic conflict, escalation in Transnistria, and military attack, where opinions are more divided – the latter even slightly decreased but remains above 50%. The following trends appear:

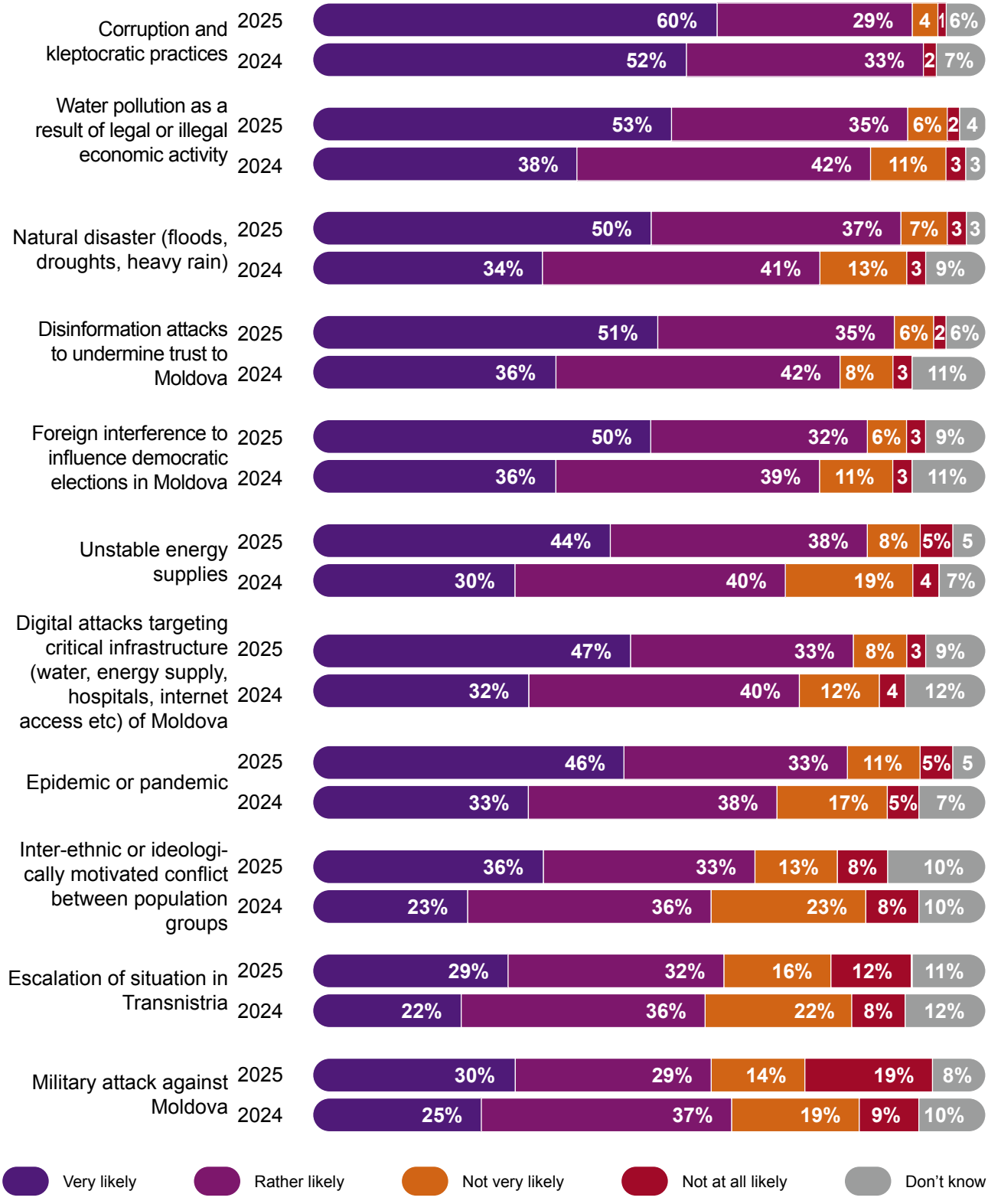
- Corruption and kleptocratic practices are perceived as a likely threat most often (~90%), probably reflecting the growing public intolerance of corruption and increasing awareness of its negative impact on Moldova's development, as discussed above.
- Pro-European respondents are more likely to identify threats typical of modern hybrid warfare – such as disinformation and foreign interference aimed at manipulating Moldovan elections or the economy – as well as military threats etc.
- Pro-Russian groups tend to focus more on environmental issues, such as water pollution and natural disasters, while perceiving escalation in Transnistria or military attacks against Moldova as less likely.
- The trend toward positions radicalizing is evident here as well, with a significant increase in the proportion of respondents rating most threats as either "very likely" or "very unlikely."

Many of the probable threats identified by the NIR index actually materialized in 2024/2025, including extensive election interference and FIMI, which helps to explain why they are perceived as likely in the coming year.[12] However, the increase in already high threat perceptions across almost all categories suggests that this may also reflect overall heightened security anxiety.

[12] „Amenințări cu care se confruntă Republica Moldova și modul cum acestea se rasfrang asupra exercițiilor democratice"



HOW LIKELY IT IS THAT THE FOLLOWING WILL POSE A THREAT TO THE STABILITY AND SECURITY OF MOLDOVA DURING THE NEXT YEAR



DEFENSE READINESS UP – BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN

The willingness of the Moldovan population to enlist in or fight alongside the Moldovan army to defend the country, in the event of an invasion or a threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity, is gradually increasing, reaching 23% in 2025 (up from 18% in 2024). Higher readiness is more likely among:

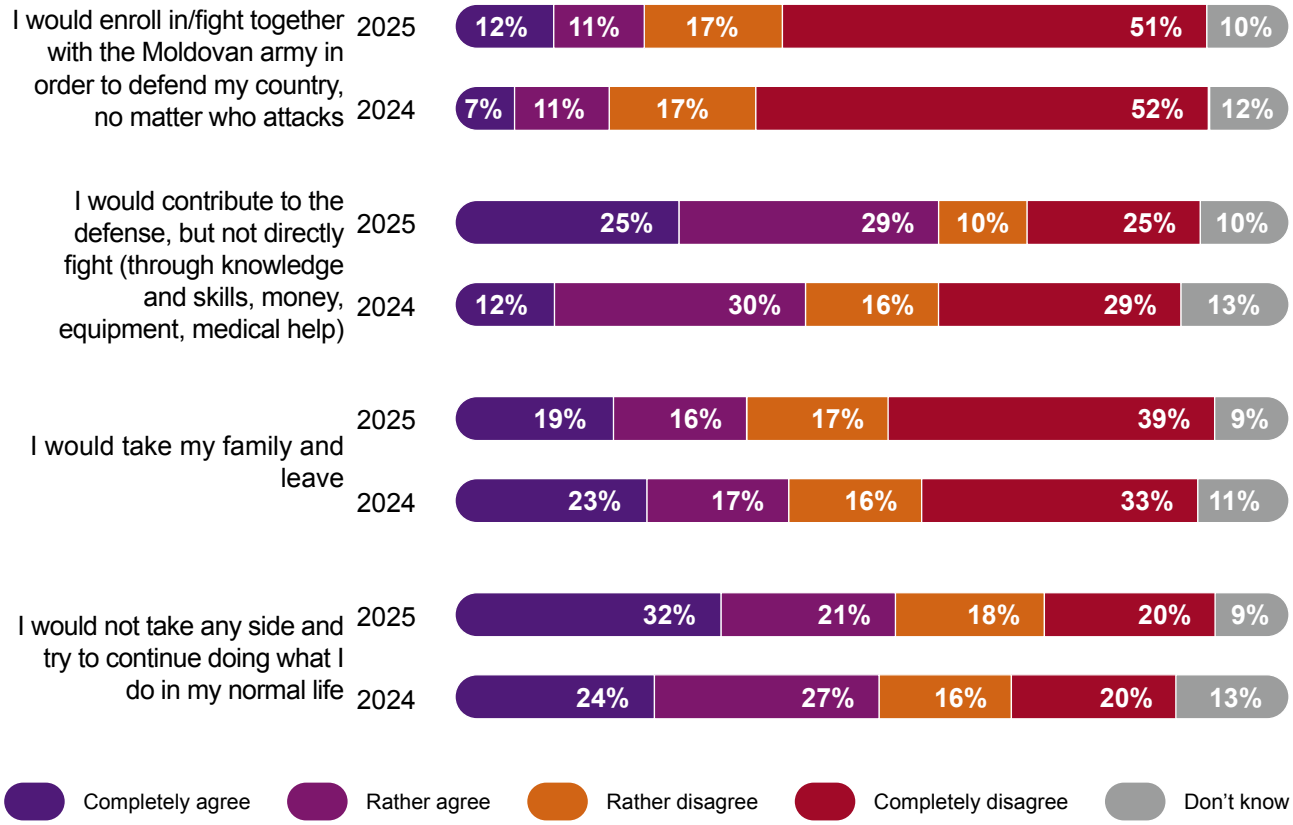
- male respondents (38%), especially among younger groups (18-34-year-old males expressed readiness in 47% of cases);
- respondents who have higher income levels and/or who are employed in state institutions;
- those who believe that Moldova can be defended;
- those who see the EU and NATO as positive partners for the security of Moldova;
- those who consider Romanian- and Russian-language Moldovan media an important information source.

The civilian defense potential is considerably stronger – over half (55%) of respondents would contribute to national defense without engaging in direct combat, with support consistent across gender and age groups. Regional variations are modest: the Center regions show higher readiness (67%), the North lower (43%), with other regions near the national average.

Intention to leave Moldova if threatened decreased compared to 2024. This choice remains slightly more likely among younger/middle age groups (18-34, 35-55), while people aged 55+ are more likely to stay neutral. Neutrality is also more common in North/UTAG regions, rural areas, among ethnic minorities, and economically insecure respondents.



IF MOLDOVA WERE INVADED AND ITS SOVEREIGNTY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY WERE UNDER ATTACK...



NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

Safeguarding Moldova's interests and ensuring stability through regional and national security constitute the fifth and final priority outlined in Moldova's Strategic Communication Concept for countering disinformation, information manipulation, and foreign interference.

National Security within the Regional Context hinges on comprehensive public awareness of how regional developments affect Moldova's national security and their cascading effects across all societal dimensions (governmental stability, economic resilience and prosperity, domestic security, educational systems, etc.). The corresponding NIR Index measures public perception and assessment of contextual unpredictable threats, anticipated future risk trajectories, and required actions to bolster both national and regional security frameworks.

Building trust in Moldova's regional defense and security objectives among citizens and strategic allies requires transparent dialogue about regional partnership initiatives and the critical significance of national and regional security coordination. National security within the regional framework is inherently connected to the success of regional security initiatives, encompassing international partnerships, regional collaborative efforts, and external support mechanisms.





NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT: KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **REGIONAL THREAT PERCEPTIONS HAVE INTENSIFIED.** Already high in 2024, awareness of the impact of most global and regional threats on Moldova increased even further in 2025, both in terms of share and intensity. This suggests further escalation of the threat-related public anxiety noted in 2024, which, without clear and comprehensive communication on prevention and mitigation strategies, risks undermining public security and potentially eroding trust in state institutions.
- **SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION ROSE, AS DID SUPPORT FOR PREPAREDNESS.** The overwhelming majority of Moldovans recognize Moldova's dependence on regional wellbeing, while 59% agree that Moldova must actively prepare to defend itself against potential regional threats.
- **NEUTRALITY IS HIGHLY DESIRABLE – WHAT IS THE MOLDOVAN WAY TO BE NEUTRAL?** The position that Moldova should remain neutral and strictly non-aligned is currently shared by 69% of the population, up from 2024. However, the considerable public support for preparedness discussed above suggests a foundation for defining a "Moldovan way" of neutrality – one that avoids vulnerability or helplessness.
- **THE EU AS THE MOST POSITIVE PARTNER FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION.** When assessing partners' roles in Moldova's stability and security, the EU leads with positive views (49%), closely followed by Romania (48%). Compared to 2024, there is also a trend of more moderate positions giving way to more definitive stances, consistent with the increasing polarization documented throughout this report.

REGIONAL THREAT PERCEPTIONS HAVE INTENSIFIED

Already high in 2024, awareness of the impact of most global and regional threats on Moldova increased even further in 2025, both in terms of share and intensity A global economic or financial crisis is now perceived as the most acute threat by 90% of respondents, followed closely by cross-border crime (89%), while global climate change is seen as a threat by 88% of respondents.

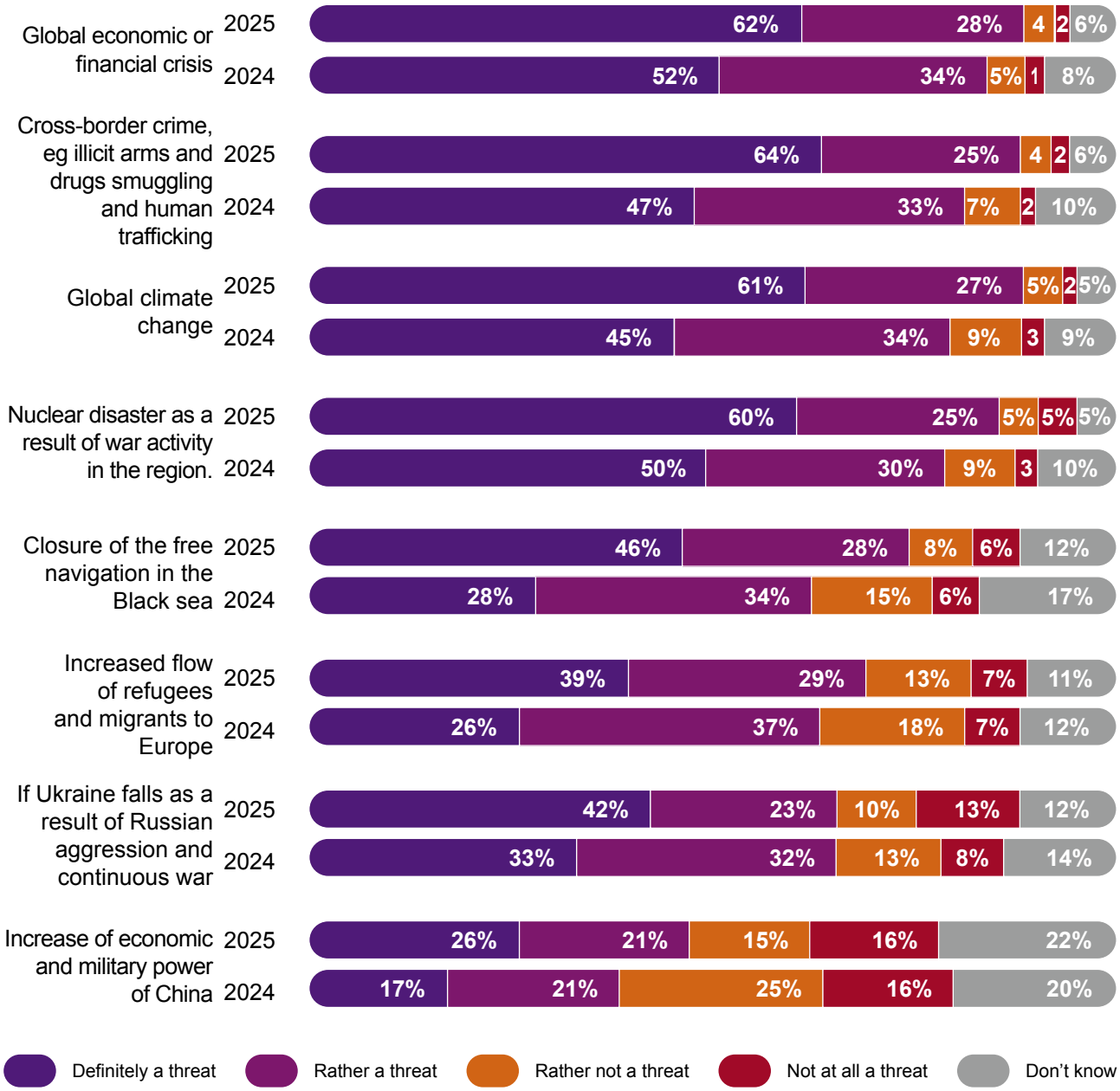
Regional threat perceptions show minimal differences across gender or age. Exceptions include younger people who are slightly more aware of the risk of Ukraine falling to Russian aggression and China's growing economic/military power, while the 55+ generation expresses less concern about a potential closure of Black Sea navigation and the rise of China's power.

Similar to the Moldovan national security threats discussed above, the intensity of regional threat perceptions has increased. Previously, the shares of "definitely a threat" and "rather a threat" responses were roughly equal, but now the stronger position is chosen twice as often as the milder one. This suggests a further escalation of the threat-related public anxiety observed in 2024, which, without clear and comprehensive communication on prevention and mitigation strategies, risks undermining public security and potentially eroding trust in state institutions.



TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE FOLLOWING REGIONAL/GLOBAL THREATS POSE A THREAT TO THE SECURITY AND STABILITY OF MOLDOVA

(definitely/rather a threat, n = 1207, %)



SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION ROSE, AS DID SUPPORT FOR PREPAREDNESS

The overwhelming majority of Moldovans recognize Moldova's dependence on regional well-being: 86% understand the importance of cooperation among democratic countries (up from 79% in 2024), and 76% agree that the economic wellbeing of neighboring countries impacts Moldova.

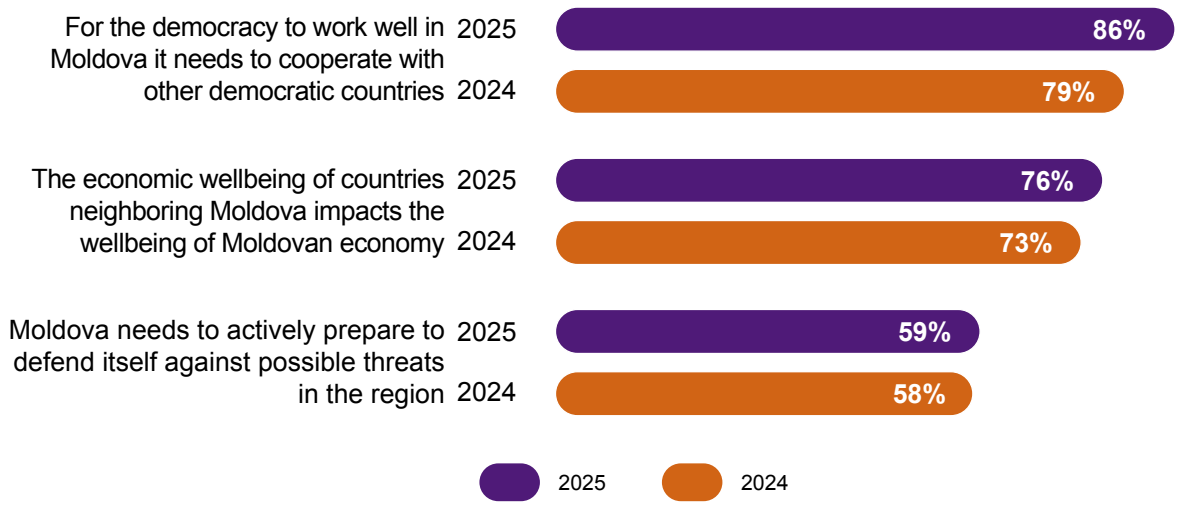
59% of the Moldovan population agrees that Moldova must actively prepare to defend itself against potential regional threats. This view is more strongly supported by:

- the younger generation (69%) and among respondents in Chisinau (65%) and Center region (70%), while UTAG&Taraklia stands out with the weakest support for this position (17%);
- respondents who have experience living in the EU or the USA;
- respondents with higher regard for democratic governance, higher institutional trust;
- those who feel a stronger connection to Europe rather than to Russia.

Support for these regional security narratives is generally likely to correlate with an overall positive perception of and alignment with the EU/NATO (as opposed to the RF), as well as higher trust in state institutions and the Moldovan media space.

PLEASE REVIEW THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS AND MARK HOW MUCH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH EACH OF THESE STATEMENTS

completely / rather agree



NEUTRALITY IS HIGHLY DESIRABLE – WHAT IS THE MOLDOVAN WAY TO BE NEUTRAL?

The position that Moldova should remain neutral and strictly non-aligned – not joining either pro-European or pro-Russian institutions – is currently shared by 69% of the population. Support for neutrality shows the following trends:

- To some extent, it overlaps with alignment toward the RF and its media space, although not exclusively – it also correlates with a neutral perception of the EU/NATO.
- Expectation for neutrality is the highest in UTAG&Taraclia, lowest in Chisinau.
- It is stronger among respondents with a weaker socio-economic standing.

When examining the essence of neutrality and the measures considered most desirable for protecting it and preventing a possible military attack against Moldova, the overall picture has changed little compared to 2024, though some trends have emerged:

- 59% of respondents see neutrality as non-provocation, in the hope that this would prevent Moldova from being attacked. Support for neutrality as non-provocation is higher in UTAG&Taraclia and lowest in the South region. It is also higher among people facing economic difficulties, those who perceive discrimination, and people who have lived in Russia.
- There appears to be a slight decrease in support for relying on cooperation with the EU – though support for cooperating with Russia has also declined, dropping to 18%. Even so, good relations with the EU are mentioned almost twice as often as those with Russia.

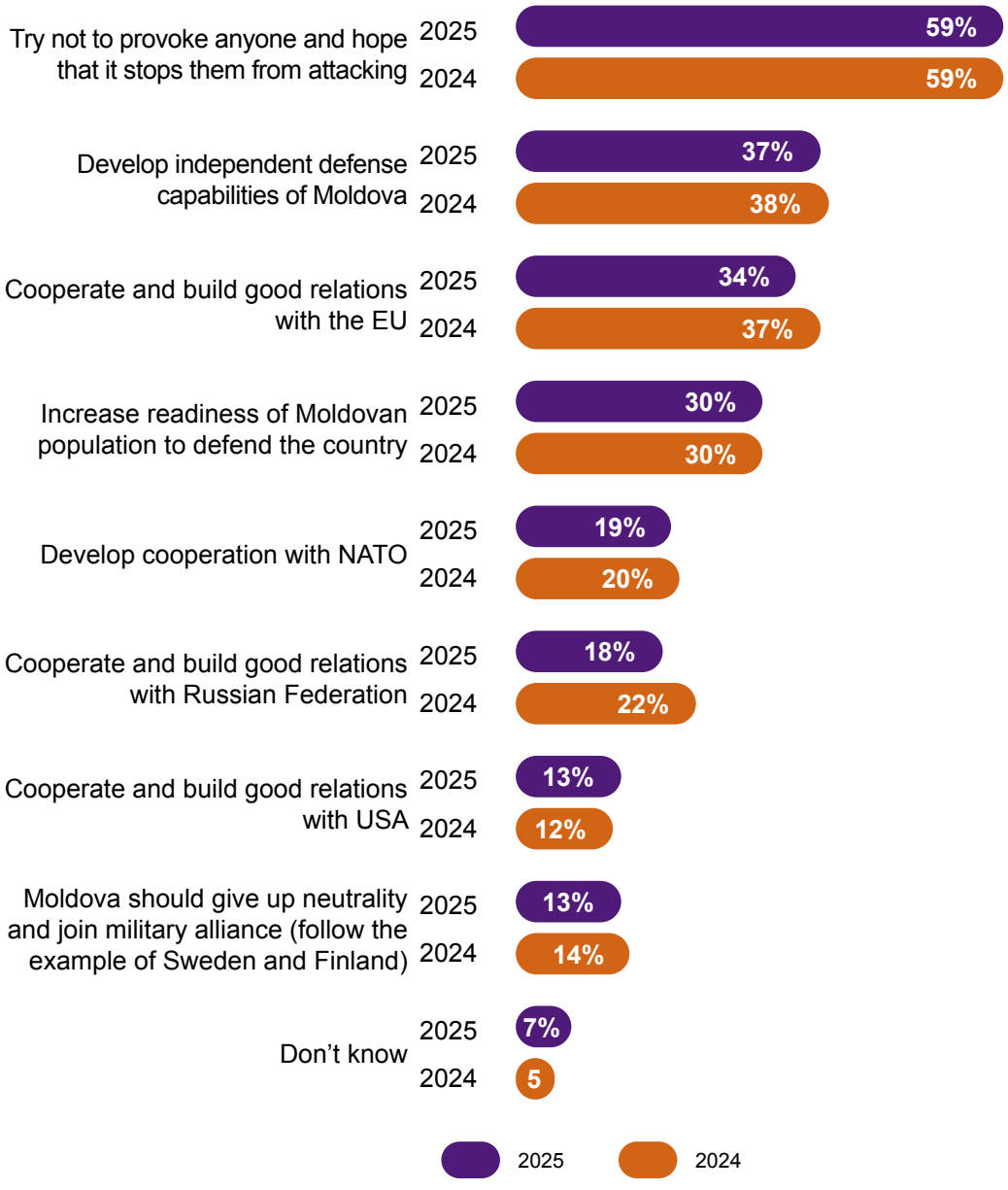
The popularity of non-provocation as the basis for neutrality highlights a limited understanding of what such a strategy entails – especially if on the other side there is an actor that actively provokes or demands concessions, while framing any refusal to give in as a provocation.



The considerable public support for preparedness discussed above suggests there is a foundation for formulating a "Moldovan way" of neutrality – one that avoids vulnerability or helplessness. With 37% of the population clearly stating that neutrality means developing independent defense capabilities, and 30% associating it with civilian defense readiness, these findings only support this perspective.

WHAT MEASURES SHOULD MOLDOVA TAKE, IN ORDER TO PROTECT ITS NEUTRALITY AND PREVENT POSSIBLE MILITARY ATTACK AGAINST MOLDOVA?

completely / rather agree



THE EU AS THE MOST POSITIVE PARTNER FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

When assessing partners' roles in Moldova's stability and security, the EU leads with positive views (49%), closely followed by Romania (48%) – unchanged from 2024. However, negative views of the EU increased slightly, to 18% (from 15%), while neutral positions dropped from 26% to 17%. Similar trends can be observed for Romania: neutral views declined from 31% to 23%, while "don't know" responses increased from 11% to 16%. Comparable shifts appear across attitudes towards all partners, reflecting an overall trend of declining shares of neutral positions, which are replaced by either greater uncertainty or more definitive, clear-cut stances.

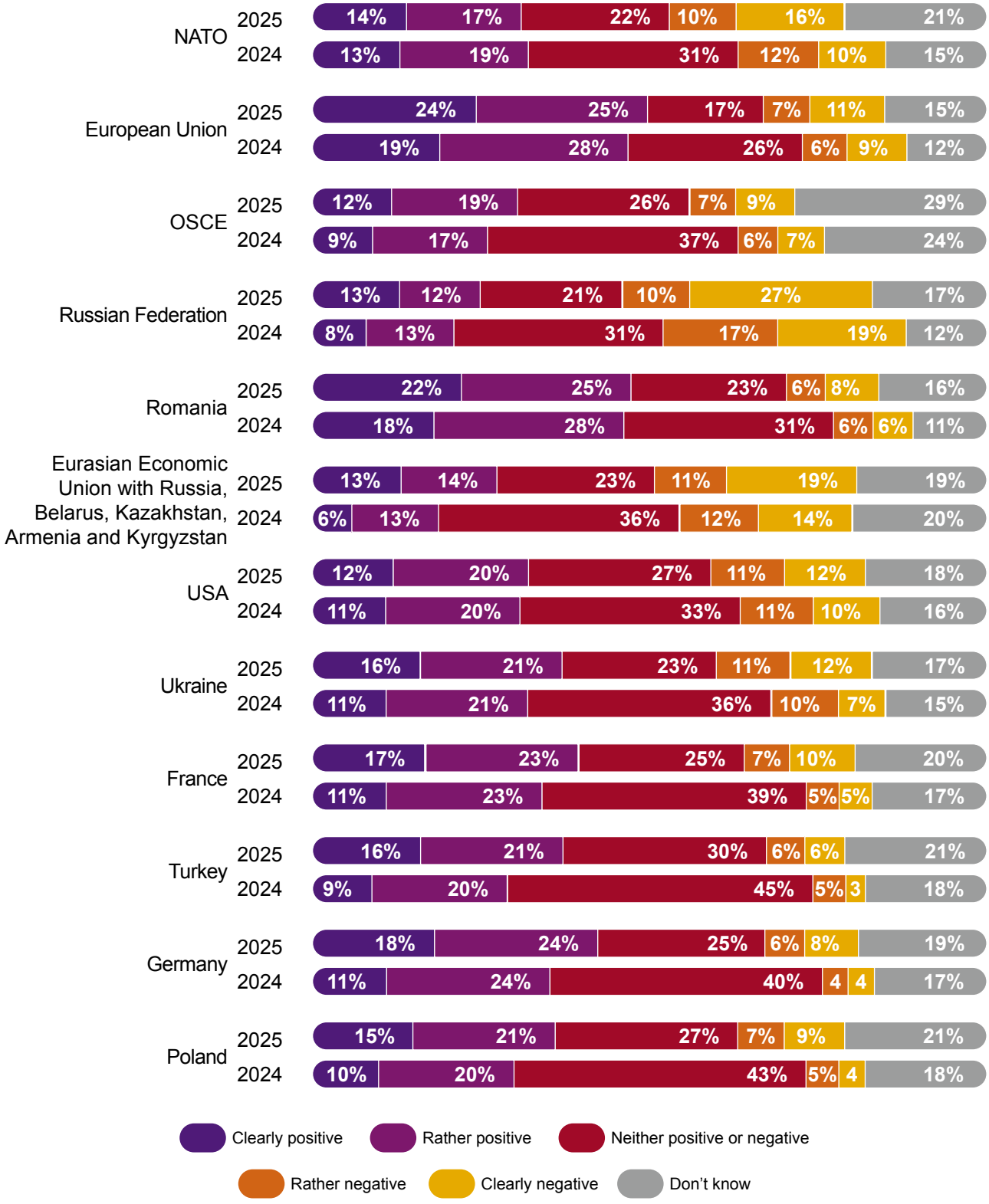
In addition, the following trends can be observed:

- There is a substantial increase in the share of respondents viewing Ukraine, the EU and European countries as positive for Moldova.
- At the same time, the share of respondents who see the Russian Federation and the EEU as positive for Moldova also increased.
- Attitudes towards the USA are relatively unchanged, while the proportion of respondents with a negative attitude towards NATO has slightly increased, compared to 2024

The emerging trends are consistent with the increasing polarization documented throughout this report – the more moderate positions are giving way to more definitive stances. This phenomenon appears consistently across multiple indicators, suggesting a societal shift from nuanced perspectives toward more binary viewpoints. Such polarization typically occurs during heightened political tension or significant national decisions, compelling citizens to choose sides. This trend has a profound impact on democratic discourse, shrinking the space for compromise and constructive dialogue that democracies need for effective consensus-building.



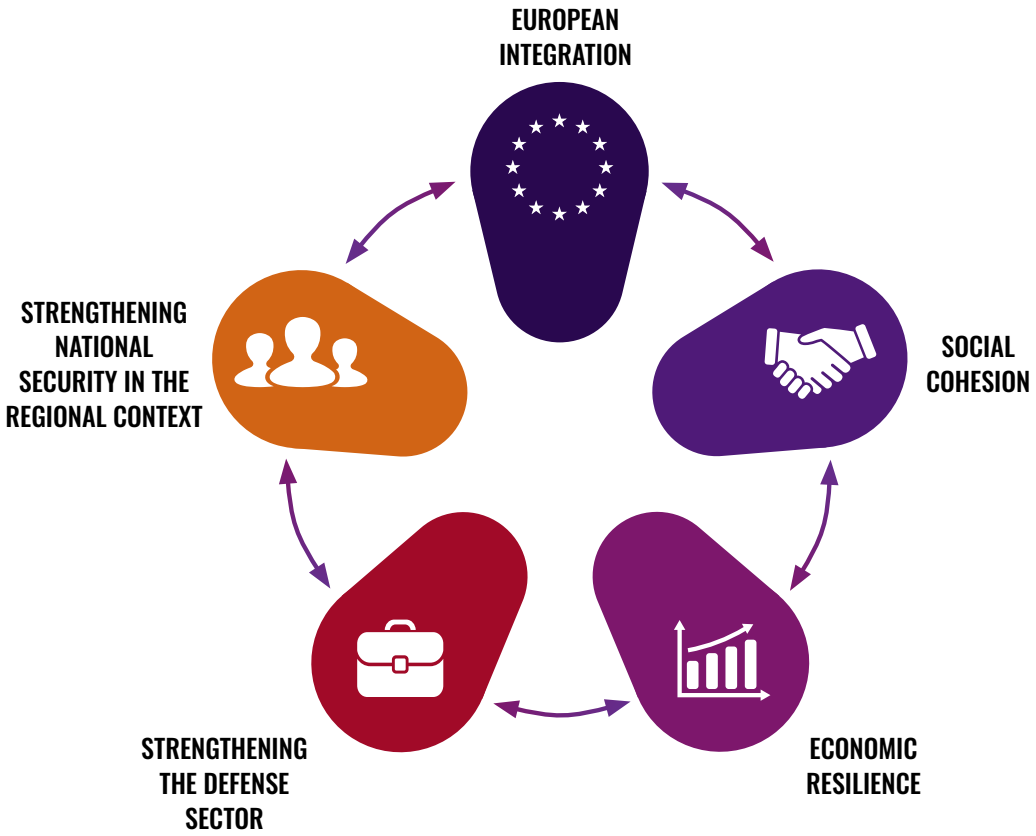
WHAT ROLE DO THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES AND UNIONS HAVE FOR THE STABILITY AND SECURITY OF MOLDOVA?



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS AND TAKE-AWAYS

Building on the 2024 baseline, the current data-driven insights provide rich material for analysing the changes in Moldovan society over the past year. They offer an opportunity to predict possible risks and needed developments, informing the work of the Center for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation (CSCCD) and its partners in strengthening societal resilience against foreign information manipulation. The report examines all five pillars of the Concept for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, both individually and in relation to one another, enabling an understanding of the synergies between strategic priorities and supporting coordinated action and inter-institutional collaboration. The analysis of key indicators across priority areas reveals several societal trends that highlight prevalent needs and expectations, crucial for enhancing the resilience and cohesion of Moldovan society.



NIR INDEX 2024–2025: CROSS-SECTIONAL TRENDS

POLARIZATION ACROSS STRATEGIC DOMAINS

The 2024–2025 NIR Index reveals a marked intensification of societal polarization across Moldova's strategic priorities. While overall support for EU accession, democratic governance, and institutional trust remains relatively stable – even pointing towards some improvement – the distribution of opinions has shifted toward stronger extremes. This trend is evident in the growing number of respondents who either firmly support or firmly oppose EU membership, democratic elections, and defense partnerships. The erosion of moderate positions suggests a societal shift toward binary viewpoints, often driven by emotional narratives and disinformation. This polarization undermines the space for constructive dialogue and consensus-building, which are essential for democratic resilience. It also increases vulnerability to foreign information manipulation, as emotionally charged environments are more susceptible to fear-based messaging. Addressing this trend is crucial and requires careful fostering of inclusive public discourse, along with reinforcing the value of nuanced, fact-based debate, while bearing in mind the intertwined strategic domains of the pillars of the concept of strategic communication of Moldova.

THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE AND INFORMATION SPACE

Personal experience and media consumption emerge as powerful determinants of public attitudes across all five pillars. Moldovans with firsthand experience living in EU countries consistently express higher trust in institutions, stronger support for reforms, and greater optimism about Moldova's future. Conversely, those who rely on Russian Federation media tend to exhibit greater skepticism toward democratic governance, lower perceived security, and a diminished sense of agency. This dichotomy highlights the critical role of the information environment in shaping societal resilience. The correlation between trusted media sources and strategic alignment underscores the need to protect Moldova's information space from manipulation. Promoting media literacy and shared democratic values, supporting value-based education and independent journalism, and ensuring access to reliable information are essential steps to counter disinformation and foster informed civic engagement.

AGENCY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Agency – the belief in one's ability to influence societal outcomes – is a central factor linking multiple strategic domains. The NIR Index shows that higher agency correlates with trust in institutions, support for EU integration, and readiness to defend Moldova. However, overall agency remains low, particularly among residents of UTAG&Taraclia. This disparity reflects broader socio-economic and informational divides. Low agency contributes to disengagement from democratic processes and increases susceptibility to disinformation. Strengthening agency requires targeted civic education, community empowerment, and integrity of the state institutions, all of which are necessary to strengthen societal trust and transparent governance. By enhancing individuals' understanding and trust in their role in shaping Moldova's future, the policymakers can foster a more resilient, participatory society capable of withstanding external pressures.

REGIONAL DISPARITIES AND TRUST BUBBLES

The NIR Index highlights emerging regional divides in trust, agency, and strategic alignment. Chisinau and the Center region exhibit higher institutional trust, stronger pro-European sentiment, and greater civic engagement. In contrast, UTAG&Taraclia and parts of the North show lower trust, weaker agency, and greater reliance on Russian media. These disparities are compounded by the formation of "trust bubbles," where regions increasingly trust themselves but not others. Such fragmentation risks undermining national cohesion and complicates the implementation of unified strategic policies. Addressing regional disparities requires localized interventions, inclusive communication strategies, and investment in regional development. Bridging these divides is essential to ensure that all Moldovans feel represented and empowered within the national framework.

KEY INSIGHTS BY STRATEGIC PRIORITY PILLARS

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: ADDRESS EMOTIONAL NARRATIVES AND SHOW TANGIBLE RESULTS

Public support for EU accession remains stable at 53%, yet the data shows a shift toward more extreme positions, with both pro-EU and Euroskeptic sentiments intensifying. This polarization is driven by personal experience and media influence: Moldovans with experience living in the EU and those trusting Romanian-language media are significantly more optimistic, while Russian media consumers exhibit skepticism and distrust. The correlation between support for democratic governance, institutional trust, and pro-EU sentiment underscores the importance of reinforcing democratic values and transparent communication. At the same time, to maintain momentum, it is essential for Moldova to foster inclusive dialogue and highlight the tangible benefits of implemented reforms, while addressing emotionally charged narratives and misinformation in a manner that considers the specific concerns of various target groups.

SOCIAL COHESION: BUILDING AGENCY TO INCREASE TRUST AND STRENGTHEN RESILIENCE

Social cohesion indicators present a mixed picture. National pride and perceived security have strengthened, yet trust in democratic elections has slightly declined, raising concerns about civic engagement. Agency has the potential to drive meaningful change; however, as it remains low overall, it requires consistent investment of energy and resources to translate it into greater trust within society in the future. For now, emerging regional trust bubbles – particularly between Chisinau and other regions – signal growing societal divides, the reversal of which will require a strategic approach. Disinformation continues to erode trust, especially among Russian Federation media consumers. These trends highlight the need for tailored civic education efforts that equip citizens with the knowledge and confidence to participate actively in democratic processes. Complementing this, community engagement initiatives should foster trust in institutions, strengthen individual agency, and create a more resilient society capable of resisting disinformation and polarization.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE: CONFIDENCE VS. POLICY AWARENESS

Economic resilience indicators present a paradox: while life satisfaction has increased, belief in the successful implementation of economic policies remains low. Support for principles like innovation, diversification, and energy security is high, yet many Moldovans doubt the effectiveness of current economic strategies. This gap reflects limited awareness of governmental actions and policy impacts, indicating a vulnerability to disinformation and other forms of malign interference. Youth mobility further complicates the picture, with nearly half of younger Moldovans considering emigration. Corruption perception has intensified, driven by increased public awareness and media influence – in line with ongoing anti-corruption efforts. These trends suggest need for a consistent and transparent communication of economic policies, visible local impact, as well as youth-focused employment strategies and continued anti-corruption reforms – especially in regions with low trust and high vulnerability. Enhancing transparency and showcasing success stories can help build public confidence and reduce susceptibility to negative narratives.

DEFENSE AND SECURITY: TRUST VS. CAPABILITY

Public trust in the Moldovan National Army has grown, yet the public's confidence in its ability to defend Moldova remains low. While civilian readiness to contribute to defense is increasing, regional disparities persist. Perceived security has improved slightly, but general societal anxiety and polarization continue to affect public attitudes. Public support for enhancing Moldova's defense partnerships is high; however, interpretations of which partners are desirable vary widely, reflecting completely opposing views on potential threats and potential allies.

These findings underscore the importance of strategic communication that clarifies Moldova's defense strategy while emphasizing a shared understanding of Moldovan public's responsibility and role in ensuring security and promoting inclusive narratives around national security. In this context, the constitutional concept of neutrality becomes crucial for framing the importance of building defense preparedness and highlighting the role of a whole-of-society approach to national defense. One possible option for building societal consensus and resilience in the face of external threats may be agreeing on a common understanding of neutrality – recognizing that neutrality does not inherently exclude preparation and security building.

NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT: REGIONAL SECURITY AND NEUTRALITY

Discussion on regional security intersect with many topics related to national defense and security, which makes sense for a small country whose stability and prosperity are inevitably strongly affected by the wellbeing of, and relations with, its neighbors. The EU and Romania are viewed as Moldova's most positive partners, with views on their positive role for Moldova strengthening overall. At the same time, polarization has also affected these attitudes, decreasing neutral and slightly increasing negative or undecided positions – a trend that applies to attitudes toward all external partners. Threat perceptions have intensified, with growing concern over regional and global risks. Meanwhile, support for regional cooperation and defense preparedness is rising, especially among younger and pro-European respondents. These trends underscore the importance of transparent dialogue about regional partnerships, proactive security communication, and strategic framing of Moldova's geopolitical choices as key strategies to navigating this complex landscape.

Similarly to national defense context, neutrality remains a popular stance among Moldovans in regional security matters, with 69% supporting non-alignment. However, interpretations of neutrality in both contexts remain vague and at times contradict each other. Views on the substance of neutrality vary widely – its supporters often equating it with passive non-provocation rather than strategic preparedness. Contradictions emerge, for instance, between the strong support for strategic partnerships with countries and unions that could defend Moldova in the event of an attack, and the simultaneous desire for strict non-alignment with both EU and Russian institutions. This ambiguity reflects gaps in public understanding and leaves Moldova vulnerable to information manipulation. Here also, the challenge lies in articulating a clear and coherent national approach to neutrality that safeguards sovereignty while fostering resilience. Promoting a "Moldovan way" to be neutral – one that includes independent defense capabilities and proactive regional engagement – can help reconcile public sentiment with strategic imperatives.

CONCLUSIONS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The NIR Index reveals a society at a crossroads, with increasing polarization, regional divides, and vulnerability to disinformation. Yet, it also shows growing awareness, civic pride, and support for strategic priorities. The interdependencies between pillars suggest that strengthening one area – such as agency or media trust – can positively influence others, creating a multiplier effect for resilience.

To move forward, it is imperative to:

- **PROMOTE INCLUSIVE AND FACT-BASED PUBLIC DIALOGUE**

  Polarization is eroding moderate positions and fostering binary viewpoints, making society more vulnerable to disinformation. To counter this, Moldova should invest in platforms and initiatives that encourage constructive debate, reach out to specific vulnerable target groups and emphasize evidence-based narratives, while engaging diverse voices to rebuild trust and consensus.

- **STRENGTHEN MEDIA LITERACY AND INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM**

  The correlation between media consumption and strategic alignment highlights the need to protect the information space. Expanding media literacy programs, supporting independent outlets, and ensuring access to reliable sources will reduce susceptibility to manipulation and foster informed civic engagement.

- **ENHANCE CIVIC AGENCY THROUGH EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT**

  Low levels of agency, particularly in UTAG&Taraclia, contribute to disengagement and vulnerability to external influence. Targeted civic education, participatory governance, and community-driven projects can empower citizens, reinforcing their role in shaping Moldova's democratic future.

- **ADDRESS REGIONAL DISPARITIES WITH LOCALIZED STRATEGIES**

  Emerging trust bubbles and regional divides threaten national cohesion. Tailored communication or on-site reach out campaigns, regional development initiatives and transparent communication of their local impact, as well as inclusive policymaking are essential to bridge gaps and ensure all communities feel represented and engaged in Moldova's strategic trajectory.

- **CLARIFY STRATEGIC GOALS AND DEMONSTRATE TANGIBLE RESULTS**

  Public skepticism toward economic and governance reforms stems from limited awareness of policy impacts. Transparent communication emphasizing tangible results, showcasing success stories, and highlighting local benefits of reforms will build confidence and counter negative narratives, especially among youth and in vulnerable regions.

- **DEFINE AND COMMUNICATE MOLDOVA'S MODEL OF NEUTRALITY**

  Ambiguity around neutrality leaves Moldova exposed to manipulation. A clear, proactive approach – combining non-alignment with defense preparedness and regional cooperation – should be articulated through strategic messaging to reconcile public sentiment with security imperatives.

- **CONTINUE INVESTING IN ANTI-DISINFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND PARTNERSHIPS**

  Given the role of foreign media influence, Moldova must further strengthen its institutional capacity to detect and counter disinformation. Collaboration with EU partners, tech platforms, and civil society will ensure a coordinated response and enhance resilience against external threats.

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