DID THE INTERNET BREAK THE POLITICAL MACHINE? MOLDOVA'S 2009 "TWITTER REVOLUTION THAT WASN'T"[1]

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Abstract: Moldova's April 2009 mass unrest and the subsequent ouster of Vladimir Voronin's Communist Party have become widely known as the country's "Twitter Revolution," which in turn is often cited as an example of the Internet promoting revolution and democratization in a hybrid regime, a political system combining elements of democracy and authoritarianism. A close analysis of these events, however, shows that social media played a secondary role at best. Instead, Moldova's revolution is best understood as the product of a succession crisis that happened to hit the regime as the country was entering a sharp economic decline linked to the global financial crisis. The findings emphasize the risk of overestimating the Internet's effects on regime change if researchers neglect the hard work of carefully tracing the actual processes by which nondemocratic regimes are ousted.

In 2009, Moldova experienced a dramatic and violent political upheaval that broke the political machine of longtime president and Communist Party leader Vladimir Voronin and replaced it with a coalition known as the Alliance for European Integration. Much remains unclear about

what actually happened. Reporters initially focused on the role of social networking websites,[2] and the term "Twitter Revolution" gained wide currency as a moniker for this episode in Moldova's history.[3] But for an event that has become a common reference point for arguments about the Internet's democratizing effects, and more generally for an event that is so dramatic in content and outcome, Moldova's 2009 revolution is remarkably under-researched. We thus lack clear answers regarding the role of the Internet and, crucially, what lessons this case might hold for how social media might be expected to impact non-democratic regimes.

Drawing on field work in Moldova both before and after the revolution, including face-to-face elite interviews and an examination of a wide range of media sources, the present article employs the method of process-tracing to construct an account of the chain of events preceding, constituting, and immediately following the April 2009 protests.[4] This method reveals that Moldova's revolution can best be explained not by social-media-driven activism, but instead first and foremost by a succession crisis that happened to hit as the country was just entering a sharp economic decline as a consequence of the global financial crisis. These two crucial factors, which boil down to public opinion and succession politics in the dominant political machine, are shown to have generated both the mass rioting and the subsequent ouster of the Communist Party that are often attributed to social media. The Internet's effects on these events were marginal at best. This suggests that studies of social media's impact on revolution[5] must not only examine patterns in their use and the activities of their users, but crucially be embedded in rigorous and systematic study of the larger political context in which the Internet operates. Without this, we cannot hope to gain a true understanding of the extent of social media's effects.

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[2] Particularly influential in this regard was *The New York Times*, April 7, 2009, p.1.

[3] E.g., Evgeny Morozov, "Moldova's Twitter Revolution," *Foreign Policy* magazine's "Net.Effect" online portal, April 7, 2009, 2:15pm, http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/04/07/moldovas_twitter_revolution; Evgeny Morozov, "Moldova's Twitter Revolution is NOT a Myth," *Foreign Policy* magazine's "Net.Effect" online portal, http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/04/10/moldovas_twitter_revolution_is_not_a_myth; Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Igor Munteanu. 2009. "Moldova's 'Twitter Revolution,'" *Journal of Democracy* 20: 3, July: 136-42; Giovanni Ziccardi. 2013. *Resistance, Liberation Technology, and Human Rights in the Digital Age*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands: 27-8. An example of the moniker penetrating scholarly accounts that refer to these events only as passing comparative referents is Elena Korosteleva. 2012. "Questioning democracy promotion: Belarus' response to the 'colour revolutions'," *Democratization* 19: 1, February, pp.37-59, here p.52.

[4] Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

[5] As used here, the term "revolution" refers to the ouster of a country's top leadership accompanied and supported by large-scale mass street mobilization.

Moldova's "Twitter Revolution" and Theories of the Internet's Effects

Moldova, a country with a population of under four million citizens sandwiched between Romania and Ukraine, emerged from the USSR in considerable political chaos, including a civil war that resulted in the loss of its Transnistrian region after Russian troops intervened.[6] Parliament eventually won a power struggle with the presidency in 2000, eliminating direct elections for president and deciding to choose the president itself in a vote that would require a supermajority of 61 of the body's 101 members. The parliament deadlocked when it came time to select the next president, calling new parliamentary elections in 2001 to resolve the crisis. The Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) then surprised observers by surging from opposition to win a whopping 71-seat delegation, more than enough to install its own leader, Vladimir Voronin, in the presidency and also to fill the major posts of prime minister and parliamentary speaker. Voronin gradually closed Moldova's political space, constructing an increasingly strong political machine that featured growing control over mass media (especially television), a tight relationship between power and business, and the reputed use of state force agencies for political purposes.[7] But since opposition parties were allowed to exist and compete in the most important elections, including the 2009 parliamentary contest that is at the center of attention here, Moldova remained a classic "hybrid regime," combining some significant elements of both democracy and authoritarianism.[8]

Voronin ultimately lost power through a series of events that began with a sudden and dramatic outbreak of mass street protest against the results of the April 5, 2009, parliamentary election. The fact that many of the initial protesters used social media, especially Twitter, immediately captured the attention of international media and experts on the Internet's role in politics. By one prominent journalistic account, groups of outraged youth organized a protest via Twitter and other social media, which attracted over ten thousand people "seemingly out of nowhere" into Chisinau's streets, with the crowd eventually ransacking the building that houses Moldova's presidency.[9] A leading scholar focusing on the Internet's

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[6] Lucan A. Way. 2002. "Pluralism by Default in Moldova," *Journal of Democracy* 13: 4, October: 127-41.

[7] A good overview of Moldovan politics since independence is Nicu Popescu. 2012. "Moldova's Fragile Pluralism*," Russian Politics and Law* 50: 4, July-August: 37-50.

[8] Henry E. Hale. 2011. "Hybrid Regimes: When Democracy and Autocracy Mix," in Nathan Brown, ed., *Dynamics of Democratization*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press: 23-45. On Moldova's usual features in comparative post-Soviet perspective, see Dmitrii Furman. 2007. "Udivitel'naia Moldova," *Rossiia v global'noi politike* 5: 5: 186-96.

[9] *The New York Times*, April 7, 2009, p.1.

political effects reported in a blog entry at the time that "Technology is playing an important role in facilitating these protests," citing "huge mobilization efforts both on Twitter and Facebook" and the role that these played in gaining support from abroad.[10] The most prominent scholarly article dedicated to these events provides mostly an overview, though puts Twitter in the article title and concludes that nearly 30,000 people had come out into the streets after "Word had been spreading rapidly via Twitter and other online networking services," implying a strong mobilizational role for the Internet.[11] The article that provides perhaps the most rigorous analysis of the Internet's role in Moldova's revolution downplays the focus on the country's relatively few actual Twitter users but concurs with the general conclusion that various forms of social media were crucial, asserting that there was "no noticeable prior offline organization" that could explain the sudden uprising.[12] This study concludes that such media were significant particularly in building a database of contact information for potential protesters, mobilizing the first flashmob that sparked the uprising, and winning support from outside by informing people inside and outside of the country.[13]

There are some prima facie reasons to question these interpretations. For one thing, it is curious that the two reports most influential in establishing the term "Twitter Revolution" were written not by people who were on the ground in Moldova at the time, but by observers following the events from afar. And the sources they reported consulting as they posted their early accounts tended to be either from social media or online activists they managed to contact.[14] Indeed, more generally one notices that the pieces advocating a major role for social media tend to look primarily at patterns of Internet use, devoting very little in the way of original research to the larger set of events both inside and outside the Voronin regime that may have produced its downfall or made it vulnerable to tweeting masses.[15] Moreover, a few accounts exist that call into question either the role of social media or the revolutionary nature of Moldova's April 2009 events as they unfolded, though mostly consist of commentary or passing references.[16] Of course, Moldova sometimes comes up in scholarship on the

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[10] Morozov, "Moldova's Twitter Revolution."

[11] Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu 2009, p.138.

[12] Volodymyr V. Lysenko and Kevin C. Desouza. 2012. "Moldova's Internet Revolution: Analyzing the Role of Technologies in Various Phases of the Confrontation." *Technology Forecasting & Social Change* 79 (2):341–61, here p.341.

[13] Ibid.

[14] *The New York Times,* April 7, 2009, p.1 was reporting from Moscow and New York. Evgeny Morozov, judging from the content of his posts on April 7 cited above, was also outside Moldova though had visited it in 2008.

[15] E.g., Lysenko and Desouza 2012.

[16] Maximilian C. Forte, "This Failed Revolution, Powered by Twitter: Revisiting the Recur-

post-Soviet "color revolutions," considering whether the 2009 events are part of the series of regime overthrows that typically includes Ukraine's Orange Revolution and Georgia's Rose Revolution. But these works generally do not treat the Moldovan events in any depth.[17] And finally, we must seriously consider the conclusions of many specialists on the Internet who have concluded that scholars frequently overestimate its political effects.[18] The rest of this paper presents an examination of other forces at work in Moldovan politics and uses them to frame a reexamination of the Internet's role in the 2009 revolution.

Impending Presidential Succession: A Wrench in Voronin's Political Machine

To begin, it is helpful to consider another logic that might also have been working toward generating the kind of mass uprising we saw in Moldova in April 2009. As prior work has demonstrated looking at other countries, political machines centered on the authority of a single patron tend to become more vulnerable as moments of succession near.[19] This is because, especially in societies like Moldova's where informal politics dominates and tends to revolve around competition among rival political networks,[20] the patron's ability to enforce unity in his or her coalition weakens for at least two reasons. First, exiting the top post in the land casts doubt on the patron's ability to follow through on promises and threats made prior to leaving office. Second, since political machines in such contexts tend

ring Themes of the Moldova Twitter Revolution, and Raising Some New Doubts," posted on his personal "Political Activism and the Web" website, January 21, 2010, http://webography. wordpress.com/2010/01/21/this-failed-revolution-powered-by-twitter-revisiting-the-recurring-themes-of-the-moldova-twitter-revolution-and-raising-some-new-doubts/; Kramer and Hill 2009. The most serious study of Moldovan politics in 2009 remains unpublished: Luke March, "The Consequences of the 2009 Parliamentary Elections for Moldova's Domestic and International Politics: A Narrow Window for Europeanization," paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Boston, November 13, 2009. Morozov later qualified his initial exuberance in Evgeny Morozov. 2011. *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York: Public Affairs, p. 3.

[17] E.g., Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Moldova's Revolution Against Cynical and Cronyist Authoritarianism," *RFE/RL Commentary*, April 13, 2009; Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes After the Cold War*. New York: Cambridge University Press; Lincoln A. Mitchell. 2012. *The Color Revolutions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 163, 187.

[18] For a critical review, see Henry Farrell. 2012. "The Consequences of the Internet for Politics," *American Review of Political Science* 15: 35-52.

[19] E.g., Gordon Tullock. 1987. *Autocracy*. New York: Springer. On post-Soviet countries, see Henry E. Hale. 2005. "Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *World Politics* 58: 1 (October): 133-65.

[20] Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky. 2006. "Introduction," in Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, eds., *Informal Institutions and Democracy: Lessons from Latin America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press;Way 2002.

to consist of a complex coalition of rival networks that the patron holds together, the prospect of succession tends to unleash competition because each network has incentive to seek the top post for itself and--at least as importantly--to avoid a rival network representative from obtaining it.

This prospect creates uncertainty that can lead elite networks either to hedge their bets or to gamble by betting on an opposition strategy, either way weakening the regime. The gambling strategy can consist of backing a network that is out of power at the time or breaking away from the regime and becoming the opposition. All these elite dynamics, in turn, can generate openings in the political opportunity structure and sources of logistical support for mass mobilization and create opportunities for it to impact politics in important ways.[21] For this reason, public opinion – and associated struggles to win the hearts and minds of citizens – can become particularly influential in driving the fate of non-democratic machines during moments of succession. Since elite networks do not want to wind up on a losing side of such a struggle, they are more likely to abandon incumbent patrons and their hand-picked successors and to back opposition forces when they think the opposition already has "in hand" a significant resource in the form of public support that can be used to bring masses into the street and make it less credible to falsify elections.[22]

Research reveals that many of these dynamics came into play when Voronin, with his 2005 reelection, entered his constitutionally final term as president. While he did not did not plan on leaving politics and hoped to still remain dominant beyond even after leaving the presidency, the fact that he was expected to exit the formal office meant two things. First, someone would need to replace him as president, which elites saw as potentially giving that someone a strong chance to emerge as Moldova's next patron, especially as Voronin aged (he would turn 68 shortly after the 2009 election). Second, since Voronin had always ruled from the presidency, it was unclear whether he would be able to control the country to the same degree from another post, especially if his successor as president would have ambitions or his or her own.

This uncertainty, understood by Voronin as well as many of those both inside and outside his administration, started to create several important problems for him and his political machine. For one thing, he and his advisors recognized that his leaving the presidency could open the way for a split between himself and the future president, even if the new president

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[21] Sidney Tarrow. 1996. "States and Opportunities: The Political Structuring of Social Movements," in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*. New York: Cambridge University Press: 41-61, here pp.54-6.
[22] Ibid., pp.60-1.

came from within his own party.[23] In addition, there was the danger to his authority that such a split within Communist ranks could occur even before the 2009 elections for the parliament that would choose the next president. Should the president announce his preferences too soon, factions in Voronin's system who were not chosen could try to use the parliamentary elections to stage a revolt. Thus Voronin pointedly refused to announce any choice of presidential successor in advance of the parliamentary election.[24] One way he sought to deal with this was to make the formal presidential succession seem to be a minor event, taking pains to emphasize that by leaving the formal post of the presidency, he was not planning to stop being the country's patron-in-chief. While he did not specify whether he would seek either the formal posts of parliamentary chair or prime minister, he did allow that: "I will remain chair of the party. And whatever my job title will be after the elections, the party will manage the parliamentary delegation, which will work under my leadership... If we win and get the necessary number of mandates, the party, in accordance with constitutional norms, will propose candidates for president and members of the government."[25] The subtext he sought to communicate here is that formal presidential succession would not affect the power of his political machine and thus that elites would be wasting their time breaking rank to compete for the country's top formal executive posts.

In the context of the upcoming presidential succession, therefore, the nationwide local elections of 2007 came to be seen as an important test of strength for the Voronin machine and the different forces considering challenging it or at least staking out distinct bargaining positions with it. These elections were hotly contested, and none more so than the race for the office of Chisinau mayor. This post had become vacant when the previous mayor, Serafim Urechean, resigned to lead his party's new delegation in the parliament in 2005. But four successive elections to replace him had failed due to turnout so low that the elections were invalidated, some of which reflected opposition efforts to protest the way the election was conducted. Indeed, the fact that a hard-core opponent had been mayor for the Communists' entire first term in power meant that the Communists were in a weak position locally to push through their own candidate, helping give public opinion substantial scope to play an important role there. In the fifth attempt in 2007, however, a Communist candidate was soundly defeated by a candidate who managed to capture the aspirations

[23] Mark Tkaciuk, Voronin's most prominent political strategist and a top figure in the Communist Party, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

[24] *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, January 28, 2009.

[25] President Vladimir Voronin, interview with A. Venediktov on Ekho Moskvy Radio, transcript published in *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, February 26, 2009. See also his similar remark on television: *Infotag*, December 11, 2008.

of anticommunist forces in the capital: Dorin Chirtoaca, a 28-year-old representative of the previously minor Liberal Party led by his uncle, Mihai Ghimpu, a longtime political activist and one of the leaders of the late Soviet-era national independence movement.[26] The Liberals, who also won enough votes in the city council election to get Ghimpu elected chairman, attracted supporters of the national independence movement disenchanted with its former flag-bearer, the Christian Democratic People's Party, which had surprised many of its members, as well as outside observers, by going into alliance with the Communists after the 2005 election.[27] The Communists also failed to gain ground in other mayoral and council elections across the country in 2007, coming away with control of just 328 mayor's offices out of 898 nationwide, down from 368 elected in 2003. The Communists' main opponents, however, also lost ground as Urechean's Our Moldova Alliance claimed just 155 mayors in its stable, down from 191 in 2003. The gains in the mayoral races were made by other, smaller parties, like Ghimpu's Liberals and the Democratic Party.[28] The picture was similar for the council races.[29] The Communists were found to have deployed administrative resources at their disposal here, including media bias and voter intimidation.[30]

The 2007 local elections had two major implications. First, they gave or confirmed various non-communist parties' hold over some local administrative resources, especially those connected with mayoral offices. Crucially, key cities included Chisinau, where Chirtoaca was now in charge of sanctioning public protests and doling out various capital city funds. They also gained increasing control over local election commissions, which would make it even harder for the Communists to generate fraudulent results in the 2009 parliamentary elections and, in theory, could give some opposition forces the ability to manipulate results themselves.[31] Second, the 2007 elections confirmed for most that the Communists were still not invincible despite the increasing repression during Voronin's second term, and many concluded from the results that Voronin would not likely be able to secure a sufficient supermajority in the parliamentary elections to choose the presidency without needing any allies. This raised the expected gains to networks from challenging the Communists: One could reasonably hope to wind up with a "golden ticket" – the crucial

[26] Ryan Kennedy, "Moldova's Local Elections Reflect National Trends," *RFE/RL Newsline*, June 29, 2007.

[27] Igor Botan, executive director of the analytical center ADEPT, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 30, 2009.

[28] *RFE/RL Newsline*, June 19, 2007.

[29] Ryan Kennedy, "Moldova's Local Elections Reflect National Trends," *RFE/RL Newsline*, June 29, 2007; *RFE/RL Newsline*, June 8, 2007.

[30] *RFE/RL Newsline*, June 5, 2007; *RFE/RL Newsline*, June 19, 2007.

[31] March 2009, p.10.

votes needed to elect a president – or perhaps even a chance to force the Communists either out of power or to share at least one major executive post with a rival political network.[32]

It is surely no coincidence that it was at this point that the Communists began to suffer a series of defections from their network. The first major figure from the Voronin network to go throughout the entire period of its rule was Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev, who after seven years of loyal service stepped down in March 2008.[33] It remains unclear exactly why he resigned, and there is a strong case to be made that he was actually forced to do so by Voronin, who was present at his resignation and actually gave him a state honor.[34] Whether or not resigning was his idea, Tarlev did not remain loyal or even quiet, but instead went into opposition and began preparing to challenge the Communists in the April 2009 elections. Asked in late 2008 about the reasons for his resignation, Tarlev volunteered that he came to feel Voronin would not be president for much longer, citing his age, and one way or other there would be a change in political generations. Tarlev, only 45, said he did not consider himself part of the old generation. He averred that he had a great deal to offer the country with his experi-ence in business and government and alluded to what he perceived as broad support for him as a future leader among both ordinary people and elites. Queried as to why he opted to pursue his goals independently of the Communist network, he replied that there were different groupings within it that were bound to explode at some point, adding that Communism was also an idea of the past.[35] Indeed, the last "Barometer" public opinion survey taken before Tarlev's resignation found him to be the second-most trusted politician in Moldova with the faith of 40 percent of the population, behind only Voronin with his 44 percent. While the Communists were still revealed to be leading the parliamentary race among parties, a whopping 42 percent of those intending to vote declared that they had not yet decided which party to support, a situation that would surely look encouraging to someone in Tarlev's position. And the survey also confirmed that there was vast uncertainty as to who would become the next president, with 66

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[32] For example, one party leader said in an interview prior to the April 2009 election that the 2007 local election showed that the Communists could not win a supermajority and thus would be unable on their own to win the presidency. He still thought that Voronin could control the country through just the posts of parliamentary chair and prime minister, but expected the Communists to need allies to handle the presidency, which would weaken Communist control over the country. Party leader, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, December 19, 2008.

[33] *RFE/RL Newsline*, March 20, 2008.

[34] Igor Botan, "6th PCRM Congress and Its First Consequences," *E-democracy*, March 31, 2008, http://www.e-democracy.md/en/monitoring/politics/comments/200803311/, accessed October 3, 2013.

[35] Vasile Tarlev, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, December 19, 2008.

percent not being able to provide a name, and the most mentions being given to parliamentary chair Marian Lupu (12 percent) and Tarlev (8 percent).[36]

Certain big business networks were also reported to be backing opposition candidates as April 2009 approached, as is reflected in the appearance of people linked to major business figures (often called "oligarchs") on opposition party lists. Least surprising was Chiril Lucinschi, the businessman son of former president Petru Lucinschi and a Voronin rival who had not succumbed to the incumbent political machine. Evidently reflecting a reconciliation between longtime Democratic Party leader and former parliamentary chairman Dumitru Diacov and the family of former president Lucinschi, the latter's son Chiril wound up as the fifth candidate on the Democratic Party list. Lucinschi's network could contribute, among other things, assets in mass media, including ownership of the TV 7 television channel that was generally not biased in favor of the Communists and sometimes broadcast reports friendly to the Democrats.[37] The Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova was founded by Vlad Filat in 2007, who, as director of privatization under President Lucinschi in the second half of the 1990s, had major connections to big business and by some accounts had accumulated considerable personal wealth during his time in private business in the early 2000s. While Filat declared that his own contributions and party dues were enough to sustain the new party project, it quickly attracted some major business figures: Vice-president of the huge ASCOM corporate conglomerate Iurie Leanca appeared as the number ten candidate on Filat's party list, and another major businessman, Calin Vieru, the son of a venerated poet, joined in the number seven slot.[38] Another ASCOM vice-president, Anatol Salaru, appeared as the number-three man on the list of Ghimpu's Liberal Party, surging in popularity after its impressive win in the Chisinau mayoral race. This strongly suggests that the ASCOM network of Anatol Stati, regarded by many as the richest business-based network operating in Moldova at the time and previously having made peace with the Communist machine, had moved into opposition to Voronin by backing two of the most potent rising opposition party projects.[39] There were some figures who switched from opposition to backing the

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[36] Institute for Public Policy, "Rezumat de presa: Barometrul de Opinie Publica - Noiembrie 2007," IPP website, November 30, 2007, http://www.ipp.md/libview.php?l=ro&idc=156&id=457.

[37] For example, TV7 news broadcasts ("Segodnia v Moldove," 8:30 pm) prior to the April 2009 election observed by the author in Chisinau on March 23, 24, 25, and 26, 2009.

[38] Party lists of parties in Moldovan national elections can be found on the e-democracy website of ADEPT, cited above. See also *DECA-press*, January 28, 2009, 16:19, reprinted by *Moldova Azi*, http://www.azi.md/ru/story/1104, accessed May 27, 2012; *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, December 17, 2008, p.5.

[39] Kseniia Il'ina, "La Famiglia," *Kishinevskii Obozrevatel'*, October 21, 2010.

Communists at this time, such as Eduard Musuc, a former anticommunist Chisinau city council member who joined with the Communists to become city council chair replacing the Liberal Party's Ghimpu, but these paled in comparison to the scale of defections away from Voronin by Tarlev and the ASCOM Group.[40]

Despite some key components starting to rattle off, Voronin's machine was put into high gear as the April 5, 2009, parliamentary election neared. One Communist strategy was reportedly to use the opposition's success in the last local elections against them: The central authorities could deny funds and other support to localities controlled by opponents, and then blame them for the consequent failures.[41] As a concrete example, the Justice Ministry froze the accounts of the city of Chisinau, controlled by Liberal Party mayor Chirtoaca, more than once during 2008 and early 2009.[42] This put Voronin in good position to make widely publicized tours of other regions, touting all the progress that had been made there in providing natural gas service, infrastructure, school repairs--a central part of his campaign strategy.[43] The Central Election Commission ordered two parties to pull television advertisements that criticized the Communists.[44] Prosecutors investigated Urechean and Filat during the final months of the campaign. Tarlev, the former prime minister, came in for special harassment: State officials initially let him know that they would not register a new party before the election, and when he responded by becoming formal leader of a preexisting party (the Union of Centrists), the Ministry of Justice found grounds for refusing to recognize him as its leader. First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Dodon also presided over a meeting with major enterprise representatives that removed Tarlev from his other main formal post, chair of the National Association of Producers.[45] State and other procommunist media dragooned Tarlev, citing all kinds of reasons why Voronin had to get rid of him as PM,[46] lambasted other opposition

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[40] Elena Moldoveanu and Alexandru Eftode, "The Communists and the Kid," *Transitions Online*, 4 December 2008.

[41] Expert, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, March 2009. Asked about this practice on Romanian television, Voronin blamed the opposition, saying that the latter sometimes delayed government payments to their own regions so as to then blame the Communists (*Kishinevskie Novosti*, March 27, 2009, p.1).

[42] *Info-Prim Neo*, 26 January 2009, 18:27.

[43] For example, *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, February 20, 2009; *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, February 26, 2009; NIT channel, "Curier" news broadcast, December 18, 2008, 20:00 Moldova time, observed by author.

[44] *Infotag*, March 11, 2009.

[45] *Moldova Azi*, January 26, 2009; Vasile Tarlev, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, December 19, 2008.

[46] E.g., Sergei Ovcharenko, "Za chto Voronin prognal Tarleva?" *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, February 24, 2009.

figures,[47] and generally positively reported on the incumbent authorities,[48] including trying to create a sense that it was inevitable that the Communists would win.[49] Favorite themes included the economic progress of the country since 2001 and a general orientation toward the European Union, though with a dose of suspicion of Romania and a call for better relations with Russia, which was widely understood to have returned to backing Voronin.[50] Electronic media that did not fall in line could be themselves accused of bias (as with Lucinschi's TV7[51]), be warned that their licenses would be revoked and their frequencies put up for bidding later (as with Chisinau's PRO TV), or actually be shut down (as with the Romanian television channel TVR1).[52]

The Liberals, Liberal Democrats, and Our Moldova Alliance campaigned hard against the Communists and, making the centerpiece of their campaigns breaking its monopoly on power and achieving European integration, jointly pledged that they would not vote with the latter under any circumstance.[53] Filat's Liberal Democrats' central slogan was "vote without fear."[54] Liberal Party leader Ghimpu stressed that ensuring no defections to the Communists would occur required prioritizing loyalty (which some in the party characterized as personal loyalty to him) in composing the party list of candidates.[55] Our Moldova Alliance chief Urechean expected a coalition to be the ultimate outcome, however.[56] All blasted the Communist regime in their ads and interviews. Former PM Tarlev, dogged by state interference in his organization-building plans, ultimately did get on the ballot as the Centrist Union party list leader, campaigning for closer relations with Russia, multinational tolerance (himself being ethnic Bulgarian), and policies friendly to manufacturing.[57] The Christian Democrats circulated negative information on rivals

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[47] E.g., a report linking Filat to mafia on the NIT channel ("Curier," Russian-language, March 26, 2009, 20:00).

[48] *Moldova Azi*, February 20, 2009, 18:38; *Moldova Azi*, March 11, 2009, 18:31.

[49] E.g., reporting on polls in the "Curier" news broadcast, NIT channel, December 18, 2008, 20:00.

[50] Viorel Cibotaru, director of the European Institute for Political Studies of Moldova, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, March 23, 2009 and, e.g., *Infotag*, February 24, 2009; Moldova1 channel, "Mesager" news program, in Russian, March 24, 2009, 19:00; *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, February 11, 2009; Vladimir Voronin, interview live on NIT TV channel, January 23, 2009, extended quotations in *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, January 27, 2009.

[51] "Segodnia v Moldove" program, TV7 network, March 25, 2009, 20:30.

[52] *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, December 17, 2008, p.3.

[53] *Moldova Azi*, February 3, 2009, 18:32.

[54] E.g., this appeared in a Romanian-language ad aired just before NIT TV network's Russian-language news program "Curier," March 25, 2009, 20:00.

[55] Infotag, February 5, 2009, in *Moldova Azi*, February 5, 2009.

[56] Serafim Urechean, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, December 19, 2008.

[57] *Kommersant Plus* (Chisinau), December 19, 2008, pp. 2-3.

like Filat in an effort to salvage their Romania-oriented electorate and attempted to justify to their former voters why they had aligned with the Communists for the past four years.[58]

Overall, as Voronin's constitutionally final term as president wound to a close, we find significant fissures emerging in his power pyramid. Despite the PCRM's relatively high public support relative to other parties, Moldova's parliamentary system made it potentially profitable for major political networks to challenge the dominant one at this point in time. The challenges came because, even if an opposition coalition could not realistically hope to win complete control over Moldova's parliamentarist system, it could still hope to deny the Communists the three-fifths majority they needed to choose the president without allies. They could thereby hope to force the chief patron into a deal that would cede them at least one of the chief formal executive posts and the opportunities that would entail for strengthening their own networks. What was emerging as the April 5, 2009, parliamentary elections approached, therefore, was a tough political battle. Voronin's network had significant advantages in popularity and media control despite its second-most-popular figure and the country's richest corporation moving into opposition, but opposition networks still could attract enough resources to mount significant resistance, aiming at least to deny the Communists the supermajority they needed to fill all three major executive posts. A preelection Barometer poll accordingly found that the Communists were in range of winning the three-fifths majority they sought, but that a great deal of uncertainty remained.[59]

From Succession Crisis to Revolution: The Marginality of Social Media

The ultimate result was in fact a "revolution" in the sense that the incumbent network was ousted at least in part through mass mobilization in the streets, though this revolution had little to do with the popular online social network that was sometimes cited as a central cause. The drama began on election night, when a Barometer exit poll, co-funded by USAID, indicated that the Communists had won 45 percent of the popular vote and thus 55 of the parliament's 101 seats, enough to elect a prime minister and parliamentary speaker but short of the 61 needed to elect the president unassisted.[60] As the Central Election Commission (CEC) processed the results overnight

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[58] Author's field notes and, e.g., *Moldova Azi*, 26 March 2009, 18:56.

[59] Viorel Cibotaru, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, March 23, 2009, based on data summarized in Institute for Public Policy, rezumat de presa, "Barometrul Opiniei Publice - martie 2009," Chisinau, Moldova, copy obtained by the author at the public presentation of the results in Chisinau March 24, 2009.

[60] Institute for Public Policy, "Exit Poll aprilie 2009," IPP website, http://www.ipp.md/libview.php?l=ro&idc=156&id=453 , accessed July 3, 2012.

and began announcing preliminary vote totals, however, the Communists' share was reported to be much higher, very close to 50 percent. As more votes were reported, the Communists total crept upward. With 94 percent of the ballots considered, the CEC reported on April 6 that Voronin's party had won 49.91 percent and that it was likely to complete the counting by mid-day. When mid-day rolled around, the CEC announced that with almost all of the ballots counted (97.93 percent), the Communists were at 49.96 percent of the vote counted, enough to translate into 61 parliamentary seats--precisely the number that Voronin's party needed to elect a president unilaterally.[61]

What happened next is the subject of different interpretations. The "Twitter Revolution" interpretation has already been described. At best, this version of events leaves out some crucial pieces of the story. For one thing, rather than having appeared out of nowhere, post-election protests had in fact been planned and advertised by the main opposition parties long before the voting, in anticipation of fraud. Moreover, Chisinau city hall – controlled by Liberal Party mayor Chirtoaca – had actually approved it well in advance of election day, officially sanctioning post-election protests for the whole period April 6-20 at the request of the Liberal Democratic Party's Filat. Many parties had announced their intention to protest then if they found fraud, and by one account protester tents were already being set up in anticipation two days before the voting.[62] And this was advertised using "old-fashioned" television, specifically outlets controlled by power networks willing to challenge the Communists. Thus as early as March 26, Chiril Lucinschi's TV7 network had broadcast opposition intentions to protest after the elections,[63] and on election night itself, Filat appeared live on Chisinau-based PRO TV to remind citizens that his party had reserved the capital's central square for protesting possible election fraud.[64]

Thus when reports emerged the next day that the Communists were suspiciously likely to win the precise number of seats they needed to control all major state posts despite exit polls saying they got fewer, upset voters already knew where to go to register their feelings, knew they would find supporters among at least three major parties, and knew these actions had the approval of city authorities. Overlapping with these initiatives, two youth groups called for a "Day of National Sorrow" and then a flash-mob late in the day on April 6, also in the center of Chisinau and also securing permission from the mayor's office. One of the organizers of the youth protests, journalist Natalia Morar, avers that the youth organizers ceased

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[61] *Unimedia*, April 6, 2009, 13:09, http://unimedia.md/?mod=news&id=10237.

[62] *Polit.Ru*, April 3, 2009, 11:46.

[63] TV7 network, "Segodnia v Moldove" Russian-language news program, March 26, 2009, 20:30.

[64] *Infotag*, April 6, 2009.

to play a central role in events after the flash mob at 8:00 p.m. on April 6. Indeed, Filat appeared before the crowd after the flash mob and reiterated that he had secured permission from the mayor to hold demonstrations for the entire next two weeks, and opposition parties called on protesters to show up the next day (April 7) at 10:00 a.m. for a new round of protests.[65] The announcement of the Communists likely winning 61 seats, which many considered an outrageous attempt at election manipulation, thus coincided with longtime protest planning and advertising by both political party organizations and youth groups using both traditional and nontraditional media, pulling thousands into the streets, but most returning home that evening.[66]

On April 7, as opposition party leaders had called for, throngs again gathered in central Chisinau, reportedly in even greater numbers, but this time things took an ugly turn. Protesters clashed with police, throwing stones at, storming, and ransacking the buildings housing the presidency and parliament. They heaved computers and office equipment outside, setting them alight in a bonfire as police tried to disperse the crowd with a water cannon. Curiously culminating the event, the Romanian and European Union flags were hoisted atop the presidential building.[67] Voronin and his allies lambasted their political opponents for causing the "bacchanalia," accusing them of plotting with Romanian[68] special services to destabilize Moldova.[69] The government responded by imposing a visa regime on Romania,[70] expelling Romanian journalists and diplomats,[71] and arresting (among others) masses of protesters, Morar, and Gabriel Stati, son of the director of the ASCOM Group linked to Filat and Ghimpu in this election.[72] Opposition leaders and sympathizers accused the Communists of using agents provocateurs to infiltrate the peaceful protest and instigate the violence to discredit the opposition, rally opinion against Romania, and create an outcry for stability instead of change. They pointed, for example,

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[65] "Zaiavlenie initsiativnoi gruppy po organizatsii flesh-moba 6 aprelia 2009 goda - 'Ia antikommunist'," April 8, 2009, 17:30, posted on Natalia Morar's Live Journal blog, http://natmorar.livejournal.com, accessed April 9, 2009. Morar was a leader of this group as the leader of the association ThinkMoldova.

[66] March (2009, p.11) also stresses other conventional media, including text messaging and mobile phones, with only a "small circle of activists" using Twitter, which was emphasized by "Zeitgeist-chasing journalists."

[67] *RFE/RL*, April 7, 2009.

[68] Or Russian, if one believes the Christian Democrats' version of the story: *Polit.Ru*, April 8, 2009, 22:51.

[69] *RFE/RL*, April 7, 2009; Tudor Sorochanu, "Troianskii kon' Traiana Besescu [sic]," *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, April 29, 2009.

[70] *Moldova Azi*, April 29, 2009, 17:20.

[71] *Infotag*, April 8, 2009.

[72] *Polit.Ru*, April 8, 2009, 15:58; *Polit.Ru*, April 16, 2009, 16:02; *Polit.Ru*, April 24, 2009, 18:27. Simple protesters were soon amnestied (*Polit.Ru*, April 16, 2009, 10:32).

to video footage where a particular group can be seen appearing to start violent behavior and a videotaped statement by then-parliamentarian in the Communist fraction Vladimir Turcan (a former Interior Minister) that he personally arranged for a group of protesters to make their way through the heavily guarded upper floors of the presidential building to raise the EU flag atop it so as (he said) to create a sense that the event was over and get the crowd to disperse, implying that the protesters violated the agreement by also flying the Romanian flag.[73] This did not end the protests, however. By some reports, financial department records housed in the presidential building happened to be burned in the process.[74]

While the true origins of the violence may never be established beyond doubt, the events did reveal that simply having crowds seize the building housing the main institutions of power does not itself constitute a revolution or a turnover in power. Instead, the key is when this causes the political machine itself to disintegrate, which effectively means the defection of elites in the power pyramid who are necessary to carry out a patron's orders, especially those wielding the means of force. Such disintegration did not happen in Moldova in April 2009, with Voronin still recognized as the most popular and powerful patron in the country. Thus with his power pyramid intact despite the challenge, he was able by April 8 to reclaim the seized government buildings. Voronin announced afterwards, "One cannot declare war on one's own children! And thus we made the decision to yield to them for one day everything that was for them so longed for: the offices of the president and of the speaker of parliament, the parliamentary meeting hall, and our telephones and computers. We made the decision to yield to them everything that for them exhausts their whole conception of state authority!"[75]

The Communists did not claim their projected 61-seat supermajority, however. Despite having reported results with 97.93 percent of the ballots counted on April 6 and having promised – prior to the massive protests – that the few remaining ballots would be counted by lunchtime that same day, it took the Central Election Commission more than two full days, until the evening of April 8, to present results with 100 percent of the precincts accounted for. In the end, the Communists came away with only 60 seats, one short of the magic number 61. The same day, the CEC chair reportedly checked into the hospital with a heart problem.[76] One interpretation is that

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[73] Such videos were shown to the author by Ghimpu in his office on June 25, 2009. Video with Turcan making such statements can be seen on YouTube, uploaded by MoldNews, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynh8O2y4Fng, accessed July 3, 2012. See also *RFE/RL*, April 7, 2009.

[74] *Infotag*, July 21, 2009.

[75] *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, April 9, 2009.

[76] *Polit.Ru*, April 8, 2009, 17:29.

the Communists backtracked on an original plan to manufacture a 61-seat majority under pressure from the protests. Such a concession may not have seemed too painful for Voronin since he had reportedly expressed confidence shortly beforehand that his party could attract or cajole at least one member of the opposition to back the Communist candidate for president if necessary.[77] Indeed, the experience of 2005, when Voronin had successfully lured a relative abundance of defectors from the opposition camp, might have made this seem quite a reasonable calculation.

The official explanation from the CEC for the counting delay and for the slip in the estimated number of Communist seats was that the remaining votes had been absentee ballots from abroad, which took time to count and which wound up going overwhelmingly to Ghimpu's Liberal Party, enough so to drop the overall Communist seat count from 61 to 60.[78] At least one independent analyst thought the official explanation most plausible, calling the slip from 61 to 60 mainly a technical matter of finally having all the ballots in hand and doing the math.[79] And unsurprisingly, Communist strategist Tkaciuk, when asked to explain the change, cited the CEC explanation as valid.[80] Ghimpu, whose Liberal Party benefited from the Communist loss of a seat, averred that the authorities had tried to claim the 61st seat for the Communists via fraud, but were thwarted not by the protesters but by Liberal Party observers in the foreign precincts.[81] While plausible, none of these explanations would appear particularly compelling. The larger picture of events would seem to suggest there is at least a strong circumstantial case to be made that the opposition-organized protests may have in fact been decisive in persuading the incumbent authorities to accept a 60-seat delegation and to use other methods to get the additional vote for their presidential candidate.[82]

Confident that he would obtain the 61st vote from one of the other parties' lists, Voronin now had to decide how to allocate the three key executive posts among the many different factions and individuals in the PCRM network and potentially the defector(s) from the opposition he would need to co-opt. He chose for himself the position of parliamentary chair, which he formally occupied after the new parliament convened (but still keeping the presidency until his successor could be named). The aim of minimizing the chance of a presidential challenge to Voronin was also

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[77] *Polit.Ru*, April 10, 2009, 19:05.

[78] *Infotag*, April 9, 2009.

[79] Expert, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 2009.

[80] Mark Tkaciuk, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

[81] Mihai Ghimpu, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

[82] One also wonders whether such a deal could have been discussed in a reported meeting between the three main opposition leaders and the two top state officials, president and prime minister, late in the day on April 7 (or a similar meeting) (*RFE/RL*, April 7, 2009).

a chief consideration in his choice for successor as president: Zinaida Greceanii, the longtime Finance Ministry official who had risen through the governmental ranks to become Prime Minister after Tarlev resigned in 2008. The Communists' chief strategist Mark Tkaciuk confirms that the choice of Greceanii was made in large part to avoid the possibility of a future split between Voronin (as parliamentary speaker) and the next president: This could best be achieved if the president were a non-party technocrat, someone without her own base in parliament that could be used to mount a serious challenge. Greceanii fit this bill perfectly, a respected expert in finance who had never been a PCRM member and was not regarded as a subpatron with her own strong set of personal loyalists or powerful backers other than Voronin's core network.[83] The Communists also hoped that as a technocrat who was not a member of the Communist Party, Greceanii would be seen by the opposition deputies as a compromise candidate worthy of their vote for president.[84]

This choice of Greceanii for president meant, however, that Marian Lupu was passed over despite being widely considered a leading contender for the presidency. Lupu was a popular parliamentary speaker during 2005-09 who had become a party member in late 2005 and who was seen as building a strong network of his own within the Voronin pyramid. By some accounts, his growing group of supporters had come to include oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc, who by some accounts saw Lupu as a likely successor to Voronin in the presidency.[85] In opting for Greceanii for president, Voronin reportedly planned for Lupu, seen within the network as having presidential ambitions, to be prime minister instead.[86] For the moment, Lupu accepted his pre-assigned fate and loyally voted for Greceanii on May 20 and June 3.

Perhaps the most remarkable part of Moldova's revolutionary episode – and one that proved decisive – is that the Communists in the end proved unable to gain a single vote from among the 41 deputies elected on the lists of the Liberal Party, Liberal Democratic Party, and the Our Moldova Alliance. Each of these parties managed to hold rank during two successive parliamentary votes for president, on May 20 and June 3. In each case, Communist candidate Greceanii got just 60 votes, one shy of the needed 61, thereby forcing new parliamentary elections for July. The Liberals and Liberal Democrats had refused to negotiate at all with the Communists leading up to these votes.[87] While both parties also had prominent figures from the ASCOM Group high on their party lists, the son

[83] Mark Tkaciuk, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

[84] Victor Stepaniuc's remarks as reported in *Moldova Azi*, May 20, 2009, 16:55.

[85] Graham Stack, "The Talented Mr Plahotniuc," *BNE Business New Europe*, April 11, 2011.

[86] Mark Tkaciuk, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

[87] *Infotag*, May 25, 2009.

of this corporate conglomerate's president had been arrested in the wake of the post-election protests, giving them special cause to keep the party line firm. Ghimpu explained his party's lack of defections by his care in composing the party list so as to ensure loyalty.[88]

Urechean, leader of the Our Moldova Alliance, similarly explained his party's solidarity in the face of temptation by his caution in selecting candidates for his party's 2009 list, inspired by experiencing the defections from his list in 2005 that allowed Voronin to keep the presidency. A key criterion for 2009, he averred, was that he had known each list member personally for a long time and had worked with them – these were core members of his network.[89] Urechean admitted that he actually discussed the possibility of a deal with Voronin, but said that the only one he would have considered would have been with an opposition president.[90] Communist strategist Tkaciuk asserts that Urechean in fact wanted Voronin to back Urechean for president.[91] But the Communists had from the start ruled out any deal that would have given the opposition the presidency.[92] The Communists reportedly offered many positions other than president and parliamentary chair to Urechean, and Urechean claims that at least one of his deputies was offered 2 million Euros for his vote while others were offered large apartments in Chisinau and even the post of deputy prime minister.[93] But without the presidency, Urechean's personal network in parliament stuck with the Liberals and Liberal Democrats. Since the voting in parliament was secret ballot, the three opposition parties opted not to actually vote against the Communist candidate, but instead to go so far as to keep their own deputies physically out of the parliamentary hall during the voting to make sure that none of them could covertly slip a vote for the Communists into the urn in return for a payoff. To ensure each kept the deal to stand firm, Ghimpu, Filat, and Urechean met "constantly" to coordinate, a practice they were to maintain for the early elections that ensued in July.[94]

Voronin regrouped his forces. He secured Greceanii's reelection as prime minister so as to keep her in good position for the next presidential election, and kept both the parliamentary speakership and the presidency for himself. Perhaps in an effort to show opposition parties what bargaining with the Communists can yield, he also made Christian Democrat leader Iurie Rosca deputy prime minister in charge of the ministries of defense, interior, and justice as well as potentially lucrative patronage

[88] Mihai Ghimpu, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

[89] Serafim Urechean, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

[90] *Infotag*, May 25, 2009.

[91] Mark Tkaciuk, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

[92] *Infotag*, May 25, 2009.

[93] *Moldova Azi*, June 29, 2009, 19:03.

[94] Serafim Urechean, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

posts.[95] Perhaps also hoping to enhance the chances of these allies of his to make it into parliament, the threshold for winning seats was reduced from 6 percent to 5 percent.[96] The Communists also unleashed a blistering campaign for the early July elections that Tkaciuk summarized as having one main theme: The Communists are for an independent Moldova while their opponents are enemies of Moldova.[97] Media controlled by the authorities and their allies, as well as Voronin himself and official party ads, appeared almost hysterical in portraying dire threats from Romania, organized crime, and revolutionary disorder that the opposition were said or implied to represent, all symbolized by dramatic video images of the April 7 violence in Chisinau that culminated in the flying of the Romanian flag atop Moldova's presidential building. The Communists depicted themselves as the saving force of stability and order.[98] These themes were summarized in a special film called "Attack on Moldova" that was broadcast on the NIT network.[99] New Deputy Prime Minister Rosca engaged in a crackdown on campaign finance violations.[100] Gabriel Stati, son of the ASCOM Group president and a big businessman in his own right, along with ASCOM's security director were kept in jail.[101] Even the Liberal Party mayor of Chisinau, Dorin Chirtoaca, was detained by police at one point.[102] Some foreign election observers identified with "colored revolutions" were sent home, with authorities citing a lack of proper accreditation.[103] This time, Voronin boasted, the Communists could get as many as 80 percent of the seats in parliament.[104]

But the opposition's stunning success in denying the Communists a single vote – in a land where many assumed anyone could be bought – arguably dealt the fatal blow to Voronin's power pyramid, setting in motion a chain of succession-related events that led to its crumbling and the culmination of Moldova's revolution. Most dramatic was the defection

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[95] *Infotag*, June 18, 2009.

[96] *Infotag*, June 18, 2009; Tudor Sorochanu, "Muzhskoi postupok," *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, June 19, 2009.

[97] Mark Tkaciuk, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

[98] For example, *Infotag*, June 16, 2009; Moldova 1 Channel, "Mesager" news program, Russian-language, June 24, 2009, 19:00; NIT TV (Moldova), "Curier" news program (Russian-language), June 29, 2009, 23:45; and Communist Party TV advertisements shown just before Moldova 1 network, "Mesager" news program, Russian-language, 19:00 Moldova time; before after PRO-TV's news program, June 28, 2009, 19:30; and before NIT TV, "Curier" news program (Russian-language), June 28, 2009, 20:00. On the extent of media bias, see *Moldova Azi*, July 10, 2009, 16:28, http://www.azi.md/en/story/4341.

[99] *Moldova Azi*, June 8, 2009, 19:22.

[100] *Kishinevskii Obozrevatel'*, June 25, 2009, p.2.

[101] *Moldova Azi*, June 11, 2009, 18:19.

[102] *Infotag*, July 20, 2009.

[103] *Polit.Ru*, July 28, 2009, 17:12.

[104] *Polit.Ru*, June 3, 2009, 17:25.

of two more major elites in Voronin's system, the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc and former parliamentary speaker Marian Lupu. Passed over for the presidency by Voronin in favor of Greceanii, Lupu announced just one week after Greceanii's final defeat that he was leaving the Communist Party.[105] Lupu explained in an interview that the Communists no longer had anything to offer him had he stayed in the party, and confirmed that Voronin had calculated correctly by choosing Greceanii in that Lupu would not have been just a symbolic president of the kind Voronin wanted, which would have been a threat to key figures in the Communist Party's leadership.[106] Lupu also emphasized in this interview and publicly that he and Voronin had developed deep differences in worldviews over the years, culminating with what he called the Communists' "very aggressive" and "nondemocratic" actions following the April 7 events that replaced the pro-European and democratic agenda he had earlier pursued within the party.[107] Implicitly recognizing the importance of elite expectations in driving behavior at this pivotal moment, Lupu added in one public statement: "We should not remain victims of rumors about the omnipotence of the Communist Party – it is strong only so long as we are afraid to stand up against it, and it is weak while certain in imagining itself as the only competent fundamental political force in this country. The April events showed that it is very vulnerable, particularly in moments when the scenario goes out of control. It becomes hysterical, incapable of cold-bloodedly and with honor resolving political conflicts."[108] Asked in two separate instances why he did not leave the party earlier, he replied that he had felt a sense of obligation to the party for having given him his political career, and that this duty was fulfilled with his complete support of the election campaign that had just ended.[109]

Big businessman Plahotniuc had reportedly backed Lupu within Voronin's machine to be the president's successor, and when Voronin passed Lupu over, entered into negotiations with political veteran Dumitru Diacov about joining and reinvigorating Diacov's Democratic Party – which had gotten just 3 percent of the vote in the April election – together with Lupu. Diacov later confirmed that Plahotniuc played a key role in his recruiting Lupu, who shortly after leaving the Communists indeed joined Diacov's Democrats in a move that dramatically shook up the political

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[105] *Infotag*, June 10, 2009.

[106] Marian Lupu, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 29, 2009.

[107] Marian Lupu, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 29, 2009; Marian Lupu, interview in paid-for campaign article in *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, June 26, 2010, p. 3. He also cites disappointment that the party refused to change its name from "Communist."

[108] Marian Lupu, interview in paid-for campaign article in *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, June 26, 2010, p. 3.

[109] Marian Lupu, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 29, 2009; Marian Lupu, interview in paid-for campaign article in *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, June 26, 2010, p. 3.

landscape.[110] Diacov said that the idea from the start had been to push Lupu for president and that a deal to back Lupu would not have been possible had he remained in the Communist Party.[111] Explaining his choice for the Democrats, Lupu said that ideally he could build a new party of his own, but there was no time or money. The Democrats offered not only a developed regional network, but crucially agreed to allow Lupu to really take over the party, not only leading the candidate list but installing other people from his personal network in key party posts so that he could actually take it over as party leader.[112] As for others that courted him, Lupu said, Filat's Liberal Democrats would not cede real control over the party (only backing him as presidential candidate and as top of the candidate list) while others were not consistent with the left-centrist stance he shared with the Democrats.[113] While Plahotniuc – who among other things controlled the large Prime TV network – remained deep behind the scenes at this point, the public fusion of Lupu with the Democrats made the Democrats a new center of political gravity expected to win a delegation in the next parliamentary elections and accordingly generated a series of defections of regional elites from other small parties and mid-level technocrats.[114] Relatively few Communist elites joined in, however.[115] There was some notable wavering among mass media after the April election stalemate, with the state-owned Moldova 1 television network broadcasting much more balanced news programming than previously, though in the final weeks of the campaign its reporting returned to its old form.[116]

   The Communists, with their political machine at full throttle as more important pieces were spinning off, thus now faced four viable opponents in the party competition, each mounting fierce attacks on the Communists in their political advertisements with significant administrative support (oligarchic groups, some media, some local administrations) in a very uncertain political environment.[117] The three party leaders who

[110] Graham Stack, "The Talented Mr Plahotniuc," *BNE Business New Europe*, April 11, 2011; *Tribuna.md*, June 15, 2012, 10:18. Lupu earlier had denied reports that Plahotniuc led him out of the Communist Party. See *Infotag*, August 10, 2010.

[111] Dumitru Diacov, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

[112] Marian Lupu, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 29, 2009. Diacov confirmed that this was part of the deal: Dumitru Diacov, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009. See also Marian Lupu, interview in paid-for campaign article in *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, June 26, 2010, p. 3. Diacov became honorary chairman of the party.

[113] Marian Lupu, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 29, 2009.

[114] E.g., *Infotag*, July 3, 2009; *Moldova Azi*, June 30, 2009, 16:44. On his control of Prime TV, see Graham Stack, "The Talented Mr Plahotniuc," *BNE Business New Europe*, April 11, 2011.

[115] E.g., *Moldova Azi*, July 1, 2009, 19:01.

[116] *Moldova Azi*, July 10, 2009, 16:28.

[117] *Moldova Azi*, June 29, 2009; Democratic Party ad shown just before Moldova 1 network, "Curier" news program, Russian-language, 19:00 Moldova time; Liberal Party Romanian language ad shown just before Moldova 1 network, "Mesager" news program, Russian-

had held out together in April and May continued their close cooperation, deciding to run separately but as a unified team that would once again refuse to compromise with the Communists.[118] While Lupu's reinvigorated Democrats also pledged not to vote for a Communist president,[119] many observers (including the other anticommunist parties) treated them with some suspicion, wondering if Lupu's defection was not part of an elaborate Communist plot to collect the necessary 61 votes through two parties instead of one, meaning that Lupu would rejoin his Communist colleagues in coalition after the voting.[120]

Meanwhile, the economy continued to deteriorate in the wake of the global financial crisis, and a wave of bad economic news came out as the mid-year point came and went prior to the election.[121] So bad was this news that the Communist-controlled government slashed the budgets of state institutions by 20 percent, including to local state administrations, which in turn often cut the salaries of their employees, causing embarrassment for PM Greceanii just a week before the crucial election.[122] Surely this must also have reduced incentives for local leaders to carry out any election shenanigans at Communist orders. And this happened despite Voronin's meeting Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in Moscow and, claiming to have been a victim of an attempted colored revolution, securing a $500 million credit to shore up the economy.[123] The Communists nevertheless continued to make social promises, including financial assistance for agriculture.[124]

When election day rolled around, the Communists claimed about four percent more of the vote than was reflected in the internationally funded Barometer exit poll,[125] but their official share of the ballots nevertheless slipped to 45 percent, which proved enough only for 48 parliamentary seats, three votes shy even of a simple majority. The other parties to win seats now included not only the Liberals (15 percent), Liberal Democrats (17 percent), and the Our Moldova Alliance (7 percent), but also the resurgent Democratic Party (13 percent). Together, these four parties secured 53 seats. Rumors soon flew of Voronin promising large personal payments to Lupu, Diacov, and other Democratic Party deputies in a desperate bid to

language, 19:00 Moldova time; *Moldova Azi*, July 6, 2009, 19:41.

[118] *Infotag*, June 15, 2009.

[119] Marian Lupu, interview in paid-for campaign article in *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, June 26, 2010, p. 3.

[120] *Infotag*, June 10, 2009; *Infotag*, July 17, 2009.

[121] *Infotag*, July 23, 2009.

[122] *Moldova Azi*, July 21, 2009.

[123] *Komsomol'skaia Pravda v Moldove*, weekly, June 25-July 2, 2009, p. 2.

[124] *Moldova Azi*, June 30, 2009, 16:48.

[125] Institute for Public Policy, "Exit Poll 2009: 29 iulie 2009," IPP website, http://www.ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/Exit_Poll_29.07_ora_21_final.pdf, accessed July 5, 2012.

cling to power, since together their two delegations would have mustered exactly the 61 votes to fill all the country's major executive posts. By some accounts, the Communists were even ready to cede the presidency so long as Voronin could keep the speakership.[126] But Lupu dispelled any doubts that he was a "Voronin project" by sticking with the other opposition parties to reject any Communist offers and instead form a four-party coalition dubbed the "Alliance for European Integration" (AEI). According to the deal, Filat, whose Liberal Democratic Party got the most votes, had his pick of posts and opted for the prime ministership, while Ghimpu was to get the parliamentary speakership, with Urechean accepting a lesser post of first deputy parliamentary speaker due to his party's weak showing. Lupu became the AEI's candidate for president. Most importantly for the AEI, even before they could elect their own president, Voronin left that office in September, replaced by new parliamentary speaker Ghimpu as acting president pending what the AEI hoped would be Lupu's eventual election.[127] After another parliamentary election, this one in late 2010, the stage was finally set for Moldova to elect a new president: The AEI induced a small group of deputies to defect from the Communist Party and vote for Nicolae Timofti, widely regarded as a relatively neutral compromise figure, who became president in 2012.

Conclusion

Voronin's resignation and the installation of Timofti represented the Communists' ouster and the culmination of Moldova's 2009 revolution. This was a revolution that had much more to do with elite network coordination and succession politics within the political machine than with Twitter or any other new social media. Voronin's expected presidential succession had combined with the centrifugal incentives that the parliamentarist constitution gave other networks to undermine his machine. But the public at large also played a role through the mass mobilization of April 7 and their patterns of support that influenced how many parliamentary seats each elite group could claim, enabling the opposition to dramatically stand down the Communists and, by denying them a single parliamentary vote, shake widespread expectations of Voronin's future dominance and ultimately shatter them in the July 29, 2009, election as the rapid onset of economic crisis took its toll on the incumbent authorities' support.

These findings suggest, at a minimum, that researchers must exercise caution in attributing causal impact to factors that might be highly

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[126] E.g., *The Guardian*, December 2, 2010, 02:00; Dumitru Diacov, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, March 17, 2010; Serafim Urechean, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, March 19, 2010.

[127] Ghimpu held both posts until the next election.

accessible and exciting to outside observers, such as patterns visible to those looking in online throughout the world in social media. They also underscore the importance of accompanying studies of the Internet's influence with deep and careful tracing of political processes inside the political machines as well as outside of them, lest such research miss the much harder to see but vitally important intra-regime elite dynamics that can be crucial in supplying the political opportunity structure that can drive outcomes themselves and that often determines when protest (and social media) become visible or influential in the first place.